

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

COOL HEADS

Army mountaineers kill it in the Austrian alps



OCTOBER 2025

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SCAN ME

OUR CONTRIBUTORS
THIS MONTH...**TPR NIKOLE
PHILLIPS, RL**

THIS 19-year-old won't be complaining about CO's PT any time soon now she's tackled the cliff faces of Austria's highest mountain. Do trips like this really help soldiers win wars, though? Find out on **page 42**.

**MAJ ANDY
CROMPTON, LANCS**

WHEN *Soldier* had a crack at flying FPV drones this month, the UAS Centre OC had a fair bit to say. On **page 38** he explains how winning battles with the devices is all in the detail.

**WO2 LEWIS
HANNINGTON, REME**

A POSTER boy for the army's talented athlete scholarship scheme, this judo ace will have much to prove at next month's Kata World Championships. Get the lowdown on **page 66**.

Gaming world's lethal legion

EVER since I first fed ten pence coins into a *Space Invaders* machine at my local Aldershot leisure centre back in 1979, I've been hooked on video games.

My mum – despairing at her geeky five-year old standing on a plastic crate so he could see the screen – hoped it would be a passing phase. But how wrong she was; she cursed when my dad then won an early home computer, a Sinclair ZX81, which came with a basic flight simulator.

It was the crudest software you could imagine, but it accurately replicated aviation basics. A passing phase was now an obsession.

With this in mind, it shouldn't have been a surprise that I already had the core skills to be a first-person drone operator when I was given the once-over on PC-based sims at the UAS Centre in Lulworth (**page 38**).

Yet for a man who is dangerous only to himself with a rifle, turns left when others go right on a parade square, and for whom phys is a measure of how gassy your beer is, finding a military skill at which I was at least okay gave more than a little satisfaction.

But there is a real lesson here.

My skills came from video games. Most soldiers also play them – games that are far more sophisticated in nature than anything available to me growing up. If I have these skills, they too possess the basics to fly one of the most potent assets in the battlespace.

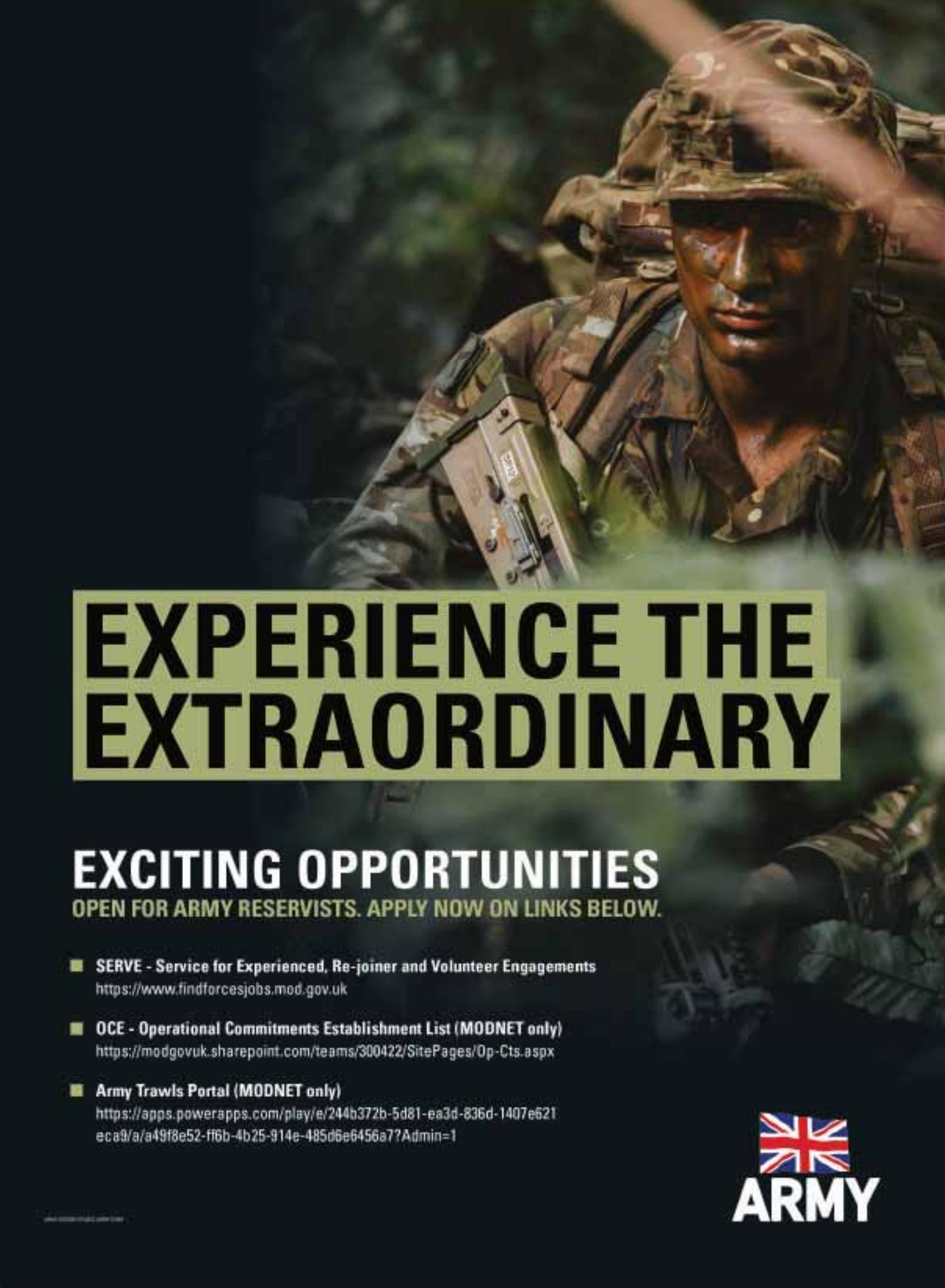
If there is a message to commanders, it is to seek out these people, encourage their instinctive ability and get them signed off for ops.

Flying this kit is exhilarating and they'll love it. The enemy, however, will wish you were more like my mum.

Cliff Caswell • **Assistant Editor**

‘Flying this kit is exhilarating and they'll love it’





EXPERIENCE THE EXTRAORDINARY

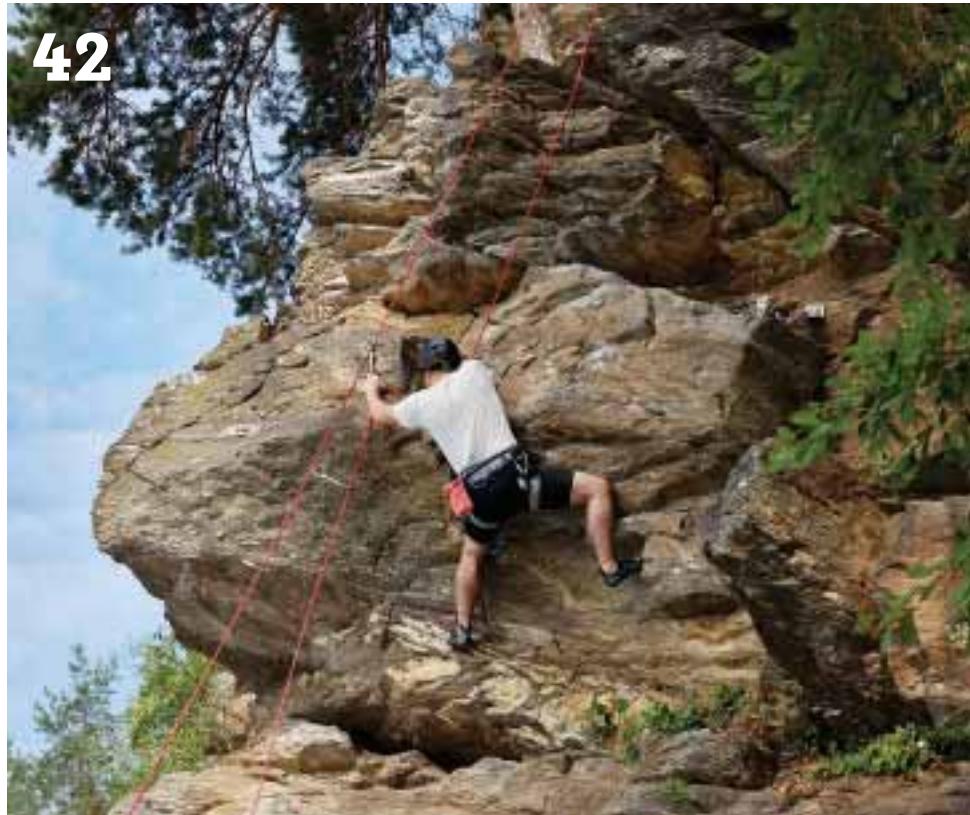
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*Telegraph Independent Exam Results, 2024



FAIL TO PREPARE...

INSTRUCTING staff at the UAS Centre in Lulworth are urging units to ensure the troops they put forward for its drone commander and operator courses are properly prepared.

"We suggest COs give each candidate the time to complete at least 30 hours of practice flying time on a simulator before they come here," SSgt Andy White (KRH), a senior instructor at the facility, told *Soldier*.

"The units need to organise aptitude testing to ensure their candidates have good flying ability because if they don't they'll be sent back."

"Assessments are easy to do; simply buy some laptop software such as *VelociDrone* and various other bits like controllers that can be purchased with a simple business case, and then gauge who is the most skilful before applications are submitted."

The senior NCO emphasised that the intensity of the course syllabuses, particularly the four-week FPV system commanders and

'Units need to organise aptitude testing... this isn't for teaching drone flying'

operators package, meant there was no time to spend on the basics.

"This isn't for teaching personnel drone flying," he added.

"We run four risk-reduction exercises in the first week alone and if a student fails they get booted off."

The focus of the course, which is staged eight times a year, is exploiting drones as a military capability so that 'graduates' can pass on the knowledge to troops back at their units.

"Over the four weeks we teach personnel how to command a team, understand air space, manage the battlespace, coordinate two different drones doing different tasks, and feed information in such as battle damage assessments," explained SSgt White.

"They will also learn how to plot and navigate at 100kph while flying low to the ground. It's not about being up high – anyone can fly up there."

"We teach how to use cover like wood blocks and other features on the ground; that's what we need them to know how to do."

With FPV one-way attack drones gaining popularity, the centre also includes modules on how to programme them for different flight characteristics and missions, assembly and maintenance procedures, navigation and precision ID – which highlights the vulnerable points on various vehicles.

With the Ukraine war amplifying the need to understand drones, the UAS Centre is certainly doing its best with what resources it has to lead the way (page 38).

WHERE TO FIND SOLDIER



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CYPRUS

Long range hot shots

COMPREHENSIVE live firing serials in the Mediterranean gave troops from 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment the chance to hone individual and collective marksmanship techniques.

The two-week outing – known as Exercise Kronos Warrior – saw members of B Company practise shooting both at close-quarters and up to distances of 500m, before progressing to platoon-level drills at night.

Lt Luke Green said personnel had impressed with their performance, especially since opportunities to conduct longer-range shoots are rare.

"Usually we only go up to 300m once a year and the effective range of the SA80 is 400m, according to doctrine," he explained.

"But we had lads getting scores of nine out of ten on targets at 500m. They did well and really enjoyed it."

The package culminated in a field exercise focusing on dispersal and concealment tactics.



BELIZE

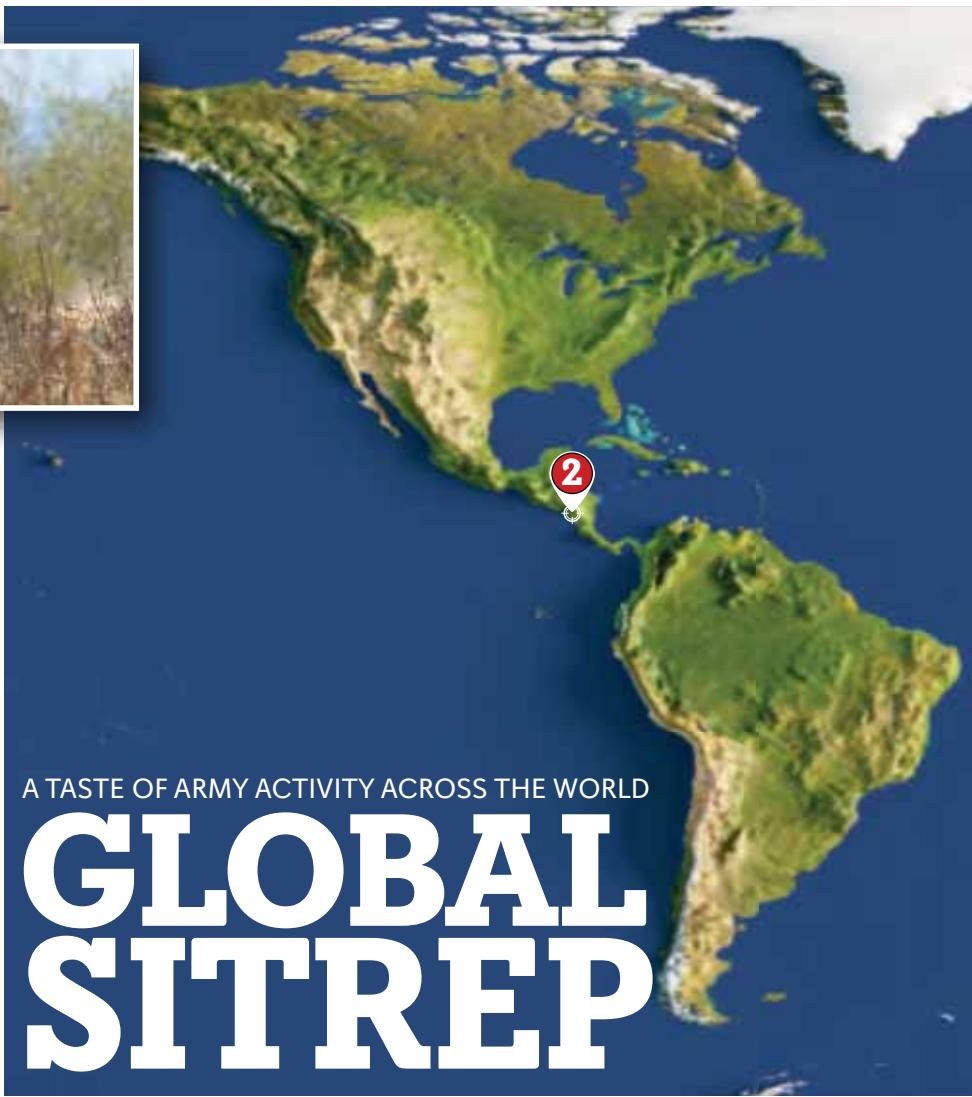
Chat show

AIRBORNE comms experts are hitting the wilderness for a state-of-the-art radio package in demanding jungle conditions.

The troops, from Colchester-based 216 (Parachute) Signal Squadron, will be trialling the mobile ad-hoc network while putting their core soldiering and fieldcraft skills to the test.

As well as robust situational awareness and data transfer capabilities, the system has a 'self-healing' ability to stay online if comms links are disrupted.

Senior officers say Ex Mayan Cyclone will show how the tech could be integrated into the command and control architecture of 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team.



LATVIA

Baltic boost

BRITISH troops are heading to the Baltic region to take part in Exercise Tarassis, a series of drills involving allied land, sea and air forces lasting until the end of this month.

Operating under the command of the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force, they will be tested on their response to regional security threats.

Ex Forest Guardian sees 11 Brigade Headquarters and 240 personnel from 3 Scots Battlegroup deployed to work alongside Latvian partners.

Meanwhile, 825 soldiers and 350 vehicles from 8 Engineer Brigade and 104 Theatre Sustainment Brigade will be demonstrating their ability to reinforce and support Latvian armed forces on Exercise Austere Shield. The training also represents a key step in 8 Engr Bde's path to full deployability for the ARRC's Strategic Reserve Corps.



Picture: Batuk



KENYA

Marathon master

A MEMBER of the Queen's Gurkha Signals made history as the first ever soldier to win the gruelling For Rangers Ultra race.

Nanyuki-based Sig Rupesh Khapung Limbu beat 78 other competitors, including elite civilian runners, to top the podium in the five-day marathon.

Hugging the foothills of Mount Kenya, the 142-mile route took participants through a number of wildlife conservancies – across grasslands and forests, before finishing on the equator.

The event, which was launched seven years ago, raises money for the rangers who protect the country's most endangered animals.

"I planned to just complete the race, but the team out here encouraged me to really push to win," said Sig Limbu. "The most challenging part was the heat and terrain. But I realised that if I really pushed myself to my limit I could win."



5

THE NETHERLANDS

Above the rest...

BRITISH personnel completed a series of parachute jumps and cargo drops alongside international colleagues as part of Exercise Falcon Leap.

Some 77 troops from units across 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team were involved, together with colleagues from Germany, Poland, France, the US and the host nation.

Focused on improving air mobility and readiness, the package was staged in and around Eindhoven, with aircraft including the C-130 Hercules and Airbus A400M Atlas used to insert personnel and supplies into drop zones at Ginkelse Heide and Marnewaard.



Picture: Cpl Jake Hobbs, RAF

'It 100 per cent improves your confidence'

Climbing exped tests troops' limits – page 42



6

ESTONIA

Change of watch

RESPONSIBILITY for Nato deterrence duties has passed from the Mercians to the Royal Tank Regiment as Operation Cabrit 17 gets under way.

Personnel were bedding into their six-month tenure at the helm of the alliance's multi-national battlegroup shortly before this issue went to press.

Their arrival came against a backdrop of heightened tensions in the region, with Russian jets and drones repeatedly violating Estonian, Polish and Romanian airspace.

Foreign secretary Yvette Cooper told the UN Security Council that the UK would confront such incursions if necessary, branding them "dangerous and reckless" acts that could open the door to direct confrontation.

7

FRANCE

Final farewell

SOLDIERS from 5th Battalion, The Rifles helped lay three of their forebears to rest at a ceremony near the old First World War front line on the Somme.

Sjt Richard Rounslay of The Durham Light Infantry, together with two unknown servicemen, was reinterred at the Commonwealth War Grave Commission cemetery at Warlencourt, France.

