

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY
SOLDIER

DECEMBER 2007 £2.50



**ROBOT WARS: PLAYSTATION
GENERATION COMES OF AGE**



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ARMY



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& a happier New Year.*

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PERSIA AND IRAQ
1943

To all readers of Soldier.

Thank you so much for your support throughout the year.

Your fundraising efforts have yet again ensured that we can continue supporting soldiers,
former soldiers and their families in need.

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

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MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

SOLDIER

in this issue

December 07 Vol 63/12



Cover picture (left): Foster Miller's new "Transformer-like" robotic platforms represent the ultimate in boys toys. See Pages 21-23
Background image: Cold war thaw – British and Russian militaries help warm international relations. See Pages 47-49 Picture: Steve Dock

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"Another bright idea from head office to help us with 'difficult deliveries!'
I bet there'll be staff cuts after Christmas . . ."

● Robot Wars – Pages 21-23

Techno gifts as MAARS attacks

AHI-TECH, interactive Christmas is
on the (credit) cards as consoles and
remote-controlled gizmos look set to fill
stockings nationwide.

Whether they're dreaming of a Blanket Time
Igglegiggle or a Dr Who-inspired voice-changer
mask, it is technology that will dominate
children's wish lists this year, according to the
Toy Retailers Association.

However, it is not only today's techno-savvy
kids who are in line to receive next-generation
gifts from Santa's sack.

If this month's cover star, MAARS (Modular
Advanced Armed Robotic System), is anything
to go by, the British Army's fabled "PlayStation
generation" could soon have kit similar to their
video game counterparts (see Pages 28-29).

While it may look as though it's trundled
straight off the set of this summer's blockbuster
movie, *Transformers*, MAARS – which is
fitted with an M240B machine gun and has
been designed by the clever elves at QinetiQ
subsidiary Foster-Miller to help infantry
units secure checkpoints and conduct armed
reconnaissance – is firmly grounded in reality.

Its siblings have already seen action with US
Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan (Pages 21-23).

FIRST SIGHT

And although, for the British at least,
MAARS does not yet belong to Christmas
present, soldiers this side of the Atlantic won't
be playing the part of Tiny Tim.

Having already taken delivery of Bulldog
and Mastiff, British troops are soon to add a
new utility vehicle to the toy box under the
Future Rapid Effect System programme.
Other stocking fillers include a new sniper
rifle (Page 13), bang up to date training
packages (Pages 25 and 37) and a revamped
website (Pages 34-35).

And if that hamper of innovations doesn't
whet your appetite, then how about this tasty
morsel passed on to *Soldier* HQ.

As a show of support, *Est Est Est* are
offering complimentary meals to any member
of the Forces who dines in their restaurants.
Service personnel presenting a valid ID card
will be entitled to a free starter, main course
and dessert when accompanied by at least
one paying customer. Tasty stuff. ■

**Soldier Magazine wishes all its readers and advertisers
a very happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year**

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Picture: Cpl Andy Benson RAF

Personal note of thanks: Gen Sir Richard Dannatt, pictured centre, during a visit to 2 Rifles in Basra city earlier this year, praises his soldiers' commitment

An extraordinary year

Head of the British Army reflects on the military's achievements in 2007

AS the year draws to a close, I think it is important for us all to reflect on another 12 months of intense activity for the Army, but also a year in which we can be very proud of what we have achieved.

It is, however, a year that is very much characterised by sadness over those we have lost, or who have been injured and for the families who are dealing with the consequences. Their sacrifices act daily as inspiration and motivation to us all.

Not surprisingly, the focus this year has been on Iraq and Afghanistan, where we are making progress.

In Iraq, we have handed over Basra Palace to the Iraqis and have successfully relocated our forces to the Contingency Operating Base at the airport while continuing to train the Iraqi Security Forces.

At the time of writing this, we are on course to hand over Basra, the last province within the MND(SE) area, to Provincial Iraqi Control.

In Afghanistan, we have sought out and defeated the Taliban where we have found him. At the same time, we have been training the Afghan National Army and developing the support of the Afghan population through

reconstruction. All of this is in support of the elected Government of Afghanistan and will establish the basis for a more prosperous and stable country.

Elsewhere, the last British battalion withdrew from Bosnia in March after 15 years, leaving a few remaining staff officers and the legacy of a stable country now capable of standing on its own feet.

In July, the Army successfully ended Operation Banner in Northern Ireland after 38 years, leaving a garrison of 5,000 just as in any other region in the UK.

Both these operations remind us that complex missions can take many years

to resolve; Iraq and Afghanistan will also require the patience and resolve for which we are renowned.

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

Your efforts have not gone unnoticed and I have been hugely impressed by the response of the nation, whether it is letters of support, offers of assistance, or homecoming parades.

These gestures show that the nation really does care and we can take great heart from that.

I have said that I do not think that the military covenant is broken but it is a fair reflection of thinking in the Army today to say that it must be brought into balance.

In response to these concerns, we have had some welcome news this year on medical treatment, equipment, pay and improvements in accommodation.

I am also pleased that the Government has commissioned a Service Command Paper to examine the way people in the Armed Forces, their families and veterans are supported and we should welcome that.

As we look back on 2007, I think that you will agree that it has been an extraordinary year in many ways.

The Army, in the spirit of its rich heritage, continues to excel operationally. Such excellence is not a given, but rather relies on honourable men and women whose competence, motivation and courage will often mark the line between success and failure. It also relies on the unstinting and selfless support of our families.

So I would like to thank you all for your efforts and commitment and wherever you are serving, I wish you all a very Happy Christmas. **9**

Gen Sir Richard Dannatt
Chief of the General Staff

‘The nation is asking a lot of you and I am constantly struck by the resolve that you show’



CLARENCE HOUSE

I just wanted to send my warmest and heartfelt good wishes to everyone serving overseas at this special time of year. I know that it is a particularly difficult time to be separated from the ones you love, but it is important you realize how much your service is valued by so many people in the United Kingdom, including myself. I shall be thinking of you and of your families and praying for your safe return.

Charles

Outstanding commitment

AS Christmas approaches, I welcome this opportunity to congratulate every man and woman in the Army (Regular, Territorial Army and Reserve), for what has been achieved this year.

On operations, I have witnessed the commitment and inspirational performance by so many and the successes we have achieved. Your professionalism, courage and positive attitude, in every circumstance, is clear for all to see.

It's not only on operations that your commitment has been tested and seen to be outstanding.

Life between tours is very busy and there has been much to do in preparing for operations, bringing in new equipment, maintaining training

standards, to name just a few.

A great deal has been asked of you, individually and as families – all our senior commanders understand that.

There has been some welcome progress in pay, medical support, accommodation and training, but there is still a great deal to be done – we know that.

We must do all we can to deliver what we know is needed to ensure that our Army remains the best.

It is my hope that you all have a very good Christmas and I give you my best wishes for the coming year, whatever it may bring. **;**

**Lt Gen Sir Freddie Viggers
Adjutant General**



Humbled by all you are doing



AS Controller of the Army Benevolent Fund I would like to send a strong message of support to all those who are serving on operations in Iraq and southern Afghanistan.

I have been humbled by seeing and hearing what today's soldiers are achieving and coping with.

All our supporters are full of

admiration for all that you are doing for the nation and would wish me to convey their very best wishes at Christmas time.

We stand by to help wherever and whenever we can. **;**

**Maj Gen Sir Evelyn Webb-Carter
Controller ABF**

Be merry and keep safe

DURING my time as an Army wife and now as Chief Executive of the Army Families Federation, I have always been proud to be part of the Army family.

The wives, husbands, partners and relatives of Servicemen and women are a fantastic bunch of people who keep the family together, cope with separation and, most importantly, eat turkey in February when they have their second Christmas on the return of their loved one from operational tours.

My thoughts are with everyone who is separated from someone they love this Christmas, with everyone who has returned from operations injured and especially with those who have lost loved ones and friends in recent times.

May you all have the best Christmas possible, be merry and keep safe. **;**

**Julie McCarthy
Chief Executive AFF**



You have our gratitude

MY admiration for anybody in the Armed Forces is limitless.

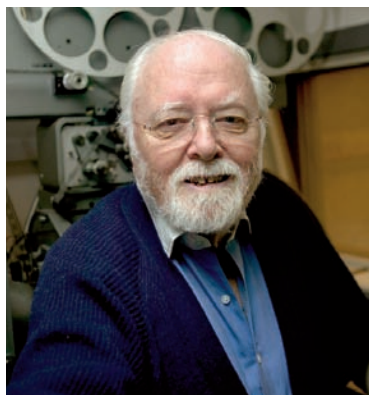
The respect that the rest of us feel for your devotion to the job that you're doing is endless. We are deeply in your debt because you are doing more than simply setting down a sense of duty, you are placing your lives at risk.

So at Christmas, which is a time for families, there aren't any words that

are sufficient except to say that you are in our hearts and in our minds.

I hope you know you have our gratitude because what you are dealing with, which is not necessarily of your making, is a defence of human rights and dignity and there is nothing more important than that. **;**

Lord Richard Attenborough



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Picture: SAC Kimberley Waterson RAF

Sharpshooter: Cpl Lee Wilbor, 5 Regiment, Royal Artillery, right, fired a single round to stop a suicide bomber's bid to attack a British Army convoy in Gereskh

One shot wonder

Artillery marksman thwarts would-be terrorist bomber in Afghanistan

CRACK-shot British gunners foiled a suicide bomber attack when they opened fire on a car attempting to ram their convoy in Afghanistan.

It took the troops from 4/73 Special Observation Post Battery, 5 Regiment, Royal Artillery just a split second to react when a Toyota Corolla suddenly swerved towards their column of Pinzgauer vehicles in Gereskh.

But the quick thinking of top-cover sentry Cpl Lee Wilbor proved decisive. He hit the driver with a single shot through the window before colleagues

in the vehicle behind pressed home their own attack, leaving the car in flames.

An Afghan civilian was killed in the resulting explosion but none of the British soldiers were seriously hurt.

Recalling the dramatic events, Capt James Ashworth paid tribute to the courage of his soldiers and the accuracy of his top-cover sentry.

"Cpl Wilbor was in an ideal position to fire a single round," the officer said. "The rear vehicle opened fire on the target and the bomb detonated. Luckily the car was now between our two vehicles and we

were sufficiently far apart from the blast not to sustain any serious injuries."

LCpl Darren Clark, who was driving the Pinzgauer at the front of the convoy, said: "As soon as I saw the car heading towards us I knew it had to be a suicide bomber. I felt shrapnel flying over our heads. I was told to stop but the explosion had blown the brakes so it took me a while."

Cpl Sandy Blunt, who was top cover on the rear Pinzgauer, was knocked off his feet by the explosion. "I jumped up and thought the driver and the sergeant major, WO2 Paul Hodgson, must be dead," he recalled. "But to my amazement the boss was on his feet, calm as you like."

Preparing for suicide attacks is a key part of training and Army instructors now have simulated suicide vests and roadside bombs for use on exercise.

Brig Nick Caplin, commander of the Collective Training Group at the Land Warfare Centre, is convinced that soldiers are adapting well to the threat. He added: "They amaze me in what they do. They have confidence in their training and fully realise the importance of operating as a team."

● Vested interest – Pages 25-27

Free deliveries to continue

DELIGHTED Forces families have welcomed news that a free parcel service for their loved ones on operations will not be wrapped up after Christmas.

The initiative, which has proved a huge morale booster with soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan since its launch in September, will continue indefinitely after a deal was struck between the Royal Mail and the MoD.

The move means that loved-ones can post up to 2kg of goodies to troops, giving them an important link with home during

their operational tours. The Royal Mail and BFPO will jointly meet the costs of continuing the scheme.

Lt Col James Swift, CO of the Basra-based 2nd Battalion, The Royal Welsh, said: "The smile that broadens on a face when he or she is handed a letter or parcel is priceless," he added. "The impact here of the free parcel service is palpable."

Around 100,000 free packages a week have been sent to front-line personnel in the run-up to Christmas.

UNDER BigBen

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

Report to foster pride in soldiers

A STUDY designed to promote a greater sense of pride in the Armed Forces is to be carried out in the coming months, MPs have been told.

In a written statement, Defence Secretary Des Browne confirmed that the document would aim to give the UK public a greater “understanding and engagement” with the work of the Services.

The Government would also produce a command paper setting out how troops could be supported in future.

The Defence Secretary added: “We envisage engagement with key external stakeholders from the charity sector and our Service families’ federations.”

Service suicides: Coroners have recorded 17 suicide or open verdicts on Armed Forces personnel who had deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Responding to a question from a fellow MP, Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth said the statistics covered deaths up to January 31, 2006.

But Mr Ainsworth admitted: “The figures do not include any violent or unnatural deaths that have not yet been fully investigated by the coroner.”

Armistice anniversaries: A special event to remember the First World War would be planned after the death of the last Great War veteran in the UK. Mr Ainsworth confirmed that the occasion would be “commemorative and educational”, adding that there would also be special events in 2018 to mark the 100th anniversary of the end of the war.

Crowd control: Hundreds of baton rounds have been fired by British troops since the Op Telic campaign started nearly five years ago.

According to figures released to MPs, more than 2,500 rounds were used in 2005 and 2006, although the number has decreased dramatically to 200 over the past 12 months. Soldiers have also made use of CS gas grenades during the campaign.

Atkins to weigh up Army cases

Commissioner to hold Services ‘to their word’

TROOPS who believe they are the victims of harassment and bullying now have access to an independent Armed Forces ombudsman.

Dr Susan Atkins, who is taking on the mantle of the Service Complaints Commissioner, starts her job at the beginning of next month.

While allegations will still be probed by the chain of command, Armed Forces chiefs will have a duty to keep her informed of any developments.

Dr Atkins, who previously established the Independent Police Complaints Commission, is determined to ensure grievances are treated seriously.

She added: “The Forces have signalled their commitment to having a rigorous, independent and transparent scrutiny of the complaints system.

“They have understood the need for an alternative route of access for both Service personnel and their families – I shall hold them to their word.”

While the commissioner will not have the power to conduct investigations or challenge the outcome, Dr Atkins

will be able to raise concerns directly with ministers. She will also publish an annual report.

The new position was created following recommendations by the House of Commons Select Committee’s report into Trainee Welfare and Nicholas Blake QC’s probe into the deaths of RLC recruits at Deepcut.

In his report, Mr Blake said the creation of an independent ombudsman was an “essential step” in improving confidence in the handling of complaints.

He added: “It will be difficult for the Armed Forces to satisfy the public they have nothing to hide in the running of their discipline and complaints system if there is a perception of unwillingness of meaningful independent oversight, which is increasingly seen as a necessary counterweight to the powers and prerogatives of military life.”

In announcing the appointment of Dr Atkins as the first Service Complaints Commissioner, Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth said: “She can raise any concerns she has with me at any time.”

Handover heralds new era

STEADFAST troops serving in southern Iraq are preparing to open a new chapter in the country’s history as security for Basra Province passes back to Iraqi control.

As this issue went to press, it was confirmed by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki that the handover would take place in the coming month. But Defence Secretary Des Browne stressed British soldiers still had a key role to play, and would remain in theatre for the foreseeable future.

Mr Browne emphasised: “The transition of Basra does not signal the end of our commitment to the people of Iraq – it now enters a new stage. We will continue to train and mentor the Iraqi security forces and we will protect the border and supply routes while retaining the capability to support the Iraqis directly if requested, but the Iraqis will take the lead.”

Mr Browne was speaking after visiting soldiers from 1 Mechanised Brigade who were coming to the end of their tour in Basra. They have now been succeeded by colleagues from 4 Mechanised Brigade.

He also congratulated soldiers from the 1st Battalion, Irish Guards, for ensuring

their Iraqi counterparts were fully prepared to take on their role and pledged the work would continue on the latest Op Telic tour.

Violence in Basra had been in decline with attacks against UK Forces down significantly, said Mr Browne.

Lt Col Michael O’Dwyer, commanding officer of 1 IG, shared the Defence Secretary’s optimism. The Iraqis had taken a greater role in operations and security, he added. The CO said: “During our six months in Basra there has been a significant improvement in the Iraqi Army’s effectiveness and the capability of their people. It has been satisfying to see the difference that my battle-group and other British troops are making.

“Our monitoring, mentoring and training is helping give the Iraqis that ability to look after themselves,” he stressed.

As reported in last month’s *Soldier*, numbers of British troops in Basra are being slashed in half to around 2,500 by the spring. Those remaining in theatre will be solely responsible for providing training but could be called on to re-intervene if the security situation deteriorates.



Deadly accuracy: Under a £4 million contract, Army, Royal Marine and Royal Air Force Regiment snipers are set to be equipped with L115A3 long-range rifles

Precision purchase

New sniper rifle boosts long-distance lethality of Army's élite marksmen

TERRORIST fighters confronting British soldiers could soon find themselves in the sights of a deadly new sniper rifle capable of lethal precision over long distances.

Expert marksmen have been so impressed with the latest L115A3 weapon that the Government is ordering nearly 600 of them for operations.

The gun, made by Portsmouth-based firm Accuracy International, fires a larger calibre bullet than the existing L96 7.62 rifle. It will be fully deployed on operations in the spring after a successful trial run.

Lt Col Richard Latham, R Anglian, CO of the Support Weapons School in Warminster, described the latest weapon as a "huge leap forward".

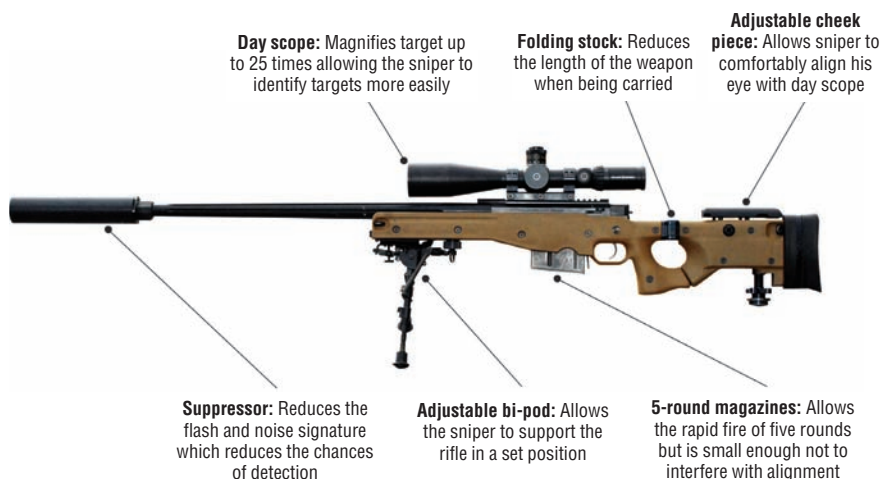
He said: "It allows us to engage a wider range of targets with increased precision and at greater ranges. It will enhance our capability. We know it is a good weapon as it has already been deployed in theatre."

The L115A3 has a scope that can magnify the target up to 25 times, a suppressor to reduce flash and noise, a folding stock and five-round magazine.

With a range of around a mile, the new rifle is being rolled out alongside the broader Sniper System Improvement programme, which is designed to give Army specialists more power, precision and stealth. The scheme will give sharpshooters top-of-the-line, all-weather, day and night sights so they can operate around the clock and in arduous conditions.

Lt Col Latham said that sniping had

become a key skill on ops and demanded the recruitment of fit and gifted soldiers. He added: "It is a specialist discipline that had been in decline for many years but it is now back at the forefront of infantry skills. It requires a high quality individual, trained to a high degree of competence, who is able to engage a target without them knowing they are being watched."



IN BRIEF

● THE Duke of Edinburgh paid tribute to the "huge contribution" of the Victory Service Club when he spoke at a special luncheon to mark the London establishment's centenary and the 50th anniversary of his tenure as its Patron-in-Chief.

He described the club near Marble Arch as a "living and prestigious memorial" to Britain's Servicemen and women.

Club president Air Marshal Sir Roger Austin told guests that £2.3 million had so far been collected towards the VSC's £5 million centenary appeal to pay for refurbishments.

The club has introduced welfare breaks for the families of soldiers wounded on operations and is installing disability-friendly rooms for their use.

www.vsc.co.uk

● **SOLDIERS** deploying to theatre can freeze their assets in a scheme offered at a private London fertility clinic.

The Bridge Centre is offering reduced rates for egg and sperm freezing storage to members of the Armed Forces.

From next month the clinic is slashing its costs to personnel in half, claiming the move will give troops and their partners the chance to have children if they are wounded or killed.

A spokesman for the clinic said: "We hope this will provide a small measure of support to people whose contribution to our security is immense and often insufficiently recognised."

"We are pleased to be able to use our skills and expertise in this way."

● A HOST of German "angels" busy parcelling up festive goodies for British troops serving in Iraq this Christmas has called for more people to adopt a soldier.

Soldiers' Angels Europe sends care parcels and letters all year round to coalition troops but a special call has gone out for extra support for British soldiers in Basra.

A donation of £20 enables the Angels to send a morale-boosting package to a soldier serving on operations.

Filled with magazines, books and games, the most popular are the themed parcels such as the poker and teatime packages.

Sandra Weiland, who leads the angelic throng from Heidelberg, continues to support soldiers of all nationalities to make sure "they are not forgotten about".

"A soldier is a soldier no matter where he comes from. Being a Soldiers' Angel is the most rewarding thing I've ever done in my life," she added.

To find out more visit www.soldiersangelseurope.org or email Sandra.weiland@soldiersangelseurope.org. But remember – a soldier is for life, not just for Christmas.

Fusilier falls in IED attack

Blast claims life of 'gifted officer' in Helmand

TRIBUTES have been paid to a highly regarded Royal Highland Fusilier officer who was killed in an explosion during a joint operation in southern Afghanistan.

Capt John McDermid of 2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland, had been on patrol in Sangin, Helmand province when an improvised explosive device was detonated on the morning of November 14. An interpreter was seriously injured.

The officer, who was 43 and from Glasgow, enlisted in The Royal Highland Fusiliers and served for more than 20 years as a soldier before he received his commission in 2004.

He was attached to the 2nd Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment in Helmand and was tasked with training the Afghan National Army.

He was responsible for developing the leadership and infantry skills of both platoon and company commanders.

His close friend, Capt Ekbahadur Gurung of 36 Engineer Regiment, remembered the married father-of-three

as a gifted officer and devoted husband and father.

"He was a Scot who was professional and committed to his job," Capt Gurung reflected. "He was also absolutely dedicated to his family and children."

Described as a "hugely experienced, skilled, knowledgeable and capable soldier," Capt McDermid served around the world during his long and distinguished career, including four tours in Northern Ireland and a spell in Iraq.

Lt Col Paul Harkness, commanding officer of 2 Scots, said: "Capt John McDermid represented everything that is special about both the British Army and The Royal Highland Fusiliers."

"From fusilier to regimental sergeant major, his 21 years' service as a soldier was notable for its professionalism, commitment and loyalty."

Defence Secretary Des Browne added his condolences.

He said: "Capt McDermid's death is terribly sad and my thoughts are with his friends and family."



● Capt John McDermid

NCO dies in Sangin smash

A **NEWLY** promoted and highly respected sapper was killed in a road accident in southern Afghanistan while taking part in an operation in support of the Afghan National Army.

LCpl Jake Alderton, of 20 Field Squadron, 36 Engineer Regiment, died when the vehicle he was travelling in left the road and rolled off a bridge near Sangin in Helmand province on November 9.

The 22-year-old, who was from Bexley in Kent and had served in the Army for six years, was declared dead at the scene.

After overcoming a serious back injury LCpl Alderton was selected for promotion in July and deployed to Afghanistan two months later to provide training and engineer support to Afghan soldiers.

Colleagues remembered the NCO as a well-respected and professional soldier

who always gave "100 per cent whatever was put in front of him".

His commanding officer, Lt Col Richard Wardlaw, said: "The regiment was fortunate to have a totally committed and thoroughly professional junior NCO who always put the interests of others before his own."

"These were qualities which made him a natural choice for the demands of training and mentoring the Afghan Army, a challenge which he had self-evidently risen to with boundless enthusiasm and real flair when his life was brought to such a tragic and untimely end."

In a statement, LCpl Alderton's family and girlfriend recalled that the NCO's childhood dream had been soldiering. The statement added: "He will always be in our hearts and minds and never be forgotten."



