

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

LOOKING BACK

The legacy of Afghanistan,
in troops' own words





1915

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2015

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ARMY

End of an era

WITH the combat operation in Helmand at an end – and with it the British Army's longest-running campaign of modern times – we decided that this month's edition should reflect on the legacy of Afghanistan.

From the incredible advances in front-line medicine and the rehabilitation process (pages 32 and 40) to the battle-winning equipment procured through the urgent operational requirement process (page 28), the conflict has transformed the Service beyond all recognition.

Much of this was driven by the enemy's use of improvised explosive devices. On page 36, two Servicemen relate their harrowing encounters with this most insidious of weapons. One would pay the ultimate price for his dedication.

And while the debate continues about whether such sacrifices will lead to lasting security in the country, personnel in Kabul are quietly cracking on with the job of mentoring the future officers of the Afghan National Army (page 57).

Above all, however, we wanted to reveal the personal stories behind the headlines, as told by the troops themselves.

Some recalled milestone missions, others friends lost in battle and a few spoke of how serious injury had changed their lives.

Whatever the political fallout of the 13-year struggle, the bravery and selfless commitment of the Army's Afghanistan generation deserve our utmost respect.

On behalf of everyone at *Soldier*, I would like to wish all of our readers the very best for 2015. ■



Becky Clark • Assistant Editor



Dear diary
Troops' most personal thoughts from the front line revealed – pages 48-50

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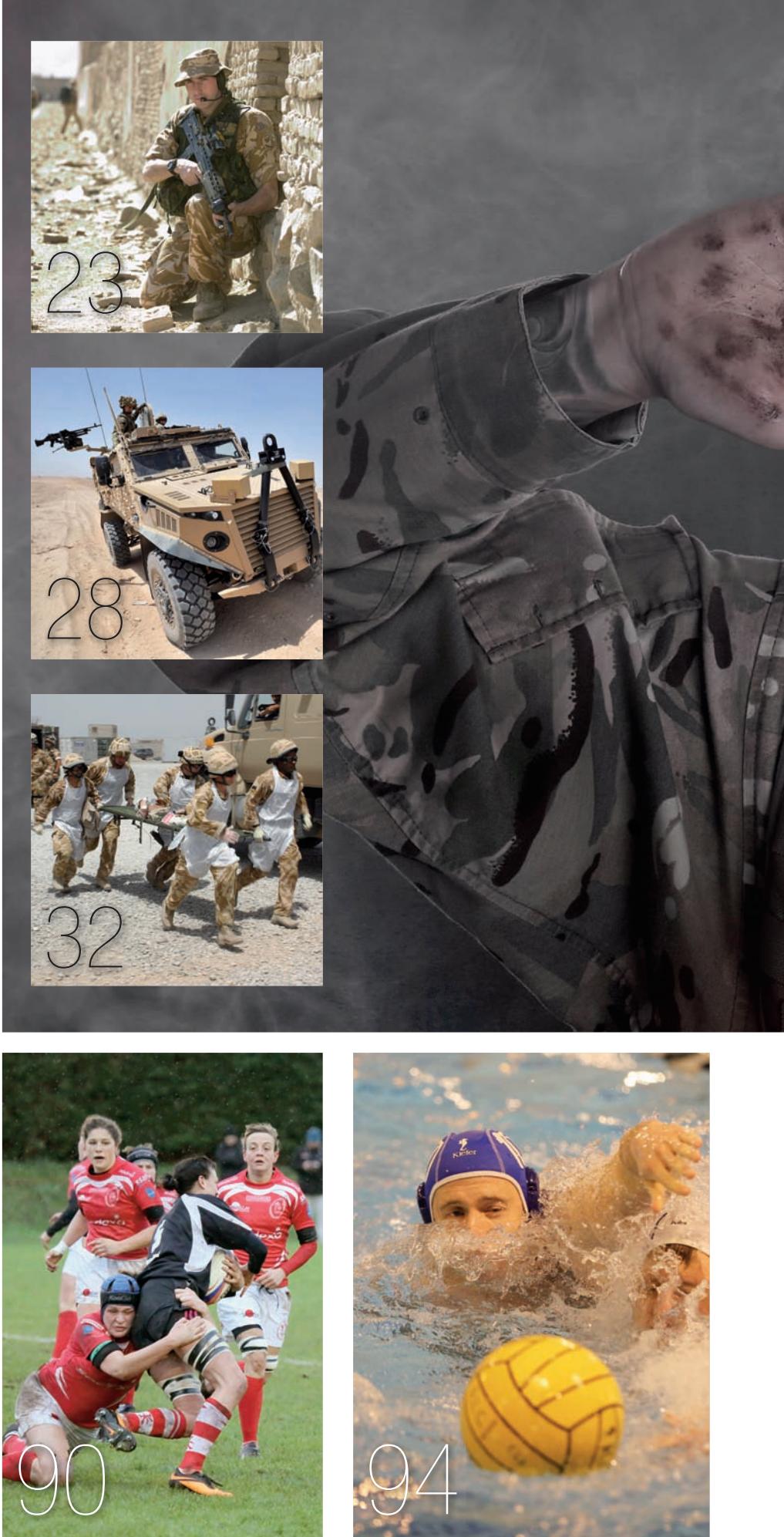
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How crucial kit was fast-tracked to the front line p28