The 30-year-old NCO died on October 5, 1916, but his body lay undiscovered until it was found during work to install a wind turbine at Le Sars, close to what had been Blaydon Trench.

Research by the MoD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre established the identity of the remains as those of Sjt Rounslay, a married father of four.

The process resulted in some of his grandchildren becoming aware of each other's existence for the first time and three branches of his family attended his reburial.



RANGERS MOVE IN

Picture: Graeme Main



ARNHEM REMEMBERED

MEMBERS of the 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team gathered with Colchester residents to remember the sacrifice of Second World War colleagues at Arnhem 81 years ago.

Wreaths and flowers were laid at the city's war memorial (shown) to commemorate last month's anniversary of the ill-fated Market Garden campaign, which saw the allied 1st Airborne Division suffer heavy losses in an attempt to seize bridges across the Rhine.

Brigade commander Brig Ed Cartwright said: "The determination, endurance and selflessness shown by the soldiers who fought against overwhelming odds continues to serve as an example."

Picture: Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC

TROOPS from The Ranger Regiment have launched their own welfare fund as they formally separate from their antecedent units.

As of October 1, the soldiers no longer had formal attachment to The Rifles, The Royal Regiment of Scotland, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment and The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment – which provided the battalions that spawned the new cap badge.

However, becoming standalone means a Ranger cashpot will be required to help the formation's wider family who find themselves in need.

Members of Aldershot-based 4th Battalion (pictured above in training) led the charge with a sponsored 24-hour phys event at their barracks (shown right).

Unit adjutant Capt Tim Rice said building up the regimental reserve – dubbed the Peregrine Fund – would take time but a good start had been made.

"Familial bonds" would continue to prevail with old parent regiments, which would

support soldiers in the Rangers while the new structure was fully established, he added.

Speaking to *Soldier* as troops completed the sponsored outing, he continued: "As we change we are creating a new regimental community and we must have our own means of supporting our members' welfare.

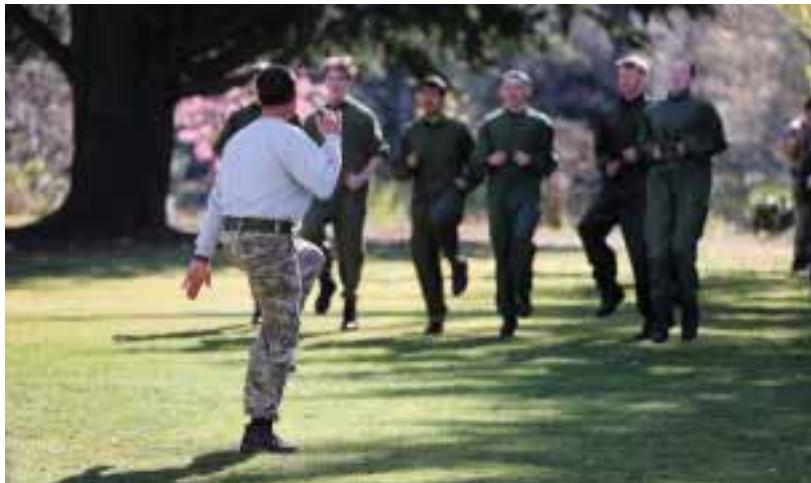
"There were several people taking part in the phys event – a hardcore of troops and others coming and going – and some £6,000 has been raised so far.

"There is a definite feeling that we are all writing history."

Capt Rice has served with 4 Ranger for the last three years and said it had been "great" for the battalion's personnel to deploy operationally so much.



Picture: Graeme Main



CADET CASH KICKS IN

PLANS to boost the cadet forces with a cash injection will be life-changing for youngsters, volunteers say.

Defence minister Al Carsen revealed plans to grow groups affiliated to the army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force by 30 per cent by the end of the decade – confirming £70m would be made available. Qualifications will also be improved, including in drone piloting, with

more joint air and army cadet centres.

As previously reported in *Soldier*, there have been concerns that funding to cadet groups had been in decline.

ACF ambassador Sally Orange (ex-RAMC) said the cash would help create more once-in-a-lifetime experiences and new skills for teenagers.

"This can only help as we grow the cadet forces," the Herrick veteran added.

BEST FUSILIER FORWARD

A FORMER Royal Regiment of Fusiliers officer took a sombre trek from the Scottish Borders to central London in memory of military colleagues lost to suicide.

Retired lieutenant colonel Andy Marriott embarked on the 420-mile trek to raise funds for a monument at the National Memorial Arboretum to those who have taken their own lives.

The gruelling three-week walk was also a tribute to troops who experienced health issues after taking anti-malaria drug Lariam (mefloquine).

Having served on global ops during 35 years of service, the 70-year-old said suicide victims had been left "in a remembrance form of no-man's-land". He wanted to ensure they were properly honoured.

Marriott added: "They did serve; they were prepared to do what the rest of us were prepared to do when we signed up – we are going to bring them in from the cold."

Visit lariumtab.com for further information.



'Lean on us'
A service daughter's
plea to troops – p29

JUDGE PRAISES VICTIM'S COURAGE

A TOP military judge has praised a sexual assault victim for her bravery after her female assailant received a suspended jail term and was dismissed from the ranks in disgrace.

Assistant Judge Advocate Gen John Atwill said the woman, who cannot be named for legal reasons, had shown "great courage and dignity" in reporting the matter to service police.

He was speaking after Musn Adelle Foster (RCAM) left a hearing in Bulford with her 13-year career in tatters (see below). The court was told how she touched the soldier's breast, buttocks and vagina through clothing before grabbing and ordering her to stand up.

Foster, 42, was convicted of three sexual assault counts and admitted a charge of battery.

The former member of the Band of the Coldstream Guards was also told to undergo treatment for her mental health after it emerged she had been drinking and had issues with alcohol dependency at the time of the attack.

In passing sentence, Judge Atwill said the victim had shown "great courage and dignity is standing up to your offending, and great courage in reporting it".

He also assured the victim her anonymity would be protected in law for life, and warned soldiers of their responsibilities.

"It is a criminal offence for anyone to publish information leading to the identity of the victim being made public, and that includes posting on social media," he added.

KICKED OUT

THE following personnel were dismissed from His Majesty's Armed Forces following conviction at court martial in July 2025:

Musn Adelle Foster (Royal Corps of Army Music), 42, was convicted of **three counts of sexual assault**, and admitted **battery**, at the Military Court Centre Bulford. Sentenced to six months' imprisonment, suspended for 18 months, and ordered to complete 200 hours of unpaid community work.

Gdsm Saikou Bojang (1st Battalion, Grenadier Guards), age 32, pleaded guilty to **theft** and **fraud** at the Military Court Centre Bulford. Sentenced to 20 weeks' detention for theft and ten for fraud, served consecutively.

To read the full transcripts of the sentencing remarks in the above cases log on to gov.uk/government/publications/military-court-service-sentencing-remarks-2025





URBAN SKILLS HOUSES

TROOPS have been honing their close combat drills at two new urban fighting facilities.

The purpose-built 'skills houses' have opened at Rolleston Camp on Salisbury Plain and Whinny Hill in Catterick Garrison to provide an immersive experience that replicates the complexity and unpredictability of modern war.

Part of a wider £17m investment in urban training, they feature moveable walls that allow them to be set up for specific scenarios, unlike fixed spaces such as Copehill Down.

The hangars offer authenticity through light, smoke and sound effects, as well as briefing rooms for after-action reviews.

Col Richard Gibb from the Defence Infrastructure Organisation – which led the project – said the facilities represented a significant milestone in furthering the army's urban combat capability.

"They offer safe and highly realistic spaces to better prepare military personnel for operations around the world," he continued.

The first units through the doors in the Wiltshire venue

included the Infantry Battle School, 2 Medical Regiment and 4th Battalion, The Rangers.

Meanwhile in Yorkshire, 3rd Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery and 4th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland were among the initial customers.

Lt Col Gord Robinson (Rangers) from the Land Warfare Centre added that the "state-

of-the-art" compounds had been well received by soldiers and would enable units to meet platoon-level training objectives.

Who Dares Wins

Could the SAS Reserve be for you?

Find out on page 34



SHOCK TANK FIND



THEY may have terrified a generation of *Soldier* readers – but a new find shows that Second World War personnel gave as good as they got when up against the infamous German Tiger I.

During a recent inspection of The Tank Museum's working example of the platform, technicians were stunned to pull this lump of shrapnel from one of the wheels – suggesting it took some serious punishment on its last op.

Dubbed Tiger 131, it was captured by allies in Tunisia, April 1943.

Nick Booth, from the museum, said: "To find a remnant from the battle in which it was captured is remarkable. It is a stark reminder of the history of this tank – and the desperate conditions in which British soldiers fought it to a standstill on a Tunisian hillside."



Something to say about the day-to-day?

THE army wants troops' anonymous views on the business-as-usual support services and infrastructure at its permanent bases.

Scan the QR code below or visit <https://forms.office.com/e/WsUV8taWGi> to take part in the survey from the Firm Base Transformation Programme.

Personnel of all ranks are invited to take part, and the questions take just a few minutes.





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GROUND VIEW

Army Sergeant Major WO1 John Miller gives his take on service life...

SUMMER leave seems a distant memory; life is full on again, there is a huge amount going on and we as an army are going to continue to be very busy in the coming months.

Kit has dominated recent Soldier issues – notably the work going on with UAS – and the wider equipment issue has been on my mind as we move into the autumn.

A visit to the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) event in London was a real eye-opener in terms of how fast technology is moving and how we are adopting new thinking. Well done to everyone involved on the British Army stand – it was an impressive showcase.

For me, it showed just how important the relationship is between us and industry.

You might already have heard the phrase 'techcraft'. It describes the work that goes on between the technologists responsible for producing our kit and us as tacticians – and DSEI was an example of this in action.

I have always served in the Royal Signals – a cap badge where you often deal with the latest advancements. But the cold, hard fact is that change is coming fast now.

In some cases, new tech is making our jobs easier and in others far harder.

It is more vital than ever, then, that we keep the channels of communication open; making sure we properly feed back our experiences on exercise, for example, so that specialists can do their job meeting our needs.

If you want to report back on something, make sure you go through your chain of command in the first instance.

On a separate note, I want to ensure that we as soldiers maintain the highest standards expected of us.

We have a responsibility like no other. It involves serving our country at a time of war and, if required, taking the lives of the enemy. So our conduct must hit a higher bar than most.

Misogyny, sexism, bullying and racism have no place in this army. The chief of the general staff has already been clear on this. Like him, I expect courtesy, decency and the highest professional behaviour at all times, on or off-duty, home or away.

Hold yourself to the highest standards and please ensure you call out the bad stuff.

WO1 Miller's month...

Visits

- Malaysia and Brunei

Impressed with

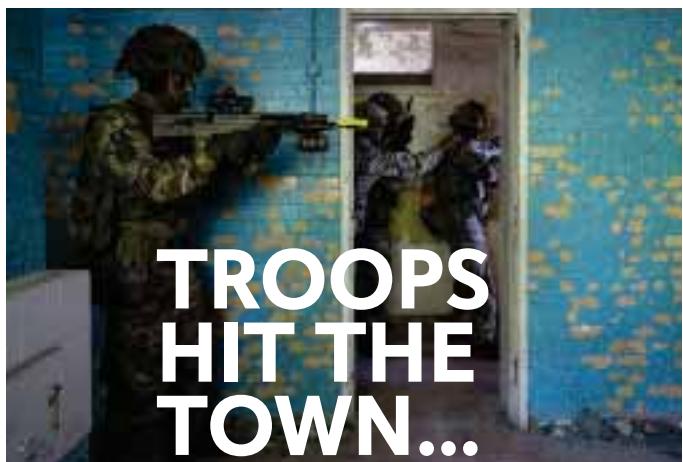
- The army's outstanding showing at DSEI

Areas of focus

- Developing our people capability with education/training

Coming up next

- A programme of UK unit visits



TROOPS HIT THE TOWN...

RESERVIST infanteers had to think on their feet when overhead drones were thrown into the mix during an urban training package at an unused camp in Driffield.

The soldiers from 4th Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment also got to grips with clearing buildings, moving between structures and a confirmation exercise using Simmunition.

The serial was closely followed by annual training for 100 or so personnel in Sennelager, Germany as this issue went to press.

The exercise was set to include further UAS drills, live firing, rural and urban ops and a range of tactical actions.

It topped a busy few months for the battalion, who have also been brushing up on fighting in woods and forests and the treatment of battlefield casualties.

CO Lt Col Ken Neilson said it had been important for his troops to hammer core skills while



developing themselves as leaders.

"As infanteers, it's vital for everyone to know their own job and that of the person one and even two up from them," he added.

"Reservists bring a lot of skills and experience to the regiment and they take away a lot of personal development that puts them in a good place with their civilian roles."

4 Yorks is recruiting. For more information follow **@4royalbacks** on Instagram.

The UAV tips you need

– page 31



FAST WORK FOR FORCES CHIEF

THE top priorities for the newly appointed chief of defence staff are readiness, people and modernisation.

In a video message to troops, Air Chief Marshal Sir Rich Knighton (shown above), who previously led the Royal Air Force, said that what defence does matters more now than for many years.

"Technology is changing the battlefield and our adversaries are moving fast;

we have to move faster," he said. "All of us have a part to play, whether regular, reserve, civil servant or contractor."

He explained one focus for his work would be ensuring the armed forces "recruit, train and most importantly retain" the people they need. He added he would look to get on with it quickly.

The chief replaces Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, who left the role in September.



STATE OCCASION

SOME 1,000 UK troops helped to deliver a lavish state visit for US President Donald Trump.

Along with First Lady Melania, the leader was treated to a textbook display of pageantry, with a carriage procession and full sovereign's escort by members of the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment.

The Grenadier, Scots and Coldstream Guards provided a guard of honour, while the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery and Honourable Artillery Company fired 41-gun salutes. The visitors also attended a beating of the retreat ceremony and state banquet.



REASONS TO BE **CHEERFUL**

By **Rev Ailsa Whorton (RAChD)**, Army Foundation College chaplain

In the rhythm of military life – whether on deployment, in training or back at camp – it's easy to get caught up in the grind. But even in the toughest moments, there are reasons to be cheerful. As a padre, I've had the privilege of walking alongside troops and seeing how hope and humour can thrive in adversity. Here are some reminders that joy is never far away...

Camaraderie

There's nothing quite like the bond between soldiers. Shared laughter, knowing glances, banter that lifts the mood – it's a kind of fellowship forged in fire. These relationships are a source of strength and remind us we're never alone, even when things get tough.

Purpose

Serving in the forces is more than a job – it's a calling. Whether you're on ops, supporting communities or training for what's next, you're part of something that matters. That sense of purpose can be a powerful anchor, especially when life feels uncertain.

Small joys, big impact

A hot brew on a cold morning; a message from home; sunset after a long day. These small moments can carry surprising weight. They remind us to pause, breathe and take stock of the good that's already here. Gratitude doesn't ignore hardship – it helps us endure it.

Faith = resilience

Whether you're religious, spiritual or searching, faith can offer a deeper well of resilience. It's not about having all the answers – it's about knowing where to turn when life gets messy. As a chaplain, I've seen how faith can be a quiet companion, a source of peace and a spark of hope.

Perspective

Sometimes, stepping back helps us see the bigger picture. What feels overwhelming today might look different tomorrow. Perspective doesn't erase problems, but it can soften their edges. And when we share our stories, honestly and openly, we find strength in each other's journeys.



So, wherever you are – on exercise, ops or back at base – remember, there are always reasons to be cheerful.

And if you're struggling to find them, your padre is just a brew away...



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EGYPTIAN KINGS

TROOPS from 1st Battalion, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment showcased border security ops for their Egyptian counterparts during a training serial alongside US forces.

Exercise Bright Star also saw the soldiers work with military police in scenarios that were designed to enhance regional security and stability.

Picture: US Army



a worry for troops who left in the 1990s – often hitting their mental health hard.

And while accepting that good progress has been made over the decades, commentators say more is still needed to address “the legacy of empire”.

The concerns were raised after a study involving both serving and retired Gurkha and Fijians was published by the Forces in Mind Trust charity – with the probe finding that historic discrimination still had an impact on older vets, some 40 of whom were surveyed.

It also flagged that the distress had been compounded by longer periods of separation from loved ones than Brit counterparts.

Fears of having to cope on old pension terms after discharge – particularly for Gurkha veterans – had also caused anguish.

In parallel, researchers at King's College London discovered that some of the 300 serving Nepalese and Fijians polled were more likely to put up with physical and mental health symptoms. But most reported being in good overall shape.

Among a series of recommendations, the academics

suggested that support services should be better coordinated between defence, welfare groups and charities.

They also stressed that officials at the MoD and Department for Work and Pensions needed to continue to address “enduring differences” in pension inequalities faced by Gurkha veterans who retired before 1997 on older terms.

Report author Prof Edgar Jones said that the soldiers involved in the study remained highly resilient and were “rightly proud of their military achievements”.

But the expert added: “Discriminatory treatment has had an impact on their health and though much has been done to address the legacy of empire, the task is not complete.”

Forces in Mind chief executive officer Michelle Alston shared the concerns, adding that the latest study should serve as a useful reference point when assisting all non-UK troops.

“Regardless of their country of origin, all former service personnel and their families should be empowered to make a successful transition to civilian life,” she concluded.

GURKHA WELFARE WARNING

OLDER foreign and commonwealth vets are still suffering from issues caused by past discrimination – and more should be done to help them, charity bosses have said.

They point out that the threat of sudden termination of service, uncertain immigration status and financial concerns caused by less generous pensions were all

Picture: Air Tpr Dave Allen, AAC



CLIMBING SEASON PEAKS

PTI takes on the biggest and best mountains of the Alps

MOUNTAINEER Sgt Jack Harrison (RAPTC) experienced the splendour of the Alps from a unique perspective after he scaled the highest peak in each of the seven countries that fall within the range.

The 28-year-old started the challenge in swift style as he climbed Mont Blanc in France, Italy's Gran Paradiso and the 3,798-metre Grossglockner in Austria in quick succession on the back of an adventurous training expedition.