● LCpl Jake Alderton



Flags and banners: Youngsters were among those welcoming the Light Dragoons home in Dereham

Heroes return

Troops applauded as they march back to base

DELIGHTED soldiers and their senior officers have spoken of their pride at receiving warm homecoming welcomes on their return from operational tours.

In a huge show of support, vast crowds showed up to applaud the 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment in both Guildford and Norwich as they paraded on their return from Afghanistan and train operators One Railway named a locomotive in honour of the troops.

In Dereham, The Light Dragoons were given a rousing reception on their return from theatre in what was described by civic leaders as the biggest turnout in living memory. A special beer was brewed to commemorate the occasion.

The 1st Battalion, Irish Guards were treated to a heroes' welcome on their return from Iraq. As the coaches carrying the troops arrived at their Aldershot barracks, the soldiers were greeted with banners put up by the local borough council.

Lt Col Michael O'Dwyer, 1 IG's commanding officer, said the returning personnel were overwhelmed by the affection in which they were held by the community. He added: "We have had an extremely successful tour.

"I would like to say thank you to the people back home who have supported us throughout, particularly the wives and families.

"But there are also big banners up all over the town – thank you to all who have been behind us."

Light Dragoons CO Lt Col Angus Watson said the soldiers had been deeply touched by the generosity and support shown to them in Dereham.

He added: "The links between the regiment and the local community can only get stronger.

"It was almost overwhelming to turn the corner onto a high street packed full of people. It was a hugely proud moment for us."

Lt Col Stuart Carver, commanding officer of 1 R Anglian, was delighted to parade in front of crowds in Guildford – close to the battalion's Pirbright base – and at home in Norwich, where the troops celebrated their Freedom of the city.

The East Anglia event culminated in a service at Norwich Cathedral, where soldiers remembered nine colleagues who gave their lives in Afghanistan.

Reflecting on a tough six months, Lt Col Carver said he was proud of his troop. "We thank our families, friends and the wider public for their support during what has been a testing tour," he added. "To put it into context, each soldier and officer was probably involved in around 40 significant engagements with the enemy."

● Vox pop – Page 98

● **PRESS** reports that soldiers are to pay hundreds of pounds more for insurance have been played down. As this issue went to press, sources at Aon, the company behind the Pax scheme, accepted that premiums would rise but dismissed revelations of sky-high hikes. Brig Jamie Gordon, the Army's Director of Personal Services, said the MoD could not endorse one cover provider over another, but pointed out that Pax was a business and was responding to operational risk.

IN BRIEF

● **LEAKS** to the media are both irresponsible and unhelpful, senior officers have warned. Adjutant General Lt Gen Sir Freddie Viggers has told subordinates that unauthorised dealings with the press would hit the Army hard and could cause a culture in which nobody would "commit their views to paper".

He added: "The Army Board will not understand what the issues are for the individual soldier and we will not be able to make ministers aware of the facts. We will all lose." Lt Gen Viggers was speaking after elements of a report by the Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team appeared in some quarters of the media last month. He said: "I stress that we do not welcome or need anyone acting in such an irresponsible manner."

● **SOLDIER'S** Andy Simms was named New Editor of the Year by the Association of Communicators (CiB) in Business at a prestigious awards ceremony in the Sheraton Park Lane Hotel in Piccadilly last month.

The national accolade for Simms recognised his contribution in helping *Soldier* win the coveted best internal newsmagazine class less than a year after taking up his post.

In a further testimony to the excellence of Britain's single Service publications, Andrew Wise, editor of sister publication *RAF News*, received the Experienced Editor of the Year award, succeeding *Soldier's* John Elliott, who won the same title 12 months ago after stepping up to become managing editor.

● **WOUNDED** soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, have pledged to fight on after forming themselves into an élite group.

The troops, who were badly hurt during the recent tour of Iraq, signed up for the new Shackleton Platoon, the only unit made up of injured personnel. And they have urged the public to get behind troops returning from ops with physical and mental scars by supporting the Help for Heroes fund-raising campaign.

● **AN** Armed Forces charity that provides cash awards to families whose loved ones die in service has urged soldiers to consider signing up. The Army Dependents' Trust hands out grants of up to £10,000 to those left behind after bereavements. All members of the Regular Army and Brigade of Gurkhas can sign up for an annual donation of around £9. The TA and Reserve Forces while on active duty, Non-Regular Permanent Staff and the Military Provost Guard Service are also eligible. Further details are available by calling 01980 615736.



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Picture: Sgt Anthony Boocock RLC

Southern spirit: Platoon commander Sgt Jo Tagica gets to grips with the Falklands as he directs his men during live firing manoeuvres on Onion Ranges

Atlantic crossing

South Atlantic tour troops are changed amid heavy operational commitments

GERMANY-based soldiers have been patrolling the Falkland Islands, replacing troops from Cyprus who have traditionally taken on the role.

Men from B Company of the 1st Battalion, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, are the latest to head to the South Atlantic from their home base in Paderborn.

With Cyprus personnel committed in Iraq and Afghanistan, military chiefs

decided to use 20th Armoured Brigade units to form the Roulement Infantry Company (RIC), which undertakes six-week tours of the islands.

The 5th Battalion, The Rifles has already deployed to the South Atlantic while the UK-based 1st Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment is taking on the role in the New Year.

Troops deployed to the Falklands are charged with deterring any would-be

aggressor from attacking the islands. This year marked the 25th anniversary of their liberation from Argentine forces.

Brig Nick Davies, Commander British Forces South Atlantic Islands, confirmed that senior officers needed to balance the Falklands mission with high-intensity operational commitments in Iraq and southern Afghanistan.

He added: "When Land Command did their assessment of how best to support the RIC they came to the conclusion that it would be better to cast the net across the wider infantry. It made sense for the Cyprus battalion to hold this role but they are heavily committed and it is no longer appropriate for them to be sent."

As well as providing a deterrent to any potential aggressor, troops deploying to the Falklands have the opportunity to take part in high-quality training.

PWRR personnel who took part in live firing manoeuvres at Onion Ranges during the five-day Exercise Cape Bayonet, said they had been getting to grips with a demanding environment and conditions.

They also said they appreciated the opportunity to work alongside colleagues from the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. Sgt Matthew Gough said: "Down here we have been able to call in mortars and fast air."

Tours top list of family concerns

SENIOR Defence chiefs have pledged action after Army spouses raised concerns about the turbulent effect of operational tours on married life.

Ministers stressed that the Government would study the results of the latest Families Continuous Attitude Survey and examine any problem areas.

The questionnaire highlighted that nearly half of 2,000 soldiers' and officers' spouses believed that the gaps between tours are currently too short.

And up to four out of ten of those questioned believed their partners' behaviour had changed, mostly for the worse, when they returned from deployment.

But the study, which was carried out between February and May last year, found

that the overwhelming majority of Army dependants believed military life was either the same, or better, than they had originally expected.

Many of those questioned were also satisfied with the standard of housing they were living in and were pleased with their health and dental care.

A spokeswoman for the Army Families Federation confirmed that spouses were concerned about tour intervals and the effect operations had on their partners.

She believed that maintaining the traditional "patch life" of Service communities during deployments was vital for keeping up the spirits of spouses.

Veterans' Minister Derek Twigg said he was fully behind Forces families.

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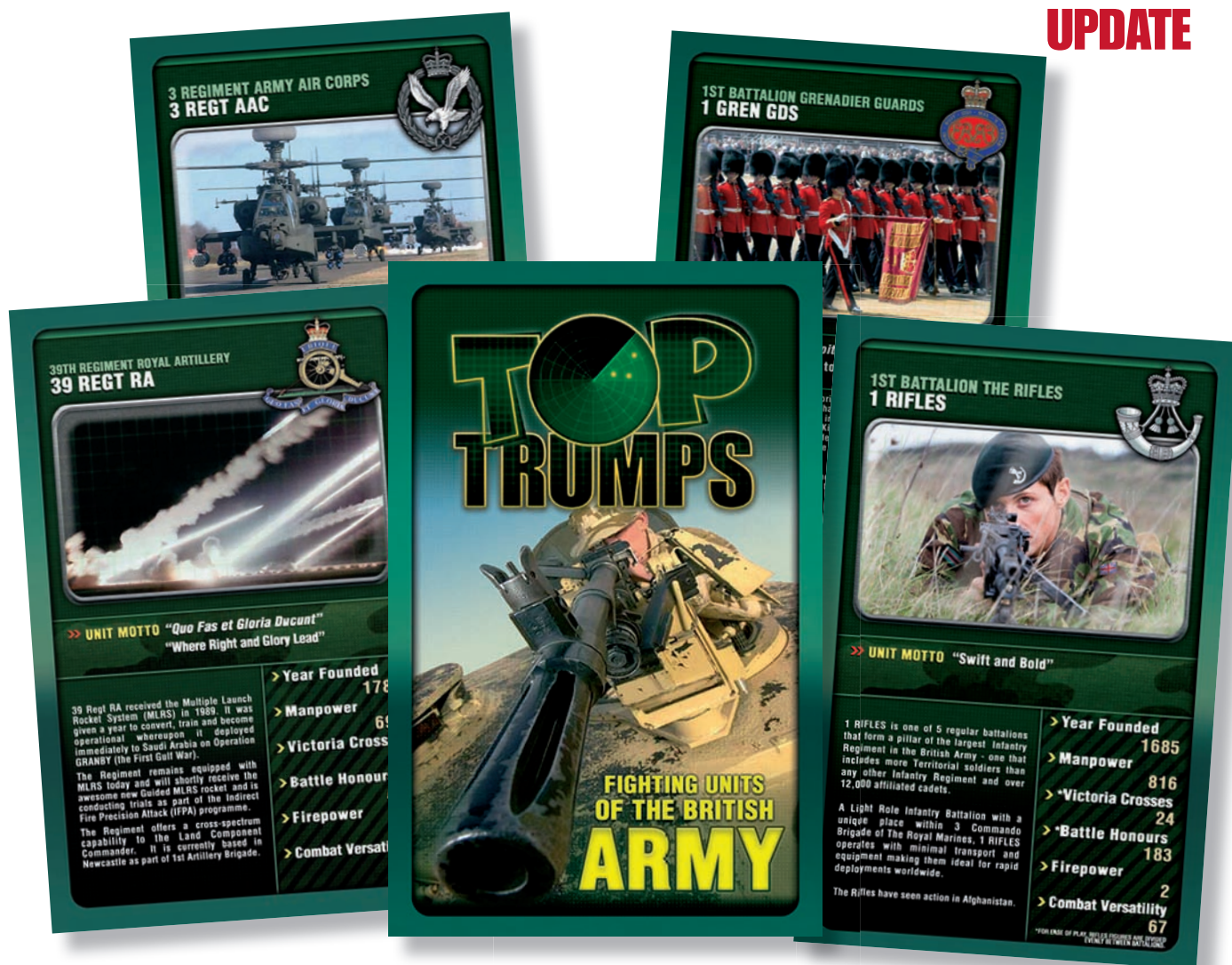
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Charity dealt trump card

British Army units set to storm toy stores to raise funds for Afghan appeal

POPULAR playground game Top Trumps has enlisted the British Army to help raise money for humanitarian work in Afghanistan.

A special edition pack of the card craze will allow players to battle 30 Army units against each other in categories including battle honours, manpower and formation year.

Royalties from every set sold will be donated to the Afghan Appeal Fund (AAF) which is working to fund the construction and running of schools and medical facilities in Afghanistan.

Dr John Ross, the Rheindahlen-based

● **AN HILARIOUS** calendar chronicling the lives of those left at home during the Grenadier Guards' tough summer tour of southern Afghanistan is set to swell the coffers of Forces' charity Help for Heroes.

Soldiers' wives Deborah Poxton and Lara Beardshaw borrowed military kit and dress to give an Army focus to the 12 photos they took to depict their daily chores and the major events missed by their husbands. In the calendar Mrs May

GP who came up with the idea of Army Top Trumps, said the inspiration for the themed set came from a visit to his son's bedroom.

"I went in there and saw a set of Top Trumps," he explained. "I remember the game from the 1970s having sets for tanks, fighter jets and warships, but never one for the Army so I got in touch with the game's makers."

Top Trumps players must choose a category from one of their cards that they think will have a higher figure than their opponent's equivalent statistic.

In addition to hard facts about each goes out tabbing with her pram in combats and Mrs August gives birth to a cammed-up baby doll.

Lara Beardshaw told *Soldier*: "We want our calendar to raise a smile and remember that life is not all dull while our husbands are away."

Calendars cost £5 and can be bought online from www.supportasoldier.co.uk. Donations can also be made at www.justgiving.com/larabeardshaw

unit's history, every card contains figures for firepower and combat versatility that have been calculated by war gamers.

The firepower was based on each unit's weapons, systems and effects, while the combat versatility figure takes account of deployability, threat versatility and geo-versatility.

Players wanting to get one up on their opponent in the firepower category should keep an eye out for the 3rd Regiment, Army Air Corps card, which trumps the rest thanks to its Apache AH-1 Attack Helicopters.

The Special Air Service heads the pack in combat versatility, while 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment leads the way in Victoria Crosses.

● *Soldier* has teamed up with Winning Moves to offer ten readers the chance to win a pack of British Army Top Trumps.

To enter, simply tell us how many Army units feature in the game.

Send your answers on a postcard to the address at the front of the magazine by December 31. Visit our website for a free Top Trumps card offer.

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Robot wars

Mechanical warriors join fight against IEDs in Iraq >

IED eye in the sky: Honeywell's radio-controlled Micro Air Vehicle can "hover and stare" at suspect devices, allowing explosive ordnance disposal teams to identify any potential risk to troops from a safe distance



Techno team: Man and machine are working together to defeat IEDs – insurgents preferred method of attacking coalition troops – in Iraq



Report: Andy Simms

LOOKING for telltale signs of hidden roadside bombs makes daily convoys in Iraq numbingly long and frustratingly slow.

Every pile of suspect litter, every eerily empty street, every maggot-ridden animal carcass and every square foot of new asphalt saddles them with risky delays. Such caution is not unwarranted.

As iconic as the machine gun in the First World War or the "smart bomb" of the Gulf War, the roadside bomb has become the signature weapon of insurgents in Iraq.

Small but often imperfectly formed, the bombs, or improvised explosive devices (IEDs), represent the perfect asymmetric weapon – they're cheap, effective and anonymous.

They have caused nearly two-thirds of the 3,100 American combat deaths in Iraq and an even higher proportion of battle wounds, and this year alone they have claimed the lives of 20 British soldiers on Op Telic. During the first seven months of 2007 they also resulted in an estimated 11,000 Iraqi civilian casualties and more than 600 deaths among Iraqi security forces.

With British and American forces locked in a battle of ingenuity and adaptation with the bomb-makers of the insurgency, the war on IEDs is being fought on multiple fronts – not only by the soldiers on the roads of Iraq, but also by scientists and engineers in laboratories and research centres.

And among those enlisted in this multi-pronged war effort is a new breed of front-line combatant – the robot.

Wheelbarrow, the remote eyes and hands of the British Army's explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams, is being joined on the battlefield by the next generation of fearless, mechanical warriors. American-based robotics firms iRobot and Foster-Miller, a QinetiQ subsidiary, have both deployed large numbers of their respective "bomb bots", the PackBot and Talon, to Iraq.

Like Wheelbarrow, both ground robots are tracked and have manipulator arms that allow them to recce and make safe potential bombs while keeping their operators out of harm's way, but the mechanised soldiers also have the ability to sniff out danger.

Using technology successfully tested in Iraq and Afghanistan, scientists at ICx Technologies have given the bomb disposal droids a nose for trouble.

Fido, a man-made imitation of a dog's nose fitted to the robot's arm, can detect vapours emanating from IEDs and, mimicking a Geiger counter, alert its operators by triggering a warning signal if it senses explosives are present.

The level of detection afforded by

Fido, which amplifies fluorescence polymers found in explosives and can detect levels of materials in parts per quadrillion, is comparable to that of a highly-trained sniffer dog – long regarded as the gold standard in bomb detection.

Stronger than their human and canine counterparts, the bomb bots have also been ruggedised to the extreme.

Talon, the veteran of the robotic duo after completing more than 20,000 EOD missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, has repeatedly proved it can take a punch and stay in the fight. One robot

was blown off the roof of a Humvee in Iraq as it crossed a bridge, plunging it into the river below. It survived the blast and fall and soldiers later used its operator

control unit to drive it through the river and up onto the bank so it could be retrieved. Another has been blown up three times in the line of duty yet is still serving with new arms, wrists, wiring and cameras.

"We've got more than 1,000 Talons deployed with US troops," said Foster-Miller spokesman Tim Everhard, who retired from the US Army with 27 years' EOD experience to his name. "In a five-month period 150 were destroyed doing their job in Iraq and of those 150, 105 were patched up and put back in operation. Those durability figures speak for themselves."

Equally robust, the 1,000-strong legion of PackBots currently in service with the American military is taking its fair share of knocks and shrapnel while saving lives.

"We'd rather see parts of our robots coming back in boxes from Iraq than the bodies of soldiers," said iRobot's Tom Thomas. "In the main any damage can be repaired on the ground, but a destroyed PackBot represents at least one human life saved, so it's hard to get upset about it."

The war against IEDs is not only being waged at street level. A host of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are also being tailored and equipped to tackle the problem from up high.

Among them is Honeywell's Micro Air

Vehicle (MAV), which is expected to be a mainstay of the US Army's Future Combat Systems and is already in Iraq providing an anti-improvised explosive device for the US Navy.

Capable of vertical take-offs and landings and hovering in mid-air, the IED eye in the sky is the robotics answer to the humming bird.

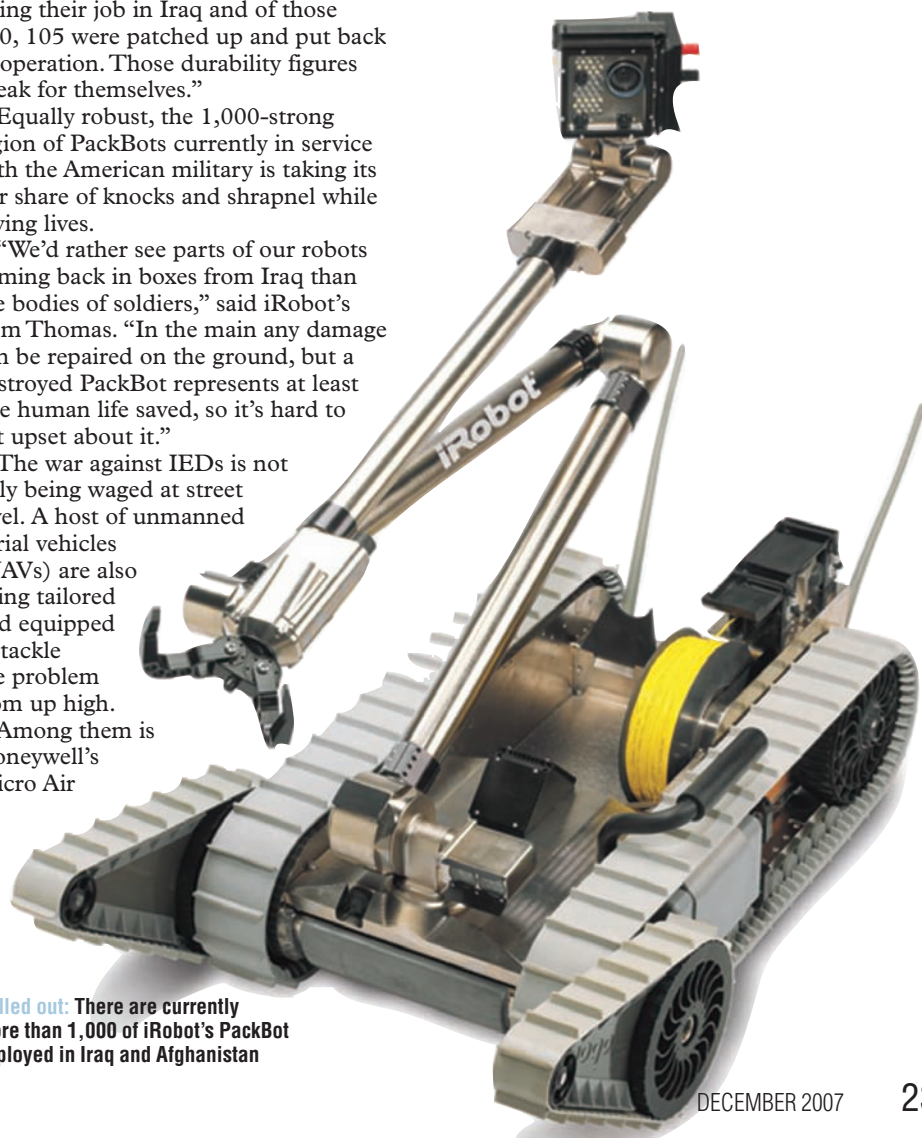
Small enough to fit in a bergen, once airborne it can "hover and stare" at suspected devices, relaying detailed imagery of a bomb's make-up and payload to a computer screen up to 10km away using its forward and downward looking electro-optical and infrared cameras.

"The feedback we're getting [from Iraq] is very positive," said MAV programme manager Vaughan Fulton. "You can persistently stare at an object to collect long-term surveillance. You can get in very close."

"We routinely fly the vehicle at altitudes of less than 50ft above ground level. That gives you a unique perspective."

While there is no technical silver bullet to end the threat of IEDs, the evolution of robots such as MAV and bomb bots should provide coalition troops with an effective new weapon for their deadly duel with Iraq's bomb-makers. ■

'We'd rather see parts of our robots coming back from Iraq in boxes than the bodies of soldiers'



Rollled out: There are currently more than 1,000 of iRobot's PackBot deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan



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Vested interest

Sim-suicide bombers help Brit troops know their enemy »

Report: Cliff Caswell
Pictures: Graeme Main

AS the journalists assembled for a media briefing during Army manoeuvres on Salisbury Plain, they were unaware of the danger lingering among them.

Moving silently through the throng of television cameras and notepads, the figure in the bulky coat seemed as absorbed as the rest of the crowd. It was not until he unzipped the jacket to reveal a suicide vest that the visitors realised they were in the company of a potential killer.

Fortunately, the rows of explosives were fake; the vest a training tool to teach troops how to counter the threat of a human bomb. For the members of the press, it was a salient lesson in the indiscriminate tactics of the terrorist.

Accurately replicating the conditions of modern operations has become vital in the diverse theatres of the 21st century. Unlike the Cold War face-off between East and West, where clear lines were drawn, the threat in Iraq and Afghanistan can come at any time and from any direction.

And to keep troops up-to-date in training, the latest equipment being used on exercises includes this simulated suicide vest, realistic improvised explosive devices and a dummy RPG launcher.

These terrorist weapons of choice are all linked to the electronic Tactical Engagement System (TES) to make battle simulation as realistic as possible.

"Today soldiers are facing an enemy that is indiscriminate, often anonymous and who has little feeling for whether he lives or dies," said Brig Nick Caplin, commander of the Collective Training

"Soldiers are facing an enemy that is indiscriminate, often anonymous and who has little feeling for whether he lives or dies"

Group at the Land Warfare Centre.

"It is vital that soldiers understand the operational context in which they are going to be deployed, and the nature of the insurgent tactics they are up against. We have to make sure the training is as realistic as we can make it."

Brig Caplin stressed that training troops against the spectre of the terrorist bomb was vital if they were to match the ever-present threat in theatre.

"We faced the IED for years in Northern Ireland, but there is clear evidence that the technology being used against us in Iraq is migrating to Afghanistan," he added. "It is a weapon system that is indiscriminate and fairly commonplace in the areas we are involved."

While the TES electronic training network has been a feature of military life for many years, bringing it up to date to recognise the nature of modern warfare has been a key priority for the Army's training bosses.

The simulated suicide vest and IED certainly provide shock value for the soldiers involved in training.

Both use compressed air

and coloured powder cartridges to simulate explosions, while troops wearing vests fitted with sensors get a warning if they have become casualties.

Commanders can also use the info gained from exercises to learn from any mistakes by replaying complete sequences in debriefing sessions.

For Army training boss Lt Col Tim Coombe, bringing the TES network up to speed with the latest enemy equipment has been a priority, particularly with British troops involved in diverse operations around the world.

"Originally TES was designed for the Cold War and bringing simulators into the 21st century obviously requires continuous investment.



"Improvised explosive devices can be deployed anywhere and we must assume that they will be used in any theatre in which we are present."