“Had we unwittingly put our two children in danger?”

Asbestos hazard causes housing headache p63

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Reviewer underwhelmed by rocker’s new release p79

ARMY RECOVERY CAPABILITY

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www.army.mod.uk/ARC



Picture: Sgt Gary Kendall, RLC

'The changes are immense'

Chiefs reflect on 13 years of combat operations

THE UK's top soldier has praised the work of British troops in Afghanistan in the last 13 years.

At the start of a new year away from combat operations in the country, Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Nicholas Carter, said that by taking the insurgency on in its heartland Service personnel had helped to create the conditions that have allowed progress.

"It is remarkable how the country has moved on," he told *Soldier*. "It now has technology – there are an extraordinary number of mobile phone users, for example, and three million people enjoy access to the internet.

"There are 70,000 kilometres of roads – it only had around 700 kilometres when I first went there in 2002.

"It also has a sophisticated media and an education system with eight million kids in schools, of whom 40 per cent are girls.

"This has led to a civil society which in turn creates even more progress, hence last year's presidential

elections where candidates campaigned on serious issues and around eight million voted. The changes are huge."

The senior officer's comments suggest a positive legacy left by UK troops, and came as international leaders met in London to discuss the future of Afghanistan.

Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond – who held the post of defence secretary for the last three years of the Herrick campaign – described the military contribution over 13 years as "immense".

"At one point 9,500 troops were stationed in Helmand," he said.

"It demanded great sacrifices from Afghans and from nations around the world and I pay tribute to all those locals, and members of Isaf, including the 453 UK Service personnel who have been killed in operations there.

"Those who have strived to achieve security and development in Afghanistan can take great pride in what has been achieved."

“
Those who
strived to
achieve
security
can take
great pride
”

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Progress: A member of the Royal Military Police during a Helmand patrol in 2010. More children are in school than under the Taliban

Q&A

We ask Gen Sir Nicholas Carter for his view on the legacy of Operation Herrick...



» What do you say to soldiers wondering where the excitement will come from now?

It may surprise people, but in 2014 around 91,000 British soldiers were committed to more than 300 different missions in 50 or so countries worldwide. That is a reflection of the demand for the Army and its enduring effectiveness.

» What was the biggest lesson the Army learnt in Afghanistan?

Realising the importance of adaptability and agility, to get ahead of the enemy. That comes, fundamentally, from having the right sort of leaders at every level, personnel who have the ability to innovate and to use their imagination and be prepared to change direction if things aren't going right. That's been an important lesson for the British Army and something we are now instilling in our leadership training and development.

» What was the biggest lesson for you personally?

Realising just how important it is to understand the local environment. After I arrived for my second tour in 2009, to take charge of Regional Command South, I decided to exercise command through Afghans. I spent 16 hours most days on the ground with them. It meant taking risks to inspire them, and to give them the confidence to take over from us.

» With the benefit of 20-20 hindsight is there anything you would have done differently?

No, not at the level I was operating at. Our tactical approach was right because, ultimately, delivering stability doesn't come from killing people but from getting people to talk with each other. In this situation our task was to ensure there was a conversation at the tip of the spear, that the population was protected, and the insurgency was increasingly irrelevant.