However, he then had to wait two years to complete the set - returning this summer alongside friends Sgt Ben Combe (RAPTC) and Cpl Toby Tibbits (AAC) to tackle Germany's Zugspitze; the highest mountain in Slovenia, Triglav; Grauspitz in Liechtenstein

and Switzerland's Dufourspitze.

"When I started out the aim was to just push my limits in mountaineering," Sgt Harrison told *Soldier*. "Mont Blanc was the best for that as it is the highest peak in the Alps.

"After the first three I saw an article online about a climber who attempted a speed record for all seven, which gave me the idea for the challenge."

The NCO, who is based at AFC Harrogate, scaled a total of more than 25,000 metres in elevation and after a spectacular start had to negotiate some challenging weather patterns to complete the arduous quest.

"The scenery is amazing and there were views that not many get to see," he continued. "I enjoy the challenge of setting an

objective that seems impossible and seeing where I can get to.

"Mont Blanc was the first time I had been above 2,000 metres and that final ridge to the top was a shock to the body.

"When we returned for the four remaining peaks we had planned to do them in a logical order, but the weather was against us.

"We were driving back and forth looking for good windows and did 50 hours on the road in

nine days to make it work.

"The standout moment was reaching the top of Dufourspitze (shown near right). It is the second highest mountain in the Alps and is meant to be done over three days - we had to do it in two.

"They were 14-hour days but it all came together - it was an amazing way to finish."

You are here – page 44

From left: Cpl Toby Tibbits (AAC), Sgt Jack Harrison and Sgt Ben Combe (both RAPTC)





The team tackle the crevassed descent down from the summit of Dufourspitze



GREG'S PULLING POWER



INJURED veteran Greg Dunnings has smashed the **Guinness world record** for pulling a vehicle the furthest distance in 24 hours.

The ex-soldier, who was wounded in an IED blast while serving with the Coldstream Guards in 2009, hauled the 1.6-tonne van a total of 40 miles at Carlisle Airport – beating the previous best effort of 32 miles.

He is no stranger to endurance feats having completed previous fundraising challenges of running 100 miles, rowing for 24 hours and carrying a rowing machine over Yorkshire's Three Peaks.

"It was a brutal challenge, but I kept moving one step at a time – for every brother and sister who needs support," said Dunnings, who is now a firefighter with Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service.

He was raising money for SSAFA, The Coldstream Guards Charity and the Fire Fighters Charity.

Search 'furthest distance pulling a vehicle' at [justgiving.com](https://www.justgiving.com) to donate to the cause.

STATESIDE SUMMIT

BRITISH troops will join colleagues from 91 other countries at a major defence expo in Washington DC this month.

Billed as the premier event of its kind, the Association of the US Army Conference is a trade show and top-level networking forum, with more than 750 exhibitors and 40,000 visitors set to attend.



DEATH IN DUBAI

VETERANS have helped to expose illegal prostitution in the Middle East as part of a new podcast and documentary.

Death in Dubai investigates the fates of two Ugandan women, Monic Karungi and Kayla Birungi, who were lured to the UAE with promises of work.

Instead, they are thought to have fallen prey to sex traffickers and later died in suspicious circumstances.

Two-and-a-half years in the making, the project was a collaboration between the BBC and Thread Studios, which was founded by former combat camera team member Mauricio Gris (ex-LG, pictured right).

Together with Chris Jones (ex-PWRR) as assistant producer,

the pair brought their military experience to bear throughout as they managed the risks of undercover filming and operating in countries that have reduced press freedom.

Talking to *Soldier* shortly after its release, Gris said the production, which involved covert filming of an alleged criminal, had been “like lifting up a stone and looking under it”.

“Once we dug a bit further we couldn’t just turn away – we had to keep going and find out what was at the end of it,” he continued.

“These women are voiceless, powerless, so to be able to give them a platform is incredibly important.”

Correcting misinformation around the victims’ lifestyles prior

TACTICAL TOURNAMENT

DRONE racers went head-to-head in an international tournament at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

The summit, which saw the Australian Defence Forces take the overall win, also featured the British Army Drone Sports Championships – a more tactical affair that was supported by paratroopers from 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team (shown), the army’s lead formation for developing the use of UAS.

The domestic competition saw pilots fly the devices around an obstacle course to find and strike targets, with points awarded for accuracy.

Drone racing is one of the British Army’s newest official sports.



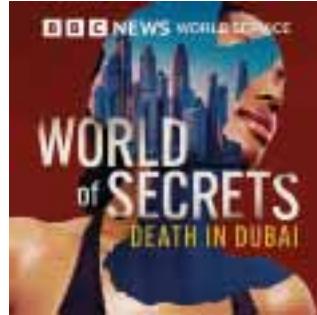


to their deaths had also been "incredibly satisfying", added the ex-officer.

"We got to show the complexity of the situation and how a massive hidden number of

women are being failed," he said.

Having left the military in 2014 after seven years in the Household Cavalry, Gris completed a masters in journalism and made films in the likes of Syria and Iraq as



a freelancer before setting up Thread Studios.

He described his army media role, which saw him gathering content in Afghanistan (shown), as the service's "best kept secret" for those interested in the field because it provided valuable on-the-job training as a producer in a war zone.

Death in Dubai is available as a documentary on iPlayer and a six-part podcast on BBC Sounds.

TAX RETHINK

CONTROVERSIAL plans to slap inheritance tax on death-in-service benefits of unmarried personnel have been canned.

The Treasury had planned to impose the levy on lump sum payments given to partners of personnel who died off-duty – unless they were wives, husbands or civil partners.

But the move, which was outlined by Chancellor Rachel Reeves in the last budget and had been due to come into force in April 2027, has now been halted following consultation with organisations representing troops.

Among them, the Forces Pension Society had argued that the proposal was at odds with the spirit of stated agreements with soldiers and their families.

CEO Maj Gen (Retd) Neil Marshall said: "This welcome decision will ensure all armed forces pension scheme death-in-service benefits will now be out of scope of inheritance tax, irrespective of marital status.

"This is in line with the Armed Forces Covenant whereby those who served, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services."

NEW DIGS

CONSTRUCTION workers are putting the final touches to state-of-the-art new digs at Weeton Barracks, near Blackpool, ahead of the arrival of its first residents in the coming weeks.

The single living accommodation block (shown) has nearly 70 ensuite bedspaces plus a raft of green features.

Lt Col Robert Carman, CO of 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, said it was "excellent" to see a better standard of living for his troops who are based there.



OCT

diary dates



Picture: Cpl Rob Kane, RLC

4

Reservists unite

ALL eyes are on Sennelager (shown above) this month, for the largest mass deployment of British Army reservists since the Cold War. Exercise Rhino Heart will see more than 800 troops from across 1st (UK) Division take on demanding and realistic training, while honing HQ planning and execution skills. The battlegroup will work alongside Nato allies, including the US National Guard and German Bundeswehr. Soldiers will also get chance to do some sightseeing.



Pictures: Shutterstock

10

City snooze

TROOPS are being encouraged to swap their beds for a London churchyard to raise cash for veterans living rough. The call to arms comes from charity Alabare for this year's Big Sleep, which will take place in the gardens of St Paul's Cathedral to mark World Homeless Day. Participants are asked to raise £1,000 and there will be an evensong service led by a military choir. Visit thebigsleep.org.uk

10

World Mental Health Day

POOR mental health is not inevitable, and this annual event can be used to discuss how best to support teammates. Got a friend who is struggling? Finding things tough yourself? It can be daunting knowing where to get help, but there are many places you can turn to including your mates, family, boss, padre, unit welfare worker, med officer or GP. For free and confidential advice you can also call Combat Stress's 24-hour military mental health helpline on **0800 323 4444** or by text via **07537 404 719**.



SUPPORT FROM SOLDIER: *Find these recent articles on mental health by clicking 'archive' on soldiermagazine.co.uk*

Pictures: Graeme Main



Football therapy – Sept 2025



Rifles fight suicide – June 2024



Sleep matters – March 2025



Gambling in mind – Oct 2024

18

Jackals set for services test

THE army American football team lock horns with the Royal Navy at Tilsley Park in Abingdon in their opening game in this season's Inter-Services Championships. The soldiers downed their rivals 35-6 last year to win the tournament for the first time and will be targeting another comprehensive victory before facing the Royal Air Force two weeks later.



Picture: Jason Brown



23

Stepping up to the oche

AFTER being recognised as an official service sport in February, darts will fall under the spotlight of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst as it hosts the discipline's inaugural Army Championships. The contest comes on the back of a successful military event in Blackpool last year, called Op Bullseye, and with momentum building in all three military arms it is hoped an Inter-Services competition will follow.

fitness

Grip strength
There are lots of different training aids to help you with this. A v-shaped grip trainer costs about £5 and is good enough to get you going. Then there are pinch blocks that you attach weights to as well as wall-mounted finger boards that allow you to practise different holds, from basic ones to crimps, where you're hanging on with your fingertips.

Arms
A good place to start is with a weights programme. Normal PT isn't enough if you want to get to higher levels of climbing – you need to do additional strength and endurance training. Focus on lower weights for longer – I do five sets of 14-18 reps, before finishing with as many reps as possible. Aim for 30 to 40 per cent of your one-rep maximum, which is quite light but getting the muscles moving for longer builds endurance. At the same time, there will be occasions in climbing when you need to hold your own body weight so don't skip power and strength training.

Core
This is an important one, although I don't do much core training personally because I find it comes naturally through bouldering, which is very technical and allows me to focus on overhang routes. You can do hanging knee or leg raises or some people I know combine pull-ups with leg raises. Hanging exercises are good because they train your core and grip at the same time.

Legs
A lot of the professionals will do plyometric stuff – exercises incorporating jumps – but I find I get enough power from static moves like front and back squats, single-leg presses and Bulgarian split squats. For strength, I usually work between 70 and 80 per cent of my one-rep max, doing two or three reps for five sets. For endurance, I do eight sets of 15 reps at 50-60 per cent of my max weight.

AIMING HIGH
LOOKING to get into climbing or wanting to improve? Army team member LCpl Josh Connor-Latus (RTR) says it's not just about upper body strength. Here are his top tips on what muscle groups to work in the gym...

Picture: Graeme Main

tech

SIM TIME SUCCESS

FREE-ROAM virtual reality has been giving the edge to operational training for Royal Logistic Corps personnel.

Soldiers from 6 Regiment used what is known as adaptive virtual reality training (AVRT) kit to deliver individual training requirement 10.4 (urban basics).

And as well as creating a realistic and responsive environment in which to assess troops – including via a first-person view that enables instructors to see what soldiers see – the tech allowed leaders to get kitted up and teach lessons from inside the system as trainees watched their avatars.

"This digitised system is exactly what we need to be utilising to inspire enthusiasm towards training in the newer generation," said Sgt John Walker (RLC), the NCO in charge of the package.

"Soldiers enjoyed the experience, and the user scenario playback showed them exactly what they did, or could have done, and inspired increased tactical thinking and awareness."

Positions of weapon carriage, movement in the urban environment and doorway entry methods were among the topics covered.

AVRT's full 3D replays also provided detailed feedback for after-action reviews.

"The system allowed personnel to experience an actual urban setting with a variety of buildings, structures and furnished rooms, as opposed to the traditional empty concrete spaces with four walls and a roof that we are accustomed to on exercise," Sgt Walker added.

"It is not an understatement to say that the training was so immersive users forgot they were in a VR setting."

To add to the realism, AVRT kit was deployed alongside haptic technology from Teslasuit, manufacturers of a full bodysuit that enables soldiers to experience sensations ranging from light weather effects such as rain, through to simulated bullet strikes.



health



BREAST
CANCER
AWAWARENESS
MONTH



CHECKS AND BALANCES

Athlete urges troops to examine their breasts after a shopping trip for swimwear ended in a cancer diagnosis

EX-ARMY physio Sally Orange was trying on a bikini in a high street changing room when she noticed an ominous lump.

It is a worrying moment for any woman – but after rapidly progressing through the medical chain, the retired major was given the shocking news that this was cancer.

Surgery followed, and the former servicewoman was beginning a course of chemotherapy and radiotherapy to prevent a recurrence as this issue went to press.

Speaking at the start of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the athlete – who raises cash for charity in ultramarathon events around the world – advised soldiers to keep a closer watch on their body.

The illness could strike anyone – even those in peak physical shape, she said.

Orange told *Soldier*: “I’d actually been competing in challenges – including going up Mount Aconcagua in the Andes with amputee Gurkha veteran Hari Budha Magar – without knowing that I had the disease.

“I didn’t feel unwell and it was only as I was trying on the bikini in front of a changing room mirror that I noticed the anomaly and went to have it checked.”

Despite her diagnosis, Orange – who often dons fruit-themed fancy dress outfits to raise cash for mental health charities – has remained resolute.

After clearance from the docs, the Royal

Army Medical Corps vet ran the Everest Marathon, this time dressed as a giant boob for Breast Cancer Now (pictured).

She said: “The Nepal event was my 87th marathon – completing it is a good opportunity to remind troops to check themselves, however fit they think they might be.

“Many do not realise that men – as well as women – should also examine themselves.

“While the disease is rarer in males, one man is diagnosed with the condition every day.”

The former officer – who completed an Operation Herrick tour during nearly 22 years of service and is now an Army Cadet Force ambassador – added: “We are still open to donations for the Everest Marathon but so far £2,500 has been raised – I am running and fundraising at the London Marathon next year as well.

“I have also been contacted by five women who checked themselves after seeing my online posts and found lumps too – I’m glad to have been able to assist.”

Orange said she would remain steadfastly committed to fitness and training where possible throughout her chemo and radiotherapy.

“It is important for me to do this during treatment,” she emphasised.

“It is also important to remember that one-in-two of us are going to get cancer in our lives,” she concluded.



Picture: Shutterstock

TEETH: THE DRILL

Why travelling abroad for cosmetic dental work could affect your deployability

TROOPS heading overseas in search of bright white gnashers – or ‘Turkey teeth’ as they’re sometimes known – risk a host of oral health problems that could impact their medical grading, dental bosses say.

Named after low-cost procedures offered in various Eastern European countries, the process usually involves filing down natural teeth before fitting veneers or crowns on top of them.

But while the surgery might deliver an Insta-worthy smile, Lt Col Wassim Slim (RAMS, shown below) from Headquarters Defence Primary Healthcare pointed out it it can be highly invasive and should not be entered into lightly.

“Teeth don’t grow back once you’ve cut into them, the enamel doesn’t recover – that is an irreversible process,” said the army dentist.

“You will need repair and ongoing maintenance for the rest of your life.

“In the UK you would have various diagnostic examinations and investigations, then the treatment would be done over several appointments and you would have



Picture: Shutterstock

long-term support for months afterwards. None of this is possible when you go for a weekend abroad.”

Among the serious dramas that could result from rushed or substandard care are inflammation and necrosis of the tooth pulp, abscesses and tooth loss.

Poorly fitting veneers can cause plaque build-up – leading to gum disease and bad breath – or bite and jaw joint problems, explained Lt Col Slim.

As a result, military dentists may not be able to categorise personnel as dentally fit to deploy because they cannot be sure issues will not arise that could undermine their operational effectiveness.

“A questionnaire was sent out to MoD dentists and half of them said they had assessed patients who’d had dental treatment from a non-service provider in the last year,” the officer continued.

“Of those who’d had to manage problems relating to cosmetic treatment abroad, the majority deemed the quality of care as poor or very poor.

“Many said they would be concerned about managing such cases moving forwards because of the complexity of the treatment required.”

The survey and other evidence are now being used to draw up formal policy on the subject, he added.



BRUSH UP...

How are veneers and crowns fitted?

A number of your front teeth – up to 20, depending on how wide your smile is – are cut down to make room for veneers of ceramic or plastic. It’s a bit like false nails for teeth.

What can go wrong?

You are cutting away healthy tooth substance. If it’s not done carefully, with good planning, any one of those teeth could develop problems such as pulpitis – inflammation of the soft inner tissue – or even die off and cause an abscess, all of which can be very painful.

How would you treat that?

In the worst cases, your dentist may have to dismantle the veneers to find out which tooth is affected. They may then have to do a root canal, but if it doesn’t respond positively to the treatment, you could lose the tooth completely.

Why is this a problem in terms of deployability?

Scientific evidence states that 20-25 per cent of teeth that have been cut down for crowns will die. Military dentists categorise natural, healthy, clean teeth as being unlikely to need treatment in the next 12 months, but with teeth



Picture: Shutterstock

that have been significantly filed down, the risk of a problem occurring on operations is much higher, so the patient may be deemed dentally non-deployable.

What if your teeth are affecting your confidence, though?

There are less invasive methods that could achieve the look you want, including professional whitening and braces. I strongly urge people considering any cosmetic treatment to speak to their dental officers, who can advise, even though such procedures aren’t provided within the military system. If you do decide you want veneers, seek out a reputable practitioner in the UK so you get the appropriate planning and follow-up care. Yes, it’s expensive – but it’s better to pay properly once than go cheap and spend three times as much fixing it, if you can at all.



‘The risk of a problem on ops is higher’

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welfare



Picture: Paul Melia

'LEAN ON US'

Army daughter Leonie Case has an important message for troops with adult children

“IT WAS a huge shock when we lost my dad, Capt Gaz Case (Rifles), back in August 2019.

He just went to work one day, then my life went into a tailspin after that.

Never in a million years did I think I'd be in a position where a policeman knocked on my door to tell me my dad had died and that he'd taken his own life.

The thing that hurt the most was the fact he felt like he couldn't speak to me about his issues, when we'd had countless conversations about making sure you're okay and looking after yourself.

I would always say 'I'm fine, dad, I've got you and mum – but you've got a lot on, you need to talk to people too, you can always talk to me'. He'd say 'I will'.

So never in a million years did I think I would be in this position.

My dad was in his fifties when he died.

I had started my own life – I was moving to Wales to teach and it was getting to the point where the roles were reversing, and he was able to talk to me a bit more about situations

going on at work and things that he was struggling with.

Funnily enough, mental health never really came up, though.

His concern for other people came up, but not *his* concerns.