The new terror weapons simulation suite, which underwent trials at the Suffield training area in Canada, has already proved its worth with troops in the UK, who have been quick to develop tactics against the insurgent threat.

"This enhanced equipment makes training a lot more realistic for the guys and they've been taking a lot away from it," said Sgt David Adamson, 1st Battalion, The Royal Welsh, an infantry instructor at the Army's Copehill Down training ground on Salisbury Plain.

"With this kit you get a pretty good idea about what you could face."

Capt Mike Wade-Smith, of the 3rd Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment, was also impressed with the bomb and rocket-propelled grenade simulators. The officer, who has been helping to train theatre-bound soldiers, said: "The addition of the IED and suicide vest simulators make the training realistic and demonstrate how easily a terrorist can infiltrate a civilian population."

This is certainly true. Warfare in today's theatres is complicated. Training with the new kit will give troops an idea of the enemies they face and, most importantly, how to deal with them. ■

Clockwise from right, Terror tactics: A mock insurgent takes aim with a replica of a rocket-propelled grenade launcher; Suicide strike: A would-be attacker detonates the simulated suicide vest close to a Warrior armoured vehicle; Actions on: Soldiers dismount after a mock IED, right, is detonated





Techno troops

Use new technologies wisely, defence professionals tell industry captains

It doesn't take long for the science fiction weapons and equipment of shoot 'em up video games to become tomorrow's reality, writes **Cliff Caswell**.

But at a recent military technology exhibition, some delegates were questioning whether the trend is going too far, too fast.

Unmanned aerial drones, robots sporting machine guns and advanced night vision kit are extensively used on combat operations: the wars of science fiction are already being fought.

The proliferation of new kit, however, has prompted a cautionary note. Senior defence experts and captains of industry at the *Soldier Technology* exhibition in London warned against overburdening troops with unnecessary items.

There are fears that not all projects are focused precisely enough on the needs of troops and that unnecessary equipment could distract from their core business of fighting.

"Technology will not do everything," Rune Lausund, a project manager from Norwegian research agency Normans, told *Soldier*. "We need the tactics and procedures to use the new equipment that industry is working on."

"Interoperability is crucial to the future. Not only do we need interoperability between forces, but between systems and components."

Mark Richter, a programme manager at the United States Marines Corps Systems Command, echoed the concerns. With millions of dollars being pumped into research projects, he believed a clearer vision was needed about what was practical and useful in the next two decades.

"I need the science and technology guys to give me what we need, and that means we

need to start talking to them about what we want our squad to do in future," he said. "The question is how to get them going in the right direction."

The obsession with high-tech military kit is best reflected in the video games industry. Defence companies have borrowed liberally from the products of entertainment, whose programmers and publishers have in turn been inspired by military themes.

In attracting the so-called "PlayStation generation" to the ranks, defence companies have used the console as a starting point in their designs.

The sighting system for the Javelin missile bears more than a passing resemblance to the controller of the PlayStation and allows gamers to easily transfer their skills.

Christian Allen, a former US Marine and creative director of Ubisoft's acclaimed *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* video game series, is well aware of the link between console and warfare. Pitted against virtual insurgents in the games, players are forced to use their technological edge to stay alive.

"Everything you see in the games is based on either prototypes or planned programmes by industry and government agencies," he told *Soldier*.

But Allen admitted that it had been tough to keep up with so many

different initiatives. "Several times during the development of various *Ghost Recon* games a certain project has been cancelled or changed, and we had to do our best to keep on top of those modifications," he said.

Making sure technology has a clearly defined use, and is easy for troops to get to grips with was a priority for the defence contractors at the London trade show.

Mike Brown, of UK research and development firm Qinetiq, agreed that future technologies for individuals had to be simple, easy to use and of immediate benefit.

"Communications are a major issue that you need to resolve," he said. "If you don't have reliable comms in place, you can't do anything. Equipment availability is important too."

Andy McKenzie, of Thales Land and Joint Systems Division, believed practicality was an issue. "As a soldier you do not want to be taking a large computer around, particularly if it is in a hot environment and you have a lot of other stuff," he said.

"Getting information is not a problem, but you need to have the right information, and you obviously need different data depending on where you are. The challenge for the defence industry is providing the right options."

For others, getting back to the basics of operating on the modern battlefield rather than the issue of complex kit was the priority.

Bosses at Camelbak believe keeping soldiers combat-ready in the heat of Iraq and Afghanistan is key.

"At the end of the day, you have got to have ammunition and you must have a supply of water – without them you will have big problems," said sales director Peter Shand.

"What we have tried to do is reduce the amount of carriage the guys take with them."

Whatever the future holds, the core skills of soldiering are certain to remain at the forefront of operations. Advances in technology can help, but the practicalities must be considered.

It must also be acknowledged that any enemy will become more advanced in terms of equipment and know-how. Keeping a step ahead will be vital. ■

‘Everything you see in the game is based on either prototypes or planned programmes’



Future battlespace: Defence contractors are borrowing heavily from the video game world – iRobot's PackBot's controller mimics the design of the next-generation consoles

Below left, Advanced warfighter: Ubisoft's vision of the soldier of the future





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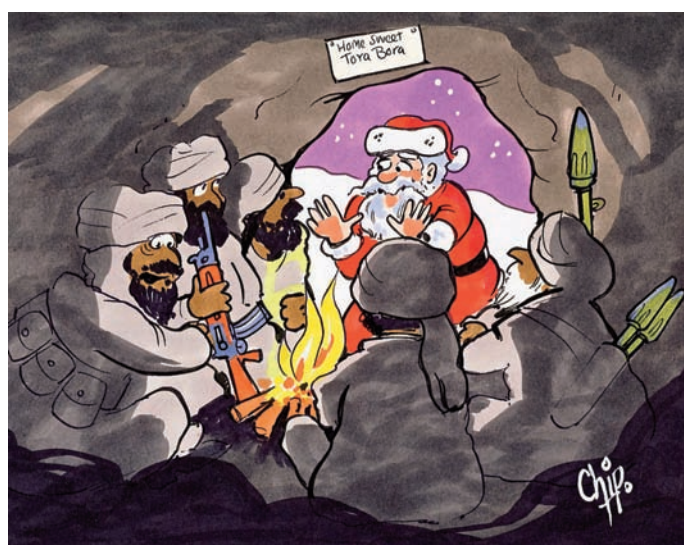


"And here for the umpteenth time, by request of the RSM who loves it, is 'I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas'. And who's to say he's wrong?"

Front-line festivities

Chuckle
with **Chip**

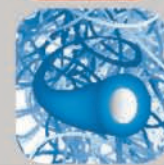
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"If that's the new Taliban uniform, I'm out."



"They are indeed very excited, Minister. Of course, they're expecting Katherine Jenkins."



Afghan Suit

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Knee length zips on trousers for easy on/off with boots.

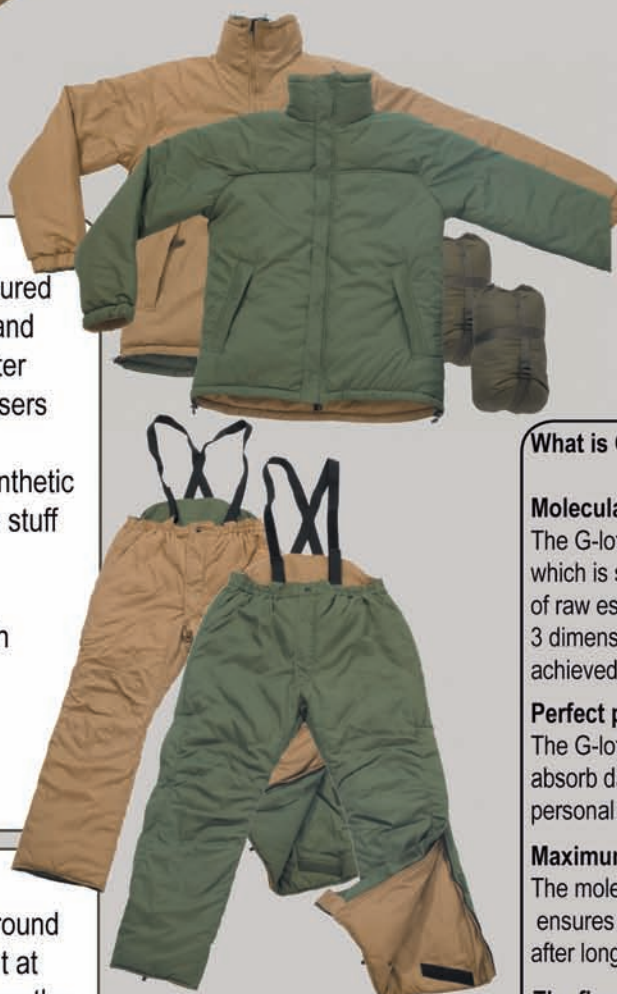
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Weight: 700g

Trousers £49.00

Weight: 690g



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The G-loft fibres themselves do not absorb dampness, providing the perfect personal climate control

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The fibre has a micrometer wide hollow running all the way through it.



Scrapheap sapper: Gems winner Spr Jay Coombes RE, one of the team of three who designed and built a cooling device for the Cobra radar system



Picture: Graeme Main

Diamond geezers

Telic troops take on a scrapheap challenge to come up with inventions

INGENIOUS sappers serving on Op Telic 10 in Iraq have emphatically proved that necessity is the mother of invention, writes **Stephen Tyler**.

The baking temperatures and operational environments in Basra have thrown up a number of challenges for troops working in the city and at the Contingency Operating Base (COB).

But under the MoD's Gems scheme, which provides cash rewards for clever solutions, soldiers have used everything from scrap wood to cling film to consign those problems to history.

"Guys come up with so many suggestions when they're on tour," explained SSgt Stuart Ward, REME. "Gems gives them the opportunity to use the skills they were taught during their training and put their initiative to the test. It really doesn't have to be a huge change, it just has to make some aspect of life easier."

SSgt Ward's assertion that minor tweaks often yield the biggest results is backed up by the experience of Royal Engineers LCpl Tom Glinn, Spr "Cookie" Cook and Spr Jay Coombes.

The trio were tasked with finding a way to cool the COB's Cobra radar system after the essential piece of kit began to fail under Iraq's unforgivingly

high temperatures. An inflatable tent placed over the Cobra unit proved ineffective as the air inside soon heated up and the structure itself was prone to blowing over in the wind.

But using a crude design sketched on the back of a cigarette packet, the engineers scavenged for scrap wood, discarded plastic tubing and even humble cling film to knock up a unit that drew a breeze from an air conditioning unit and fed it into the Cobra via a set of insulated tubes.

A prototype of the rudimentary design cost just £20 to build, but the innovation proved so effective that a full model was built and the idea awarded a Gems cash prize.

"The problem was that the Cobra is made for European temperatures and it didn't work during the day," explained Spr Coombes. "The temporary one worked so we had a new one made out of metal and thermal piping."

The device is not the only clever innovation to be dreamt up by COB-based soldiers. Recognising the threat posed to patrols by roadside bombs, fellow Royal Engineer Sgt Jim Randall

set about designing a gadget to make it easier for troops to uncover them.

The fruit of his labour was a metal hook which can be dragged along the ground to identify command wires leading to roadside IEDs. The simple design, which consists of a hook attached to an adjustable metal pole, was so effective that it was taken on board by explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams in Basra.

Craftsmen Steve Whiting and Phil Ashby, REME, also took on the Gems challenge after noticing that power lines in Basra city were being torn down when they became snagged on ISO containers on the back of some of the Army's larger vehicles, with the resulting loss to the city of its electricity supply. Whiting and Ashby designed an angled metal frame that allowed the cables to glide over the containers.

"The deflector is a simple design, but it means that people aren't losing power as much," explained Cfn Whiting. "With Gems, it's the most basic ideas that often make the biggest difference." ■

"It's the most basic ideas that often make the biggest difference"

● www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/Personnel/Gems

Virtual reality

Coming soon – a great new website to showcase the British Army

Report: Karen Thomas

YOUR best mate is giving you earache about the latest so-called revelations on the Army in the press and, as a serving soldier, you feel honour-bound to defend the most professional fighting force on the planet.

As you start giving it loads about Army life and the fab opportunities on offer, you get her to click onto www.army.mod.uk to prove your point. But your arguments soon wither when she is randomly sent to outdated and old-fashioned webpages all over the Army online shop.

Bored with scrolling lengthy volumes of text and wading through the equivalent of the Magna Carta, your mate hurries out the door unimpressed with the website and the British Army. A bit nonplussed, you peer into your funky flat screen.

You have to admit the site is a bit disorganised and perhaps has missed the video and podcasting boats. In fact, if you're honest, it has the look and feel of a pair of your Dad's old nylon flares.

Ten years after its initial launch, www.army.mod.uk has evolved into something haphazard, low-tech, unprofessional and boring – everything your Army is not. Worse still, it is a turn-off for the audience it is meant to capture.

Hard to admit but the soldiers' cyberspace reflection might be falling short of its hard-won battlespace reputation. Luckily, the MoD already has the internet equivalent of *What Not To Wear's* Trinnie and Susannah propelling style-challenged virtual soldiers towards tailored web self-esteem.

Pippa Sillitoe, a digital media consultant for the MoD web team, told *Soldier* that two years of hard graft has produced a design certain to flatter the Army's figure and make it the friendly but professional, consistent and authoritative outfit that everyone would want to work for.

"The extensive research we did before refurbishing the website was less about

the Army and more about the people who use the pages to look at the Army. We had to think about how soldiers could present themselves in a rich and engaging way to the public browsing the website."

The website's users were invited for their candid views on how easily they could navigate around the pages and their impression of the Army after visiting the site. Their comments were not the most flattering (see panel) and a massive revamping operation was ordered.

After months of extensive research and re-modelling, long jargon-heavy text was given the boot. Instead, the new polished and dynamic website will tempt surfers

to immerse themselves in pages filled with regularly refreshed news, photos, blogs and video.

Designed as an interactive two-way street, visitors will be invited to rate and email articles to friends, and a global community can have their say on the latest Army issues at snap online polls. Those who need a bit of online retail therapy can fill

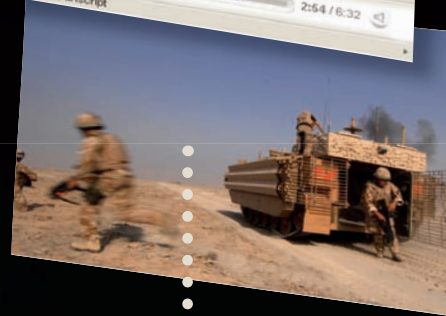
their internet shopping trolleys with the latest soldier goods.

For the Army webmasters reeling in horror at the prospect of putting the Gucci pages together, a nifty piece of software is at hand. The Red Dot content management system is as easy to use as Microsoft's PowerPoint – a swift click here and there

and Bob's your virtual uncle.

Everyone logging on will see the images, read the words and hear the voices of a dedicated and focused Army. www.army.mod.uk will don the cyberspace mantle of credible, trustworthy and professional soldiers who have no limits on what they can achieve. ■

"The extensive research we did before refurbishing the website was less about the Army and more about the people who use the pages to look at the Army"



Video and image players will be used throughout the site

Young explorers

THESE are the "PlayStation generation" – students and cadets – who have high expectations of what a website will offer. They are web savvy and don't always trust what they find in cyberspace but www.army.mod.uk is an exception.

They might just want quick info for their homework but they might also be interested in a career in green.

Verdict: "Boring. Needs more pictures, like on Army jobs."

Who hits the website and what do they think of it?

check

Additional navigation bars on the left and right hand columns will contain a series of visual links



Story modules on the homepage will link to current and up-to-date content within the website

The new homepage will play a key role in engaging and influencing users with high value, high impact features and imagery.

The top banner will set the scene throughout the website with the Army's crossed swords brand logo forming the key brand identifier. The primary navigation bar and other navigation modules will link to current and up-to-date content.

Serving soldiers

PRIVATES to generals are habitually surfing the web for personal and work-related reasons but most serving soldiers clicking onto the site are in their early to mid-20s.

This group are big news lovers, regularly visiting happening websites to make sure they get the official story although, ironically, they are least likely to find internet information credible or trustworthy.

Verdict: "Not proud. Not exciting."

Information seekers

PARENTS of potential recruits, career advisers, charities and families of soldiers have the site bookmarked because they want updates on the Army from the horse's mouth.

They use the internet daily. They need information to help them make decisions or to complete their work, or, in the case of journalists, research their assignments

Verdict: "Confusing, messy, not clear, not organised."

Hitting the web next year

- 1.7 million visits to the site each month
- Re-organised around user and visitor needs
- Hi-tech and clear account of who you are and what you do
- Interactive – a two-way virtual chat with your audience
- Credible and trustworthy source of the Army and operations
- Encourage cyberspace visitors to return time and time again

● **www.army.mod.uk**

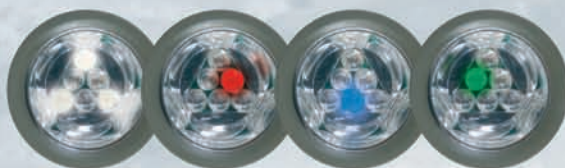
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Main picture, Hi-tech turret: The Warrior gunnery simulator in action

Below, Graphic depictions: Examples of the colour and thermal imaging screens

Bang up to date

New Warrior simulator brings added realism to gunners' war games

Report: Heidi Mines
Pictures: Graeme Main

ARMOURED vehicle gunners are being put through their paces on a high-tech simulator, which boasts graphics and sound to rival the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 consoles.

The latest Warrior trainer has been proving a hit with troops, who now have the opportunity to roam a three-dimensional virtual world populated by a realistic and intelligent enemy.

Richly detailed environments and changing climate patterns have replaced the 1980s *Space Invaders*-style graphics of the old trainer and, with the help of detailed terrain databases, soldiers can now hone their skills in a wide range of European, desert and urban settings.

The simulator is an identical replica of the Warrior turret and can accurately mimic the firing action of the vehicle's cannon and machine guns.

Instructors can test students to the limit by rapidly changing the lighting and visibility and introducing malfunctions, while recordings of an

individual's performance can be played back to peers in the classroom.

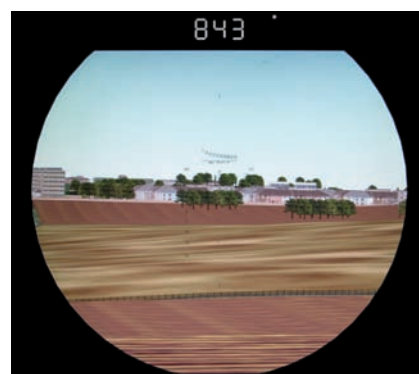
Capt Alex Logie, Scots, from the Bovington-based trials team, was impressed with the quality of the trainer, adding that the inclusion of the latest thermal imaging kit was particularly useful.

He stressed: "Thermal imaging makes a real difference on operations. Before, at night, you had very bad vision but now it's absolutely fantastic. Also, when driving down roads it makes it a lot easier to spot potential threats such as roadside bombs."

Nearly 40 of the simulators have been rolled out across the UK and Germany in a £6.5 million programme carried out by technical specialists CAE.

The virtual trainer is designed to prepare soldiers for live firing on the range – the final stage of training before an operational deployment.

Gunnery instructor Sgt Ross McFarlane, of the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Welsh, was delighted with the arrival of the new kit: "We now have 21st century technology." ■



Fighting spirit

3 Para's war-wounded winning battle for fitness »



Report: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Graeme Main

WHEN soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment arrived in Helmand last year they could never have envisaged the ferocity of fighting they were to encounter.

Constant contacts with Taliban fighters across the province took a deadly toll on the proud regiment, which lost three men during the intense tour.

As if the firefights were not enough, the Paras also faced the indirect but very real threat posed by landmines and several more soldiers were forced out of theatre after being caught up in explosions. The injuries were horrific. Young men at the peak of their physical prowess were left facing up to life with missing limbs or restricted mobility.

But the much-lauded airborne spirit is alive and well among the injured soldiers who are now fighting fit in new roles thanks

to their own incredible determination and the help of their regiment.

Commanding officer Lt Col Stuart Tootal has been at the heart of the drive to ensure the Op Herrick veterans are given every chance to rejoin their mates, but he admits the successful rehabilitation is entirely reliant on the soldiers' own determination and resolve.

"We have been continually struck by the fortitude, the determination and the paratrooper spirit that these guys have shown," Lt Col Tootal told *Soldier*. "The fact that they want to go back into the battalion is admirable and we have never failed to be impressed or humbled by their attitude.

"It's very important that the nation looks after its war wounded and that has been well recognised by the chain of command as something that needs to attract resources.

"We are asking our soldiers to go into harm's way and they deserve to be properly looked after if they pay a personal cost for that dedication and service."

Former sniper Cpl Stuart Hale is a case in point. The 25-year-old stepped on a landmine in Kajaki on September 6 last year as he tried to get within range of a Taliban vehicle checkpoint.

The incident led to the death of Cpl Mark Wright and caused severe injuries to three other men, including Cpl Hale who lost his right leg in the blast and was extracted from theatre to Selly Oak hospital in Birmingham.

Despite the physical and mental strain of his ordeal, Cpl Hale admits that he never gave leaving the Army more than a passing thought and he hopes to play a part in future 3 Para deployments as a sniper trainer.

"I'm working in the intelligence cell now and it's the best way I can contribute to the war effort," he said. "I'm really keen to deploy again because I know that if I didn't go I would just be sat in front of Sky News and Al Jazeera all day.

"Being a paratrooper gives you a lot of respect for your regiment and we think very



Returning to duty: Soldiers from 3 Para who suffered serious injuries on Op Herrick have been rehabilitated and given new roles in the regiment. Cpl Stuart Hale, left, and Sgt Stuart Pearson, right, who both lost legs in landmine explosions, say the regiment's help has allowed them to continue their Army careers in spite of their injuries.

highly of ourselves. That's what gives us such pride in everything we do and that has been a big factor in pulling me through."

The steely determination to remain an integral part of 3 Para's strength is also evident in Sgt Stuart Pearson. The 32-year-old lost his left leg after stepping on a landmine as he cleared a helicopter landing site for the casevac of Cpl Hale.

As with his colleague, Sgt Pearson remained focused on continuing his Army career and, thanks to the support of Lt Col Tootal, he is now working in the PRI shop at Hyderabad Barracks in Colchester.

"I have not got a bad word to say about the way I was treated," said Sgt Pearson, who completed a tandem parachute jump with the Red Devils in July. "I never gave giving the Army up a thought for more than five minutes. I have eight years left of my 22 and I intend seeing them out."

Another of 3 Para's injured troops is Sgt Paddy Caldwell, who was directing fire

from a rooftop in Sangin when he was shot through the neck in August 2006. He awoke weeks later in Selly Oak to find he was unable to move from the neck down.

Although he is currently consigned to a wheelchair, Sgt Caldwell is gradually regaining his movement and was well enough to start a new job in the battalion welfare office at the end of October.

Praising his regiment, Sgt Caldwell said that he hopes the exemplary treatment he received will be used as a template to help ease the transition back into working life for any soldiers injured on future operational tours.

"The regiment has been outstanding for any needs that I have got. I have been a bit of a pathfinder," he said. "As Afghanistan goes on, there might be people that are worse off than me and I hope that I will have been in the forefront of getting things changed.

"If I had a chance I would deploy again. Because of the level of my injury I was recommended to be medically discharged, but the CO worked to keep me on, so as long as I want to serve I will be able to continue to do so. You can be miserable and blame the world or you can crack on. I'm determined to get back on my feet," said Sgt Caldwell.

Regardless of the level of injury suffered, each of 3 Para's war-wounded troops have used equal measures of personal strength and regimental

support to get back into the career they love.

"The thing that is significant is that these guys have surpassed a lot of people's expectations," concluded Lt Col Tootal.

"What the medical staff and clinicians didn't realise when they gave them their prognosis is that these are paratroopers and they are excelling because of the mental attitude and approach they take." ■

"You can be miserable and blame the world or you can crack on"

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After the Army

Resettlement programme
smoothes switch from green
street to civvy street »

Greener grass: When to
move on from Army life
is a decision all soldiers
have to take Picture: Mike Weston

CIVVY

Report: Karen Thomas

IT'S a massive step that almost every soldier must take but leaving the Army for a bite of the civilian life cherry should be as straight-forward and fulfilling as joining up.