» So looking back, was it all worth it?

We have made a big difference, no question about it. Afghanistan is a country now moving in the right direction. And let's not forget the lack of terrorist attacks stemming from the region. None have occurred in the last eight years and that is a tribute to the way the country has been developed. Sure, there are still violent incidents, as we've seen recently, but you have to judge progress in Afghanistan over a long period of time.

» How do you feel about the lives lost?

Every life that's been lost and every person affected through being wounded or being related to those killed or wounded is tragic, and as the head of the Army I can reassure everyone that we will never forget that commitment or the loss and we will look after those who have been touched by this campaign for as long as we possibly can.

THIS MONTH IN MOVIES



PAGES 74-75

1 CALIFORNIA

CATCHING THE SURF

INJURED Service personnel have travelled to California to compete in the tenth annual Operation Surf.

The programme is designed to help troops overcome physical and psychological disabilities and featured one-to-one tuition from some of the sport's biggest names.

"The energy throughout the week was tangible and everyone caught some great waves," said Jonpaul Nevin, lead strength and conditioning coach at Help for Heroes, who organised the trip.



NEW HEIGHTS

"With England winning the World Cup, a lot of girls have been encouraged to go out and play."

— Women's rugby ramps up, page 90

2 FRANCE

A MONTH IN PROVENCE

PERSONNEL from 1st Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery travelled to Provence for a month-long training exercise alongside their French counterparts.

The package gave soldiers an opportunity to master the art of operating the home nation's Caesar 155mm gun as they were embedded with members of 3eme Regiment d'Artillerie de Marine.

Having fully immersed themselves in battery life they concluded the trip with a tactical live-firing exercise on the Canjeurs Training Area.

The visit was organised as part of Project Brittany – an agreement that sees British Army personnel practise with French mechanised equipment.



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It's good to
get away
from camp