I remember saying to him once, 'dad, you deal with everybody else but don't forget about yourself' and he said 'yeh I know Lou, I will'.

I just wish now that he understood how serious I was – that, yes, I was still his little girl and would always be his little girl, but also I was there for him to lean on whenever he needed anything.

So I want to try and make that more apparent to dads, mums, brothers, sisters... or whoever it is that needs somebody.

The younger generation are there for you.”

PROFESSIONAL VIEW ...

In my work with military personnel I often see how difficult it is for people to reach out in difficult times.

Soldiers can have rigid rules – 'I have to be strong, no matter what'.

Feeling unable to cope can feel like a weakness and can therefore trigger shame and self-criticism.

There can often be a tendency to put loved ones first, no matter their age, and a fear of being a burden or of letting others down.

Sadly, this can sometimes spiral into very dark thoughts.

All of this emotional turmoil can mean people isolate themselves from those that care about them, which further compounds the distress.

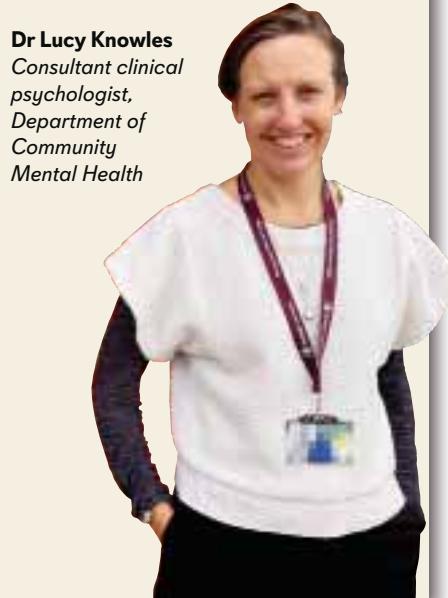
It can take real strength and bravery to overcome this battle that might be going on in someone's mind.

However, opening up is how people become closer.

Many talk about how honoured they feel to be able to be there for someone at their darker moments, and how it has deepened their bond. And feeling less alone can be a powerful antidote to distress.

Dr Lucy Knowles

Consultant clinical psychologist,
Department of
Community
Mental Health



Leonie Case has set up the **Lean on Me** project in The Rifles Regiment, to encourage parents to consider turning to their adult children in times of need. If you want confidential support with your mental health turn to **page 60** for organisations that can help.

skills



FLY TO SURVIVE

DRONE operators are now high priority targets on the battlefield. So taking measures to enhance survivability is key. Cpl Fergus Williams-Tanton (RL) – an instructor at the Combat Manoeuvre Centre's UAS Centre – talks us through a six-point checklist that small UAS (sUAS) teams should follow on ops and exercises.

1 Being **aware of your position** and any potential vulnerabilities is everything when selecting a site to fly drones from. Make sure you have really good cover from the air. It sounds obvious, but I cannot emphasise how important this is because enemy airborne assets will be everywhere. Invest time in camouflaging your hide and yourself really well.

2 Thermal cover is vital these days, with enemy drones carrying all sorts of sensors. **Thermal blankets** can be bought through the SQMS system, as can sheeting and shrouds or even thermal covers designed for vehicles which can be cut to fit over your hide. Barracuda cam nets which have integrated thermal screening are great if you can get them.

3 Offset your **launch point**. Position the drone on the ground well away from your hide so when it takes off it does not give your position away and attract enemy fire.

4 If you are not operating a one-way attack drone, use a different route on the return journey to fool any enemy who might be tracking your sUAS. And when you want to recover the platform, do a '**stop short**' – land the drone well away from where you are located. Once it's on the deck, wait for a period of time to see if you can get eyes on any enemy movement in case the drone was tracked. If you're about to exit the area, you could fly the platform to a spot where you know it will be safe to pick up en route.

5 If you're flying an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) platform you'll want to stop to observe potential targets on occasions. Do everything you can to avoid hovering against a plain, solid backdrop such as an overcast sky. Look to **disguise your drone** in front of a woodblock, for example, because then it will be almost impossible to discern from a distance. We tell our students to do a 180-degree turn with their camera as soon as they hover to be sure they are positioned correctly in front of a backdrop that obscures the drone's presence.

6 Always carry a comprehensive tool kit for repairing your drone and **lots of spares** – primarily batteries, propellers and antennas.

You'll rinse through this type of gear on an operation or sustained exercise and if this kit is on hand you won't need to move to obtain spares or be resupplied by another team, reducing the chances of being spotted.

UNTAPPED TALENT

DRONE skills could be boosted if the army made more use of reservists with civvy jobs in the field, a specialist and part-time soldier has said.

SSgt Toby Townsend (AGC (RMP), pictured), who runs his own commercial UAS and training firm, believes there could be significant untapped potential in the ranks that might help with all uses of the kit. And he urged defence chiefs to more closely scrutinise the list of civvy skills that troops already provide to see if they can help.

The 33-year-old, who is also an instructor with Manchester and Salford University Officers' Training Corps, told *Soldier*: "The drone is a game-changer on many fronts, the one-way effect platform being just one example.

"There are reservists with the experience to assist.

"Knowledge they have from civvy street can be adapted for military use, but it needs to be identified.

"All of us record our civilian skills on Defence Gateway, so they are available to see. We could help as soldiers if they are picked up by the right people."

SSgt Townsend – who has been in uniform for 16 years and established his own firm a decade ago – said reservists came from many walks of life. Several

skills, some of which were niche or highly specialist, could be useful to the army if properly configured, the senior NCO added.



Ever wondered what it takes to fly a first person-view (FPV) one-way attack drone? Turn to page 38 to find out, as assistant editor Cliff Caswell tried his hand at piloting these deadly weapons.





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TRADERS TO TRUST

Website helps public to source ex-army expertise

A FORMER soldier has given a big boost to military leavers-turned-tradespeople after launching a website that puts members of the public in touch with their services.

Tony Howley is continuing to welcome new firms to Trust A Veteran – an online directory of ex-armed forces professionals running



ventures from dog walking to cyber security, building services and heating to plumbing.

And with 300 outfits already enlisted, the network is expanding apace while offering members a raft of benefits to help them in their life after the military.

Howley, who notched up deployments in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan after joining up as a sapper in the late 1980s, admitted the venture had been a journey of discovery.

He only made the leap to civvy street himself after medical discharge two years ago.

Working in property maintenance, he thought a network seemed a good way of bringing self-employed ex-troops together and promoting their skills.

"You tend to find people want to employ veterans because service in the armed forces means something – it is about trust, discipline and integrity," said Howley, who went on to serve in the Staff and Personnel Support

branch of the Adjutant General's Corps before commissioning into the Royal Army Medical Corps during his later years in uniform.

"Originally we launched in the northwest of England where I live and am based, but we now have businesses all over the UK."

"There are all kinds of people with us and we have a fair few sectors covered."

Ex-personnel have to provide proof of their military service – such as a veterans' card – to be listed on the website.

The first year of membership is free, with a £75 annual fee thereafter.

The various benefits include online publicity plus discounted rates at the hardware superstore B&Q.

Howley said members would also be given a full opportunity to address complaints if any were received from customers via the website.

They would only find themselves de-listed if matters persisted or went unresolved.

"The overwhelming majority of us in this community want to stand up for the values and standards that were instilled in us when we first joined up," he added.

To find out more or to sign up to the website visit trustaveteran.com

'People want to employ veterans because service means something'

Q & A

GUNNING FOR BUSINESS

Soldier asked Joe Salt (ex-RA), owner of kit and clothing firm JoJoes Branded Merchandise, why he enlisted with Trust A Veteran...

You're an ex-gunner. How did you land in this line of work?

I actually followed an aunt who used to work in this space when I left the army – I really enjoy it.

What brought you to this site?

I was scrolling online and came across it by chance – the whole thing sounded interesting and you get your first year free so you can't really lose.

Has it drummed up much trade?

Not a flood of business, but work has come through. I'm definitely staying and have just paid my subscription for the second year.

Does the network promote confidence?

Yes, I think so. Tony, who runs it, keeps a close eye on things too and will act if there are any concerns from customers using the network.

What are the other benefits?

You get good advice from fellow members. They are people who also have a military background and get what you do – we help each other out.

Do you think it will continue to grow?

Definitely – it has expanded a lot from the 70 organisations listed when I joined.



Name: Joe Salt

Age: 33

Role: Owner, JoJoes Branded Merchandise

Former cap badge:

Royal Artillery

Years in: 2009-2016

Ops: Afghanistan

WHO DARES

The Special Air Service Reserve is recruiting. And did you know army leavers can do selection as part of their resettlement?

WINS

Pictured: SAS reservists conduct mission specific training prior to deployment



Report: Sarah Goldthorpe



13 more facts you might not know about soldiering in the SAS Reserve ...including the flexibility

1 The SAS Reserve – part of the first echelon component of UK Special Forces – has troops operating globally, 24/7, across the spectrum of UKSF campaigns and highly specialised missions. And all alongside a civvy street career.

3 Its soldiers must be able to undertake intense and extended training demands, be willing to deploy overseas on a wide range of tasks, and commit to operations.

5 Unlike other reserve units, 21 and 23 SAS routinely deploy on their own missions as formed units, sub-units or small teams, too. This sets these soldiers apart, with more responsibility than others.

2 The force is made up of two regiments, 21 and 23 SAS – both of which date back to the Second World War and SAS founder David Stirling

4 The role, according to SF bosses, offers “an unparalleled sense of purpose, a high degree of autonomy and unrivalled operational mastery”. Put simply, it’s damn exciting.

6 As a result of deploying as formed units, both regiments require attachments from various cap badges – including the Royal Signals, Intelligence Corps, Royal Logistic Corps, Adjutant General’s Corps, Royal Army Medical Service and Royal Army Chaplains’ Department. These roles are advertised on Serve (findforcesjobs.mod.gov.uk).

7 SF personnel enjoy more permissions, a higher level of training and state-of-the-art, specialist weapons and equipment in order to carry out their role.

8 The regiments operate with other nations' special forces across temperate, desert, arctic and jungle environments.

9 The job might be busy, but it's also flexible and can be done on your terms. An SAS Reserve trooper or commander is expected to mobilise operationally every three years. And in the UK, 60 reserve service days is the average contribution. In addition, UKSF employs many people on full-time reserve service.

10 To join, personnel must be phase two trained in another reserve or regular unit. They first undergo the UKSF briefing course and, if successful, are mobilised to undertake a six-month, full-time selection course which runs twice a year. Those who pass routinely progress straight onto mission specific training and operations.

11 Applications are accepted from men and women, across all three services.

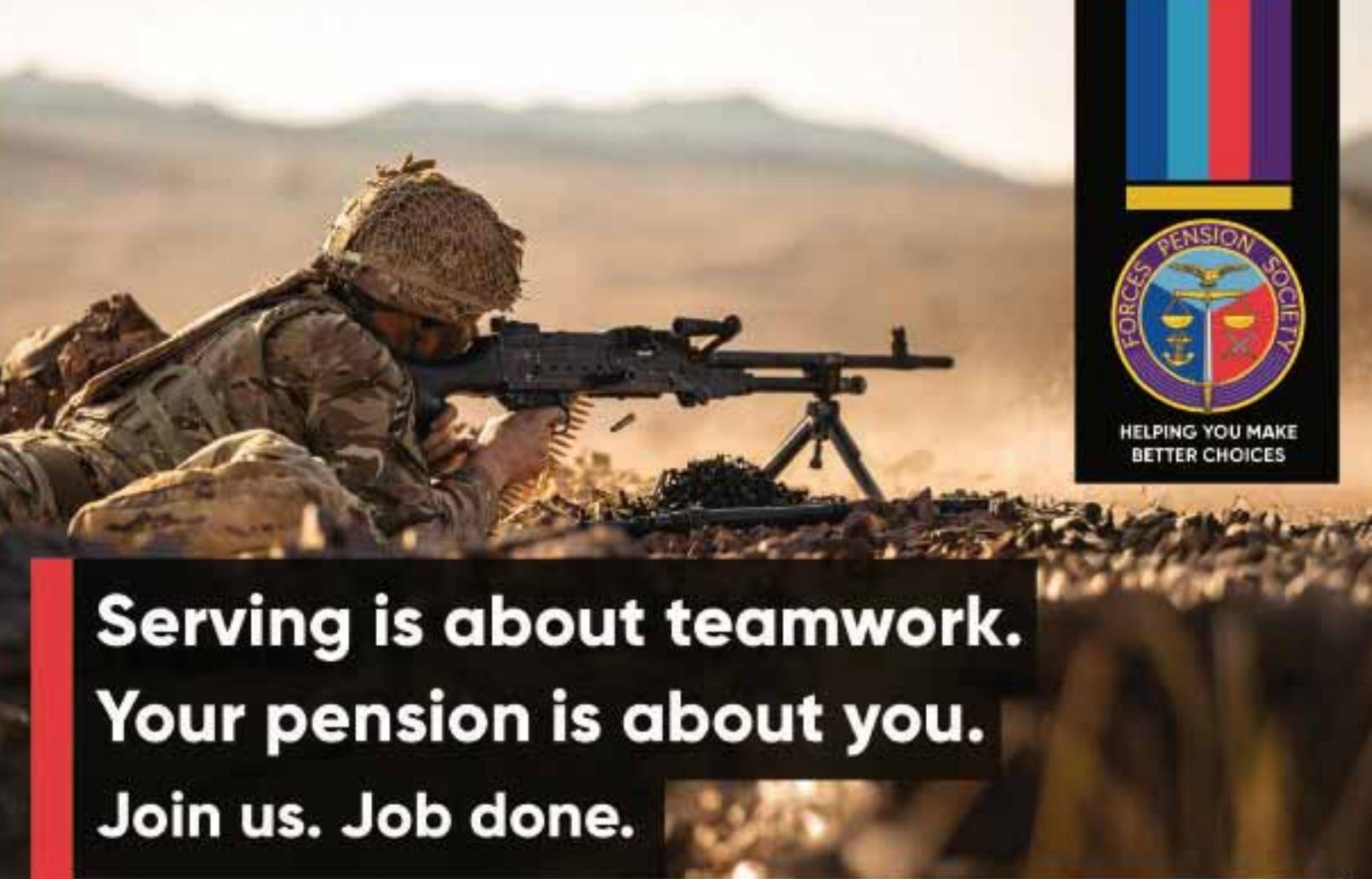
12 Joiners must be no older than 43 and 364 days when they start selection.

13 Detachments are located across the UK, from southwest England to north Scotland.



FIND OUT MORE

21 and 23 SAS offers a Special Forces career on your terms, but with all the access to ops, kit, training and pay that you would get in the regulars. To find out more scan the code or email sftc-uksf-reserve-recruiting@mod.gov.uk



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CRASH AND





BURN

Soldier takes off for a one-way drone strike – and returns to tell the tale



Main picture: A parked strategic bomber force proved easy prey for *Soldier* during a simulated drone strike based on Op Spiderweb

TIS impossible to appreciate the array of solid objects on an airfield until you are skimming the surface of a runway and watching assorted obstacles zip past.

There are the spikes of aerials poking up into the sky, engineering vehicles and runway control points, to single out a few. Adding to my dramas, there's also the buzz of groundfire I'm starting to attract – the world is getting hectic.

"It's a bonus if you manage to extract your drone from the Iso container at the start line," one of the soldiers watching this PC-based exercise serial had joked. But to his astonishment, I managed to squeeze out.

The first-person view UAV under my control is now gaining height, the panorama of an enemy base appearing. Dodging around another radio mast, our targets are in sight – Cold War-era TU-95 bombers parked at dispersal points.

The monitor flickers irritably, maybe interference from the incoming small arms fire. But I am undeterred; I've picked out an aircraft and direct the controls accordingly, throttling up and slashing down on a collision course.

There is a burst of enemy tracer, but the gunner is ridiculously over-optimistic. The drone is now hurtling towards the bomber at about 80 knots. It takes two or three seconds before the device makes contact.

While it is not carrying a huge explosive payload, a strike between two of the aircraft's four dual-propeller engines – and the fuel lines leading to them – will easily do the job. The monitor goes to static before another camera shows the target ablaze.

It might be a simulation, but this game is based on reality.

Launched by Ukrainians against five air bases in Russia during the summer, Operation Spiderweb saw 117 explosive-laden UAVs despatched from trucks slam into Vladimir Putin's strategic bomber force as it sat on the ground – with ten platforms claimed destroyed.

As David killed Goliath with a slingshot stone, hundreds of millions of pounds of aviation hardware were smashed by machines sounding like mopeds, with a price tag of a few hundred quid each and flown by pilots miles away.

It was a strike concept that would have been unthinkable even a few years ago, and a massive humiliation for the Kremlin leadership.

The first-person view, one-way effect drone – a sacrificial UAV that is manually guided onto its target by an operator – has proved a nightmarish game-changer in modern warfare.

With the ability to prowl the battlespace with a lethal payload, it can wreak havoc ➤



Below: Magazine writer Cliff Caswell hits a Lulworth laptop for a simulated one-way effect serial. Despite being an FPV virgin, he was nonetheless able to wreak digital havoc via thumb skills forged through years of console gaming

» on positions while operators work well beyond sight.

And for both better or worse, my experience on the PC suggests the kit is reasonably tactile to control. In fact, I had never flown an FPV drone, either simulated or real, until I arrived at the Unmanned Aerial Systems Centre in Lulworth earlier today.

My ability is entirely rooted in years of video-gaming using the standard dual-thumbstick controller. While chunkier, the drone handset behaves in the same way and, by this reckoning, there must be thousands of people out there who have the basic one-way effect skills to destroy enemy hardware. Army recruiters take note – gaming geeks are the way to go.

"This type of flying is all about honing fine motor skills rather than heavy movements," the facility's OC Maj Andy Crompton (Lancs, pictured right) explains to *Soldier*.

"It's a matter of individual preference but we tend to recommend holding each stick with a finger and thumb – slightly different to how you would use a PlayStation or Xbox controller – so you can have that level of accuracy.

"Operators also wear goggles that show the view from the UAV so they are not distracted by anything else in the world around them, which can take some getting used to."