If a teacher can change their career for a life in combats, there's no reason why a soldier can't switch from the battlefield to the classroom. And soldiers hold some trump cards for the transition with their experience in meticulous planning and thorough preparation, as well as their excellent resettlement programme.

Designed to ease the inevitable bumps along the path from life in the Army to civvy street, the resettlement package offers workshops on basic life skills such as writing a CV and preparing for job interviews. Trained civilian professionals from the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) will also advise you on the practicalities of civilian employment and whether you need particular qualifications.

If you have served at least four years and want to leave you can apply for the programme through your unit resettlement staff and Service resettlement advisers. They will put you in touch with the CTP, which helps the 15,000 personnel leaving the Forces

each year to tailor the resettlement package to their individual needs.

LCpl Christopher Davidson, RLC, joined the Army at 16 and served six years before he decided to leave.

"I didn't even know there was a resettlement programme and I found out about it through a mate. But once you are put in contact with CTP, it's brilliant. I don't know what I want to do yet but it's good to meet everyone else and hear their plans," he told *Soldier*, as he surfed for jobs on the internet in the resource room of the Aldershot Resettlement Centre.

"Civvy street is almost a completely different world but the workshops give you a lot of confidence and a positive attitude towards leaving because you are surrounded by people who see leaving the Army as a good thing. They make you feel like civilian employers really want you."

LCpl Alvin Edward, RLC, already had experience of civilian life, having worked in a bank and as a teacher before he joined up at 24. After serving five years, including tours of Iraq and Afghanistan, LCpl Edward

felt it was time for a new challenge. "The CTP courses are brilliant and I'm very impressed with the staff who encourage you to ask questions.

"You have someone to support you for two years after you leave and they are very proactive and tell you what you are entitled to," he said.

Because you can access the programme up to two years before departing the Army, you have plenty of time to obtain necessary qualifications

and get up to speed on buying or renting property. You are also entitled to a resettlement grant, which you can use to ease your changeover to civvy street.

For those among the 4,500 soldiers who leave every year but miss the camaraderie and ethos of the Army, there is always the option to join

the Territorial Army. If you sign up less than three years after leaving as a Regular, you would have a reduced annual training requirement and a relaxation on your call-out liability for mobilisation.

But, as *Soldier* found out, former soldiers are very much in demand outside the wire . . . ■

‘Civvy street is almost a completely different world but the workshops give you a lot of confidence and a positive attitude towards leaving’

STREET

Career signpost: Experts are on hand to make the transformation to civilian as smooth as possible

After the Army – at a glance

● **Nigel “Wicked Will” Williams works as a project coordinator. Joined the Army at 16, served 23 years, left as a captain, RLC.**

“EVERYTHING has fallen into place and I’m enjoying life number two but it’s dog-eat-dog out here and they don’t take prisoners.

The resettlement programme is very good and you must take from it what you can and use that to your advantage. The Career Transition Partnership resettlement officers were very helpful when I wanted to make sure my Army qualifications were accepted in civvy street. I also used my grant to get additional qualifications at civilian colleges and membership of professional bodies.

But it comes down to planning, preparation and wanting to do well, so ex-soldiers will stand out as the few who want to put their best foot forward.”

● **Paul Simpson works as a security officer. Joined the Army at 16, served 20 years, left as a private, R Irish.**

“WRITE down the good and not-so-good things about being in the Army, and if the not-so-good outweigh the good, then leave.

But it’s a cruel world so you must plan your resettlement.

Ask yourself what qualifications you have and whether they are accepted in civvy street. For example, if you need GCSEs you can do them through the education centre.

The support I had from CTP was fantastic, as I hadn’t a clue about putting a CV and application form together. Give yourself two years before you leave to plan what you want to do – don’t leave your resettlement to the last month of service.”

● **Russell Brierley works as a training instructor. Joined at 16, served 23 years and left as a colour sergeant, RGBWLI.**

“THERE is life after the Army. I didn’t realise you could get resettlement up to two years before you left and probably left it too late, as I crammed everything into the last few months. I hadn’t a clue what I wanted to do and had never had an interview or written a CV so the CTP workshops were a good confidence-builder, especially for life skills.

The career consultant looked at my abilities from a civilian perspective and tried to steer me into suitable employment.

I would definitely recommend attending the CTP workshops as soon as possible – don’t get fobbed off.”



CTP resettlement packages offer:

One-to-one career counselling
Workshops in job-finding skills
Identifying your training needs
Professional skill training courses
Local employment advice
Access to online job search service
Support for two years after leaving

■ For more information, including a guide to the resettlement package, go to www.ctp.org.uk



Million pound tipster

Dragons' Den star Duncan Bannatyne backs ex-soldiers for head start in business world

Interview: Karen Thomas
Picture: Graeme Main

HIS woodwork teacher said he would never amount to anything, he served six months in Colchester's glasshouse after being dishonourably discharged from the Royal Navy and his father warned him against starting up a business.

All the more reason for SMEM – self-made entrepreneur millionaire – Duncan Bannatyne to sit back and feel good about his £200 million fortune. His renown in the business world for his chain of fitness clubs is matched only by his fame in the BBC1 hit show, *Dragons' Den*.

The man who grew up in Clydebank and joined the Navy at the age of 15, believes that fellow Service leavers – with their unique skills and attributes – have the necessary credentials to conquer the business world.

"After being discharged I started meeting Servicemen who had come out after 20 years and they were getting themselves jobs as doormen.

"I thought what a complete waste because these guys had got the discipline, they were fit and they had got the ability to start a business but it was never something that entered their

heads," Bannatyne told *Soldier* in his plush West End pad.

"I just think when people come out of the Services they've got to really look at the qualities they have and focus on those qualities and do something with them. And I think if they can't get a fantastic job or a job that they're happy with, they should start in business. There's a lot they can do."

'Soldiers have the ability to be disciplined, work long hours, be dedicated and take risks'

Bannatyne should know. After serving with the Navy for four years, the young sailor was found guilty of the Forces' charge of showing violence to an officer who was behaving in a "drunk and obnoxious" manner. He'd tried to chuck his superior into the drink, egged on by a mate and a £5 bet.

After his time in Colchester, Bannatyne drifted for ten years until he started grafting for his ice-cream business. Succumbing to a taste for the entrepreneurial, he struck out into nursing homes. Despite finding himself £6 million in debt, steely determination and self-belief eventually netted him £46 million for the business.

Now a donor to numerous children's charities and awarded an OBE, the Scot revealed just a few of the secrets to business success for all those soldiers leaving the Army with a commercial leaning . . .

Got what it takes?

“Soldiers have the ability to be disciplined, work long hours, be dedicated and take risks. They have that inside them and it's a matter of whether they're focused on that when they leave the Army. I think they should write down their strengths and weaknesses on a piece of paper.”

Getting started

“You should focus on what you think you want to do. There's no point focusing on driving a truck if you hate driving trucks. You've got to build your life around what you enjoy and what you want to do.

I don't think anybody should dream about being a multi-millionaire overnight. You could do that by robbing a bank but you can't do that and be proud of what you're doing. I'm very proud of what I do in my businesses. I enjoy it and I think those two things are very much the driving factors.”

Pitfalls

“On *Dragons' Den* I've never seen so many blooming crazy ideas. I never knew there was so much money just spent on patent solicitors. I met a patent solicitor and said: 'Look, I can't understand why you guys give people false hope and take money to patent an idea that's completely crap and unworkable'. But people think that because a patent solicitor is going to patent it, it's a good idea, and it isn't.

The other pitfall is when people who, the day they go into business, buy a brand new top-of-the-range Mercedes on hire purchase and live the life of a successful businessman. It's a terrible thing to do but some people think they can spend money the day they start in business. You've got to work at it and make the money.”

Risky business

“Soldiers take risks when they go to war and in danger zones but I suppose they've been told to take that risk so it's not a risk in the same way. But they've got to use that ability to have taken that risk and had the courage to stand up and fight, to think, 'well if I can do that then surely I can set up my own business, as surely fear of failure isn't going to be something that is going to stop me'.”

Competition

Soldier has five signed copies of *Anyone Can Do It* to give away. To stand a chance of winning, tell us who else is a Dragon in the Den. Is it a) Philip Green, b) Charles Saatchi or c) Peter Jones? Send your answers on a postcard to the address at the front of the magazine by December 31. Usual rules apply.



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Russian revolution

A full-page photograph of two Russian soldiers in ceremonial uniforms. They are standing in a doorway with a red brick wall in the background. The soldier in the foreground is in a high-kick position, holding a rifle. The soldier behind him is also holding a rifle. Both are wearing grey overcoats with gold braiding, white gloves, and grey fur hats with gold emblems. The title 'Russian revolution' is overlaid in large white text at the top.

**Cold War
thaw: Brits
help build
new lives
for Soviet
soldiers »**

Report: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Steve Dock

It would not be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that England and Russia have not seen eye to eye in recent years.

The poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko in London put a strain on the link between the two nations, while England's recent defeat against their Russian counterparts in a European Championship qualifying match in Moscow didn't help.

But while the headlines may point towards a frosty relationship, the reality is different. A special bond between the two countries' militaries has resulted in tens of thousands of Russian soldiers being retrained in new careers and getting a second lease of life after leaving the ranks.

Since 1995, British Army officers have been working to set up the Russian Resettlement Project (RRP), a network of state-of-the-art training centres across the country which help educate and integrate former Soviet soldiers making the move into civilian life.

Outgoing project leader Maj Donald Smith (AGC (ETS)) told *Soldier* that the RRP has been so successful that Britain has now withdrawn its support to allow Russia to manage the project on its own for the first time.

"The problem with Russia before was that there were no training centres that had the experience or expertise required to train what are a quite specific bunch of people," Maj Smith explained.

"The Russian Resettlement Project has changed that and

I'm pleased and proud that Britain has been involved because I honestly believe in the value of resettlement training."

The need for such an initiative in Russia became a pressing issue in 1994 when the Soviet Army's withdrawal from a newly-unified Germany led to the largest-ever reduction in the country's troop numbers.

Soldiers whose life experiences were entirely based around the military found themselves thrust into the alien world of the civilian and had to look for new employment.

Although the Russian Ministry of Defence said that Servicemen who left the Army were entitled to be retrained, there was no money in the budget for a scheme on the scale needed.

With highly-trained military officers being forced into low-paid manual work or even unemployment, the Russian

Army knew it had to do something to ease the often awkward transition between army life and civvy street.

The answer came with the arrival of their British counterparts. The RRP was formed in 1995 and the project's first centre, the Institute for Professional Training and Retraining, in Rostov-on-Don, opened soon after.

Since then, a further 11 centres across Russia have ushered nearly 28,000 students through their doors on intensive three-and-a-half month, 500-hour courses ranging from IT to real estate valuation.

Yuriy Logvinov, head of the IT faculty at Rostov-on-Don, said that although he was sad to see the end of Britain's support, he was confident that the RRP network's foundations would help the

project flourish in the future.

"I'm optimistic because I feel that although the involvement has ended, we have learnt a lot from the British and we won't forget them," he explained.

The statistics back up Logvinov's optimistic outlook. A proudly-displayed poster in the Rostov centre shows scores of RRP graduates who have progressed into highly skilled roles including commercial directors, government inspectors and network administrators.

It is no coincidence that so many of the 90 per cent of students who pass the RRP's courses move into employment so quickly. Each centre works closely with the regional business community to help place the right person in the right job.

Nina Simonova, Rostov Institute's real estate and valuation faculty head, said her students' military backgrounds allied to their newly learned skills made them an attractive proposition for employers.

"Our experience has shown that employers are very happy to take on former military personnel," she said.

"Firstly it has to be said that, in general, the sort of person that comes to us has a good level of education.

"Secondly, the employers know they are able to manage others.

'Although the involvement has ended, we have learnt a lot from the British and we won't forget them'



That's a quality you can only truly acquire with experience and time. Finally, we teach students according to their individual abilities so we are not trying to fit round pegs into square holes.

"What has characterised our relationship [with the British] is cooperation and mutual respect. Even though the finance has ended, we have a professional programme left behind."

For many of the people currently enrolled on courses in Rostov, the RRP has been their salvation from a life of menial labour and wasted talent.

Asked whether the course had made a difference to his prospects, network administration student Roman Melnikov was emphatic in his answer. "Without a doubt," he said. "I'm very optimistic about finding work."

"Because of this course I not only hope to be able to go straight into work, but I think I will have a degree of choice over

it. Without this I would have been forced to accept the first job I was offered."

Fellow IT student Valerij Anikin added: "This resettlement training will allow me to get a better job with a better salary. It has really improved my prospects."

Reflecting on the spirit of cooperation between Britain and Russia, Rostov centre director Col Anatoliy Kanunnikov said he

had always found a common language with his colleagues regardless of which country they hailed from.

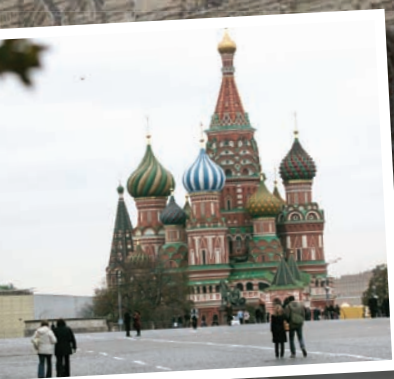
"Irrespective of who it has been, they were

always cooperative on a professional level," he said. "What is particularly gratifying is that a system that was set up by the British has now been handed over successfully to the Russian Federation which has recognised that there's a future for this programme and a future for resettlement training."

Although he has now departed Moscow for a new role in Germany, Maj Smith believes he is leaving behind a British legacy which will continue to breathe new life into Russian soldiers ending their service in their proud country's army.

"We are leaving, but we are leaving behind the infrastructure for the project to continue," he concluded.

"I think we have set something in place which will remain for a long, long time." ■



Clockwise from main picture, Money-maker: The GUM department store's designer shops showcase Russia's thriving economy; Tourist traps: Visitors flocking to see St Basil's Cathedral and the Moscow Metro have created scores of jobs; Computer course: Maj Donald Smith (AGC (ETS)) checks the work of an RRP student

A theatre of

Home Guard of classic comedy pays tribute to troops' courage

Interview: Cliff Caswell
Pictures: BBC

HE was a classic example of a young recruit willing to stand up to a trumped-up superior officer. As a junior member of the Home Guard, Pte Frank Pike was a constant thorn in the side of bank manager-turned-soldier Capt George Mainwaring. And in dealing with the youngster's irritatingly insubordinate voice, the boss, played by the late Arthur Lowe, was reduced to two words: "Stupid boy".

It was a phrase that quickly embedded itself in British military culture. The characters that made up the Home Guard unit in the BBC comedy *Dad's Army* provided quotes for a generation of British soldiers squaring up to the challenges of military service.

And for Ian Lavender, the actor who brought Pike to life, the popularity of the show with real-life soldiers has been particularly satisfying.

"We were fondly adopted by a lot of messes when we were making the series in the 1960s and 70s," Lavender, 61, who is touring with the comedy play *Donkey's Years*, recalled.

"During filming in Thetford, we'd get Territorial Army and Regular

soldiers coming through on exercise and would always have a great time.

"I tried to inject a lot of my own character as I was back then into Pike. Although he's naïve, you find he is often right, and it is Capt Mainwaring who is wrong."

Despite the comic approach of *Dad's Army* to the Home Guard, Lavender admitted that starring in the long-running series had given him total respect for those who were willing to lay down their lives had the Germans crossed the Channel.

He also dismissed the views of some critics who had opened fire on the show for belittling the Home Guard. At its core, *Dad's Army* showed that the part-time troops, who were lightly armed and represented Britain's final line of defence, would have fought to the death.

"I've actually done a couple of documentaries about the real Home Guard and heard some extraordinary tales about what those men were expected to do if there was an invasion," he added. "There was also a secret wing of the organisation and two of the veterans I met still refused to talk about their role."

"We were fondly adopted by a lot of messes when we were making the series in the 1960s and 70s"

While respectful of soldiers and the demanding role they were charged with carrying out, Lavender confessed that he had never considered a military career. His older brother had been enlisted for National Service but, by the time the thespian was in the firing line, compulsory duty had been axed.

"My brother was one of the last to be called up under Mr Profumo but that is my only experience of the military," Lavender said with a smile. "If I had been called up, I believe that I would have been institutionalised within five weeks."

The Army's loss was the entertainment world's gain. With his gift for acting, Lavender trained at the Bristol Old

Vic School before launching into a career that has taken him from roles in Shakespeare to the highly charged drama of *EastEnders* and the whacky world of Richard O'Brien's *Rocky Horror Show*.

Now a veteran of stage and screen, he has worked alongside Hollywood stars including Dustin Hoffman and forged a track record for excellence in his work. He carried off the role of Pike for nearly a decade, has endured the relentless high-pressure world of the soap opera and continues to perform on the stage.

"I'm lucky because I've had the pleasure to be in theatre companies with actors who are jaw-droppingly talented," said Lavender. "The people I'm with at the moment are a joy to work with and, at my time of life, it is amazing to sit back on their energy."

"I love the theatre – there is nothing like performing in front of people. You can step out on stage and every night you have a completely different experience. Obviously you are saying the same lines but it is not the same because there is something there that is absolutely unique to the audience in front of you."

Lavender said that performing live was in stark contrast to filming a soap opera such as *EastEnders* – he played the role of Derek Harkinson on Albert Square for three years – in which actors and writers faced incredibly huge pressures.

"You have to come up with two



war

hours of TV a week, which is as long as a feature film, so time is an issue, and standards do slip as a result,” he admitted. “I think that is a problem that every soap opera suffers from at one time or another.

“It is not so much the pressure on the actors, but on the programme’s writers and producers. We can, after all, only work with the tools we have been given.”

For Lavender, however, there are no regrets about the roles he has played or his chosen career path. Years after bringing the irksome Pike to our screen, he remains as fresh and enthusiastic about acting as the day he first trod the boards.

“I wouldn’t have missed *Dad’s Army* for the world,” he concluded. “But now I’m enjoying the tour with *Donkey’s Years* as well as recently being in episodes of the BBC’s *Casualty* and *Doctors* – the sheer talent around is amazing.

For his part Lavender – a Home Guard stalwart of British theatrical excellence – certainly shows no signs of slowing down just yet. His lifetime of thespian service continues. ■

Right, Treading the boards: Ian as Derek Harkinson in the BBC’s *EastEnders*.

Left, Dad’s lads: As Frank Pike in *Dad’s Army*



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Evening hymn: A sunset ceremony over Little Aden, where scores of British fallen lie in the cemetery in Silent Valley

Last post

Veterans return to remember the dead of Aden, four decades after the British withdrawal »

Report: Cliff Caswell
Pictures: Mike Weston

THEY lie beneath a parched landscape, baked by a relentless sun and soothed only by a desert breeze that seems to whisper of times long gone.

The fallen here are isolated, far from their homeland. Buried in the most inhospitable corner of a barren foreign field, their graves are flanked by the vastness of the Yemeni desert and a majestic, jagged rock face that towers high over the lines of headstones.

The dead of Silent Valley were left behind by the British 40 years ago. After troops pulled out of the Middle East protectorate of Aden following years of insurgency, and with the military infrastructure dismantled, only the fallen remained behind to tell the human cost of the story.

"I know eight people who are buried here," said Eddie Moir, a former soldier with the Royal Corps of Transport, as he paced the lines of headstones. "They were all killed during a rebellion in 1967, and one of them was a staff sergeant in my troop.

"Their deaths have bothered me for 40 years and I had to come back – I left Aden the year before they died and had I been there, I would have been with them.

"There but for the grace of God go I," he said.

As the sun reached its zenith, Eddie and a handful of visiting British veterans and their children took part in a service of remembrance. It was the culmination of a 4,000-mile journey to a country battered by occupation, revolution and civil war. Their mission was to find the Aden of their past.

Visiting graves in Yemen has never been an easy pilgrimage for loved ones and families of those who died in the conflict four decades ago.

Just months after the departure of the British Forces from the protectorate, some 15,000 troops from the Soviet Union and their East German allies arrived in a new occupation that would deepen the Cold War and leave the area off-limits to the West.

Despite the Russian intervention, Yemen's internal political divisions simmered under the surface and it was only after a bitter civil war that the north and south of the country were unified.

Even today the area is volatile, with terror attacks and kidnappings a real threat. With inter-tribal rivalries and the ever-present spectre of Islamic extremism, some areas are still too dangerous for visitors.

For these former soldiers, old enough to remember the British in Aden, returning to locations that otherwise

now exist only in books about British colonial history was an important act on the 40th anniversary.

In the crumbling back streets they caught glimpses of a long-gone way of life – venerable British post boxes, an enduring statue of Queen Victoria and junk shops packed with the relics of an imperial age. Shelves were filled with broken radios, stacks of old razors, poker dice and Boer War rifles piled alongside bags of military cap badges.

Wandering through Aden's silent reminders of its British past was an emotional experience for Alan Davis. In 1964, his older brother, Mick, was killed while serving with the 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment.

Alan's eyes quickly filled with tears when he discovered Mick's headstone in Ma'aala Cemetery in the centre of town. While his parents had the opportunity to visit the 21-year-old's grave shortly after his death, the teenage Alan had wanted to move on with his life. But now approaching 60, he felt the need to be close to his brother and to see the place where he gave his life.

"My parents were never the same again after Mick's death," Alan recalled.

"He was shot by a sniper while he was on a convoy in the Radfan area. The gunman was in cover on a hill and was hitting anything he could.

"I was told that Mick had been shot through the shoulder and that the bullet passed through his heart," he added.

"The other soldiers

called in a Hawker Hunter fast jet which strafed the hillside. They found the sniper's body – he was armed with a First World War Lee Enfield rifle."

For Richard Viner, whose father Gordon was a commander of Aden's Federal Regular Army, seeing familiar locations where his parents had lived and worked brought back mixed memories of happiness and tragedy.

Peering out of the windows of a bus on the way to Crater – a town built at the site of an extinct volcano – he pointed out places he visited on his holidays from boarding school. But it was the chilling moments when a grenade was thrown into a party he was enjoying at a friend's house that were foremost in his thoughts.

"I had just been saying goodbye when there was a huge explosion and the senior medical officer's daughter was on the floor," Richard said. "She'd been hit in the neck by shrapnel and was bleeding very badly.

"An ambulance was called but she died on her way to hospital. Three or four other boys had also been injured in the attack. I remember walking back home and putting my shotgun at the end of the bed."

'Lt Mike Handfield-Jones was an outstanding rugby player who was offered an England trial, but insisted on coming to Aden to be with his troops'



But in seeing the familiar streets and landscapes that had been his home as a youngster, Richard also recalled many happy memories. "I had some really good times," he added. "My father, who retired as a brigadier, did two tours of Aden and it was always great to come here and see my parents."

Aden of the 1960s was an extreme mixture of life and death for former sapper Rolph James. Standing in Ma'aala Cemetery beside the grave of an old friend was a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made by British troops.

But Rolph, who ended his career as a brigadier, also experienced the elation of the birth of his daughter, Rachel, in this sun-dried land in 1966. She accompanied her father on his return to his old area of operations.

"The visit here has brought back a lot of memories," he said, pointing at the headstone. "The officer buried here, Lt Mike Handfield-Jones, was an outstanding rugby player who was offered an England trial but insisted on coming to Aden to be with his troops."

Main picture, Aden's fallen: Graves of British Service personnel left where they fell in Silent Valley cemetery; **Below right, Returning heroes:** Veterans, their relatives and children, make an emotional return to Yemen



Rolph recalled how Lt Handfield-Jones was shot in a friendly fire incident. It was the first time he had returned to the graveside since attending the young officer's funeral.

The pain of loss was acute but the world had moved on. The sun had again set over Silent Valley and the dead of Aden were in darkness. Yet this forgotten war resonates into the present.

A few hundred miles from this tip of the Arabian Peninsula, British troops are involved in military operations in Iraq. Since 2003, they have been fighting a very similar conflict to that experienced by the men and women of the British Army of 40 years ago.

Soldiers are today battling against the same environment and a similar enemy. The lessons of a tiny protectorate, thousands of miles from the UK, are more relevant today than any time in the recent past. ■

● Visit our website to view a selection of features, taken from our digital archive, on the British Army's presence in Aden



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TALKBACK

Dreaming of a ginger nut

Brief is best

YOUR letters provide a real insight into the issues at the top of soldiers' agendas . . . but please keep them brief. Emails (mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk) MUST include your name and location (although we won't publish them if you ask us not to). Anonymous letters go in the bin. The Editor reserves the right to accept or reject letters, and to edit for length, clarity or style.