99



3 UK

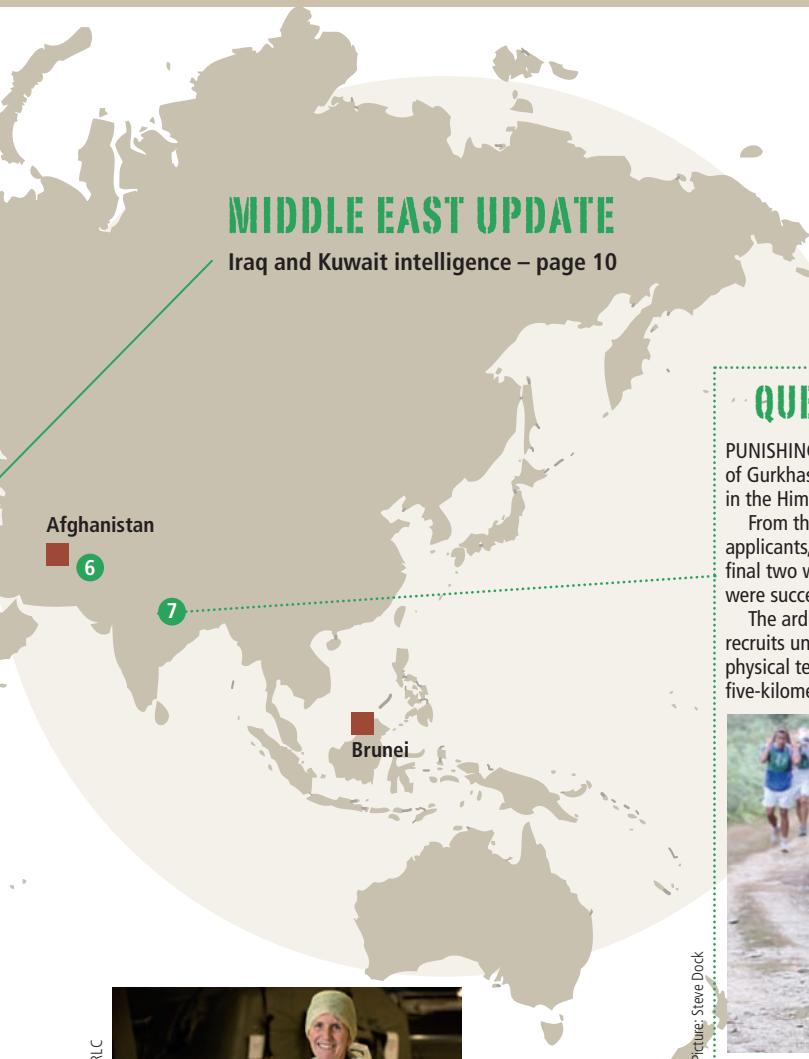
SKYE HIGH

SOLDIERS from 24 Commando Engineer Regiment braved the Scottish elements to create a mountain shelter on the Isle of Skye.

The seven-week project in Camasunary saw 26 troops from 59 Commando Squadron build the bothy from scratch.

"It was the first time the squadron had carried out training like this and it was great to be working on trade skills," explained troop commander Lt Christopher Butler (RE). "It's good to get away from camp and work in a challenging environment."





MIDDLE EAST UPDATE

Iraq and Kuwait intelligence – page 10



QUEST FOR BEST

PUNISHING selection for the Brigade of Gurkhas has taken place in Pokhara in the Himalayas.

From the initial 7,865 Nepalese applicants, 500 made it through to the final two weeks of testing, where 230 were successful.

The arduous process saw potential recruits undergo various mental and physical tests – including the famed five-kilometre Doko race (below).



5 CYPRUS

NEW CENTRE FOR KIDS

A NEW purpose-built childcare facility is being planned for Service families in Cyprus.

The First Steps centre has been funded by £3 million from Libor fines levied on banks.

It will be located at RAF Akrotiri and is expected to cater for around 100 youngsters a year.

"This is excellent news for our community," said Maj Gen Richard Cripwell, commander of British Forces Cyprus.

"Access to high quality childcare is very important to families and this will not only improve provision but provide greater job opportunities."

The centre will employ specialist staff to ensure those youngsters who move regularly are not adversely affected in their development.

“This is excellent news for our community”

4 SIERRA LEONE

RESERVES JOIN EFFORT

THE first UK Reserves have deployed to Sierra Leone to help tackle the Ebola outbreak, while more than 40 troops from 5 Armoured Medical Regiment have returned home from training local healthcare workers.

The new arrivals will use their skills to treat patients in community care and Ebola treatment centres.

Operating alongside their Regular colleagues, the soldiers from 208 Field Hospital took over from clinicians of 22 Fd Hosp at a 12-bed facility.

Before arriving in the country the team undertook a nine-day mission-specific training package.

"It provided our troops with great experience of what to expect," said Lt Col Maggie Durrant (pictured).

Picture: Sgt Si Longworth, RLC



6 AFGHANISTAN

A WINTER'S TOIL

BRITISH soldiers mentoring at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy (ANAOA) are enduring a tough winter ahead of a long-awaited move.

Speaking to *Soldier*, chief mentor Brig Charles Page said that January was likely to see snowfall and temperatures dipping to minus seven degrees Celsius.

"Keeping the training going through that weather will bring challenges," he added.

The team is still operating out of tents ahead of their move to a permanent building later this year.

And next month will see the graduation of the second intake of cadets after the first one left the facility last year.

The brigadier said the team is expecting to move into the new establishment once the water supply has been installed.

"In the spring the ANAOA will look like a proper academy," the senior officer commented.

● Herrick: the sequel
– pages 58-59

7 NEPAL

8,000-METRE MISSION

VOLUNTEERS are being sought for a medical research expedition to the Dhaulagiri region of the Himalayas.

The 2016 challenge will see a team of Forces climbers scaling an 8,000-metre peak while examining the effects of altitude.

The adventure is open to personnel of all ranks – including Reservists – and previous experience is not essential.

The main group will attempt the north-east ridge without oxygen, while the high altitude development team will climb Tukuche Peak.

For further details log on to www.dhaulagiri2016.com





“THE COMPLEXITY OF THE DAMAGE WAS NOT LIKE TYPICAL SURGICAL INJURIES”

- THE MISSION TO MEND, PAGES 40-42

Picture: Col Jamie Peters RLC



HERRICK ART IN PRINT

■ A WAR artist who was shot while on patrol with the Army during Op Herrick 18 has released a book of his work.