Maj Crompton adds that fine tuning is critical when, for example, a pilot is required to take their machine through a window into a building. It's not a situation I'd thought of, although the prospect of sneaking my drone into an office meeting through the curtains – like an errant wasp – does have a

certain mischievous appeal.

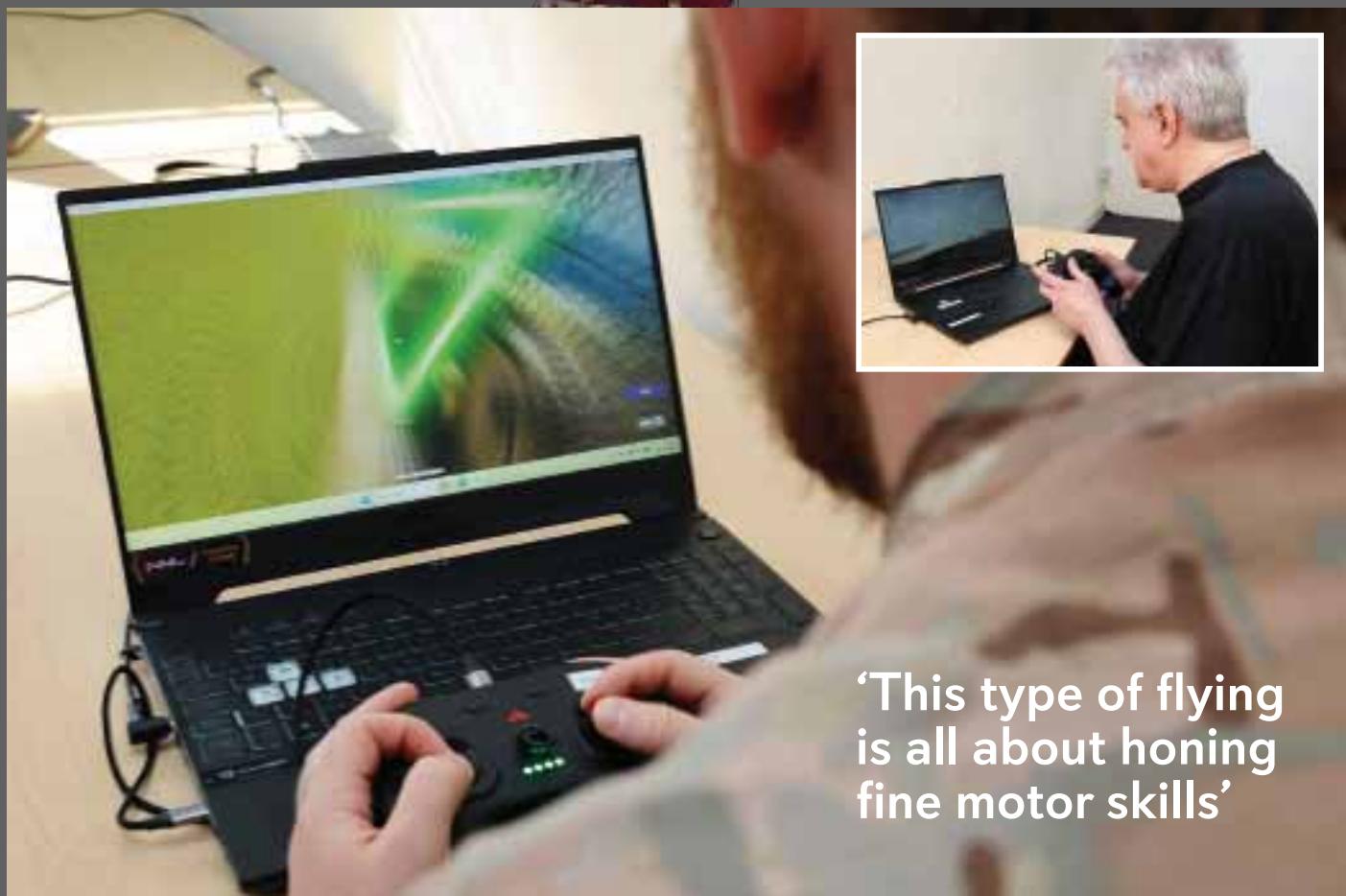
Back to reality, however, where it seems that learning to fly is just the tip of the iceberg where drone deployments are concerned. Fighting an effective guided bomb in a coordinated way is a complex business – and the reason why the UAS Centre was set up last year.

Aimed at showing infantrymen, recce professionals and other sharp-end troops how to work these assets in the battlespace, the training on offer equips personnel with the skills and tactics they need to find and identify targets before following that up with strikes.

There is also a keen emphasis on pushing knowledge out to the wider army as quickly as possible. There are courses lasting between a week and a month for pilots and commanders; the latter qualification gives bosses a tick in the box to go back to units and conduct their own drone pilot training.

The importance of the work is certainly not lost on Maj Crompton and his 12-strong team. Operation Spiderweb might have been an exceptional action carried out at extreme range, but the war in Ukraine has seen the FPV drone become a regular feature in contacts – and the threat they present is continuing to evolve as the war enters its fourth year. The Lulworth training syllabus incorporates lessons from that conflict while fitting in with British Army protocols.

The one-way effect operating model is based around a group of personnel: a commander and three or four operators responsible for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and working the business end of the attack drones. The courses feature both digital serials and hands-on time with equipment – and students are expected to have 30 hours of PC simulation time



'It's where warfare is going'

Paras help spread UAV skills



SOLDIERS from 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment took time over the summer to pass on expertise forged at Lulworth to a new generation of FPV drone crews.

The troops, from the unit's new UAS Platoon, showed personnel from across 1st (UK) Division how to configure and fight first-person view kit alongside unmanned recce platforms.

And the airborne troops were clearly impressed with the abilities of the new crews as they were put through their paces at Bramley Ranges, Hampshire.

Course leader CSgt Danny Wade (Para) – who is also at the helm of the new platoon – said: "This is very different training – first-person view flying is a hard skill to learn.

"The ability to fly accurately is more important than speed because we want to hit exact points on a target in order to maximise the damage," he added.

Student Kgn Kaidyn Hilton (Lancs) said flying was exhilarating. He continued: "This is where warfare is going – and it is interesting to be a part of it.

"There is a dose of adrenalin because you know you have control of a weapon that can hit bigger targets more quickly than the infantry used to be able to do."

Weapon v Target: Op Spiderweb in stats



Ukraine

Weapon: Osa (or Wasp)

Aircraft type: Quadcopter UAV

Number used: 117

Cost per aircraft: £1,500

Russia

Target: TU-95 Bear; TU-22 Backfire

Aircraft type: Long-range strategic bomber

Number destroyed: 10; others damaged

Cost per aircraft: £19-30million

already logged before they turn up.

"In short, the call signs must learn to work as a team to identify targets and strike them," says Cpl Fergus Williams-Tanton (RL), one of the instructors at the centre.

"Then it's about building up to working with multiple call signs against multiple targets.

"While there is a lot of simulation involved, we also have an indoor course using a small drone called the Mini Whoop. Outdoors we use the larger DP8 and D10 FPV equipment built by a company called Viking Arms, with which crews learn how the kit handles with a payload and will strike at mock targets."

While Civil Aviation Authority regs in the UK place restrictions on how far apart drone and operator can work, personnel can expect to use the kit beyond their visual range as they hone their lethal trade across exercise areas.

The concept of the centre – to act as a hub to create soldiers who will train others in the one-way effect skills – is already bearing fruit, with newly qualified commanders now cascading knowledge back through the ranks.

Recently, troops from 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment's UAS Platoon delivered a three-week workshop for operators across 1st (UK) Division at Bramley Ranges in Hampshire (see panel).

As a new crew cohort was brought online, many units are reorganising to bring FPV assets into the fold, adapting platoons to operate them as part of the support weapon mix or configuring them to assist with recce outings.

The rapid proliferation of these assets is a thought that resonates powerfully with *Soldier* as we hit the simulator again.

This time, we are above a more familiar countryside vista with a

patchwork of fields and tasked with locating the enemy.

Tweaking the pitch, it is not long before we are thinking about how we might find some targets of opportunity. Following the road below will inevitably lead to traffic – maybe a military convoy?

And beyond the hedgerows of the near-distance there is something moving – it looks as if there could be tell-tale signs of a trench system. What about the group of buildings up ahead? Is there anything in there?

I've only been working with drones for a morning, but I would be lying if I said the job isn't exciting.

Cpl Williams-Tanton shares the enthusiasm – the challenge of countering the hostile drone as well as taking the battle to the enemy is a test he relishes.

"The whole area of the UAS is about developing new skill sets that will increase our lethality as an army," he adds. "We are right at the forefront of this capability; it is definitely something that has given me a new purpose. It drives me."

Exactly where all this will lead is hard to predict; the potential crosses my mind briefly as I sit twiddling my thumbs.

This new battlespace, a sky full of odd machines, feels somewhat akin to the early days of air combat in the First World War, where pilots started using aeroplanes for reconnaissance, then shot at each other with pistols and dropped bombs by hand.

Within 50 years, their contemporaries were operating well beyond the speed of sound at the edge of space, downing each other with projectiles guided by radio waves and thermal signatures that were unstoppable without new countermeasures; some had weapons that could obliterate cities at a stroke.

I reach for the 'off' button on the monitor... <<

YOU ARE HERE



Royal Armoured Corps
troops reach new heights
in the Austrian Alps

ROM a distance, the expanse of rock looks devoid of life – a bleak granite cliff where few would surely venture.

But on closer inspection, ant-like forms can be seen gathered on a ledge, some 150m above the shoreline of a teal lake.

After a few minutes' pause, one of the figures swings out across the face, grasping for the next handhold before hauling themselves upright, while the whoops of their companions drift faintly down the valley.

The precarious-looking manoeuvre is enough to induce second-hand vertigo in those watching from below, but when *Soldier* finds the troops safe and descending through the pine forest a short while later, their excitement is palpable.

"It's sick," says Tpr Nikole Phillips (RL), still buzzing from the climb.

"You had to swing across the gap and catch onto the rung with your left hand.

"I just blanked it out and ran, swung out, kicked the wall and grabbed hold of it. It was pretty scary, but fun."

The 19-year-old and her colleagues have just completed their third day of Klettersteig – a German term for via ferrata, a method of climbing involving cables and ladders embedded in the rock.

While not considered technically difficult, it exposes participants to high altitudes with less risk, as well as developing trust in kit ➤

IN NUMBERS
Exercise Balaclava Berg

3,798

height, in metres, of the Grossglockner –
Austria's tallest mountain

14

length of the
exped, in days

32

total troops
deployed

3

main activities – Klettersteig, rock climbing
and alpine mountaineering



Right Tpr Logan Vanden Bos (RL) learns the basics of single pitch climbing at Millstatt lake during Exercise Balaclava Berg Below right Ice climbing on the Pasterze glacier

» and equipment. And in keeping with the core objectives of army adventurous training, Tpr Phillips (pictured left) says the activity very much tested her limits.

"There are three zones – comfort, stretch and panic," she explains. "This was definitely stretch. It 100 per cent develops your confidence."

"There are times back at camp, like when you're on CO's PT and in your head you're saying 'this is a lick – I can't do it'."

"But now I can think back to this and remember how I was scared, hanging off a wall, but did it. So I can absolutely do PT."

For fellow Royal Lancer Tpr Riley Wilkinson, even signing up for the Austrian outing – known as Exercise Balaclava Berg – had been a major step forward. Despite having previously taking up opportunities to try skiing and mountain biking, the 24-year-old admits his fear of heights gave him pause.

"It's not normally my cup of tea but I just felt like I should challenge myself because I like learning new skills and improving myself," he says.

"I don't struggle with normal phys but this is a different level of fitness. If I could calm myself down I'd be way less fatigued, but I get off the mountain and my arms, back and neck are hurting because I'm holding on so tight."

"You shake from the adrenalin so I try and breathe and do positive self-talk. I'm quite proud of myself for even giving it a go and making it this far."

As Troopers Phillips and Wilkinson head off with their group to spend the night in an alpine hut ahead of tomorrow's climb, elsewhere in the mountain range a further 20 or so other personnel from across the Royal Armoured Corps are reflecting on the day's exertions.

In addition to Klettersteig, those taking part in the two-week exped are working towards foundation qualifications in single-pitch rock climbing, plus summer and alpine mountaineering – with the latter taking place on the Pasterze glacier.

Located at the foot of the Grossglockner, Austria's highest peak at 3,798m, the ice field presents a hostile and challenging environment for any climber. But thanks to support from the country's military, the Brits have been able to safely explore the forbidding terrain.

The Bundesheer's 7th Jaegerbrigade – experts in high altitude ops whose motto is 'comradeship, toughness and commitment in the mountains' – have provided top level guides for the package.

And as Lt Ben Hunt (RL, pictured right) has experienced first hand, their knowledge is nothing short of crucial.

"There's not much to reference other than ice and snow and you have to keep your wits about you at all times because there are crevasses," he says.

"If you take a wrong step you can fall straight through. I went through to my knees at one point and another person went through up to his chest, with his daysack perched on the snow."

"You're roped up to each other, obviously, and the rest of the team use their bodyweight to slowly pull you back up."

"If you weren't tied together you wouldn't be coming out."

"These crevasses just go on for hundreds of metres below the glacier – all you can see is darkness."

"The key principle is knowing the ground and never being alone."

"It's the most technical climbing I've done. We were using ice axes and crampons" »





**‘The mountain
doesn’t care if you’re a
newly-joined trooper
or a warrant officer of
25 years – the enemy
doesn’t either’**

» to climb the sides of the glacier. It was so cold, but after about ten metres you'd be knackered and dripping."

As principal organiser of the exped, however, Lt Hunt's hard work started some 13 months before he even set foot on the ice.

In a time of tough financial scrutiny, deals struck with the Bundesheer to use their guides and house participants in military accommodation delivered what planners say is the best value army exped of the year.

But the 26-year-old insists wading through the paperwork that characterises any military activity in 2025 is well worth the pain for units looking to run adventurous training.

"It's hard to imagine the goal when you're in the middle of the admin but seeing the results is so satisfying," the officer goes on.

"One of the most rewarding parts has been hearing the soldiers coming back from the mountain saying 'that was the coolest thing' or being hyper, showing you their ally photos with crampons and ice axes.

"You sit back and think 'it really was all worth it'." «

'DON'T LOOK DOWN'

Troops share their tips for climbing success...



On technique

"If you're constantly using your arms you're going to get tired but if you engage your legs, especially your quads, you can keep going a lot longer.

You also need flexibility to be able to bring your feet up that little bit higher to be able to push up to the next handhold."

Sgt Richard Yockney, RTR
INSTRUCTOR





On focus

"Even if you're not great with heights, you're in a bubble where you're concentrating on the few metres around you and the route above so it's almost like the height becomes irrelevant. It's the ultimate risk assessment process. It may seem dangerous, but in reality you're more vulnerable out riding your bike with cars whooshing past."

Maj Paul Morley, RE
INSTRUCTOR



On decision making under pressure

"Fatigue makes you act too quickly – you try and grab for a safe hold and look for stability where there isn't any. It's about enduring the struggle – staying focused and calm, not flapping and losing your cool, and pushing through the pain while you look at your options."

Tpr Logan Vanden Bos, RL
BEGINNER



On steadying nerves

"Just take a deep breath and look at the view. But don't look down, otherwise you get into your head and your fingers shake. Mentally you have to tell yourself, 'I trust my belay, he has my back.'"

Tpr Waisele Tavatuilagi, LD
BEGINNER

ON THE UP

Royal Armoured Corps Mountaineering Club (RACMC) targets grassroots growth

EXERCISE Balaclava Berg is the third summer camp that the RACMC has run since launching three years ago and in 2026, the outfit is planning an expedition to Bolivia.

Incoming club secretary Maj Arthur Purbrick (RL, pictured below) says he wants as many soldiers as possible to benefit from the same opportunities he has had through army climbing – which has taken him to the likes of Peru's Cordillera Blanca and the Athabasca glacier in Canada.

But along with providing retention positive experiences, he explains the ultimate aim of equipping personnel with mountaineering skills is to develop better soldiers.

"It's really important that we're good at our jobs and I believe one of the most efficient ways of refining leadership, decision making, risk threshold assessment, planning and innovating is through adventurous training," he says.

"The mountain doesn't care if you are a newly joined trooper or a warrant officer who's been in 25 years – there are variables we can't control, we can only mitigate against them."

"That's exactly the same in combat – the enemy doesn't care who you are either. I think the mountains is the best place to replicate that."

The officer hopes those who have gained their basic qualifications in Austria will go on to complete mountain leader training as part of their professional development.

"It's one of the hardest courses to pass due to its navigation elements," he goes on.

"And that means they'll be better at their tactics courses when they go on those."

"Then in a year's time, they'll be leaders when we go on our Bolivia expedition, which gives them more opportunities to grow."

"It should become an organic process and it only benefits the soldiers and the army."



MOVING WITH THE TIMES

Medics adapt to new threats as readiness role looms

“**I**T’S about changing mindset and building mental resilience – it’s no longer good enough to treat a casualty and then wait for an evacuation,” WO2 Levi Scarlett explains.

The squadron sergeant major of 23 Squadron, 16 Medical Regiment is hosting *Soldier* on Exercise Brave Cyclone – a ten-day test in which the sub-unit is supporting a notional battlegroup embroiled in a front-line screen against an invading, peer-on-peer enemy.

The scenario is an all-too familiar one for personnel deploying on contemporary exercises, and lessons from Ukraine are very much in mind as these soldiers dig in amid the heavy rain that is lashing down on Norfolk’s Stanford Training Area.

Delivering care is the prime focus, but thoughts of minimising thermal signatures, camouflaging vehicles, sharpening field skills and reducing footprint are more important as survivability is key.

Experimentation is also in the air, with an unmanned ground vehicle transporting casualties from the battle to treatment facilities and drones performing recce roles and assessing the soldiers’ powers of concealment.

As a squadron validation exercise, this has come at an important time.

The troops deploy to Kenya in the new year in support of 1st Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles before taking over as air manoeuvre medical group one – a core component of the 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team.

“We will be at five days’ readiness to respond,” says 23 Sqn OC Maj Suzy Talbot pictured (right).