Before you write to us with a problem, you should first have tried to get an answer via your own chain of command. Our postal address is on Page 5.

I AM currently living at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Robinson in Afghanistan and will be eating a diet of mostly ten-man and 24-hour rations for the next six months.

Has anyone considered replacing or varying the "biscuits, fruit AB" with other types of biscuit such as ginger nuts, Garibaldis, digestives or custard creams?

This would not affect the weight or size of a ration pack but it would provide some variety, which would be a force multiplier. After all, "fruit" is a loose term in this instance.

— Sgt Addison RAF, attached 14 Signal Regt, Op Herrick.

PRIZE LETTER

Lt Neil Horwood RN, Defence Food Services,

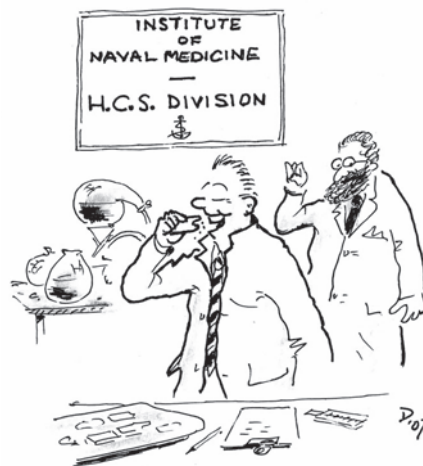
replies: Thank you for the feedback, which we are always grateful to receive. In terms of adding additional variety to the rations, this is something we are continually working to achieve.

Recent improvements to the 24-hour ration pack have been the introduction of tuna pouches and Tabasco sauce and, to address the problems with some components in extreme heat in Iraq and Afghanistan throughout the summer months, the introduction of the Hot Climate Supplements (HCS) issued with each 24-hour box.

DFS IPT recently commissioned the Institute of Naval Medicine to review the lunchtime element of the 24-hour ration pack with a remit to suggest improved ways of delivering the nutritional content required by troops and also to use the feedback from the recent HCS initiative to help develop ideas for suitable products to replace items such as the biscuits.

This work is due to be completed this month and we will take the recommendations forward from there.

With biscuits in particular it is very difficult to get the required shelf life, which is why the variety in the current ration



"Eureka! We've cracked it! The multi-flavoured biscuit to suit all tastes . . ."

pack menus is limited. It must also be considered that the biscuits packed into all 24-hour ration packs should have the flexibility to be consumed in conjunction with other snack items such as the jam, Vegemite, paté and tuna.

Different types of creamed biscuits would not give the ration pack the flexibility required.

PS...

The Saxons are coming . . .

THANK you for your interesting report on the formation of The Mercian Regiment ("Mercian might", Oct). The Saxon crown on their badge (pictured) is a unique distinguishing feature.



Perhaps the Mercians will come to see themselves as Saxons, as the Royal Anglians see themselves as Vikings.

— Name and address supplied.

Wireless is the way to go

I HAVE never written to you before, but I feel I should do so just to say that where I am based in Afghanistan we have wireless internet to use with our laptops. This is amazing: it makes home feel next to you and it's less to worry about than trying to get to use the

phones and having to queue. I can chat online and manage to use this facility every few days for a few hours. It's brilliant. I think it should be installed everywhere possible as it's the best thing we could be given. — Satisfied soldier, Op Herrick.

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

Pax didn't cover me

AS a member of the Armed Forces I was sold a Pax insurance policy during one of those promotional drives a unit does before it deploys on operations.

After a period in hospital I tried to submit a claim for my stay under the Pax scheme, only to be told that psychological illness was not covered.

However, an article in a recent edition of *The Lancet* medical journal stated that psychological illnesses are more debilitating than heart disease and other general conditions.

The trauma caused by this disablement is indescribable and a major cause of my suicidal thoughts. My disappointment lies with the MoD

for having pushed soldiers in my unit into purchasing insurance that does not cover mental illness. – **Name and address supplied.**

Jane Hyde, Pax, replies: *We have every sympathy with all those affected by this condition and for their suffering.*

The Pax personal accident policy is designed and priced to provide financial benefits to people who have suffered an accidental bodily injury resulting in a permanent disability. The policy does not cover any psychological or psychiatric conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

This exclusion is clearly defined in the Pax policy's terms and conditions.

We are not currently aware of any personal accident policy that covers PTSD. This and similar conditions are not bodily injuries and as such are far more complex as regards assessment of risk, cause, diagnosis, degree of any condition and whether it is likely to be temporary or permanent.

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), adds: *The MoD is prohibited from officially endorsing commercial insurance products on offer in the open market.*

The chain of command, however, has a duty to ensure that personnel are made aware of the requirement for providing for oneself and one's family in the event of injury, illness or death.

Terminal delay for grant

DON'T think you will get your terminal grants immediately after you leave the Army. The Joint Personnel Administration Centre has told me their targets are payment within 30 working days.

In my case this meant a wait from my discharge date of August 16 until September 30, at a cost to me of about £350 in lost opportunity to repay part of my mortgage early.

It has also stopped me using the money in a timely fashion, which for someone looking for accommodation could be problematic in the short term and might mean they have to get a bridging loan.

Please tell me why we can't have this grant sooner. JPAC staff have said they could do things quicker, but abide by the JPA-imposed targets. – **Lt Col**

(Retd) Andy Tysoe, Totnes, Devon.

Cmdr Angus Ross, SPVA, Director Military Services, responds: *I believe there has been a little misunderstanding on the part of Lt Col Tysoe and from within the JPAC Enquiry Centre and I have instructed this be addressed as a matter of urgency.*

JPA Pensions aim to process pension benefits, including terminal grants, on the first working day following termination from HM Armed Forces (the last paid day in service). Following the processing of the award, the lump sum is passed to JPA for payment to be made. Payment of the terminal grant will then be available in a payee's bank account up to three working days from the date the payment is processed. The current target for JPA Pensions is to enable the payment within five working days.

There were some understandable delays following the Army roll-out of JPA, which caused a delay in processing a number

of payments, however these are being addressed with the utmost expediency and accuracy.

The target of 30 days is somewhat misleading, so it is worth explaining its meaning. This is the period of time in which the agency must make payment of lump sums that become due, before the agency becomes liable to pay compensation for any financial loss encountered by the payee.

With regard to Lt Col Tysoe, his termination from service fell at a particularly busy time for JPA Pensions.

Despite this, from the date of his termination of service on August 15, 2007, it took 12 working days for the termination grant to be available in his bank account.

Naturally I regret and apologise for the additional time it took for payment to be made to Lt Col Tysoe's bank and I can assure him that I and my staff will continue to strive to achieve the strict targets the agency has set itself.

PS...

AS an ex-soldier, I thought the *Panorama* programme about the Grenadier Guards in Helmand showed the British Army at its very best – humour, sadness at the loss of a well-liked and respected comrade, as well as the fighting capabilities of the 21st century soldier.

Whatever governments do, and whatever the public thinks, the British Army is as good as ever.

Good luck to you all in Afghanistan and Iraq. – Kevin Mills, Liverpool.

Am I eligible for LSSA or not?

I AND three members of my unit were attached to an Army Youth Team when my battalion moved to an overseas posting last year. In April we were posted to a newly-formed Army Recruiting Team at the same camp.

We were told last year that we were eligible to claim Longer Separated Service Allowance (LSSA) as we were attached and not posted.

But no one will confirm this, or how to go about claiming the entitlement. – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), responds: *This is an issue that has caused confusion because of the different interpretations that could have been taken from the old regulations, which have now been cleared up by the move to Joint Personnel Administration.*

The simple answer is that you are not eligible. LSSA/LSA is for those who are separated.

You were not separated as your place of work, accommodation (home) and immediate chain of command were all in Wales with the AYT/ART.

In the know, thanks to you

MY son, a serving soldier, has given me an annual subscription to *Soldier* and I hope to persuade him to repeat his generosity each year.

Compared to other media, you give a less emotional picture of life on operations and more than we can expect to get from serving family members – it is only in *Soldier* that I hear of the Army's training role in Sierra Leone (or even the Army's real role in training the Iraqi police and army). And I learn of frustrations over promotion, pay and travel. How similar to civilian life. As one who just missed National Service, I enjoy Chip's cartoons. *Soldier* should be compulsory reading for all who criticise our Army. – **Chris D Carter, Halifax.**

... and also in the doghouse

YOUR article "Dogs of War" (Oct) mentioned nothing about outside units. The Theatre Military Working Dog Section at Basra is a dual Service section, not solely comprised of RAVC personnel. It has Royal Air Force members, who supply their own dogs.

The section also comprises Regulars, Regular Reserves and Territorial Army handlers from other cap badges and protection and specialist personnel.

Without the support of others the RAVC would struggle to keep up the good work it does. Please give a mention to the RAF and E2 handlers. – **Paul Welsh, Giltbrook, Nottingham.**

With pleasure. Consider the RAF and E2 handlers mentioned. – **Editor**

● WITH reference to the article on the Pipes and Drums of The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards ("Amazing return", Nov), please don't refer to them as "tankie pipers". The Scots DG is a cavalry regiment. "Tankie" should only be used in reference to the Royal Tank Regiment. – **M Parry, ex-QDG.**

One of the musicians interviewed referred to himself and the band as "tankies". – **Editor**

Medal Office pulled out all the stops

SOLDIERS quite often complain to Talkback about the poor service of the MoD Medal Office. I would like to show the other side of the coin and thank the Medal Office for its effectiveness, efficiency, politeness, understanding and professionalism in dealing with my enquiry on behalf of a

colleague, related to 1939–46 service. – **Bertram Coldrick, West Wales Branch, Royal Signals Association.**

In fairness, it is some while since the Medal Office was criticised in Talkback. On the contrary, recent letters on the topic have been in praise of services received. – **Editor.**



"It's global warming – that's what does it."



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The ABF is always in need of good photographs of soldiers and would particularly love to see any taken over the Christmas period. Please email your photos to us at kmackay@armybenfund.org. If one of your New Year's resolutions is to take part in a fundraising event for the ABF, don't forget that the unit that raises the most money, or comes up with the most original fundraising idea, will win the prestigious Carrington Drum award.

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Red card for bounty

THE "grand-in-your-hand" scheme ran between June and September 2006 and soldiers who persuaded a civilian to join up and make it through training got £1,000.

I signed my best friend up and promised him half the money. He passed out of Phase 2 training in November 2006 but I am not getting the money because the Burton Careers Office says it has lost my friend's recruiting card.

My brother signed me up in April 2003 with a recruiting card when the reward was £200 and a week's leave but the careers office just laughed and my brother didn't get anything. That's two recruiting incentives that are a bit of a con. – **LBdr Biggin, 49 Bty, 40 Regiment RA, N Yorks.**

Lt Col Doug Wren, COS Recruiting Group,

responds: *I am sorry you have been disappointed by the failure, thus far, of the Army to honour its promise to you. I have investigated the circumstances surrounding the first part of your letter but am unable to comment on the situation regarding your recruitment by your brother as this was not a Recruiting Group initiative.*

The Recruit Bounty Scheme (RBS), or "grand-in-the-hand" as you call it, was run twice in the last recruiting year: RBS 1 from Dec 2005 to Jan 31, 2006 and RBS 2 from June 2006 to March 31, 2007.

The scheme was open to soldiers and officers in the Infantry and Royal Artillery and offered £1,000 after tax for every individual they introduced to the Army and who passed out from Phase 2 training.

Following investigation by my staff sufficient proof has been gathered to award you the £1,000 you were entitled to.

It appears that the "lost" card was presented to the careers office in the period between RBS 1 and RBS 2, which may explain why it was not forwarded to HQ RG for processing.

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Battalion's costly move

I AM serving with 2 PWRR in Northern Ireland and want to know if financial help will be available for those affected by the new Queen's Division Future Army Structure cycle.

In March, 2 PWRR will move from Northern Ireland to Cyprus so I sold my car because of the cost of shipping it, port tax and so on compared with the cost of buying one there. This puts me at a loss as the car was worth more to me than the sum I sold it for.

I will have to find the cash in Cyprus as second-hand cars are not cheap there and I don't want to take out a loan.

I had to pay £50 for our family pet to be micro-chipped, £30 for his rabies jab, £30 for a blood test, plus the cost of getting him to Cyprus, which ranges from £600 to £1,400.

The disturbance allowance is



supposed to be for settling bills and buying curtains, but mine will have to pay for my pet. I know the book answer: a dog is a luxury item and the owner chooses to have it, but we also choose to have children and they are paid for.

In two and a half years I will have to do it all again when we move to London on public duties. We then go to Germany, which is not too bad,

although my breed of dog is banned there. After Germany we return to Cyprus, so more expense. I have transferred to the new versatile engagement (VEng) so still have nine years to serve. I'm going to be out of pocket every time we move. – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies:

Disturbance allowance and Local Overseas Allowance (LOA) are designed to compensate you for the costs associated with a move and the costs of buying and selling a car, but I am afraid it does not include the cost of moving a pet. Much as I would like, the allowances cannot take account of every single individual circumstance. My experience is that the costs associated with each move will vary and you may find that your costs for one move will be higher than the allowance paid, while for others they will be lower.

Catterick mess is 'woeful'

I AM a platoon commander at Catterick. The job is fantastic but the officers' accommodation is woeful.

I live in the annex to the main mess, where the standard is very poor. The heating is off and the hot water is temperamental. When it is available, the temperature fluctuates rapidly.

Although there is a waiting list for the main mess some people jump the queue. There are examples of people occupying rooms in the main mess when they live out and only use the room once or twice a week. This keeps a liver-in in the annex unnecessarily. – **Name and address supplied.**

I EXPECTED, at the very least, to live in accommodation at Catterick which was not worse than that of the soldiers in my platoon. But they live in better quarters than many officers. The only

advantage is that officers have their own room while they share. – **Name and address supplied.**

Col Nick Millen, Commander HQ Catterick Garrison, responds:

That much of the Army's single living accommodation is in poor condition is understood and being addressed. In the case of Vimy Barracks Officers' Mess plumbing, while there is some substance to what the complainant (who notably is only paying grade 4 accommodation charges) says, his letter falls some way short of presenting the whole picture.

Building maintenance is now provided through Regional Prime Contracts (RPC) and can be usefully regarded as being delivered either as part of reactive maintenance needed to address issues as they occur, or as proactive planned life cycle repair intended to bring the estate up to an agreed standard. By its very nature reactive

maintenance needs to be reported, following which the contractor can task the appropriate resources to resolve the particular issue raised.

In the case of Vimy Barracks Officers' Mess, while there have been heating and hot water related failures, these having been properly reported, all repairs have been completed, with 90 per cent done so within the contracted guideline times.

This contractual success notwithstanding, the messes' occupants have suffered inconvenience which is regrettable, but importantly the RPC processes in place now provide for better and more timely repair than was the case in the Propman era.

Notable too for Vimy Barracks Officers' Mess, the planned life cycle repair will replace both boilers and piping in 2008, and as this is done using the contractor's money, delivery of the work will not be blighted by either annularity of allocated funds or changing priorities: as such I am confident that it will be done.

Internal management of room allocation between the annex and the main building is a matter for the messes' PMC, not me, and is, I am sure, conducted according to appropriate priorities and procedures.

Finally, although there is some substance to the points raised, I note with disappointment that an officer felt it appropriate to raise these issues through the publication of a letter rather than through the chain of command; that this was done anonymously is doubly disappointing. Should the officer wish to contact me I would be delighted to give him both an explanation as to the processes through which our estate is maintained, and an assurance that it is getting better.

You'll get fair hearing at Osnabrück

AS chairman of Osnabrück Station's Housing Committee, I was disappointed to read (Oct) an unnamed soldier's complaint about the attitude of "station staff" (his description) towards any request for a larger quarter.

The last few months have seen the committee deal with a significant number of requests like this. We have allowed every move for which vacant and uncommitted quarters have been available and within reason will continue to do so, though we envisage the cost/benefit balance rising rapidly through the next few months.

Had the soldier written through his or her unit, he or she would have received a fair hearing. Although most military families will leave Osnabrück next summer and the remainder will leave by December 2008, it is not too late for the soldier to submit a formal request.

It is best that such applications are made through unit welfare officers but, should the soldier choose, he or she is welcome to write to me personally. – **Col Mark Cuthbert-Brown, Deputy Commander, HQ 4 Mechanized Brigade, BFPO 36.**

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Helpline or brick wall?

I HAVE had an issue with my pay since February. Although this is an ongoing problem, it is not my main complaint. That lies with the AFPAA (JPA) urgent enquiries helpline.

I am sure I speak for many soldiers who, having tried to discuss real problems with the people at the end of the phone, feel like banging their heads against a brick wall.

I have been promised five call-backs and not received one. I have been lied to and placed on hold, only to have them hang up on me. I was told on one occasion that my complaint had not been processed properly and had to start again (even though I had the reference number in front of me).

I have watched and listened as my unit human resources administrators, who have considerable experience in pay issues, looked in disbelief at the phone receiver because they could not believe the lines they were being fed.

I am no nearer resolving one pay issue when another appears and I have to go through the process again and listen to the same excuses. Meanwhile, my pay continues to be affected.

The biggest issue is that there is no form of recourse or complaint procedure. I have yet to receive a satisfactory response, yet am powerless to do anything about it. – **SSgt K Gatward, 16 CS Medical Regiment.**



"This is the JPA helpline . . . we value your call but all our lines are busy due to an unprecedented volume of calls . . ."

Cmdr Angus Ross, SPVA, Director Military Services, responds:

SSgt Gatward's problems stem from when he closed his German bank account in early 2007 and payment was still made to it in February, March and April as the allotment STOP failed on the previous Unicom system.

My understanding is that these issues have now been corrected and all the relevant details updated on to the JPA system. I am obviously concerned by the allegations of poor customer service experienced by SSgt Gatward. I would wish to make it clear that if any soldier has a justified complaint about how their enquiry has been handled, they are to use the widely publicised complaints process by writing to SPVA Customer

Complaints Team, Centurion Building, Grange Road, Gosport, Hants PO13 9XA or emailing SPVA-Customer Support Team (mil network).

If SSgt Gatward wishes to follow this process, I would hope his experience would help shape the future training and behaviours of the staff within the JPAC Enquiry Centre.

Good job, Glasgow

I AM writing about my annual increment of pay. Given the general air of cynicism about Glasgow and pay, I was convinced that they wouldn't get it right and I would have to complain and that it might be years before it was sorted out.

Imagine my delight when I checked on ArmyNet and found that not only had they got the increment right but they had also credited me with back pay at the higher rate. My apologies and thanks to the good folks at Glasgow.

In my job I should have realised that the justified criticisms of the disappointed are from a tiny portion of the 100,000-plus who get paid correctly and regularly. I'm writing this with my fingers crossed for the future. – **Padre Tony Roache, 2 R Welsh, Op Telic 10.**

Travel cash NRPS-ed in bud

I WROTE this letter after trying to pursue my query through my unit admin staff and through the brigade admin staff (same answer in both cases). I feel my grievance has not been addressed and so I am writing to you, the soldiers' champion.

I am a Non-Regular Permanent Staff (NRPS) warrant officer with a unit in the south of England. I have been in the job since February 2005 after completing 22 years' Regular service.

On applying, I was aware that no quartering is provided for NRPS. This was no problem, as I had my own house and had been living in it for several years prior to completing my Regular service. I was also informed that I should ideally live within 50 miles of the job, and was led to believe that travel costs would be paid between my residence and new place of duty up to a maximum of 50 miles.

I actually live 60 miles away, but it is a motorway journey and so no problem.

NRPS personnel already working there confirmed that they were being paid for travel up to 50 miles. This is where my grievance lies.

My RAO says I am only entitled to 19 miles travel, and also that I must pay for the first nine miles, so in fact I only get paid ten miles a day. Every pay and TA regulation I have read says I can be paid up to 50 miles. I understand that there is a 19-mile rule, but I feel that I do not fulfil the criteria to be placed in the bracket.

I have also read that under JPA the 19-mile travel rule is being scrapped, so travel up to 50 miles may be paid. My RAO insists that "grandfather rights" apply to me, and that I will stay on the 19-mile rate until 2010 when all travel for NRPS personnel will cease.

Have I been underpaid for travel? And if not does the 19-mile rule still apply to me under the new JPA allowance system? – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), responds: *Your unit and brigade admin staff are correct in what they say.*

Regular soldiers receive Home to Duty Travel (HDT) because they are obliged to be mobile and have restricted choice over where to live. Those in quarters pay for the first mile and those in their own home pay for the first nine miles, and out to a maximum of 50 miles.

Until 1999, NRPS could claim for up to 50 miles, after which it was reduced to 19 miles, but "grandfather rights" existed. From April 1, 2006, HDT for NRPS outside central London was cut to nothing. NRPS personnel are not obliged to be mobile and so the justification to fund your journey to and from work is not strong.

However, recognising that taking allowances away is always painful, grandfather rights for all was granted until December 31, 2010.

The rules regarding Home to Duty Travel are available to all and contained within JSP 752 Chapter 4 Section 13.



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My housing horror

No heating, a leaking boiler . . . and it hadn't been painted or cleaned

ARMY housing seems to be very much on my mind at the moment. Not just because the media has been having another lively debate on this long-running issue but also because I've recently moved quarters using the new Housing Information Centre (HIC) system.

I started the process feeling fairly excited as we were due to take over a Grade 1 for Condition property – the first we've been offered in 17 years.

The allocation procedure had gone fairly smoothly, as had arranging a pre-move-out inspection and a moving out date from our old property. However, the move-in was, quite frankly, disastrous.

The major issue was no heating and a leaking boiler but the house hadn't been painted or properly cleaned. Procedures had obviously failed and the property hadn't been checked before we arrived. At this point, with the house buzzing with hastily summoned maintenance people, we decided to turn it down and to ask for another.

This kicked off the next problem: trying to find out who actually dealt with this situation. The Defence Estates officer was sympathetic on the phone but said it had to be done by the HIC, the HIC said that Modern Housing Solutions (MHS) had to contact them direct. But MHS thought it was the HIC who made the arrangements.

It was very confusing and frustrating but we were eventually offered another house which was habitable. My faith in

the new system has been fairly shaken.

I know this doesn't happen to everyone – in August, 95 per cent of move-ins were successful. But it raises worrying questions in my mind about who looks after our interests under the new system as we now appear to have three points of contact, none of whom seem to have overall authority.

A recent Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team report suggests that poor housing is still a huge issue for soldiers and their families. This is mirrored in the latest Continuous Attitude Survey, which ranks accommodation as the third most significant area of dissatisfaction. Worryingly, around 40 per cent of officers and 34 per cent of soldiers also stated that Service

accommodation had influenced and increased their intention to leave the British Army.

With so many reports highlighting these issues it was rather hard to swallow Defence Secretary Des Browne's claim in the *Daily Telegraph* last month that the "Government is demonstrating how it values its Forces and their families by ensuring it delivers the support they deserve".

Particularly galling for families when progress seems to be so slow on issues such as improving Service housing and speeding up military inquests – as of November 9, 122 military inquests of fatalities in Iraq and Afghanistan were

outstanding (129 have been completed since the start of the conflicts).

Reports that Pax insurance premiums will have to be raised because of the excessive amount of payouts made over the last year add insult to injury.

The usual response to these issues is to quote the billions of pounds due to be invested over the next few years, even though these figures have become meaningless to soldiers and their families who not unreasonably want jam today and not tomorrow.

Criticism of this Government's attitude towards Defence was not helped by the appointment of a double-hatted minister. When AFF

queried this with the Prime Minister in July he said: "Des will be able to fulfil the responsibilities of both portfolios effectively." But when Mr Browne forgot the name of one of his Scottish constituencies while responding to a question in Parliament last month his

excuse was that he was "only part-time".

Let's hope he doesn't get similarly confused over Defence issues in his other part-time job. ■

The winter edition of the AFF Families Journal is out now, visit www.aff.org.uk for further information.



A personal view from Catharine Moss, Editor of the AFF Families Journal

... these figures have become meaningless to soldiers who want jam today, not tomorrow

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Top tips ...

HERE are some top tips to help you survive the expensive Christmas period.

- 1 – Remember the reason for the season.
- 2 – Plan ahead. Work out how much you can

realistically afford before you start spending – use a planner. The worst way to do your Christmas shopping is at the last minute, in a panic, with credit and store cards.