Graeme Lothian (pictured above) was capturing the troops of 1 Mechanized Brigade in June 2013 when he was injured in the arm and hand by an enemy weapon.

Despite not knowing whether he would be able to paint again, the former paratrooper recovered to finish his collection, which he has published under the title *An Artist in Afghanistan*.

The book, available from most major retailers, features paintings from all four of Mr Lothian's trips to the country, including several from the hospital at Camp Bastion during Herrick 11.

Meanwhile, an officer's drawings from his time on combat operations have gone on sale in a charity book.

Capt Alex Biddulph (RA) was among the last troops to leave Afghanistan at the end of last year.

Drawing the Front Line is a collection of the sketches he made to pass the time between patrols and proceeds from its sale will be split between Blesma and ABF The Soldier's Charity.

To buy it log on to www.blurb.co.uk/b/5828961-drawing-the-front-line

● Conflict on canvas, pages 45-47

Picture: Imperial War Museum



GREAT WAR HEROES

■ THE Imperial War Museum is urging Service personnel to help tell the stories of their relatives who served in the skies during the First World War.

Thousands of records of men from the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force have been added to the online digital memorial Lives of the First World War and the public are being asked to provide a more detailed picture of who they were with photos, memories and official documents.

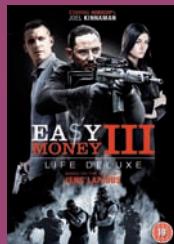
To make a contribution visit www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org

IN MOVIES...



“Danny Dyer puts in a great performance”

★★★



“A confusing opening scene sets the tone”

★★

PAGES 74-75

Pictures: Cpl Andy Reddy, RLC



Middle East momentum

Further troops set to deploy to Iraq and Kuwait

THE size of Britain's commitment in Iraq will be in the “low hundreds”, Defence Secretary Michael Fallon has revealed in a newspaper interview.

Speaking to *The Telegraph*, the politician said that military engagements would mainly consist of short-term training teams to further prepare Iraqi and Kurdish forces who are battling Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Isil) fighters.

The politician's words mark the first significant deployment of ground troops in the country since Op Telic ceased nearly four years ago.

As *Soldier* went to press an MoD spokesman said that no firm decisions on numbers, units or locations had been made.

Over the next few weeks the British Army will also be beefing up its presence in Kuwait.

Around 20 Army personnel currently make up the major component of the UK's tri-Service



Eyes east: Members of the British Military Mission (Kuwait) in action

Picture: Steve Docks

loan team there, who mentor and train the country's armed forces (see full report in next month's *Soldier*).

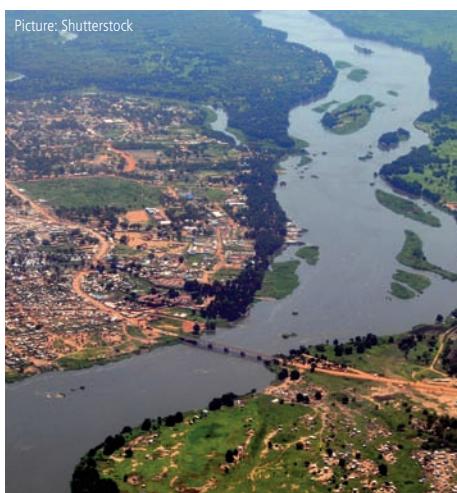
However, an undisclosed number of additional troops are being drafted in to help run the headquarters of the rapidly expanding Coalition Joint Task Force, a multinational facility that coordinates Western alliance operations in the region including Iraq.

Set for Sudan

MORE than 100 personnel from 26 Engineer Regiment will deploy to South Sudan later this month as part of Operation Vogul, which is supporting the UN presence in a nation ravaged by conflict.

The soldiers will construct base locations and carry out general infrastructure improvements to the organisation's facilities.

The sappers prepared for the mission with the support of the Operational and Advisory Training Group by honing their personal and base security skills and learning to deal with attacks.



■ PARATROOPERS carried out an airborne assault over Salisbury Plain as part of Exercise Wessex Storm.

Some 100 troops from C Company, 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment jumped from Hercules aircraft with weapons and daysacks strapped to their legs.