“In recent times that has been hurricane and earthquake relief but what we are now trying to bear in mind is that, given the current threat, we could be part of an advance force.

“So this is about how we deliver the same level of healthcare and showing we can operate in a tactical situation.

“The threat can be anywhere, and it is all the time. We are learning the importance of not being seen and not being found.

“A lot of our equipment requires charging. We need power generators, but they obviously create a heat signature. We come with big vehicles – you cannot have a hospital without at least one of those – and we are required to move patients.

“All of our work makes us vulnerable, so there is a lot to think about, but our soldiers have been really good at understanding the threat.”

Innovative approach

23 Sqn deployed with everything from a role one facility delivering care at the point of injury through to a surgical capability and are facing serials including mass casualties from an ambush, road traffic collisions and drone strikes on an NGO camp.

And trialling how to implement the likes of UGVs and drones – as well as novel ways of delivering care – is at the fore.

Maj Talbot continues: “We are keen to innovate.

“In Ukraine, personnel cannot move in daylight – they must wait for the transition to night and when drones are unable to fly.

“If we really need to move a patient, we must think of a way that poses the least risk. A UGV with a single body onboard is unlikely to draw much attention.

“We have also been able to fly drones to test our counter-UAS TTPs and are working out how they can ➤





Right 23 Sqn personnel get to work on a battlefield casualty at their concealed role one facility Below The sub-unit has been trialling the use of unmanned ground vehicles as a way of minimising the threat to combat medical technicians



» best be delivered in a medical regiment and who we use as pilots."

Reflections from the front

At the role one facility, personnel are busily working on concealing their presence having just moved north from their previous location.

Moments later a UGV arrives with a casualty, and they spring into action.

With the situation under control, Lt Erin McLernon (pictured right), troop commander of Role One Troop, says the change in approach is giving her soldiers plenty to think about.

Blast injuries, rather than small arms fire and gunshot wounds, are more prevalent, while communications is blinding old with new via field phones and Atak data terminals.

"It has been quite difficult going from a clinical to a more tactical focus," she continues.

"Comms has been the biggest test; it is about reducing signatures but still being able to reach back and contact the medical reception station and role two facility. Fortunately, we have established good lines between all three.

"We also faced a mass casualty scenario, where the combat medical technicians came across nine casualties. They had to quickly assess them on the ground while also considering how dangerous the situation was, where the threat is coming from and how it will impact them.

"The transition has been challenging, but we are adapting well."

Nurse Cpl Abby Hinselwood is on her first exercise with 16 Med Regt having previously been posted at Frimley Park Hospital with Joint Hospital Group South East.

"It is very different to a ward," she says. "You have to think about resupply, and if a patient is really poorly how many resources you use. There is

a lot to consider.

"It makes you appreciate the NHS environment. There, if you miss a cannula it doesn't matter, you just get another. Here, you are limited with things like fluids and oxygen."

Combat medical technician Pte Fran Vickery is another relative newcomer to the unit, having joined in April, and is relishing the field test.

"Compared to basic and medical training, this is a lot more forward thinking with a warfighting mentality," the 32-year-old explains.

"It comes down to the little things.

"On stag you are normally looking left and right, but you now look up as well. And in your bashers, you are constantly on the lookout and listening for different noises.

"It is also about how we can get to casualties quicker. Instead of going full steam ahead we must think about ourselves as well - if we get injured, we're useless.

"Every couple of days we are packing up and moving to a different location; it is us having that soldier way of thinking, rather than being a standard medic."

Medics on the move

In a further sign of innovation, doctor Capt Tom Vincent is delivering primary care as part of a pre-hospital treatment team.

A novel concept, it sees a doctor, nurse and medics punching out on quad bikes to administer care on the ground and then transfer patients for further treatment if required.

"We are still experimenting with the idea, but it allows us to be more mobile," he explains.

"Obviously, our footprint is quite big, and this is a way of trying to ➤



'This is more forward thinking with a warfighting mentality'

From bottom **Forward mounted radiographer Sgt Daniel Bond delivers an x-ray in the field; paramedic Cpl Melissa Duff provides an update from the scene of a road traffic collision; concealment is key as personnel change locations**



'If we're identified it puts a huge bullseye on us'



» shrink that.

"The biggest challenge comes in scaling down the equipment and figuring out what you might need and what you can get rid of.

"As a military doctor you must think on the fly, using the kit that is available and improvising where you can. You are not going to have access to everything you would in the NHS, so it is about getting as close to that as possible.

"But the quad bikes allow us to achieve a high turnover of patients and move casualties around.

"If we are identified as a medical facility that puts a huge bullseye on us - we are targets now."

Another new capability on show is the ground Medical Emergency Response Team (Mert). Combining doctors, paramedics and nurses, they bring advanced pre-hospital care further forward and, most importantly, administer blood products.

This is their first time on exercise alongside a role one capability, with a focus on trialling what works best and how they could be used in future.

"Historically, Chinooks have been used for air Merts," explains paramedic Cpl Melissa Duff.

"But airframes cannot be used in current warfighting. The ground Mert has a similar scope.

"The fact we are quite mobile puts us at risk and we have to think about when to do any road moves. It is about digging in and living under ponchos and cam nets. But we have a good background in green soldiering, and that is coming across here."

Station switch

Usually one massed tent complex featuring dental care, mental health, physiotherapy, primary healthcare and pre-hospital emergency care, the medical reception station is assuming a new look on Ex Brave Cyclone.

Here, it is broken down into separate teams and

spread across the area to make smaller targets and reduce heat signatures.

Previously taking around three hours to set up, the trial shows it can be completed in 45 minutes.

And personnel such as dentists and mental health professionals have been upskilled as drone operators, with the thinking that their primary roles will not be required in mass casualty scenarios.

So, in future, their secondary talents could be used to send blood from emergency donors forward by drones.

One of the newly qualified operators is Sgt Daniel Bond, but it is his skills in the day job that are being utilised in a new way.

Operating out of a Land Rover, he is deployed as a forward mounted radiographer capable of delivering x-rays in the field.

"It is the first time we have trialled this," he comments. "Traditionally, x-rays are done in a role two facility, but this allows us to push forward and assess patients for relatively minor injuries. We need to get people back in the fight quicker."

"The first time I tried it took ten minutes to get the kit set up, do the x-ray, pack up and leave. I used a poncho on the side of the Land Rover with a couple of poles and did it there."

"The second time, in a more lifelike scenario, it took 16 minutes. You do not want to be hanging around for long."

"As radiographers we are super keen to develop this. We have been stuck at the barracks not doing a lot, so we are hoping the concept works."

Once the exercise is complete, thoughts will turn to next year's African assignment and what lies further ahead.

But 23 Sqn are proving their ability to adapt to the changing nature of conflict and will be fully prepared for their next challenge, wherever that may be. <<



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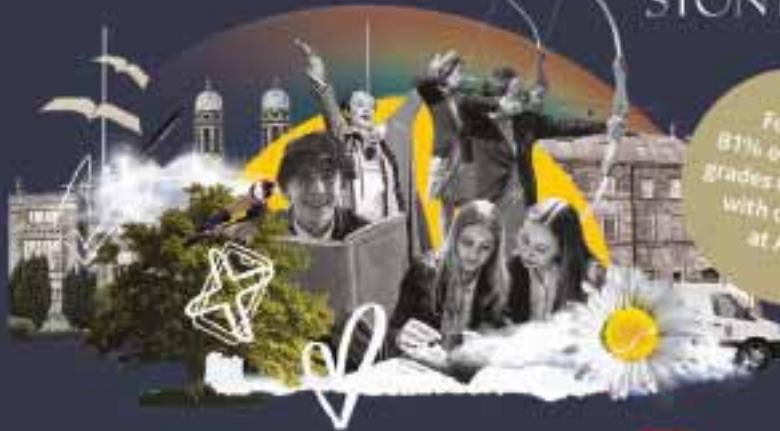
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BIG PIC



A RESERVIST from 4th Battalion, The Mercian Regiment tackles urban drills alongside a member of the Croatian Armed Forces. Around 120 British volunteers deployed on last month's Exercise Sava Star – a package designed to strengthen ties between the two nations.

Picture: Sgt Andrew Grayson, RLC

TALKBACK

mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk WhatsApp +447973 614782

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

'It's time to revise Ranger medics policy'

THE army is making an error in how it posts combat medical technicians (CMTs) into The Ranger Regiment.

They are exempted from the the unit's own selection and training pipeline.

They post in as they would for any other army position, do not wear the Ranger tab, and then go on all the same deployments.

How can this be justified? An urgent need to get the units up and running is an excuse that only lasts for so many years.

It is corrosive for morale and those who haven't completed the selection (they can volunteer for it) must surely be self conscious about it.

The medics are organic to each Ranger team and are the single most important cog in the 'go or no-go' process for exercises and operations.

Enhanced med cover is essential for operating at reach and at risk.

If it's dangerous and difficult for the Rangers it will be for combat medics, too.

If the Royal Army Medical Service cannot supply enough suitable personnel they should allow Rangers to do CMT training.

This isn't without precedent - many readers will remember regimental CMTs who were volunteers from battalions who

Picture: Graeme Main



attended specialist training and were employed as medics.

- Name and address supplied

Brig Huw Thomas, Assistant Chief of Staff Medical, Field Army, replies: All Ranger medics are strongly encouraged to complete the Ranger qualification course (RQC).

We have created a unique, capable and Nato-accredited training pathway for our CMTs.

They attend the four-week Ranger medic qualification course on arrival at unit (held once a year).

'HOW CAN THIS BE JUSTIFIED?'

This combines advanced medical training on pre-hospital trauma, prolonged and in-transit casualty care, telemedicine and advanced treatment, procedural and medication capability over and above their CMT training.

It also encompasses some physical elements from initial Ranger selection to ensure they're at a minimum physical standard to work in the regiment's teams.

Passing this qualifies them

as 'Ranger medics' and ensures they are medically trained to Nato special operations forces (SOF) standards.

If these personnel also pass the RQC they are qualified as Nato special operations combat medics (NSOCMs), ensuring they are medically and tactically trained to Nato SOF standards.

This means we have a blend of CMTs, Ranger medics and NSOCMs providing medical cover for this unit.

Unforgettable gesture

ON BEHALF of all members of T Battery, 12 Regiment, Royal Artillery I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks for the incredible care packages sent to us by the volunteers of the Wormhout Community Hub,

Llandudno during our recent deployment in the Middle East.

Their thoughtfulness and kindness touched every one of us deeply.

We were especially moved to learn about Operation Welly,

created in loving memory of LBdr Llywelyn Evans (RA), who tragically lost his life during the Iraq War in 2003.

To know that his family and friends continue to honour him by sending 'Welly boxes' to deployed personnel speaks volumes about the enduring spirit and support from home.

Although modestly described

as small gifts, their impact was anything but small.

When I briefed the soldiers and explained who had sent them and why, their faces lit up with real joy.

The fact that they took the time and care to reach out to us, across the miles, is something we will never forget. - WO2 Mark Wright, RA

Leap back in time

I FOUND the article in last month's edition on assault courses very illuminating.

I have three vivid memories of them from my time in the army.

In 1987 I did my reserve basic training at the Queen's Division Depot in Bassingbourn. I went through the dry course, including the tall climbing frame (and what a view from the top!).

After passing out I went to see the film *Full Metal Jacket* and to my astonishment there was the same assault course.

The movie's training scenes at 'Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina' were in fact filmed at Bassingbourn Barracks.

I was told the assault course was built by the film company and the army liked it so much it stayed, but I'm not sure if that is true.

A couple of years later, at my junior NCO cadre, we



Picture: Steve Dock

were ordered to parade in our passing-out dress, boots bulled thoroughly, everything else ironed to perfection. The staff then ordered us to undertake the wet assault course – we were not happy bunnies.

Later, we were at Pirbright as

part of a weekend competition and undertook the assault course with our full kit.

We were over the water pit when my mate's self-loading rifle broke open and the working parts fell in.

He was told by the senior

NCO to go in and retrieve them. It was so cold he had to break through the ice to get all the parts back!

There are many more experiences but I survived and now recount them with a smile.
– Ian Lofting, ex-PWRR

Wrong requirement

WHEN I enquired about the requirements to transfer into the Adjutant General's Corps Educational and Training Services (AGC (ETS)) reserves, I was informed I had to hold a postgraduate certificate in education.

This is used to allow the holder to teach in secondary education.

But why is this a requirement of policy when to teach the post-16 age group you need a completely different qualification, which is far easier to attain?

Nobody I have asked has been able to answer this question.

For context, I work in a secondary school supervising classes and hold no teaching qualifications. – Name and address supplied

Lt Col Chris Prior, Army Personnel Directorate, replies: ETS officers are responsible for setting education policy and developing, delivering and assuring education, training and instructor and intellectual development.

The vast majority of ETS

personnel, both regular and reserve, begin this journey as learning development officers in Army Education Centres, where they provide education, professional development opportunities and instructor capability.

In doing this, they undertake the full remit of teaching responsibilities and that's why regular ETS officers undertake the post-compulsory education and training course on commissioning if they have not already done so.

This is a well-established and internationally recognised qualification that equips our people to teach in the further, adult and vocational education sectors with its solid foundation of teaching practices, educational research and theory.

Like many other parts of the army, the ETS is considering the potential effects of the Reserves Executive Committee's decision to break reserve training equivalence in terms of the trade-specific professional development that we require our reservist ETS officers to complete.



Picture: Graeme Main

Why the black mark?

THERE is, or was, a regiment in the army whose troops wore a small black cloth on the neck and back of their uniform jacket.

Can you please identify this unit and the reason behind the unusual garb being worn?

– Peter Townsend, Honiton

Capt Harry Merriman, Regimental Adjutant, The Royal Welsh, replies: The black flash is a part of the uniform of The Royal Welsh that is shared with no other army unit.

It dates back to the early 18th century when soldiers wore their hair in a braid, known as a queue, which was held in a bag to avoid

grease soiling the back of the uniform coat.

The wearing of the queue was abolished by 1808, yet The Royal Welch Fusiliers ignored the order to remove the five black ribbons from their collars.

Being stationed in Nova Scotia at the time, little notice was taken but on returning to England in 1834 an inspecting general directed that the ribbons be removed.

An appeal was made by the regiment to the King and in the same year they were granted the right to sport 'The Flash' as a regimental distinction. They have worn it ever since.



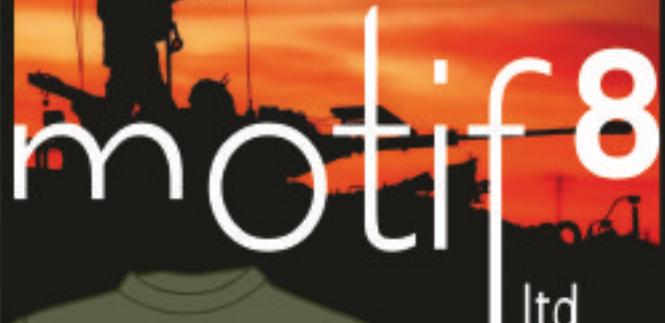
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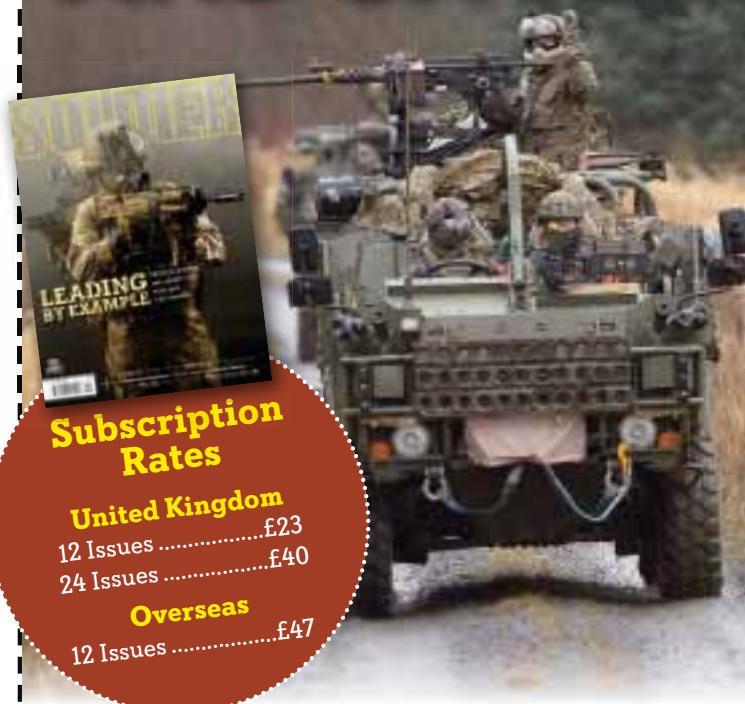
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WELFARE

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

Army HIVE

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

army.mod.uk/hives

Forcesline

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

0800 731 4880

ssafa.org.uk/get-help

Army Welfare Service

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

Forces Connect

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

ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

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

Drinkline

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

NHS support

Various information can be found at nhs.uk/livewell

BULLYING/ HARASSMENT/ DISCRIMINATION

Army Mediation Service
0306 770 7691 or
mil 96770 7691

army-mediation-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk

Army Speak Out Helpline

0306 770 4656 or **mil 96770 4656**
army-speakout@mod.gov.uk

COMPETITIONS

August 2025 winners

HOAY (RADIO) Sean Davies, Shropshire
WAGAMAMA MEAL Benjamin Beck; Jessica Andrews; Martyn Day; Jukesh Gurung

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

Defence BHD Helpline

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

DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

Forces Pension Society

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

Joining Forces Credit Union

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

Money Helper

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

National Debtline

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

StepChange Debt Charity

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

GAMBLING

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

GRIEF

Cruse Bereavement Support
0808 808 1677
cruse.org.uk

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

RESETTLEMENT

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

Newmarket – October 8

Belfast – October 15

Cardiff – November 5

Telford – November 19

Wrexham – December 4

HOUSING

Single living accommodation

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

Pinnacle Home Services Team

The primary point of contact for families for housing, the allocation of SFA and details of local housing officers

UK 0800 031 8628
Overseas +44(0) 161 605 3517
pinnacleservicefamilies.co.uk/contact-us

Forces Help to Buy

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

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services

01748 833797
spaces.org.uk

Veterans Gateway

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

INJURY/SICKNESS

Personnel Recovery Centres

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

LONELINESS

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

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

Samaritans

Someone to talk to, night or day, for free and without judgement

116 123 samaritans.org

The Royal British Legion

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

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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

Combat Stress 24/7 Helpline

0800 138 1619

Headspace

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

Mind – The Mental Health Charity

0300 123 3393 mind.org

NHS

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

Op Courage

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

Samaritans

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

The Ripple Pond

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

0333 900 1028
theripplepond.org

Togetherall

A safe, online community where people support each other anonymously

togetherall.com

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN/ABUSE**Aurora New Dawn**

Safety for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking

02394 216 816
aurorand.org.uk

ManKind

Support for male domestic abuse victims

01823 334244
mankind.org.uk

Relate

Relationship support

relate.org.uk

SEXUAL OFFENCES

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

The Defence Serious Crime Command

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

Crimestoppers can be reached at 0800 555 111

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

To discuss victim support contact the **Victim Witness Care Unit**, which operates independently from the chain of command, on 07974

074259 or via people-dscc-vwvcugroup@mod.gov.uk. Your information will be treated in confidence and you can discuss your options for

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

STAFF NETWORKS

The following groups are open to regulars and reservists, as well as the chain of command and civil servants.