3 – Try to save a little each month for Christmas 2008 in an interest-bearing account.

4 – Don't get stressed into a last-minute buying frenzy. Shop early to spread the cost.

5 – Don't overspend. Stick to a budget.

6 – Remember that Christmas is an expensive time of year for everyone.

7 – Try shopping with cash only so you can't spend more than your budget.

8 – Try not to be pressurised by children into buying items you can't afford.

9 – Don't go overdrawn without telling your bank in advance or you will be penalised.

10 – Don't go mad in the January sales.

11 – Stop worrying for one day. Enjoy it.

12 – Don't ignore debt. Seek advice. Contact our free debt advice line (in partnership with CCCS) on 0800 138 1111 or your Citizens Advice Bureau for free, confidential, independent advice (details from www.adviceguide.org.uk or your phone book).

Did you know adults spent an average £875 extra last Christmas on food (£120), drink (£56), wrapping paper, cards and postage (£53), tree and decorations (£64), going out (£131), travel (£84) and prezzies (£367)?

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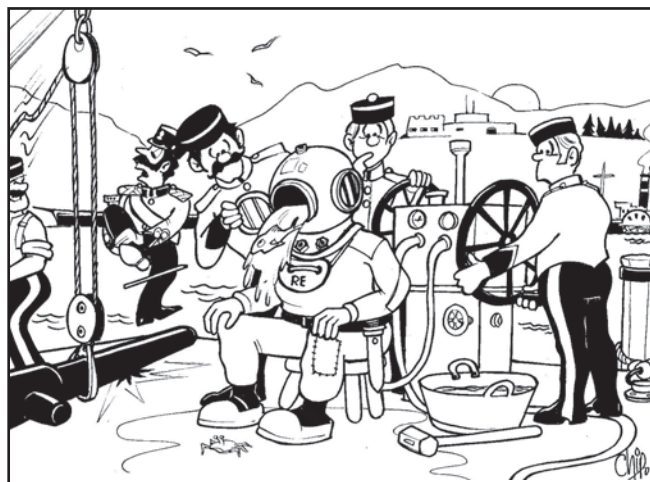
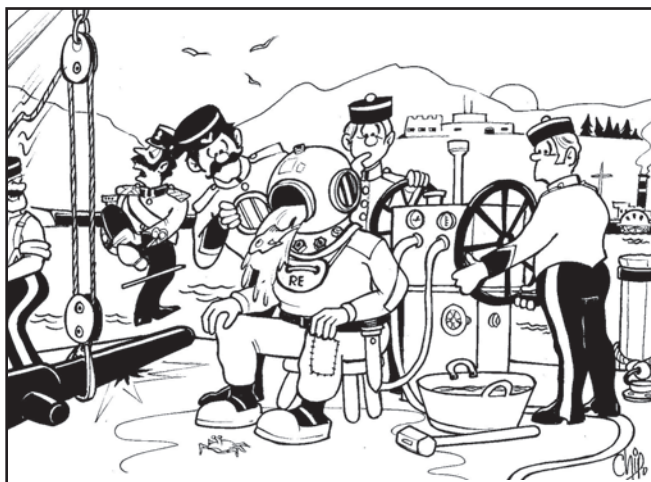
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NO. 793

HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU?



TEN details have been changed in the latest in the series of drawings by our cartoonist, Chip. Circle the differences in the left-hand image and send the whole panel to **HOAY 793**, Soldier, Ordnance Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU by December 31.

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

Name: (Give initials and rank or title)

Address:

October competition (No 791): First correct entry drawn at random and winner of the £100 prize was **CSgt Young, Dental Laboratory, Evelyn Woods Road, Aldershot**. Runners-up **WO2 Kidd, Bn HQ, 4 Yorks** and **Cpl P Rendall, PA TA LAD, Ewyas Harold, Herefordshire**, each win a £25 gift voucher.

The ten differences were: Tactical recognition flash on shoulder; rivets in helmet; sandbag over dugout entrance; puttees on soldier going over the top; hands on clock; 'Sloane Sq' signpost; lance corporal's stripe; rifle magazine; duckboard plank; lower rung on trench ladder.

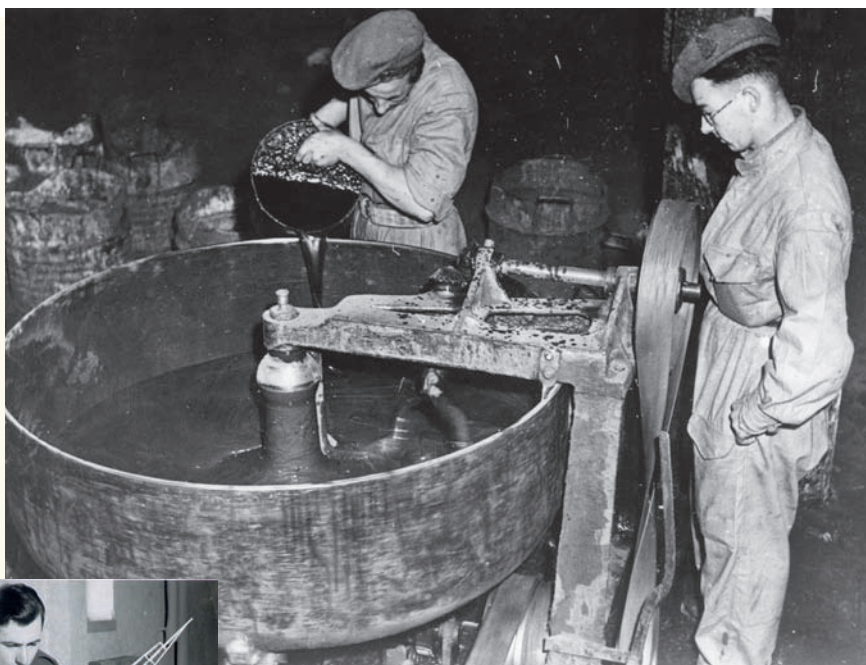


Winner of our October competition (inset)
WE liked P Clarke's topical suggestion of a caption – "He followed JPA self-learning and then the log-on instructions and ended up with this" – so we are going to send the copy of Chris Ryan's latest novel, *Strike Back*, to him at his Wokingham address.

We also liked "Charles Biggles never really took to the Army and longed to fly like his brother" from Simon Harrison, Ludgershall.

Graham Paull, of North Hinksey, Oxford, offered "Here's proof that the Spinnaker Tower, Portsmouth's newest landmark, was actually designed by the Army in 1957".

Two entries picked up on an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) theme. There was "Sgt Smith was unimpressed that Airfix had been awarded the contract to support UAVs" by Jordan Dickinson, HQ 4 Yorks and "MoD



The junior ranks mess grape press was all ready for a vintage year

WIN A BOOK: Write your own caption for the photo, above, from our May 1948 issue and send it to us by December 31. The best, in our opinion, will win a copy of Chris Terrill's *Commando*, his account of his time with the Royal Marines in Afghanistan, also filmed as an ITV series. (Century, £18.99.)



Procurements had failed to read the small print 'to scale' on the new UAV from Sgt Taff Watkins, Palace Barracks, BFPO 806.

Elizabeth Bird, DE & S Caversham, suggested "When I asked about flying, I didn't realise I would have to build my own aircraft".

Web watch

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

www.ngvfa.com

The National Gulf Veterans and Families Association website.

www.erskine.org.uk

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www.armyrugbyunion.mod.uk

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www.armyaviation.co.uk

A privately-run forum dedicated to Army aviation. The forum is for ALL cap badges associated with Army aviation and all are welcome. Membership is comprised of mainly AAC personnel but we would like to see more REME faces on the site.

www.armysafety.mod.uk

Website of HQ Land Command's chief environment and safety officer.

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The Army Museums Ogilby Trust website, approved by the MoD as the definitive guide to regimental and corps museums.

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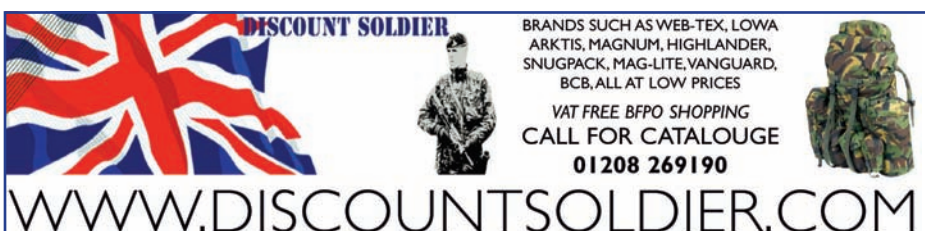


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Career Transition Partnership: 0207 766 8020
Children's Education Advisory Service: 01980 618244; enquiries.ceas@gtinet.gov.uk
Confidential support lines: UK 0800 731 4880; Germany 0800 1827 395; Cyprus 080 91065; Falklands #6111; from operational theatres Paradigm Services *201; from anywhere in the world (CSL operator will call back) +44 1980 630854. Lines open 1030-2230 (UK) every day.
Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society: 01372 841600; www.combatstress.com
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Forces Pension Society: 020 78209988
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SSAFA Forces Help: 020 7403 8783; Western Europe 02161 472 3392
Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA): 0800 169 2277 (from UK); 0044 1253 866043 (from overseas) Medical Assessment Programme: 0800 169 5401
Victim Support: Germany 02161 472 2272; UK 0845 3030900, www.victimsupport.org
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Reunions

Royal Scots Dragoon Guards: Reunion London and South East Branch annual gathering at the Carabiniers Memorial on the Embankment at the Royal Hospital Chelsea at 1000 on Dec 9, followed by lunch in the In-Pensioners Club. Ring John Rochester on 0207 881 5438 or email johnrochester@chelsea-pensioners.org.uk
2008

16/5 Lancers, 17/21 Lancers, QRL: Reunion dinner at Telford, Shropshire, on Jan 26. Attached members also welcome. Further details from billcook@fivegables.fsnet.co.uk

Royal Horse Artillery: 61st reunion dinner will take place in Trowbridge, Wiltshire on Mar 8. Attendance open to all past and present members of any RHA unit; ladies are encouraged to attend. Contact Maj (Retd) R J Whiteway, HQ Dulmen Station, BFPO 44, tel 0049 2594 784438 or email rhaasn@hotmail.co.uk

8 and 9 Int Companys and C1 Platoon (Malaya) and (Singapore): Singapore Dawnwatchers 40th anniversary reunion at the Hilton Hotel, Cologne, April 4-5. Email Dave Wakelam at davenpam47@t-online.de; Nik Collett at jack@arcor.de or Mick Conway at conwaym39@tiscali.co.uk

MRS Dhekelia: 30th anniversary to include a formal dinner and dedication of a stained glass window in St Barnabus Garrison Church. Planned for June 21-22. All former personnel welcome. Contact Maj Liz Fox, Matron, MRS Dhekelia, BFPO 58 or email elizabeth.fox@cyp.mod.uk

Help for authors

ANECDOTES, stories sought by author researching book about cooks, bakers, butchers and cooking in the heat of battle. Looking for men and women who are performing or have performed such heroic duties on the front line and who have funny, horrible, depressing or uplifting personal stories about the inescapable duty of providing pleasure and sustenance to others, no matter how they felt at the time. If you have a story please email glynncchristian@hotmail.com

Roadshows

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

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

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

Jan: 14, Yeovil; 15, Exeter; 17, Isles of Scilly; 29 Penrith; 30, Blackburn; 31, Preston.

Searchline

Julian Greaves-Smith seeks anyone who knew his father, **Charles**, a don at Cambridge in 1945-6. Soon after that he served at Derby as an Army Education Officer and was sent to Germany and the Middle East before returning to Catterick with pneumonia. Email greavessmith@hotmail.co.uk

LCpl Dennis Lillie would like to contact any **Royal Engineers** who served with him in Oxford Barracks, Münster from mid-1946 to Aug 1947. Email him at thesilvertulip@microlink.zm

J McLeish is trying to locate **Robert Stott**, who was in the REME or RE about 50 years ago. He was brought up in Perth and would be approx 71 years of age. Replies to Mr McLeish, 17 Brora Court, North Muirton, Perth PH1 3DQ.

US steamship Coamo sailed from the Clyde on Nov 14, 1942 with troops destined for Algiers. She left Algiers for the UK on Nov 25 but, for reasons that remain a mystery, she was instructed to leave the convoy and proceed to New York. Some 36 hours later she was sunk by the German submarine U-604 off Bermuda, with the loss of all 186 personnel on board. The family of the *Coamo's* captain, and the son of a UK officer lost with the vessel, would like to hear from anyone who made the outward journey to Algiers. It is also known that other UK personnel were on board the ship. D N Taylor, 54 Strouden Avenue, Bournemouth, Dorset BH8 9HZ, email dntaylor@btconnect.com, would like to hear from anyone who lost a relative on the SS *Coamo*.

Teresa (Dahlia) Brown nee Price is trying to locate her father **Dennis Bill**. He was based in Aldershot from 1964 to 1966. Last known contact was in Essex in 1975. He may have gone to Australia and would now be in his 70s. Email m_brown42@ntlworld.com

Defence diary

December 1-until further notice: Helmand: The Soldiers' Story – A free exhibition built, written and contributed to by soldiers of 16 Air Assault Brigade to tell the story of their experiences fighting in Afghanistan. National Army Museum, London. Tel: 0207 7300717.

6: 1 Mech Bde homecoming parade and service, Salisbury Cathedral.

13: Operation Barrass – Lecture by Col Matthew Lowe, Airborne Forces Museum, Aldershot. For further details and tickets call 01252 349619.

15: Charity Christmas concert for the **RBL Poppy Appeal** and **Banbury Young Homeless Project**, Parish Church, Kings Sutton at 1930. Tickets from Mike Carter on 07786 640245/01865 780124.

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



Picture: Steve Dock

Welsh wilderness: This year's Cambrian patrollers endured a tough mental and physical challenge

Patrol puzzle

Questions over future of world-famous exercise

UNCERTAINTY surrounds the future of the Cambrian Patrol after concerns were raised about costings, writes Heidi Mines.

Held annually in the heart of the Welsh countryside, the patrol is widely recognised as one of the toughest tests facing the modern soldier but talks are taking place to decide whether the event should be staged every other year.

The move comes despite 2007's patrol attracting hundreds of participants and organisers turning away more than ten international applications.

Competitions

British Army uniform stamps (Oct): Sgt Watkins, BFPO 806; G Bridges, Burton-on-Trent; Neil Mercer, Heysham; J Palfrey, South Yardley; T Spiers, New Zealand; A Paling, Colerne; K Bates, Amesbury; P Springham, Swindon; N Parkinson, Ipswich; D Fleming, Trowbridge; D Hampton Jerrery, Dinas Powys; WO2 N Land, BFPO 30; Mr and Mrs S Roe, Halesowen; Lt Col R Jarman, London; LCpl R Parry, Op Telic 10.

Battleground Vietnam DVD (Oct): Mrs I Jackson, Lowestoft; Cpl R J Hughes, Op Telic 10; Ms S Jackson, 201 Tpt Sqn RLC (V); SSgt R Bailey, 203 (W) Field Hospital; L Wells, Western Cape, South Africa.

Brig Rick Libbey, Commander 160 (Wales) Brigade, stressed no decision had yet been made about the future of the event. He added: "The plan has been for Exercise Cambrian Patrol to become a biennial event.

"However, it is currently being assessed to see if it can be made more affordable and included in next year's programme. But if I was a commanding officer I would start preparing a team for 2008."

A long-established exercise, the patrol pits teams of eight against the elements and unforgiving terrain as they race to navigate 55km in 48 hours.

Such is the difficulty that only four of this year's 80 teams achieved a coveted gold award.

Among the élite were 1 Military Intelligence Battalion, Intelligence Corps and a Cambridge UOTC team featuring OCdt Emma Jude, who becomes one of the few female soldiers to win the top prize.

A spokesman for the exercise organisers said the event was among the most gruelling on the calendar.

He added: "It's not meant to be easy. The soldiers can expect realistic scenarios that happen in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"All the mistakes you make on the patrol really hurt and you will remember them forever." ■

British Army Badges

By Lt Col (Retd) Robin Hodges

Cap badge

THE cap badge for Christian denominations serving with the Royal Army Chaplains' Department was introduced in 1940. There is a similar badge for Jewish chaplains. The centrepiece of each badge is a quatrefoil within a wreath representing the laurel of victory and the olive of peace. The original design of 1930 had a Latin motto, which King George V had changed to 'In this Sign Conquer' as soldiers would not understand the Latin.



Formation sign

HQ 52 Infantry Brigade converted to a deployable headquarters in 2007. The commander felt that the saltire, worn as the brigade flash since 1997, was no longer appropriate for the brigade's new role. The new design incorporates the colours of the original badge and a depiction of the battlements and arrow slits of Edinburgh Castle. The five crenulations of the battlements represent the brigade's five battalions. The '52' is in red, the traditional identifying colour of the infantry.



Specialist badge

82 (London) Signal Squadron (Volunteers) wears the Dutch Tile arm badge adopted by 47 (2nd London) Division during the First World War. The design is said to have been on a floor tile found by the GOC in Flanders. The badge was passed down through 23 (Southern) Corps Signal Regiment and presented to the squadron in 1985.



Tactical recognition flash

7 (Para) RHA wore a drop zone flash which has been adopted as the Royal Artillery TRF and was first worn by 1 RHA in Iraq in 2004.



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



PEN PALS

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Cath (34), 5'6", brown hair and brown eyes. Shy, quiet, honest, caring and lonely. Enjoys reading, animals, watching football & rugby and the cinema. Seeking male pen pals from anywhere. P089

Jackie (37), 5'6", slim, with dark shoulder length hair and hazel eyes. Enjoys walking, reading, socialising with friends, the cinema, meals out, visiting museums, historical places, being out amidst beautiful scenery and exercising her pet dog. Children's counsellor for a living seeking pen pals, any age group. P090

Naomi (46), slim build, wavy hair and hazel eyes. Enjoys swimming (including synchronized swimming), the gym, socialising with friends both at home or out, the cinema, reading and writing. Happy, confident, chatty, works hard, quality time is the keyword, seeking pen pals, 40-55. P091

Fun loving Yorkshire lass looking for pen pals and friendship. Enjoys music, socialising, football, cricket and having a good laugh. Honest, reliable, attractive and has a wicked sense of humour. Seeking pen pals, any age group. P092

Attractive slim lady mid 40s, enjoys creative writing, photography, history and travel. Would like to correspond with male pen pals 40+. Genuine interest only please. P093

Paula (36), 5'8" curvy, long dark hair and large dark eyes. Single, no kids, non-smoker, who would like to get to know a man who is kind, intelligent and thoughtful. Man City supporter who enjoys the cinema, dining out or cozy nights in with a DVD, bottle of wine and a take away. Seeking male pen pals, any age group. P094

Donna, 5' brown hair and hazel eyes, slim but not stick thin. Enjoys kick boxing, casual swimming, walking, cycling, watching TV, reading, music and singing alone when no one can hear her. Full time working single mum of two, shy until you get to know her, friendly, GSOH, short but feisty. Seeking pen pals, any age group. P095

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Movies

DECEMBER REVIEW



Endearing performance: Oscar winner Shirley MacLaine, above, shines in Lord Richard Attenborough's latest directorial outing, *Closing the Ring*



Sorrow of war

Iconic British director draws on personal grief for moving tale of love lost

Interview: Karen Thomas

THE deft directorial hands and cinematic vision of Lord Richard Attenborough have delivered another silver screen masterpiece that will touch Army families mourning for a loved one taken by conflict.

Based on true events, *Closing the Ring* spans two continents and half a century. It tells the story of Ethel Ann, a young American bride played by Mischa Barton, who is widowed during the Second World War.

Her husband's B-17 bomber loses its bearings and crashes into the hills surrounding Belfast. Burying her grief deep inside, the vibrant young woman grows brittle and isolated.

But 50 years later Ethel Ann – by now portrayed by Hollywood doyen Shirley MacLaine – is forced to reconcile herself to her loss amid the Troubles of Northern Ireland.

She is joined by Pete Postlethwaite

and Brenda Fricker who carry their own tragic legacies from the air crash.

To produce a tender and touching story that never strays into sentimentality or deviates from reality needs a genius at the helm. Lord Attenborough told *Soldier* that, sadly, he felt well-qualified to bring the overwhelming emotion of grief to the big screen.

"I have lost my wife Sheila and I have lost our own daughter and granddaughter, as three years ago this Boxing Day, Jane and Lucy perished in the tsunami. So I've had to deal with loss and pain and an inability to fill the terrible gap that's left.

"I feel I have enough personal experience to tell when a performance is theatrical and phoney and when it's real," he explained, adding how he first became familiar with grief when he flew with men who died in action while serving with the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. "The movie is about the loss of a boy of 20 who has only been

married a matter of weeks, and the pain and unutterable loss and inability to cope with that loss demonstrated by the girl whom he married."

The multiple-Oscar winner, noted for epics such as *A Bridge Too Far* and *Gandhi*, agreed the story of Ethel Ann would resonate profoundly with families of soldiers who have died in Iraq and Afghanistan. He described the ability for friends and loved ones to deal with the "perpetual dread" of losing someone as "miraculous".

"What must be very difficult to cope with is the fact that every day when you wake up, whether you are a mother, a father, a lover, a wife, every day you have to be aware of the fact that something could happen.

"How do you cope with that day in, day out, month in, month out? I find the degree of strength that you have to gather unto yourself miraculous.

"I don't know how parents in particular cope with it. So the movie



The Killing of John Lennon, in cinemas Dec 7

DUE to hit cinemas on the eve of the 27th anniversary of Lennon's murder, this unflinching drama, told in gunman Mark Chapman's own words, makes for uneasy viewing. In presenting Chapman's descent into madness, director **Andrew Piddington** borrows heavily from *Taxi Driver's* Travis Bickle. However, unlike **Robert De Niro's** anti-hero, the man Chapman stalks with clock-ticking finality is real. While this chilling account will catapult its lead, **Jonas Ball**, on to greater things, it will do little to fill you with Christmas cheer.



In the Valley of Elah, in cinemas January 25

WRONGDOING in Iraq, soldiers struggling to adjust to life back on home soil and the closing of ranks – *In the Valley of Elah* is America's *Mark of Cain*. The US Army's reputation takes a bruising in this story of a veteran military policeman and the search for his son, a soldier who has gone mysteriously missing on his return from Iraq. Inspired by true events, this thought-provoking drama is brought to life by a stellar cast, with **Charlize Theron** dazzling and **Tommy Lee Jones** portraying a wily, albeit institutionalised, old soldier with aplomb.



Fred Claus, in cinemas now

DON'T be fooled by the PG-rating, taking the kids to see this festive offering won't be a chore. *Wedding Crashers* director **David Dobkin** and **Vince Vaughn** reunite in this laugh-out-loud tale of Saint Nicholas's older brother, Fred – a fast-talking repo man who's run out of luck and has to accept a job in Santa's workshop. While it won't take long for even the slowest reindeer in the pack to second-guess the inevitable happy ending, the sleigh ride to the closing credits is hugely enjoyable. The "siblings anonymous" scene, in particular, is a real Christmas cracker.

is an attempt to say, 'yes, people do understand', and an awful lot of us attempt to discover how to deal with pain and loss."

Channelling his own experiences into directing *Closing the Ring*, Attenborough guided MacLaine to a performance on a par with her Oscar-winning turn in *Terms of Endearment*. His masterful use of the comedic talents of MacLaine emphasises the horror of war when she comforts a British soldier mortally wounded by an IRA bomb.

The far-reaching shock waves of one couple's loss against the backdrop of two conflicts plays out poignantly in just under two hours.

Classy and a worthy addition to the esteemed Attenborough collection, *Closing the Ring* is tragic but leaves a clear impression of hope and life if grief is allowed to run its course.

Despite the obvious personal pain, Attenborough said he derived great satisfaction and much excitement from conveying difficult and strong emotions on screen.

"I'm in seventh heaven when I'm making a movie – that's what my life is and has been for 60 years.