The Servicemen then secured and defended their position at Copehill Down until the mechanised infantry of 1st Battalion, The Scots Guards relieved them.

“As we move on from Afghanistan we are going back to basics in our training and focussing on our core skills,” explained Maj Bob McKay, officer commanding C Coy.





THE NEW JAGUAR XE

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“IT WILL SIT ALONGSIDE MY COMMONWEALTH GAMES MEDAL”

- SPORTS AWARDS REACTION, PAGES 84-85

ARMY 2020 UPDATE

ALL CHANGE IN WALES

■ THE Service's HQ in Wales has been renamed as part of the changes brought about under Army 2020.

The structure is now known as 160th Infantry Brigade and Headquarters Wales, and forms one of seven Adaptable Forces that will be used for a range of tasks including contingency operations and overseas defence engagements.

As part of Service restructuring the formation has taken on the command of 1st Battalion, The Rifles and 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment as well as their respective Reserve units, 6 Rifles and 2 R Irish.

BRIGADES MERGE

■ MEMBERS of 2 (South East) Brigade have merged with HQ 11th Infantry Brigade to create a new part of the Adaptable Force.

The formation now operates under the name of 11th Infantry Brigade and is the regional point of command for the South East of England.

It includes four Regular and two Reserve battalions and also has responsibility for British Forces Brunei – a total of 26,000 military personnel.

A service to mark the closure of 2 (SE) Bde was held at the Garrison Church of St Mary in Castro, Dover.

IN NUMBERS

10m

Parcels that have been delivered to troops in Afghanistan since the conflict began
– pages 54-55

ONLINE ASSISTANCE

■ MILITARY personnel, veterans and their families will find it easier to access support from organisations aligned with the Armed Forces covenant thanks to a new website.

The Armed Forces Community Directory is a single point of contact for anyone seeking help or advice in the fields of health, education, employment, housing, welfare and the legal profession.

Visit www.afcom.directory for more information.

“
THE BOY
BAND
HAIRCUT IS
UNSUITABLE
FOR THE
ARMY
”

Talkback title tattle – pages 61-64

New cap badge created

Combat recce troops will operate the Jackal vehicle

THE only new cap badge to be created out of the Army's restructuring process has come into being.

The Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry has been formed following a reorganisation of the Army's yeomanry regiments.

The Reserve formation, which operates RWMK Land Rovers and Jackal fighting vehicles (pictured below), is in command



of three former sub-units of The Queen's Own Yeomanry and is paired with The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards.

It has squadrons established in Ayr, Belfast and Cupar and is now seeking further volunteers for its Lothian and Borders unit in Edinburgh.

“This is a pivotal time for this new regiment,” said CO Lt Col James Campbell-Barnard.

“We need – and this is what makes light cavalry soldiers a little different – someone who will be as comfortable in a vehicle as on their feet; someone who is intelligent, inquisitive and can work independently, and most importantly someone looking for a new challenge.”

Picture: Graeme Main

Female fighting more likely

But no final decision will be made until after report in 2016



“
A huge
amount of
work has
gone into
this
”

THE prospect of women performing front-line combat roles has moved a step closer after a Ministry of Defence review made recommendations in favour of the proposal.

Having launched its study in May, the department has dispelled the long-held view that mixed close ground units would have an adverse effect on cohesion between troops.

However, the paper also calls for further research into the physiological impact on such individuals before a final decision is made on lifting the current exclusion.

With front-line deployments placing high demands on personnel the MoD is determined to conduct a thorough investigation into the

impact on women's health, stating that a failure to do such research would be “irresponsible”.

Further studies will examine how training programmes can be constructed to allow females to integrate safely, while protecting combat effectiveness.

“A huge amount of work and consideration has gone into this review,” said Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Nicholas Carter.

“It is but one supporting element to my primary goal of ensuring that we maximize the talent available to the Army.

“If the research recommends that women are physiologically suited to close combat roles then we will be able to make as many ranks and roles open to all our soldiers, within a flexible career structure.

“But this process has to be carefully managed with no final decision coming until further investigations are complete, because we have discovered from Afghanistan that there could be significant physiological risk to women serving in ground close combat.”

The research programme is expected to deliver an initial report in 2016.