LGBTQ+ Network

elizabeth.corbett117@mod.gov.uk

Multicultural Network

priscilla.quansah100@mod.gov.uk

Parents Network

armypers-parents-network@mod.gov.uk

Servicewomen's Network

samantha.dodge733@mod.gov.uk

REUNIONS**The Balkans 30 Years On...**

The **Royal Regiment of Fusiliers** will hold anniversary events on October 24 in Newcastle and 25 in Manchester. For more visit fusiliersconnect.com

NCO ACADEMY**Tea & Toast Talk**

October 15 at 1000 – CAL Development day

October 23 – Blandford

Search NCO Academy on Defence Connect.

SEARCH

Paul Borres is trying to trace a member of the **Royal Army Medical Corps** who was based in Soest, Germany in 1971 and went by the name Shirley. He is thought to have been friends with a couple whose surname was Goodyear. Email paul21_b@hotmail.com

SUMMITS**Army Transport Conferences (North)**

on November 18/19 and (South) on November 25. Read **ABN 051/2025**.

Army Dangerous Goods Conferences (North)

on November 20 and (South) on November 26. Read **ABN 052/2025**.

HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU?

Your chance to
WIN

A Majority Elias soundbar worth £120



EIGHT details have been changed in this image of Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry soldiers demonstrating an attack scenario at British Army Expo 2025 in Edinburgh.

Circle all the differences on image **B** and send the panel to HOAY 1001, Soldier, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU, along with contact details, including email address, by October 31.

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

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

The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win a Majority Elias soundbar (available to buy on Amazon).

Delivering immersive 3D audio with Dolby Atmos via up-firing speakers and 160W power, this piece of kit offers versatile connectivity along with wall-mountable design, EQ controls and remote. All the usual rules apply. Good luck!



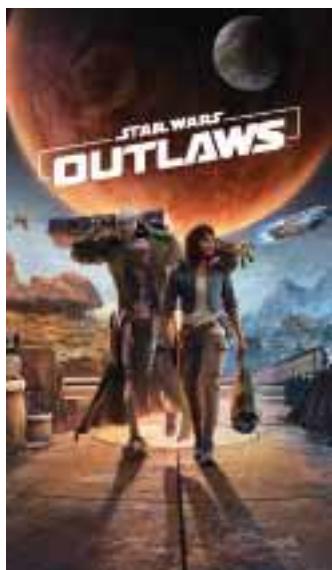
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B

REVIEWS

★ GAMES ★ BOOKS ★ MOVIES ★ PODCASTS ★



Star Wars: Outlaws

GAME

Out now for Nintendo Switch 2

FIRE AT WILL, COMMANDER

STAR WARS has always been a rich vein in the video game world.

As far back as the 1980s the Atari arcade game put players in the thick of the Death Star attack – and since then they've been cast as everything from Jedi masters to bounty hunters.

It has, however, been a mixed bag en route. There doesn't seem to be much in the way of mediocre in this universe either – the titles either fit into the 'absolutely great' or 'downright dreadful' categories with little of note in between.

So it was with some trepidation that *Soldier* embarked on *Outlaws*, released as an early Switch 2 title after making its debut on PC, Xbox and PlayStation last year.

And we're pleased to report that it squarely hits the excellent category – for while an ambitious port, this *Assassin's Creed*-esque actioner shows off the capabilities of Nintendo's new hardware in style while publisher Ubisoft has delivered a complex game, tactile enough to be played on the move.

Players assume the role of Kay Vess – an aspiring young grifter eeking out a living by using her skills to pull off scams deep in the seedy underbelly of the universe's lawless Outer Rim. But as the story unfolds, a job ends up with her biting off more than she can chew and she is caught in an unenviable position between the turf wars of organised crime groups and conventional conflict involving the Galactic Empire and Rebel Alliance.

Vess – who is essentially a female incarnation of Harrison Ford's Han Solo character from the films – has to blast, climb and charge her way around various Star Wars environments, all while picking up work at bars where the clientele invariably don't like her and which, at times, can get a little rough.

As well as a good blaster by her side, she has a dog-like pet called Nix who, while not possessing the arm-ripping boast of Solo's seven-foot Wookie crewmate Chewbacca, will happily attack foes on demand while squeezing through tight spaces to get into inaccessible areas.

There was some debate among the fan community over whether *Outlaws* could make the cut on Switch 2. But it makes an impressive leap to the reworked Nintendo hardware, where the handheld experience is especially impressive.

Controls are well thought through, the gameplay is slick and the bigger screen of the new console makes a game of this type a credible portable outing.

The environments are beautifully rendered too, and a full cast of familiar characters will please fans (this reviewer should declare an interest – being a confirmed Star Wars devotee, particularly the six films of the George Lucas era).

As an aside, *Capita* could perhaps learn from the Galactic Empire's successful armed forces recruitment campaign, which has brought in an entire legion of stormtroopers to deter any Imperial entanglements.

If there is any criticism to be made, the £50 price tag is a tad on the steep side. But those willing to part with their hard-earned are unlikely to be disappointed.

The look and feel of the movies will satisfy the established fan base and those partial to the *Assassin's Creed* or *Metal Gear Solid* action genre will find plenty to occupy the hours.



REVIEW: Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*



GAME

Panzer Corps 2: Frontlines – Westwall

Out now for PC

THIS Second World War strategy outing has always offered a satisfying experience for gamers and this latest downloadable content pack is no exception. *Westwall* sees players take command of allied forces as the



conflict in Europe enters its final phase. The campaign replicates the fight through France, the Netherlands and the enemy homeland, including ferocious clashes at Aachen and on the Roer Plains. The German foe remains potent despite being in retreat and players can expect a stern test during missions ranging from open-armoured assaults to urban combat and fighting in woods and forests. Highly recommended.

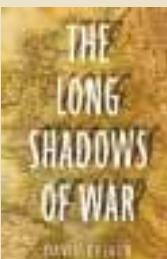


David McDougall, civvy

BOOKS

The Long Shadows of War

by David Evered

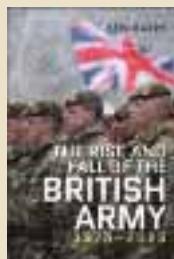


FAMILY history and fiction combine in this tale of a journalist's quest to unpick the mystery around his

soldier father, who disappeared when he was small. Inspired by the author's real-life discovery of his own dad's Second World War diary, the plot flits between 1940s Germany and London in 1989, cleverly interweaving the British and German perspectives of the last months of the conflict and the reconstruction period. A highly readable tale that explores how the tides of war – and individual decisions – ripple down the generations.

Becky Clark, *Soldier***The Rise and Fall of the British Army**

by Ben Barry



CHARTING the service's journey from 1975 to 2025 – through strategic upheaval, numerous campaigns and successive defence reviews – retired general Ben Barry serves up a forensic analysis of how the last 50 years have reshaped the organisation. Taking the position of a 'critical friend', he objectively discusses the successes and failures along the way, pulling no punches where he concludes politicians and senior leaders to have come up short. With extensive maps and referencing, this is a comprehensive, if at times uncomfortable, read.

Becky Clark, *Soldier*

MOVIE

Stand or Fall

Out now on Blu-ray, DVD and digital



OFFERING an alternative reality to modern Premier League vulgarity, where billionaires sack dinner ladies and nation states bankroll clubs, this documentary is a great 90 minutes of viewing. From the bottom of the old Division Four and being homeless, to becoming an established top-level side, Brighton and Hove Albion FC epitomises everything that clubs used to – and still should – be about: representing communities through shared values and enjoyment for the game. Featuring interviews with owner Tony Bloom and captain Lewis Dunk, both of whom are Brighton-born, as well as members of staff, fans and top sports writers, this is a refreshing rags-to-riches football story – a rare thing in today's game.



WO1 Wes Meredith, RE



PODCAST

Military Veterans

HOSTED by a former Royal Engineer, this podcast invites veterans to share their stories of transitioning to civvy street – the highs, the lows and everything in between. Having made the switch himself, Gavin Watson has a knack for coaxing the relevant details out of guests of all ranks and service backgrounds. Much like death and taxes, resettlement is inevitable, so it pays to prepare well in advance. With almost 100 episodes to tune into, this series is well worth a listen as part of that process.



Capt Mike Owens, RE

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If you fancy giving new games, movies, music and podcasts the *Soldier* treatment, email reviews@soldiermagazine.co.uk

SOLDIERSPORT



WATSON ON TOP AGAIN



Peloton riders look to close the gap

CYCLING (MEN)

A FAMILIAR face topped the standings in this season's Army Cycling Road Race Series as Sgt Lee Watson (REME) successfully defended his title from 2024.

The soldier was a dominant presence in six of the competition's seven rounds and cemented his position at the head of the field with victory in the final leg at Colchester.

"I was buzzing to take the win," he told *SoldierSport*. "After being in the breakaway with three Infantry army road team riders I couldn't quite believe it, to be honest."

"I expected them to attack me one after the other and in that company I would be happy with any step on the podium."

"After being on the front for the final lap I hit the last corner first and opened up my sprint expecting them to come round. I kept the power on all the way to

the line and held them off."

Watson's first foray into cycling came in a John O'Groats to Land's End challenge with his unit. He then got the bug and progressed to the army time trial team in 2018/19 before a two-year posting to Cyprus gave him the opportunity to hone his craft.

"It was two years of consistent riding and base training," he explained. "That set me up to come back and get into it again."

"Having won last season, I was a marked man this year. I've had to ride differently and be more tactical, making moves at varying times."

"This is a really good series, with different levels depending on your experience."

"Some guys come in with the long-term goal of moving up from category C to B and then A and there are those who cross over from other sports to try something new."

"It has been a fantastic year. We've been to some old places

and new and it is great for all cyclists – no matter the ability. It's also in work time, so what's not to like."

The series win continued a triumphant year for the soldier, who also reigned supreme at the REME Road Race Championships and was a double champion in the Army Cycling Time Trial Series.

He will progress to the masters ranks next season and is hoping to retain his place in the army time trial squad, while continuing to promote the sport within his corps.

"Time trial will be the priority," Watson continued. "For me, road racing is more about the team. Yes, I've come away with two wins, but it has never been about individual accolades.

"I love getting together with the REME riders. I have taken over as team captain and we are trying to push cycling and offer support where we can, as it can be hard to get into."

Elsewhere in Colchester, there were wins for Sgt Thomas Dobson (RE) and Capt Louis Muston (RA) in the men's category B and C races respectively, while LCpl Caitlin Beddoe (AGC (SPS)) claimed the women's honours.

The event marked the end of a year of progress for the series, with numbers across all rounds significantly higher compared to last season.

"Participation is up in all categories and age groups," OiC SSgt Will Blunt (REME), who also finished second to Watson in the men's standings, said.

"People are getting the time off work to come away and compete. We've had buy in from the chain of command and

ARMY CYCLING ROAD RACES SERIES FINAL STANDINGS

OPEN MEN

- 1 **SGT LEE WATSON (REME)**
- 2 SSgt WILL BLUNT (REME)
- 3 CSjt DANIEL SIMPSON (RIFLES)

WOMEN

- 1 **LCPL CAITLIN BEDDOE (AGC)**
- 2 SPR ASHLEIGH LEYSHON (RE)
- 3 CAPT HANNAH KNAPTON (PARA)

the Army Cycling Union has done a brilliant job in getting information about this out there on social media.

"There has also been a push at corps level to get soldiers to events and race.

"We've had between 70 and 80 at each round, whereas last year we were happy to see 50.

"The main aim of this is to get people racing and for novices there is the chance to go through and force their way on to corps and army teams.

"There are riders who have come through this series and are now on the army's talented athlete scholarship scheme – so the pathway is there.

"We've had a few army team riders involved this year and that gives people an idea of the level – it adds to the competition.

"Over the past couple of years, we have proven that the concept works. We'll now go away and make a few small tweaks, and it will be back next season."

Details for the 2026 series will be published on social media in the new year.

Follow [@britisharmycycling](#) on Instagram or join the Army Cycling Union Facebook page.

ROAD RACE BY NUMBERS

40 Winning margin, in points, for Sgt Lee Watson (REME)

7 Rounds completed by men's runner-up SSgt Will Blunt (REME, right)

24 Female cyclists in action over the various legs

2 Victories for LCpl Caitlin Beddoe (AGC (SPS)) from six races



BEDDOE ENDS DEBUT YEAR ON A HIGH

CYCLING (WOMEN)

VICTORY in the women's field marked a successful conclusion to a debut road race season for LCpl Caitlin Beddoe (AGC (SPS)).

The 28-year-old battled the wind and rain to establish a healthy lead at the head of the race – which was staged alongside the men's category C event – and never looked under any threat as she took the chequered flag in style.

"My goal coming in was to stay with the men for as long as possible and I managed to pull into a group," she told *SoldierSport*. "I didn't want it to become a time trial.

"It was quite windy out there and I had to take it easy round the bends, but it was good fun."

Beddoe has competed in all but one of the series' rounds and having scored consistent points in each was crowned overall champion.

"It has gone really well,

'IT HAS BUILT MY CONFIDENCE'

and I've improved throughout the year, particularly in my endurance," she continued.

"In some rounds I've gone up against army riders and it was about gaining the experience that I can hopefully use to compete at a higher level.

"It has built my confidence on the bike and has given me the chance to be in a race environment, riding in a bunch.

"When I go on to civvy events, that is the experience that will be much needed."

Beddoe has also been part of the army development squad this season and was called up to the senior set-up for the Inter-Services, where the soldiers won the team crown.

"It was a huge honour," she said. "I finished eighth in a field of 22 riders.

"My aim was to stay in the bunch and towards the end of the race I made an attack, which worked. It was great.

"I have always been a cyclist, and this year was about pushing myself into the racing side of things.

"From October the plan will be to train six times a week with a lot of turbo sessions so hopefully I can make the main army team next year."





Lt Col Jim Crompton (AGC (ETS)) in action at the 2025 Inter-Services

MAT STARS PRIMED FOR GLOBAL TEST

Pictures: Graeme Main

JUDO

JUDO pairing WO2 Lewis Hannington (REME) and Lt Col Jim Crompton (AGC (ETS)) will go up against some of the finest athletes in their field when they compete at the Paris World Championships Kata next month.

The duo are no strangers to the elite level of the kata discipline – which sees two people perform prearranged, formal sequences of judo techniques – having finished 15th in their debut outing at the tournament last year.

With a challenging programme planned in the build-up, they are targeting a top ten spot this time round.

Preparations started at the Silesian Open in Poland last month and will continue at the German Open on October 5. The soldiers will then join their army teammates for a two-week training camp in Gibraltar before arriving in the French capital to

compete on November 8 and 9.

While the schedule is intense, Hannington believes it will hold them in good stead for the major test to come.

"The Silesian Open has coaching with some top judges attached to it," he told *SoldierSport*. "As we don't have that access in the UK, we really need events like this to improve."

"If everything then goes well in Germany and our scores are good, we will know what we need to refine when we get to Gibraltar. It is one thing making changes, but you really want them to be on point."

"At the World Championships you are up against such a high standard of opposition, but we have been competing in world ranking events for a couple of years now and are in a very good place."

"A top ten finish is possible. This event opens the door to countries like Japan, who are the best in the world, which means it will be so competitive."

"It is an open competition. There are no age, weight or gender categories so if you win it, you are the best."

Hannington has been included on the army talented athlete scholarship scheme (Tass) this year, which has given him the opportunity to train full-time in judo.

As well as improving as an athlete he has been able to progress in his role with Team GB, where he is involved in developing a kata performance pathway.

"Tass has been amazing in terms of strength and conditioning and nutrition," he said. "I had a good base knowledge but having that in-depth support is brilliant."

"In the past, myself and Jim have had to squeeze our training in and trying to balance two busy schedules has been near impossible."

"Now, when he can take time to train I can match him and that has worked to our advantage."



Army Tass athlete WO2 Lewis Hannington (REME)



FINISHING IN STYLE

TUG OF WAR

THE army women's tug of war team ended the 2025 season on a high with a fourth-place finish at the World Championships.

Competing in the open 540kg ranks, the soldiers negotiated a tough group of 11 teams before facing reigning champions Chinese Taipei in the semi-finals.

Defeat saw them pulling against Basque Country outfit

Gaztedi in the battle for bronze, but another loss meant they missed out on a podium place.

However, given the relative inexperience in the ranks, coach Capt Gaz Wyatt (RA) was delighted with the performance.

"We won bronze in 2023 but being in the army we lose people to postings and deployments," he told *SoldierSport*.

"For some, this has been their first year on the rope. When you look at the civilian clubs they

are so settled, but I have been training people and teaching them the sport.

"So what they have achieved is unbelievable."

Other highlights this year included a silver medal while representing England in the 560kg division at the British and Irish Championships. They also claimed three medals at the English league finals.