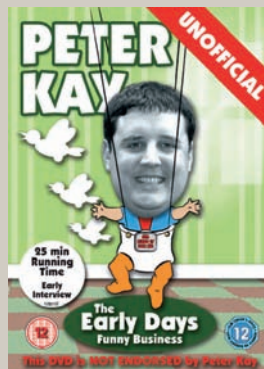
"I first worked on a movie in 1941, which was 66 years ago, so I'm a very old codger." ■

***Closing the Ring* goes on general cinema release on December 28.**



Austin Powers: 10th anniversary edition, DVD

A DECADE on **Mike Myers's** shagadelic masterpiece remains a pure gold giggle-fest as Austin struggles to adapt his swinging 60s persona to the politically correct world of 1997, while trying to save the world from his defrosted arch-enemy, Dr Evil. But is Austin worried? "As long as people are still having promiscuous sex with many anonymous partners without protection while, at the same time, experimenting with mind-expanding drugs in a consequence-free environment, I'll be as sound as a pound."



Peter Kay: The Early Days, DVD

FOR all those who enjoy the *Phoenix Nights* funny man from Bolton, **The Early Days** won't fail to make you laugh. While this offering is the epitome of low budget, the wobbly camera work and annoying interviewer only serve to enhance the comic's hilarity as he describes his life on the stand-up circuit and his weekend work at a local cinema. Highlights include Kay's personal tour of his bedroom record collection and the unveiling of the *Jim'll Fix It* badge he crafted from a bar of soap. Fans will not be disappointed.



Iluminados Por El Fuego, DVD

SHOWN on a limited run in the UK to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Falklands campaign, Argentine director **Tristan Bauer's** movie from the South American perspective of the 1982 war is a powerful piece of cinema focusing on the human cost of battle. Literally translated as "blessed by fire", it follows the tale of former soldier Estoban Leguizamon, who is forced to revisit the war when one of his old comrades attempts suicide. The movie provides an interesting sense of perspective to the events of 25 years ago and is available on DVD as an import.

Games

DECEMBER REVIEW



Conflict studies: Tom Clancy's *EndWar* puts players in command of armies fighting a worldwide conflict



Apocalypse now

Latest Ubisoft title is poised to revolutionise real-time strategy genre

Report: Cliff Caswell

COMMANDING armies in real time strategy games has never been easy for generations of console players – chunky controllers are just not compatible with the subtleties of issuing orders.

Some have valiantly tried to get around the difficulties. Back in the late 1990s Sony brought out a PlayStation mouse so its followers could enjoy the likes of *Command & Conquer* in the same way that was intended on the PC original.

But it never fully solved the problem. Consoles have always played second fiddle to PCs when it comes to strategy and it was with this in mind that French publisher Ubisoft decided to tackle the issue head on with Tom Clancy's *EndWar*.

The title, which is due to be published early next year, is unique on two counts. For starters, the game is being put together specifically for the console

market – and secondly players can go completely hands-free, donning a headset and issuing orders to their troops via special voice commands.

If the early indications are anything to go by, the game's originality will certainly make it an interesting prospect. Set in an Orwellian global conflict, in which vast armies are engaged, *EndWar* provides plenty of opportunities to do battle.

"We've been working on this for three years now and our aim is to involve players in full-scale, epic warfare," said Michael Deplater, the creative director. "We wanted to create a strategy game for a console from the ground up, and feel this is something that has never been successfully achieved."

"In our story, the world's economy is in crisis and Europe is now a superpower rival to the United States. It has become a federation and has its own army, which is fighting against US troops as well as the Russian Spetsnaz."

For the command of large armies,

however, the development team quickly decided that a new control method was needed and came up with the idea of using voice commands.

With the help of their headset, players will have the ability to prosecute their war against the enemy in a way that could transform the speed of strategic war fighting.

"It makes the game interesting," said Julian Gerighty, content director of *EndWar*. "We asked ourselves how a real general would control his troops and decided that if you can actually talk to your soldiers, and they are smart enough to behave like soldiers, then you would get a new gaming experience."

"We asked our military advisers to devise a set of commands for the game and players get to choose them. When they are comfortable with the game, most only use their voice. The experience has been described by one of our testers as 'strategy at the speed of thought'."

Despite being some way off release,



the *EndWar* previews shown to *Soldier* seemed to offer a great deal of promise with plenty of action, slick graphics and polished cinematics.

As well as the novel control method, Ubisoft has also promised that the game will feature a unique camera angle, enabling armchair generals to see the bigger picture or zoom in to check on the progress of individual units.

The battlefields featured in the game are global, encompassing some 40 territories from America to Eastern Europe. As is par for the course in Clancy titles, the storyline underpinning the game has a strong grounding in reality.

In addition, some impressive multiplayer options are also on the cards – gamers can indulge in quick, one-off skirmishes or become part of an all-encompassing campaign.

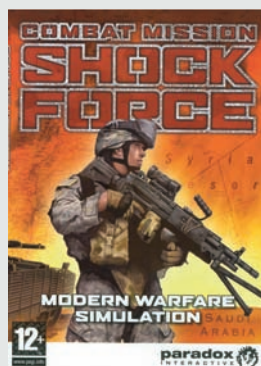
Despite the promise of *EndWar*, however, it is likely that the title will rise or fall on the control method. If the voice commands work properly, the game will probably be a hands-down winner. Any problems with the interface, however, will inevitably lead to frustration and could be disastrous if it leaves the game unplayable.

If Ubisoft can put out a polished product, *EndWar* could shake up the strategy market. Prepare for battle. ■



Jackass, PSP

THE ludicrous stunts of the famous MTV show are brought to life in videogame format on Sony's handheld console. And the title doesn't fare badly at all, capturing the sense of outrageous fun that made the TV programme so entertaining. Essentially a collection of mini-games, players get to try their hand at no-brainers such as urban wakeboarding, surfing on a bin lid through suburbia, trashing a theme park on a golf buggy and riding shopping trolleys off a skyscraper roof. It's simple and effective and will happily fill a few hours. Just don't try these stunts at home.



Combat Mission: Shock Force, PC

A DEFINITE cut above other war games we have seen at *Soldier*, *Combat Mission* gives players the opportunity to command either US or insurgent forces during a fictional conflict in the Middle East. But be warned, this is infinitely more complex than *Command & Conquer* and ploughing through the extensive manual is a must to get the best out of the game. Perseverance, however, will be rewarded and those who make the commitment will find *Combat Mission* among the best in the war game class.



Virtua Fighter 5, Xbox 360

SEGA'S answer to the classic *Tekken* series makes for a simple but impressive outing on the Xbox 360. A straightforward yet extremely slick beat 'em up, *Virtua Fighter 5* pits gamers against a series of tough opponents, each with their own signature moves and abilities. The title works best as a two-player game in which competitive souls can wipe out their opponents with a series of impressive combos. There is nothing original in *Virtua Fighter* but, like many of Sega's latest offerings, the action is carried off so well that it makes up for in style what it lacks in substance.



Pro Evolution Soccer 2008, Xbox 360

THE latest incarnation of the football gaming purist's favourite series is a decidedly mid-table affair. *Pro Evolution Soccer 2008* fails to add any flair over and above its last outing. Konami's new TeamVision system claims to learn the players' tactics and adapt the artificial intelligence accordingly, but while it works occasionally there are still certain ways to score that are available an unrealistic number of times. A disappointing online mode jumps about to the point of being unplayable even on a fast connection.



NBA Live 08, Xbox 360

THE latest episode in the long-running franchise from EA Sports will not disappoint basketball fans, writes **James Hamilton**. The game features all the latest squads from the US league plus international teams fighting for basketball's ultimate prize. A slick game engine gives total control of the on-court action while an upfront hip-hop soundtrack perfectly captures the NBA atmosphere. With a host of new tricks to master, including some impressive dunks, fans of the sport will be glued to their consoles until the next EA instalment is released.



WIN – Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

SOLDIER has teamed up with Activision to give five readers a chance to win a limited edition copy of one of the most eagerly awaited games of the year. *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* proved a hit when we reviewed it last month. The collector's edition box set includes a copy of the game for Xbox 360, a DVD with extras plus an art book and poster. For your chance to win one of the sets, tell us the name of *Call of Duty 4's* publisher. Send your answers on a postcard to the address at the front of the magazine. Closing date is December 31.

REVEREND
AND THE MAKERS

THE STATE OF THINGS

Stirring songsheet: The debut album quickly bounced up the charts with the band's take on the daily grit of life

From the pulpit: Jon "The Rev" McClure is not backwards when coming forward with his opinions on politicians and war



Riled-up Rev

Total respect for soldiers from a singer with strong sermon on Iraq

Interview: Karen Thomas

IT was with considerable trepidation that *Soldier* turned up to interview Jon McClure during live gig rehearsals by the Reverend And The Makers – the lead singer had openly stated he was against operations in Iraq.

All the more worrying that he expressly wanted to speak to us. We were braced for an angry and no doubt unprintable rant, but the appearance of McClure – the Rev – beaming broadly with outstretched hand dispelled some of the mounting tension.

Competing with the monotonous pounding of the sound check, he immediately launched into an animated spiel about his political views and ardent support for the troops fighting in the Middle East.

"I am anti-Iraq war but being anti-Iraq war doesn't mean I'm anti-soldier. You have to use your intelligence and

think that someone can be against the war but not against the Army or against the soldiers because essentially they're doing a really hard job," McClure energetically clarified in his broad Yorkshire accent while drawing repeatedly on a cigarette.

"In my mind's eye, the political situation is that we've gone in there and the battle is one for hearts and minds rather than a military one.

"Obviously the soldiers out there are going to be aware of that but my problem is with the politicians."

Hailing from Sheffield and good mates with fellow Steel City guitar slingers Arctic Monkeys, McClure gathered verbal speed. He took a pop at artists who failed to "look into the complexities of the issues" and, because of their political views, excluded soldiers from their fan base.

"My music and my message is for anyone and I think I'm a man who is

for the people. I have my views and I say what I think but I don't think I should force them on anybody," he explained, adding how he kept himself informed on the "issues" by getting the low-down on Iraq and Afghanistan by speaking directly with soldiers who had fought there.

"I think a lot of musicians, well, they've been in the union, they're a bit educated and they think they know better but I don't think you can know better than by actually being there. The things I'm saying are universal and it's not like 'you're only allowed to know about them if you're these people or those people'. That's fascism and we fought a war against fascism."

It's easy to warm to the straight-talking vocalist who penned the hit tunes *Heavyweight Champion Of The World* and *He Said He Loved Me*. Despite being offered a £200,000 record deal, McClure held out for a



company that would not spin the band's debut album, *The State Of Things*, for every penny it could get.

"I feel like you have to conduct yourself, and this is one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you, with integrity at all times and be a strong individual and do what you're supposed to do," he said although standing true to the band's music and ethos spun *The State Of Things* straight to number five in the album charts in its first week.

"I think there is a parity with soldiers because in soldiering you have to be determined and you've got to keep your principles about you," he added shyly, hesitant to draw parallels between himself and those who wear the Queen's uniform.

McClure's enthusiasm for preaching the virtues of soldiers was matched only by his band's energy when performing live on stage later that evening. Wielding the mic and spouting poetry between tracks, the Rev made for a charismatic and talented performer.

But he had one last message for his soldier-congregation.

"To all you people who are out there, girls and boys doing whatever it is you're doing, respect to you and I hope you stay safe and that you're coming home soon. And I sincerely mean that." ■



Pull The Pin (Stereophonics)

ENDURING Welsh rockers return with their sixth studio album. Unlike their last offering, which experimented with heavy effects and a synthetic sound, this reverts the band to its straight rock roots. *Pull The Pin* was recorded in its entirety in just ten days and does have that spontaneous feel of a band jamming. There are plenty of pulsating bass lines and souring riffs that are trademarks of their classic work and singer **Kelly Jones's** vocal performance shows a maturity, with less of the nasal drawl of old. A solid addition to a strong back catalogue.

Cpl Charlie Lloyd, RLC



As I Am (Alicia Keys)

ALICIA Keys is a phenomenon. The nine-times Grammy Award-winner is an extremely talented musician, a published poet and an energetic campaigner for AIDS awareness. *As I Am*, her third studio album, offers a polished blend of soulful lyrics and music with the occasional jazz-influenced infusion. At times though it appears almost too polished and lacks some of the raw passion evident in her earlier music. This is an accomplished piece of work but it sometimes lacks originality and never quite reaches the heights of her first two albums.

Pte Patrick Jordan, RAMC



Unmixed (Freemasons)

HAVING received much acclaim, the **Freemasons** have now released a second album. It's one that won't go unmissed since the track *Uninvited* rocketed up the singles chart. *Unmixed* is a soulful dance offering with lots of female vocals and uplifting melodies – sure to appeal to most tastes. An interesting selling point is that the album includes MP3 samples, which can be used to remix some of the tunes. The best one sent into the Freemasons duo will be included on the next album so aspiring producers and DJs should give it a bash.

**Bdr Luke Stevens-Burt,
5 Regt, RA**



Mothership (Led Zeppelin)

LED ZEP was one of those bands I've never really invested in but, on listening, I now realise what I've been missing out on. Set to coincide with their return to the stage, this re-mastered 24-track release showcases the band's 12-year reign. The re-issue of the classic live set *The Song Remains The Same* boasts the never-before-released complete gig from Madison Square Garden during the 1973 tour. If, like me, you have never taken a chance on this band, now is the time to find out what the hype is all about.

**Cpl Tom Robinson,
151 Tpt Regt, RLC**



Hiding Inside The Horrible Weather (My American Heart)

MY first impression was "not another teen angst, emo-style rock band" and one that could only be at home on the next *OC* soundtrack. And to be honest that first impression did last. But that's not to say that these five young lads from San Diego haven't produced an exciting and imaginative album. *The Shake (Awful Feeling)* has a fresh and lively feel and is probably the best track on the album. Fans of **Fall Out Boy** and **Panic At The Disco** will no doubt get more out of **My American Heart** than I did.

Cpl Ray Kalaker, RETDU(B)



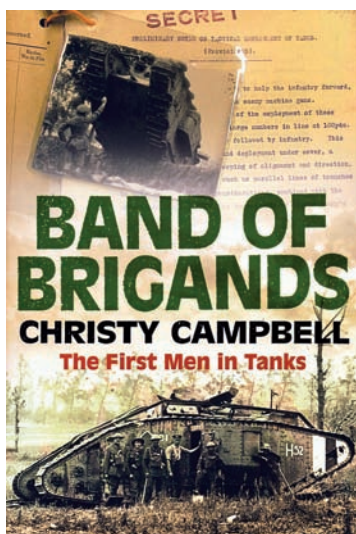
The Pigeon Detectives live in Portsmouth

I **FREELY** admit to being an old fogey who likes to be tucked up in bed by 2200 so I was not best pleased when kept up waiting for **The Pigeon Detectives**. They had better be worth it – and they were, 100 times over. The band has wooed an incredibly strong fan base for their live gigs. The throng matched lead singer **Matt Bowman** word-for-word and bounce-for-bounce on every track from their debut album, *Wait For Me*. In return, Bowman worked the crowd brilliantly for laughs. The grooviest Chrimbo pressie this year? Gig tickets.

Karen Thomas

Books

DECEMBER REVIEW



Way to victory: A Mark V tank of the 2nd Battalion, Tank Corps crosses a roadside ditch at a place called La Motte en Sauterre on the first day of the successful Battle of Amiens, August 8, 1918.

Picture courtesy of the Tank Museum at Bovington, www.tankmuseum.co.uk



Difficult birth

Life for the British Army's first tank soldiers was hard and dangerous

Band of Brigands: The First Men in Tanks by Christy Campbell (Harper Press, 422pp, £20).

Review: Maj Mike Peters

THIS compelling and engaging account details the story of the Tank Corps from its birth until the Armistice of November 1918.

It is not a dry regimental history, rather a gripping story that captures the reality and danger of life for brave young officers and men inside the cramped space of the weapon thought to be Britain's new Excalibur.

The rigours of working inside the confines of the tanks and the complexity of actually operating them are described vividly in the book. For a start, it was

a hard job just to turn the first iron monsters. It needed four of the crew to work the levers and they took their orders by signals. First the tank had to stop. A knock (by the commander) on the right side would attract the attention of the right guardsman. The driver would make a clenched fist – the signal to put the track into neutral – then repeat the signal to show it was done.

The officer, who controlled the two brake levers, would pull the right one, which held the right track. The driver would accelerate and the tank went into motion. As soon as the tank had turned sufficiently, the procedure was reversed.

In early September 1916, tanks were shipped hurriedly to the area of the Somme. Field Marshal Haig had correctly reasoned that the secret of their existence would leak out and the invaluable advantage of surprise lost. This reasoning appeared to be borne out when

the headquarters and proving ground at Elvedon Hall in Suffolk were over flown by two German Zeppelins. One actually stopped and circled the house.

The attack on Flers on September 15, 1916 was the first use of tanks in battle. The bleeding did not go well for a number of reasons, not least the lack of experience of their crews and the lack of expertise of the field commanders employing them. The potential of the tanks, however, remained obvious, and there was a call for an expanded corps equipped and manned to a fighting strength of 1,000 tanks, resulting in the establishment of a new depot or "Tankodrome" at Bovington in Dorset.

The expansion was linked directly to the planned Big Push scheduled for July 1917 in the Ypres salient.

These were grim days for the British Army and the failure of the tank, the new wonder weapon, to penetrate the morass of no man's land, epitomised that failure.

Two or three hundred tank hulks were listed as abandoned in no man's land,

Soldier ordering service

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



where they sank slowly into the all-consuming mud. And with them went the reputation of the new corps.

The misery is recounted in contemporary accounts such as this one from William Watson: "When the line had advanced a little, Cooper and I went forward to recce the road to Poelcappelle and see our derelicts. Two of the tanks had been hit. A third was sinking into the mud. In the last was a heap of evil-smelling corpses – either men who had been gassed and crawled back into the tank to die or more likely men who had taken shelter and then been gassed where they sat . . ."

The most exciting chapters of the book describe the aftermath of Passchendaele, when the future of the Tank Corps was by no means certain, and the build-up to the attack on Cambrai on November 20, 1917. In particular the last few hours before the momentous moment when close to 500 tanks left their start line in two waves and lurched toward the German lines.

This is the one of the best specialist subject books I have read on the Great War for a long time. ■

For more reviews, go to
www.soldiermagazine.co.uk

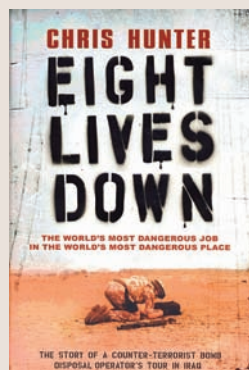


Passchendaele 1917

by Franky Bostyn

WRITTEN by the Belgian curator of the Passchendaele museum to mark the 90th anniversary of the Third Battle of Ypres, this book is exhaustively researched and packed with anecdotal accounts of the battle and a wealth of previously unpublished photos, **writes Mike Peters**. The story of the establishment of the world's largest Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery at Tyne Cot and its place in British and Commonwealth history make this a captivating read.

Pen & Sword, 344pp, £25

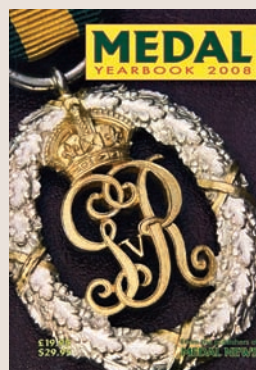


Eight Lives Down

by Chris Hunter

CURRENT operations are already a rich source of first-hand accounts of front-line soldiering. But you don't get much further forward than neutralising booby-trapped bombs in Iraq, especially if the bombers of Basra have let it be known that they are targeting you personally. This is the gripping story of RLC bomb disposal specialist Maj Chris Hunter's four-month tour of duty in Iraq in 2004, which culminated in him being awarded the Queen's Gallantry Medal.

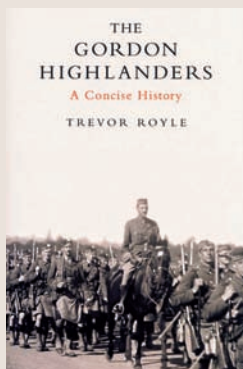
Bantam Press, 360pp, £17.99



Medal Yearbook 2008

WHAT cost do you put on a medal? For those who win them they are mostly beyond value but for those who wish to sell or acquire them there is a growing and lucrative market out there. The best guide to British and Empire medal prices – and the book used by collectors and dealers alike – is the annual *Medal Yearbook*, from the publishers of *Medal News*. The nine medals that have been added to this 14th edition include the Iraq Reconstruction Service Medal.

Token Publishing, 581pp, £19.95 paperback, £24.95 hardback

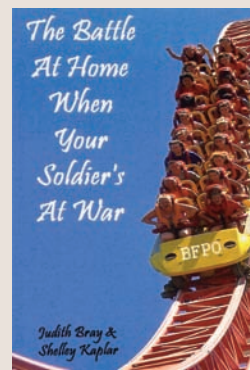


The Gordon Highlanders

by Trevor Royle

THIS "concise history" from the Edinburgh-based author (the sixth in his series on Scotland's regiments) encapsulates the long and distinguished story of the Gordons – now the 4th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland. Told through the campaigns against Napoleon, the Crimea, India, the World Wars and the Cold War years to the counter-insurgency operations of the modern era, this tapestry is threaded with amalgamations and valour.

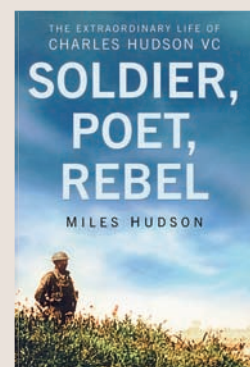
Mainstream, 240pp, £12.99



The Battle at Home When Your Soldier's at War by Judith Bray and Shelley Kaplar

THIS brilliant little book should be in the hands of anyone with a family member or friend going on operations, **writes Lady Philippa Dannatt**. Judith told me it wasn't for people like me "who knew it all" (I wish). My son is in Afghanistan on his third tour, and until I read about what to send and what not to send in BFPO parcels I had no idea razors were banned – no wonder they weren't reaching him. Highly recommended. Units might consider keeping copies to augment their information packs.

Raider Publishing, 65pp, £6.99 from Waterstones, £6.64 from amazon.co.uk



Soldier, Poet, Rebel

by Miles Hudson

EXTRAORDINARY is an overused word, but it does not do this subject justice, **writes Mike Peters**. Hudson fought in the Great War in Ypres, on the Somme, and in Italy where he won his VC. He served in an infantry company in Russia in 1919, led a brigade at Dunkirk and commanded Iraqi troops in 1944. He was awarded the MC, DSO and Bar, CB and several MiDs. This witness to history recorded events around him with clarity and wrote poetry.

Sutton, 243pp, £19.99



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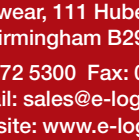
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SOLDIERSPORT



Balancing act: Capt Rupert Forrest (WG) cuts through the waves during the Army surfing championships in Cornwall

Picture: Cpl Adrian Harlen

WAVE RIDERS
Thrilling on-board
entertainment at
surfing finals

Monty's full support

Proud Panesar tells *SoldierSport* of his admiration for Britain's troops

Jump for joy: Monty Panesar celebrates taking the wicket of India's Sourav Ganguly during England's one-day international match at Headingley in September

Picture: Lindsey Parnaby/AFP/Getty Images

BEING labelled as a cult hero can be something of a poisoned chalice for a sports star, writes **Stephen Tyler**.

The title is usually reserved for crowd favourites who, in spite of their willingness and effort, lack the special talent needed to make it to the top of their chosen sport – ski-jumper Eddie “The Eagle” Edwards and Olympic swimmer Eric “The Eel” Moussambani for example.

But one man has shaken the definition of the try-hard hero. His style may be eccentric and his fielding occasionally leaves a lot to be desired, but England cricketer Monty Panesar’s affable nature and devastating bowling have made him a fans’ favourite with the skills to match.

The mild-mannered Luton resident burst onto the international scene against India in 2006 when he took the prized wickets of Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid and Mohammad Kaif on their home turf.

He is now a key member of the national Test squad and featured for the one-day team that recently recorded a stunning series win in Sri Lanka.

“Going to Sri Lanka and playing such a good one-day side it was always going to be hard,” he told *SoldierSport*. “But it was a good result from everyone

involved who put in a lot of hard work.

“The Test series starts in December and we have three matches over there so hopefully I will be involved. Obviously in Sri Lanka you can play different types of bowlers and I hope that will mean I will get a chance.”

The 2007 *Wisden* Cricketer of the Year is not just a hit with the fans. Former England coach Duncan Fletcher described him as the world’s best finger spinner and teammate Andrew Strauss has praised Panesar’s work ethic as second-to-none.