"I TOUCHED MY FIST TO HIS AND SAID GOODBYE. IT WAS SO STRANGE."
- IED REALITY RELIVED, PAGES 36-38



Up to the Challenger

TWO soldiers are celebrating becoming the first Reserves to qualify as full crewmen on the Challenger 2 main battle tank.

LCpl Richard Carson and Tpr Karl Goodwin (both R Wx Y) undertook around ten weeks of training on top of their usual commitments to reach the milestone.

It means the Servicemen could be deployed as loaders, drivers or gunners on the 60-tonne platform.

"The work had its moments and involved a lot of time away from home but hopefully it's been worth it," said LCpl Carson (pictured left).

He added that such qualifications would help to prove that Reserves are



up to a bigger role in the future Army.

Maj Richard Morgan, officer commanding B Squadron, praised the commitment of his troops.

"This makes them more employable to the Service and these guys should be the first of many," the officer explained.

“The work had its moments”

ADVENTURE SHOW

■ *SOLDIER* readers are being offered reduced price advance tickets to the Adventure Travel Show at London Olympia from January 17 to 18.

To save £4 on the door price quote "SOLDIER" when booking online at www.adventureshow.com or call 0871 230 7159 (charges apply).

DEATH GRANT SCHEME EXTENDS TO RESERVES

■ FAMILIES of Reservists who die in service are now in line for financial support from the Army Dependents' Trust.

From this month all volunteers can become members of the charity, which provides discretionary grants of up to £12,000 to next of kin if a soldier passes away, regardless of the circumstances of their death.

The money is free from tax and available immediately to help with funeral and travel costs, short-term debts or expenses such as mortgage payments.

More than 98 per cent of eligible troops are members of the trust, which costs £8.75 annually and is deducted from pay.

To join visit the "community/charities" section of the Army intranet page.

FEARLESS FUNDRAISING



TROTTERS TAKE UP GOOD CAUSE

CHAMPIONSHIP outfit Bolton Wanderers have donated proceeds from the sales of a limited edition shirt to its

official charity partner. The green kit had the words "lest we forget" embossed on the reverse with parts of the Laurence Binyon poem *For the Fallen* printed on the label.

Money raised: £700
For: MS-UK

LANDMARK VICTORY

TROOPS from 13 Air Assault Support Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps covered the equivalent distance from Colchester's Merville Barracks to the top of the Eiffel Tower. The unit's four squadrons took part in the gym challenge, which featured a 112-mile run a 21-mile row, a 181-mile cycle and 1,710 step-ups. Members of 82 Air Assault Task Force Squadron won the challenge in a time of 3hr 10min.



FUNDS FLY IN TO ARMY AIR CORPS TROOPS

Money raised: £1,700
For: ABF The Soldiers' Charity

ELEVEN soldiers from Flying Station Aldergrove staged a 2,014-mile, 24-hour exercise bike and rowing machine challenge.

GOT AN EVENT?
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WARRIOR TRAINING COURSE TAKES OFF

■ MORE than 80 soldiers have completed the first Warrior tactical turret commanders' course.

The pilot training package is designed to provide experience to junior soldiers so they are more effective on combat operations.

Troops from 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment undertook the programme on Salisbury Plain, with other units expected to follow in the spring.

"For a lot of the soldiers this is the first exercise they have done on Warrior," said course organiser Capt Chris Groves (Mercian).

"It means they are receiving tactical training rather than attempting to pick things up on the job."

Full coverage of the new course will be featured in *Soldier* later this year.



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"I WANTED TO LINK IT WITH STUFF THAT MEANT SOMETHING TO ME"
- TROOPS TALK TATTOOS, PAGES 52-53



Iraq inquiry findings

Relief for soldiers but lessons to be learnt, chief says

THE results of the Al-Sweady Inquiry – that cleared UK soldiers of torturing Iraqis on operations ten years ago – will be a "huge relief" to the accused Servicemen and their families, Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Nicholas Carter, has said.

However, the senior officer added: "It is important that we learn appropriate lessons from this case."

The allegations stemmed from events in 2004, when personnel from The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment were ambushed near Basra.

Nine surviving insurgents and the bodies of 20 dead fighters were taken to Camp Abu Naji to discover if they included

the ringleader of the massacre of six British military police around one year earlier.