Follow **@army_tug_of_war** on Instagram to get involved.



SQUAD TAKES SHAPE

Picture: AS2 Josh Gorman, RAF

BASKETBALL

ARMY players and officials were at the fore as the UK Armed Forces men's basketball team started preparations for this season's Shape international tournament.

Cpl Prajwal Thapa (R Signals), LCpl Jordan Crookes (Int Corps) and LCpl Kahmar Bailey (RE) were among the newcomers joining the 15-man squad as they recorded narrow losses to national league sides Bromsgrove Bears and Black Country Steelers.

"The ties provided invaluable lessons and highlighted strengths and areas to refine ahead of international duties," said UKAF secretary Capt Anyegwi Tambi Spicely (RAMS).

The squad travels to Belgium later this year to face Nato allies in one of the world's biggest military basketball tournaments.

They will be hoping to improve on a record of four losses from four matches last time out (pictured).

RUGBY UNION

THE 2025/26 army rugby union season was officially launched at the annual corps festival in Newbury.

The Royal Engineers celebrated a successful day after they defeated the Infantry 24-12 in the men's league one final.

The Royal Armoured Corps took the league two honours, while the Royal Logistic Corps sealed the women's prize.

The full Inter-Corps league competition is now under way.



Picture: Andrew Fosker/Allison Photography

ATHLETICS

FORMER Welsh Guards officer Tom Evans has been crowned champion of one of the world's most prestigious ultramarathons – the Ultra-Trail du Mont Blanc.

The 33-year-old battled rain, snow and sleet to finish the weather-shortened 103-mile race in a time of 19hr 18min 58sec – more than half-an-hour ahead of his nearest rival.

"This is the most incredible, spectacular race and to have a victory is a dream come true," Evans said.

The ex-captain burst onto the ultra-running scene in 2017 while serving in the army, finishing third in the Marathon des Sables – the best result by a European at the time.



Picture: Gabriele Facciotti

UPDATED SA80 SYSTEM WEAPON HANDLING

Why update weapon handling?

- Reduce Cognitive Load & Increase Tactical Advantage:

When weapon handling becomes second nature, the Soldier can focus on tactics and decision making. Accurate shooting and quick recovery increase lethality, and give an advantage, making weapon handling a key skill.

Updated SA80 system Immediate Action

The Immediate Action consists of 3 steps:

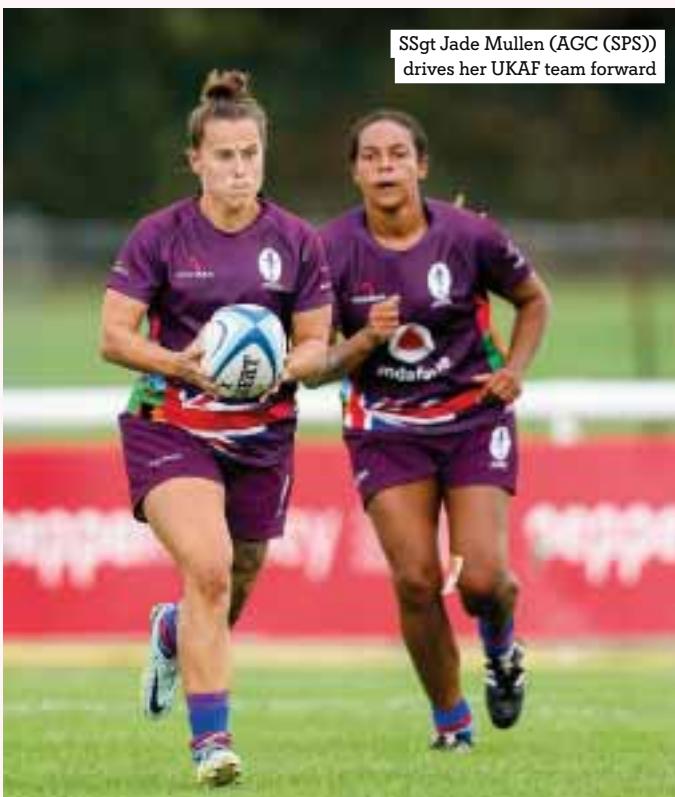
- Adopt the "high ready" position (as seen in the picture).
- Ensure the magazine is fitted correctly.
- Cock the Rifle and continue firing.



For more updates on SA80 System Weapon Handling search the British Army Electronic Battle Box or scan this QR Code.



FRENCH FIRE IN KEY CLASH



RUGBY UNION (WOMEN)

THERE was semi-final heartbreak for the UK Armed Forces at the women's International Defence Rugby Competition (IDRC) as they crashed out of the tournament at the hands of defending champions France.

Comfortable victories over Tonga and Ireland saw the personnel make the perfect start to the pool stages before Zambia provided a sterner test in their Aldershot clash.

Army prop SSgt Sarah Batley (AGC (RMP)) – a scorer against Tonga – crossed to give the hosts a 27-5 lead in the second half but the Zambians added three tries late on before eventually going on to lose 32-22.

The result saw UKAF set up a semi-final clash with their cross-Channel rivals and Batley continued her fine personal form with a converted try that saw them trail 19-7 at the break.

However, two further French

scores followed after the interval before a late consolation reduced the arrears to 31-12 at full-time.

"It is tough, we showed a lot of heart and are a team that gives everything," skipper SSgt Jade Mullen (AGC (SPS)) said.

France always show up. It was a physical battle, and they play a similar structure to us. It is hard to swallow, but we couldn't capitalise on the opportunities we had."

France went on to lift the trophy following a 14-12 triumph over Fiji in the final, while UKAF ended their campaign on a high with a 76-5 win against Ireland in the third/fourth-place playoff.

"We can be really proud of what we have done – from the day we got together to the day we have finished," head coach WO2 Sarah Mitchelson (RLC) said at the conclusion of the tournament.

"Hopefully everyone has seen what a great bunch of girls they are – both on the pitch and off."



'THIS IS WHERE
I'VE ALWAYS
WANTED TO BE'



DREAM SERIES AWAITS AS ASHMORE STEPS UP

MOTORSPORT

RACING driver SSgt Will Ashmore (R Signals) will achieve one of his motorsports dreams next season as he lines up on the grid for the British Endurance Championship.

The soldier will head to the series with high hopes after an encouraging debut outing in his new Ginetta G55 sports car at the recent Silverstone Festival, where he finished third in class in a competitive GT4 field.

"I only bought the car a week earlier," he told *SoldierSport*. "It had never raced before and was just used as a track day toy."

"The Silverstone Festival attracts huge crowds, as well as professional drivers who have competed in the likes of

touring cars and Le Mans.

"We pushed really hard to get there, qualified third in our class and then finished in the same position.

"There were two Ginetta GT4s ahead of us, but they had 30 horsepower more than our car. The guy in second is currently leading the endurance championship and we were only two tenths of a second off his best lap time.

"An extra 30 horsepower would mean we can gain a second over a 2min 10sec lap at Silverstone, which is a lot in motorsport.

"It is looking really promising ahead of next year."

Ashmore has been involved with the army sportscar racing team for 15 years, starting out in a Honda Civic and progressing to the Ferrari Challenge, before selling

the exotic Italian machine to finance the Ginetta.

However, he won't be flying solo in the next chapter of his journey. LCpl Josh Gilding (RCAM) has been recruited to share the driving duties, while the pit crew, team manager and data analysts are all fellow personnel.

"We did a Citroen C1 24-hour race with Josh at Silverstone," Ashmore added. "There were 50 cars on the grid, and we battled through to finish 14th.

"That was his first competitive race and he really impressed with his driving, attitude and intelligence.

"Because this is an endurance championship, we need two drivers and I wanted to bring in a young lance corporal to show that army motorsport is not just for guys

like me, who have been in for 23 years.

"He has got to do a lot of work to get fully up to speed and the great thing is it will be a full army team.

"This will be our first step into professional motorsport, and I have worked extremely hard to get here - I've never had anything for free.

"I have benefited from the army and would not be here without them, but there has been a lot of graft in getting sponsors onboard and keeping them happy.

"I do all the repairs and maintenance to make sure the car is reliable, and it is tough going over every component before a race.

"It has come with a lot of personal expense and time, but this is where I've always wanted to be."

POSITIVES TAKEN FROM TOUGH TEST

CROSSFIT

SUPERFIT soldier WO2 Charlotte Spence (RAPTC) battled a host of external challenges, as well as some of the top athletes on the planet, in her latest bid for glory at the World Crossfit Games.

The 38-year-old received a late funding boost from The Royal British Legion to help finance a trip that saw her travel to Ohio with hopes of a top ten finish.

Once stateside, a bout of illness scuppered her performance in the early rounds, while the workouts did not play to her strengths, but she recovered to showcase the impressive form that saw her qualify in style.

"I got really ill with nausea and sickness," Spence told *SoldierSport*. "I don't know what it was.

"I wanted to enjoy it but there were points where I was just getting out of bed and doing the workout before heading back again.

"I remember looking at the kettlebells and thinking 'I am going to be sick on these' and

it was only towards the end of the second day that it started to clear up.

"At that point I was down at the bottom of the standings but then had a good workout - five rounds of six ring muscle-ups, nine overhead squats and 12 box jump-overs - and that took me from 19th to 14th and a place in the final."

Spence also posted a personal best in the clean and jerk and went on to finish 13th in the overall standings.

"It could have gone better, but I am not disappointed with my performance," she continued. "I'm pleased to have come away with something to be proud of as I was worried about letting everyone down."

"I got a heat win and proved that I deserved to be there."

Spence is now bidding for a place in next month's British Army Warrior Fitness finals and will start her qualifying journey for the 2026 World Crossfit Games in February.

'I DESERVED TO BE THERE'



Picture: Amy Flood



Picture: James Giblin

HIGHS AND LOWS IN OPENING ROUND

RUGBY LEAGUE

THERE were mixed fortunes for army teams in the opening round of fixtures in this season's Inter-Services Rugby League Championships.

Having claimed 15 successive titles, a new-look women's outfit started in style as they downed the Royal Navy 34-8 in Portsmouth to take a big stride towards another trophy.

Pte Lou Kunadua (RLC) crossed twice as the Reds ran in six tries on their way to a comfortable win.



Picture: Graeme Main

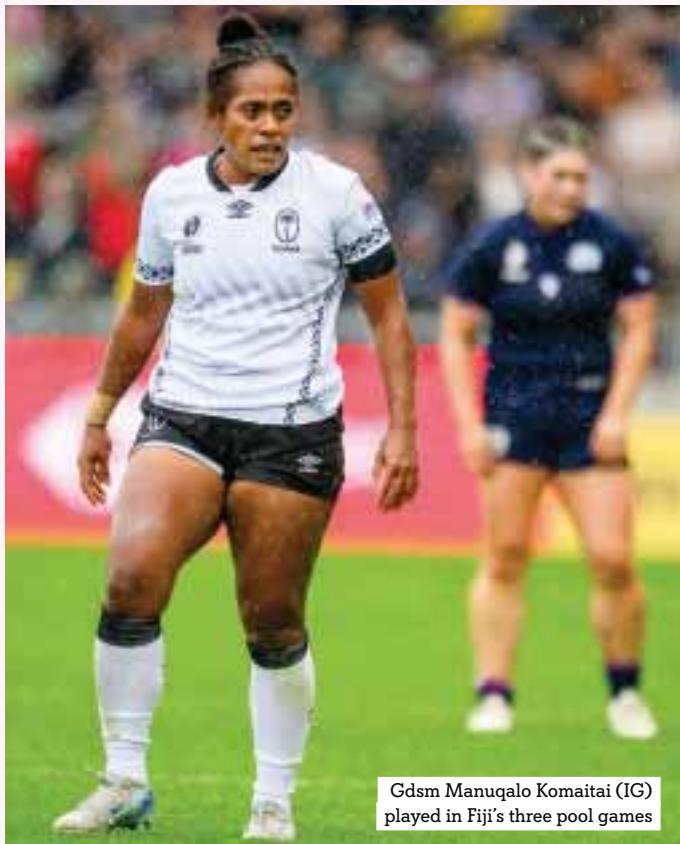
GOLF

THERE was double disappointment for the army at the Inter-Services Golf Championships as they missed out on the senior honours at Saunton Golf Club.

Challenging weather conditions added to the difficulty on the course, and it was the Royal Navy who adapted best to secure both team crowns.

Having claimed a comfortable win over the Royal Air Force, the soldiers slipped to an 8-7 defeat in the men's final and there was another close affair in the women's showpiece, where the army suffered an agonising 6.5-5.5 loss.

EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME



Gdsm Manuqalo Komaitai (IG) played in Fiji's three pool games

Pictures: Craig Watson

RUGBY UNION

FIJIAN ace Gdsm Manuqalo Komaitai (IG) has reflected on the dream experience of representing her country at the Women's World Cup.

The 29-year-old started all three games as the team exited the competition in the pool stages, but enjoyed notable highs along the way.

Fiji crashed to a 65-7 defeat to Canada in their opening fixture and further heartbreak followed in a 29-15 loss to Scotland, in which Komaitai scored the second of her side's three tries.

They ended their campaign on a positive note with a 28-25 victory against Wales.

"It feels like a dream, everything happened so fast," the forward, who became the first female soldier to serve in the Irish Guards, told *SoldierSport*.

"The international game is so quick and while it was exciting it was also scary - you felt like everyone was watching you. But it was a great experience.

"After losing to Canada

we had to beat Scotland but were unlucky with some poor discipline and did not execute our chances to score.

"The try was great, but for me it is about winning as a team and that did not happen.

"Before the Wales match I said it was important to put everything behind us as it was our last week together. I was pleased we finished on a high."

Komaitai only started playing rugby union five years ago through the army and has made rapid strides since.

She was invited for Fiji trials over the summer and won the Oceania Championships ahead of the World Cup.

"I played netball growing up and it was only when I arrived in the UK that my brother said I should try rugby," she explained.

"I went to an army training camp, and the senior players and premiership girls who were there helped a lot. SSgt Jade Mullen (AGC (SPS)) was my role model - she taught me so much. If it was not for them I would not have had this chance."

SHORT FORMAT SUCCESS



BASKETBALL

THE Army Basketball Association continued its mission to evolve the sport as it hosted the service's first 3x3 championships.

A total of ten teams took to the half-court for the day-long showdown in Aldershot, with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers emerging as champions at the end of a 27-match schedule.

Organiser SSgt Seb John (RAPTC) was delighted with the tournament's success and said the format will become a permanent fixture.

"This isn't just another event; it is about evolving this sport to fit the reality of the modern soldier's life," he added.

"The high tempo, frequent training commitments, operational demands and dispersed postings often make it difficult for personnel to commit

to the traditional format.

"3x3 caters for smaller squads, has a shorter game time and a reduced logistical burden, making it easier to enter teams, even with restricted availability.

"It is also more accessible for new players, while still providing an elite competitive pathway for experienced competitors."

It is hoped the event will become an annual fixture, with aspirations for future regional and Inter-Services competitions.



AND THE NOMINEES ARE...

SPORTS AWARDS

THE final nominees have been announced for the annual Army Sports Awards on November 12.

Taekwondo ace Gdsm Thando Dlamini (SG), St Lucia sprinter LCpl Mavric Pamphile (RE) and England international clay target shooter Maj Rob Vincent (RTR) are the contenders in the sportsman of the year category.

And Fijian rugby union international Gdsm Manuqalo Komaitai (IG), army hockey stalwart Lt Col Nic George (R Signals, pictured) and Cpl Paige Atwell (RLC), who has starred in both ice hockey and strongman, are the contenders for sportswoman of the year.

The army women's netball squad have been announced as team of the year winners and honours in the rising star, official and lifetime achievement categories will also be presented during the ceremony on November 20 at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

CYCLING

STRENGTH in depth proved key for the Infantry as they rode to glory at the Inter-Corps Road Race Championships in Bath.

Defending champions the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers finished second, with the Royal Army Physical Training Corps third.

The PT corps also claimed bronze in the women's race, which was won by the Intelligence Corps. The Royal Engineers were second.



CRICKET

HEAVY rain washed out the Army Cricket Association's showpiece finals as the 2025 season ended on a damp note.

For the first time in its history, there was no outright winner in the major units competition as 30 Signal Regiment and 1 Royal School of Military Engineering shared the title.

The signallers posted 141-3 from 20 overs and the sappers were 81-2 when the heavens opened, leaving the match a tie.

In the Inter-Corps Twenty20 final, Royal Logistic Corps skipper SSgt Denson Narayan (pictured in army action earlier this season) won the toss and elected to bat first against the Royal Artillery. They had reached 64-5 from ten overs when the match was abandoned. It will be replayed next year.



What keeps you in?

We asked troops about their main reasons for staying in the army

Interviews: Becky Clark and Cliff Caswell Pictures: Graeme Main

I enjoy the whole package. As a reservist I get to do my normal day job but then also have the opportunity to come away to do things like adventurous training.



Maj Paul Morley, RE



The independence it gives me. It was a good thing for me to leave home because I had a lot of personal stuff going on. The army has got me away from that and showed me a bit more of the world.

Tpr Riley Wilkinson, RL

I've only been in four years and spent two of those in Cyprus, which was awesome. The army offers you stability – I could never face doing a civvy office job.

LCpl Joseph Thompson, R Yorks



The travel is great – I've been to several different countries as a soldier and on leave I travelled to Japan using money I saved on ops. There are too many benefits to this life to consider anything different.

LCpl Matthew Evans, LD



For me, the camaraderie and brotherhood of 29 Commando Regiment has kept me serving for 23 years of my life. It's a unique place in which I've gone from gunner to warrant officer, gained qualifications, a driving licence and travelled all over the world. What else can I say?

WO2 Steven Kelly, RA



Travelling and seeing new places – I've been in four years and I've gone to Germany, Kenya and Poland. That and providing for my family. I don't have any plans to leave soon.

Tpr Waisele Tavatuilagi, LD

Patriotism. I want to work to make the country better. You can make money anywhere but I think the country has lost its national pride and I want to keep that.

Tpr Logan Vanden Bos, RL





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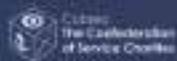
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