His career statistics to date justify the glowing testimonials, with the left arm spinner dispatching 73 opponents in just 20 international Tests, including six five-wicket hauls.

Panesar greets each wicket with his trademark celebration – high fiving his teammates as he gallops across the pitch – a celebration, he says, that stems from his love of the game.

“For me, playing first-class cricket is what I always wanted to do,” he continued. “Like any other kid, when you are young you have a dream of playing for your country and when something like that happens it’s a great feeling. I suppose that’s why I get a bit excited when I take a wicket.”

Although the closest link Panesar has to the military is through a cousin in the Indian Navy, he is full of praise for the work being done by soldiers on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

He wore a “Support Our Forces” wristband during a recent Test match and while he insists that was more through luck than design, Panesar is unequivocal in his backing of the plastic band’s sentiment.

“We had a few of the wristbands in our dressing room and I just took one from there,” he said.


“I don’t have a history with the military and it’s not something I have ever felt really strongly about, but in general I think it’s important to support the job that they [the troops] are doing over there.

“I have great admiration for British troops. It takes a lot of bravery to do what they do, but they are doing it for our country in difficult conditions and amid a lot of aggravation.

“Going out there isn’t an easy thing to do and you just have to admire and respect them.”

Away from his own cricket career Panesar is doing his bit to nurture the next generation of English talent.

Although he spends several months each year on the road, Panesar still



● CRICKET lovers lacking the skill of Monty Panesar can still play a key role on the field by training to become an umpire through the Army.

Courses run by the Army Cricket Association (ACA) teach anyone from veteran players to complete novices everything they need to know about the laws of the game so they can take charge of a match.

Training officer Malcolm Miller, formerly of the Royal Artillery, said: "I believe people should get involved because umpiring gives them a chance to develop cricket, take part in the game and to give something very important back to sport."

Umpiring courses run by the ACA are split into grades to allow aspiring officials to develop steadily over a period

of time. As well as classroom-based theoretical work, students are also judged on their on-field experience and have to pass a series of exams set by the Association of Cricket Umpires and Scorers.

Miller, a qualified umpire who presided over the prestigious National Village final at Lord's in August, hopes more Service personnel will sign up for the ACA courses and have a go at the challenging but rewarding role. "There is no doubt that you have to have your mettle about you when you take charge of a game," he added. "But it gives immense pleasure to not only take part but also to have the best spectator's position in the game."

Interested? Email malmiller621@btinternet.com ■

finds time to return to his first cricket club, Luton Town Indians, to help coach their youth teams.

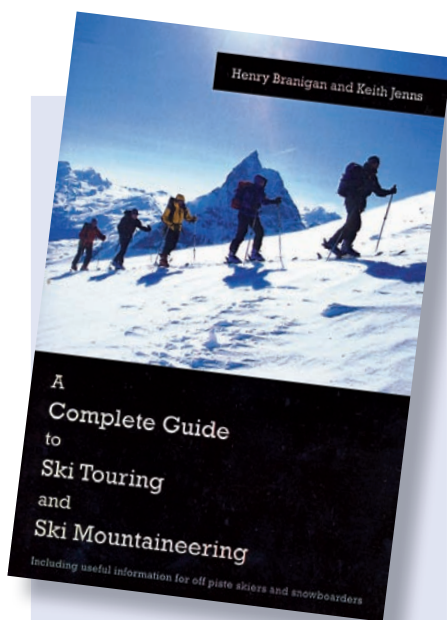
"I still go back on Sunday mornings to help out," he said.

"Luton Town Indians was amalgamated from two clubs and because of that history we have quite a strong youth section.

"I used to practice there when I was younger and those sessions still happen so I try my best to get over and help out with the other coaches."

And true to his down-to-earth persona, Panesar was modest when asked whether Luton Town Indians were happy to have an England star in their ranks.

"I suppose they are," he laughed. "But it's probably me that should be thanking them because they were the ones that helped me to get to where I am today." ■



PEAK PUBLICATION

WINTER sports enthusiasts looking to reinvigorate their time on the mountain will draw inspiration from an Army instructor's new book.

SSgt Keith Jenns (APTC) teamed up with fellow author Henry Branigan to publish *A Complete Guide to Ski Touring and Ski Mountaineering*. The detailed book contains more than 200 pages of expert advice on everything from clothing to the weather and is aimed at skiers who want to take in a fresh challenge by heading off-piste.

Jenns told *SoldierSport*: "We are trying to get people who already enjoy skiing on-piste to use the book to be able to explore the rest of the mountain safely."

Using a mix of illustrations and text, the book delivers the basics about ski touring and mountaineering and also deals with potentially the biggest danger – avalanches.

"Because it is off-piste you do have a lot of avalanche danger," explained Jenns. "That is compounded if the leader of the group can't assess the weather quickly enough."

Jenns is hoping his work will promote off-piste skiing as an exciting way to explore a mountain. He enthused about the joy of heading into practically untouched alpine scenery.

"I think I have had the most pleasure on a mountain when I was in Norway," he said. "You are completely in the wilderness and when you get up early in the morning to ski 20km and see the surface frost glinting back at you, it's a fantastic feeling."

● *A Complete Guide to Ski Touring and Ski Mountaineering*, published by AuthorHouse, £16.49, is out now. ■

Storm stops snow patrol

Weather brings an early end to ambitious climb

THE ferocious force of the Himalaya's worst weather put a premature end to a ski-mountaineering assault on one of the world's highest peaks.

Climbers from the Army Mountaineering Association (AMA) spent two-and-a-half years organising an ascent of Nepal's Mount Shishapangma for an expedition planned to be the jewel in the crown of the group's 50th anniversary.

But despite going into the adventure in peak physical condition and with extensive technical kit, the 18-strong team was forced to admit defeat when heavy snowfall and strong winds made the chance of running into an avalanche perilously high.

Expedition leader WO1 Geordie Taylor (APTC) said he cancelled the climb after his tent at a camp halfway up the mountain collapsed during a storm in the middle of the night.

"It became obvious that if I continued going forward then I would be putting people in harm's way," he told *SoldierSport*. "The primary aim of the expedition was to get to the top, but there was an equal if not greater emphasis on making sure everyone returned safely."

Disappointing as the retreat was, there was certainly no shame for the Army climbers in admitting that the mountain and the weather had got the better of them.

The snow-topped peak of Mount Shishapangma is one of just 14 in the world to pierce the 8,000m barrier. Climbers passing that height enter the aptly-named "death zone" in which oxygen levels drop so low that long-term survival is all but impossible.

It was the scale of the challenge that initially drew Taylor to the Himalayan giant, and he was not short of volunteers to join him. An initial batch of 172 people applied to take part when the expedition was first mooted.

That number was whittled down to a final list of 18 climbers who wanted to be part of the first British team to ski-mountaineer Shishapangma. The

process requires an ascent on "skins" – a coarse covering attached to the bottom of skis to provide grip – before skiing back down from the summit.

To help ensure their safety on the mountain, the team carried cutting-edge tracking gear supplied by expedition sponsor Saab Training Systems. The technology allowed real-time monitoring of vital statistics such as heart rate and blood oxygen levels.

After acclimatising to the altitude of the Himalayas, the AMA climbers made their way to an advanced base camp before splitting into teams and heading further up the mountain to establish camps at 6,300m, 6,750m and 6,900m.

They were welcomed onto the mountain by clear skies, but the weather soon deteriorated and Taylor pulled everyone back to base camp after three days of heavy snow.

"I took the decision to bring everybody down so we could compose ourselves, give the weather a chance to consolidate and get a clear five-day forecast before we set off again."

The snow eventually abated and three of the four AMA teams once again set off up the mountain, only to be greeted by temperatures so low that tents at one of the camps froze and were ripped to shreds by the fierce wind.

With the weather posing such a risk, Taylor abandoned the attempt for the final time and the teams skied back to base camp in a blizzard so strong that it was almost impossible to see.

But despite the disappointment of not reaching the summit, the APTC man said he is proud of everyone involved.

"There came a point when I realised that it just wasn't going to happen," he explained. "I have been a member of the AMA since I was a young soldier and it has been a massive honour for me to be given the opportunity to lead this. We had a great team and everyone should be very proud of themselves."

● For more information about the Shishapangma trip, visit www.army.mod.uk/sportandadventure/clubs/AMA/sp07 ■



Cold comfort: Climbers take advantage of a break in the snow to move up Mount Shishapangma during the Army Mountaineering Association's expedition

Wounded soldiers' ski school

DISABLED Service personnel are being invited to sign up for a specialist skiing programme that will help them hit the same slopes as their able-bodied colleagues.

Staff are currently undergoing intensive training run by the British Association of Snowsport Instructors (BASI) in the sport of adaptive skiing, which allows soldiers to ski downhill using equipment tailored to their particular disability.

Programme leader Lt Col Fred Hargreaves explained that because the instructors receive in-depth training, they

are able to help students to learn and develop skills and techniques on exactly the same stretches of mountain as any other skier.

He said: "The skiers are treated exactly the same as the able-bodied soldiers. They are integrated with them and use the same slopes."

Although the initial aim of the adaptive skiing programme is to help more wounded personnel take part in the sport as an adventurous training pursuit, people on the course could eventually compete in events up to and including the

Winter Paralympics, depending on their aptitude and ability.

Lt Col Hargreaves is now appealing for disabled Servicemen with an interest in having a go at adaptive skiing to get in touch ahead of a training camp which is being planned to run alongside Exercise Snow Warrior in Bavaria, southern Germany, for two weeks next March.

● For more information on adaptive skiing or to register an interest, contact Lt Col Hargreaves on 020 7218 7247 or by email at fred.hargreaves852@mod.uk ■

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Picture: Cpl Adrian Harlen

Crest of a wave: Surfer WO2 Matt Welch negotiates a fierce break on route to a second-place finish on the shortboard at the Army surfing championships

Board meeting

Surfers struggle to make a splash against more experienced opposition

Report: Stephen Tyler

SURFERS rode the waves to take part in one of the closest Inter-Services competitions to date.

The top-class surf off the Cornish coast at Penhale Corner provided a testing setting for the annual event, which is held towards the end of the year to guarantee the best conditions.

Taking on two well-established teams in the form of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, the Army's riders battled to a third-place finish but did well to keep in touch on the testing surf.

Army Surf Riders Union spokesman Capt Rupert Forrest told *SoldierSport* that his squad has been steadily improving since its formation in 2000 and hopes it will not be long before it moves up the Service standings.

"We are getting closer every year," he said. "In the long term the Army has the assets and infrastructure to be the best and that's what we are aiming for."

The Inter-Services event was the culmination of a busy week of surfing which started with the Army championships on longboard, shortboard and bodyboard.

The hotly-contested short and longboard competitions were split into heats, with each surfer getting 25 minutes to catch up to ten waves and perform enough tricks and turns to outscore their opponents.

A series of fairly turbulent waves, peaking at five to six feet, put paid to the ambitions of some of the tournament's favourites going into the second day and SSgt Steve Webber (REME) edged out Maj Alex Parks (RA) to take the longboard title.

A tense bodyboard final featured some highly-technical riding and only a few points separated eventual winner LCpl Lee Goodson (KRH) from LCpl Steve Nicholson (RE) and brothers LCpl Craig Hayes and Sgt Al Hayes (both Rifles).

Choppy waters put paid to any consistency in the shortboard final and Sgt Dave Holden (APTC) coped best with the conditions to capture the title ahead of WO2 Matt Welch (RA) and Cpl Ian Forsyth (RLC).

"This year's competition was done as fairly as possible and the standard of surfing, as always, was very good," continued Forrest. "There were a few shocks in the individual competitions, but that is normal and what you usually find is that the best surfers will shine through over a series."

Forrest added that the success of this year's competition highlighted surfing's growing popularity and the fact that it is now much more widely regarded as a serious sport.

"Ever since we formed, the sport has been attracting more and more people," he said. "It used to be seen more as a means of having fun, but the more people who have a crack at it the more it's being seen as a proper sport." ■

SPORTSHORTS

PALMERS STRIKE GOLD

EUROPE'S premier boat fishing title is in Army hands after a team of senior soldiers beat the best anglers from across the continent.

The Soldier Palmers side were named the Anglian Water Fulling Mill International champions after beating 24 other teams from Belgium, France, Northern Ireland and England during two days of fishing at Rutland Water.

The team, which is made up of WO1 John Hardy (3 Para), WO1 Jim Douglas (REME), WO2 Mark Jones (RE), SSgt Dick Turpin (RLC), SSgt Mark Rose (RLC) and Cpl Mark Duncan (R Irish), won the coveted title by just three ounces after a nervy final day of fishing.

The Soldier Palmers compete in group one of the UK league and their success has led to international call-ups for WO1 Hardy and WO2 Jones.

TELEMARK HITS THE SLOPES

SKIERS who want to pit their wits against the testing winter sport of Telemark are being invited to enter next month's Army championships.

The event takes place in Austria from January 5 to 15, with competitions for both novice and experienced skiers from all three Services as well as British civilians and non-UK military.

For more information, visit www.telemark.army.mod.uk or contact Maj Andrew Clarke on 07855 415267 or 01258 482310.

RUGBY WALK FIGHTS CANCER

A RIPON-BASED sapper has helped raise more than £50,000 for cancer research charities after walking 200 miles between northern England's Rugby Super League stadiums.

LCpl John Hilton took part in the trans-Pennine walk with former St Helens and Hull star Steve Prescott, who is currently fighting a rare form of stomach cancer.

The walkers started at Hull's KC Stadium and took in several clubs, including Leeds, Huddersfield and Wigan, before finishing at Old Trafford, in Manchester.

Hilton said that the walk had extra meaning for him as his wife Nikki is currently in remission after beating Hodgkins Disease.

Anyone wishing to donate to the fund can do so until the end of March by visiting www.justgiving.com/jonhilton

Last-ditch Damu

Combined Services leave it late to beat Barbarians

A SENSATIONAL last-minute try from Hldr Isoa Damudamu (4 Scots) secured a hard-fought victory for the Combined Services over the Barbarians in Plymouth.

The Fijian stormed over for a converted try in the corner after great work from the Royal Air Force's Cpl Angelo Flammia to secure a 27-24 win with the final move of the annual Remembrance Day game.

The explosive try was a fitting end to an enthralling encounter, although the result was harsh on a young Barbarians side that showed good resolve to get back into the match after trailing by ten points early in the second half.

Both teams made a tentative start at a rain-soaked Devonport, but it took less than ten minutes for the Combined Services to draw first blood, with electric Royal Navy winger Josh Drauninui bursting through two tackles for a try that was duly converted by LAET Dave Pascoe.

The shell-shocked Barbarians conceded again just minutes later when a looping cross-field kick was plucked from the air by man-of-the-match Drauninui, who gave further notice of his pace in scoring a second time.

The try shook the Barbarians into life and Argentinean dynamo Gonzalo Quesada's deft movement opened up

space for Esher's Matt Moore to pull back an unconverted try.

A further five-pointer from Spanish international Diego Zarzosa brought the score to 12-10, but a high octane start to the second period appeared to put the Combined Services into an unassailable position.

A Rob Sweeney penalty and a try from the Navy's Matt Rhodes opened up a ten-point gap, but the Barbarians hauled themselves back into the game when Cornish Pirate Rhodri McAtee burst down the line before offloading to Plymouth's Nic Sestaret who capped an excellent breakaway move with a try.

The Barbarians soon took the lead. Winning possession from the kick-off, the black-and-whites launched a high kick that was well caught by Frenchman Sestaret, who dodged an incoming tackle and crossed the line to score his second try in as many minutes.

But just as it looked like the tourists would hold out for a 24-20 win, Flammia showed tremendous energy to break up to the halfway line and feed the onrushing Damudamu who sidestepped one defender and outpaced the fullback to score the winning try.

In addition to enjoying a top-class game of rugby, the 3,000-strong crowd also helped raise more than £6,000 for the Royal British Legion. ■

Reds blast 'Boks

THE Army asserted its international dominance with a win against a South African military side to complete a clean sweep of victories against Rugby Union's tri-nations countries.

Fresh from comprehensive wins against Australian and New Zealand opposition over the summer, the Reds welcomed the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to Aldershot.

And although the Springboks' senior side triumphed in the Rugby World Cup, the defence force was unable to repeat the trick against an Army team featuring a smattering of new faces.

The 26-8 victory should have been much greater but the Reds too often lost possession at the crucial moment.

Head coach WO2 Andy Price (WG) attributed the occasional sloppy play to "ring rustiness", but the Welshman was happy with his side's overall effort.

"It was the first game of our season," he told *SoldierSport*. "We had nine of last year's squad away on operations so we had to call in a few new faces, but

everyone performed well."

The conditions perfectly suited running rugby and debutant Spr Rhyddian Slade-Jones (RE) took advantage to dart through the South African defence for a try that was easily converted by the ever-reliable boot of Gdsm Rob Sweeney (WG).

Not to be outdone, a breathtaking move from SANDF five minutes later ended with a classy try in the corner.

Penalties converted by Sweeney brought the score to 13-8 at half time and two more in the second period stretched the Army's lead to 11 points.

Needing tries to get back in contention, the South Africans enjoyed a positive spell of possession but failed to puncture the Army's defence.

Sgt Steve Trethewey (REME) – playing his final senior match in a 20-cap career – left the pitch to a deserved ovation before Koroaydai broke two challenges to score his side's second try.

A Sweeney conversion rounded off a deserved win. ■



Flying Fijian: Combined Services' centre Spr Peceli Nacamavuto (RE) attacks the Barbarian's defence during his side's last-gasp Remembrance Day victory

RESULTS SERVICE

ANGLING: Army Individual Championships – 1, Bdr Spratt (RA); 2, SSgt Crompton (RE); 3, SSgt East (R Signals).

Army Inter-Unit Team Championships – 1, 39 Regt RA; 2, 21 Sig Regt; 3, 14 Regt RA.

Four Way Challenge – 1, MoD A; 2, Army A; 3, RAF.

FOOTBALL: Massey Trophy – RA 2 (LBdr Carver and LBdr Williams) REME 1 (Cpl Rumgay); APTC 0 R Signals 2 (Sig Cameron and Sig McGhee); RA 0 Infantry 2 (Cpl Wood and Pte Shinn); REME 3 (Cfn Mackenzie (2) and Cfn Kwogyenga) RLC 1 (Pte Woods); RAC 1 (Cpl Sinnott) AMS 1 (Cpt McKeon); RE 7 (Spr Woods (2), Spr Miles (2), Spr Bithel, LCpl Newell and LCpl Littler) APTC 0; R Signals 0 RA 2 (Gnr Bissett and Gnr Burke); Infantry 2 (Pte King and Cpl Shanks) RLC 1 (Pte Brown); AAC 3 (TBC) AGC 3 (Sgt Slater, Cpl Biggin and OG).

Woolwich Cup – Int Corps 3 (LCpl Reid (2) and LCpl Adamson) AAC 2 (Air Tpr Sharif and OG); Infantry 1 (LCpl Smith) AGC 2 (Cpl Radcliffe and LCpl Thomas); RLC 2 (LCpl Douglas and Cpl Snowden) APTC 1 (Sgt Walbrook); RA 0 RE 6 (LCpl Cottam (4), LCpl Prince

and Spr Willett); R Signals 5 (LCpl Haley (3), Sgt Stephenson and Sig Cameron) REME 1 (TBC); AMS 1 (Pte Francis) Int Corps 1 (Cpl Tarr); AGC 6 (LCpl Tabi (2), Cpl Emerson (2), Cpl Clougherty and Cpl Radcliffe) RAC 2 (SSgt Blackwood and SSgt Westwood); AMS 1 (LCpl Everiss) AAC 2 (Air Tpr Addison and LCpl Johnson); RLC 2 (Cpl Brough and LCpl Douglas) APTC 0; Infantry 3 (Pte Shinn and Cpl Moran (2)) REME 1 (Cfn Owen); RE 5 (OG, Spr Bithel, LCpl Cottam (2) and Spr Mathis) Int Corps 0; RAC 2 (SSgt Blakelock and Cpl Hindley) AGC 1 (LCpl Thomas); R Signals 9 (LCpl Hankey, SSgt Watts, Cpl Pickup, LCpl Haley (3) and Sgt Stephenson (3)) REME 1 (LCpl McMullen).

SURFING: Inter-Services Championships – 1, Royal Navy; 2, Royal Air Force; 3, Army.

WAKEBOARDING: Inter-Services

Championships, Cable: 1, Kerry Gospel (Army); 2, Gav Groves (Army); 3, Ed Fox (Army). **Boat** – 1, Si Parker (RAF); 2, Phil Symonds (RAF); 3, Gav Groves (Army). **Overall** – 1, Gav Groves (Army); 2, Kerry Gospel (Army); 3, Jules Lewis (RAF).

MASSEY TABLES

MASSEY TROPHY – DIV 1

	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
Infantry	4	4	0	0	6	12
RE	3	3	0	0	15	9
RA	5	3	0	2	-3	9
R Sigs	4	2	0	2	3	6
RLC	3	1	0	2	1	3
REME	5	1	0	4	-7	3
APTC	4	0	0	4	-13	0

MASSEY TROPHY – DIV 2

	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
AGC	3	1	1	1	3	4
AAC	2	1	1	0	1	4
Int Corps	2	1	1	0	1	4
AMS	3	0	2	1	-1	2
RAC	2	0	1	1	-4	1

Home guard

The regular feature in which we ask soldiers for their views on a hot topic

We asked soldiers from the Irish Guards, what it felt like to return to British soil after a difficult six months serving in southern Iraq

Gdsm David McNaugher, IG

I went to Iraq straight after finishing training at Catterick. I was in theatre for about a month and it was hot. At one point we had to go and search for an IED and that was pretty freaky. However, I was very happy to go out on operations. The guys have been very good to me. I am looking forward to the Christmas break.



Lt Col Michael O'Dwyer, CO 1 IG

It was a tour of two halves. The first was dangerous – in July there were more than 300 attacks on British bases – but the handover of Basra Palace brought about a change. After that we were able to focus on our main task, which was developing the Iraqi Army. We've been getting better at what we do. But we also lost five soldiers in our battle-group.



Gdsm Chad Lennon, IG

Iraq has been a good experience for everybody. When I first arrived at the battalion, I was too young to join the tour. I went out just after Basra Palace was handed over. The hardest part for me was missing home. I was based in the Contingency Operating Base at Basra Airport where we were training the Iraqi Army – that was the high point.



Gdsm Thomas Hagans, IG

It was depressing at times but we did our job in Iraq. I was based at Basra Palace and we were getting a lot of attacks. They died down when we extracted from there. Coming home has been the high point, especially as we're back before Christmas and can see our families. But I'm proud that Basra is being handed back to Iraqi control.



LSgt David Wright, AGC

The high point of the tour was training the Iraqi Army. There were about 100 of us in the Divisional Training Centre. A lot of guys learned Arabic phrases and integrated well with the Iraqi soldiers. Basra Palace was a pretty serious place, although I wasn't there personally. It was receiving a lot of attacks. I'm really looking forward to Christmas.



Dmr Steven Atchison, IG

I was in Iraq for half of the tour, but I got my Telic Medal and a sun tan. I went straight out to theatre from Catterick. I'll always remember the people in Basra; they were friendly and you could have a laugh with them. It is good to arrive back in Aldershot. Right now I'm looking forward to Christmas and getting back to my family.



Dmr Liam Cruise-Taylor, IG

I went to Iraq a couple of weeks after the rest of the battalion and got straight into things. I was based at the Contingency Operating Base.

When I came back after R&R I was involved in training the Iraqi Army. I'm really looking forward to the Christmas break and our leave; I can't wait. I'm going back home to Shrewsbury.



LCpl Sammy Vennard, IG

The tour's been OK but it is great to be back in time for a relaxing Christmas and New Year break. I was at Shaibah Logistic Base for the first part of the tour before I moved up to the Contingency Operating Base. The low point was when two members of my platoon were killed by an IED. We've all come back here to Aldershot and they have not. It is very sad for their families.



Capt Charlie Williams, IG

The first part of the tour was very hectic, while the second was about getting the Iraqi Army to take control of their destiny. I was in Basra Palace on the last night before it was handed back. Four years of military history was caught up in that building and I don't think the moment was lost on anyone.



Interviews: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Mike Weston

Coming up . . . in SOLDIER

Out of Africa: Dispatches from British Army personnel serving in Ghana and South Africa; and BBC Breakfast presenter Kate Silverton recalls her time under fire on the Basra front line



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