Lawyers had originally claimed that some of the captured men were tortured and killed.

However, the murder allegations were withdrawn and last December the five-year investigation concluded that all of the allegations were "deliberate lies".

The report praised the soldiers' courage in battle but noted that some conduct during questioning of prisoners "fell below the Army's normally high standards".

Inquiry chairman Sir Thayne Forbes, set out nine recommendations based on his findings.



...A £150 selection of film and comic books

LAST month's spine lines clues revealed the names of celebrity messengers.

Actress Gemma Atkinson, *Strictly Come Dancing* judge Len Goodman, music moguls Sharon and Ozzy Osbourne and actor Ray Winstone sent Christmas tidings to *Soldier* readers in our last issue.

This month, courtesy of Titan Books (www.titanbooks.com), we are offering three readers a £150 selection of titles exploring the weird and wonderful worlds of film and comic characters.

To be in with a chance of winning yourself a set, tell us what links the words on the spine of this issue. Answers to the usual address or comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by January 30. Good luck!



STARS SALUTE SERVICES AT MILLIES

THE dedication of soldiers has been celebrated at *The Sun's* annual star-studded military awards night – the Millies.

The Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall turned out for the event at London's National Maritime Museum, along with a host of celebrities including Katherine Jenkins, Simon Cowell and David Beckham.

As well as the usual categories, four special awards were presented to previous winners to mark the end of combat operations in Afghanistan – the firefighter, the lifesavers, bomb disposal and mentoring Afghan forces.

Among the soldiers to scoop a prize was WO2 Karl Let (RLC) for his work with 11 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Regiment and the Royal Engineers for their flood relief efforts last year.

Col Charlie Maconochie, former CO of 3rd Battalion, The Rifles, won the mentoring Afghan forces prize alongside other tri-Service personnel.

SCHOOLS REMINDER

REGULAR personnel are being reminded to register their children for the Service pupil premium if they attend non-fee paying schools.

The £300 grant is paid out by the Department for Education to help institutions support Forces pupils during difficult times.

To qualify parents must ensure their youngsters are registered as Service children with their schools before January 15.

For more information log on to www.gov.uk/service-premium-information-for-schools



IN BOOKS...



"Moving, fascinating and informative"



"A believable story about modern ops"

PAGES 80-81

SOLDIERS ASKED TO REGISTER SEXUALITY

THE sexuality of soldiers has started being monitored on JPA.

A new section on the home page of the personnel administration system asks troops to declare the information to help the military understand its workforce.

Data is already collected on age, race, gender, marital status, disability and religion but the Army officer responsible for equality and diversity said the latest checks would help to create better policies.

"We want to recruit from the breadth of society so need to know if there's something about us as an employer that is preventing gay and bisexual people from joining, or that is alienating them in some way," Lt Col Colette MacDonald (AGC (ETS)) explained.

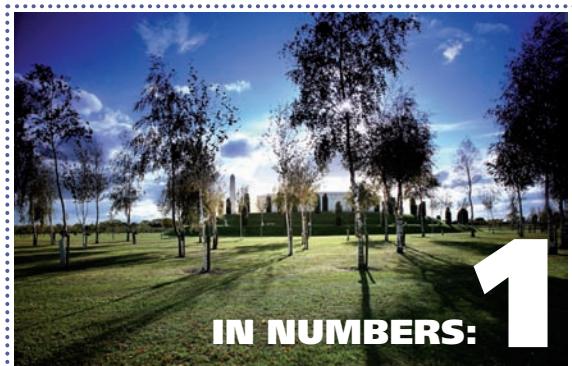
"We have to ensure there is equality of opportunity and at the moment we don't know if we are recruiting and retaining a proportionate number of homosexual and bisexual soldiers."

The change has been introduced across all three Services but personnel can opt out of declaring.

Where sexual orientation is registered by users, the information is held in strict confidence under the Data Protection Act.

This means that units and career managers will never be given details about the sexuality of their soldiers.

For more details read ABN 165/14.



1

IN NUMBERS:

Rank achieved by the National Memorial Arboretum in a public vote of the best places funded by the National Lottery in England during the last 20 years.



"IT TAUGHT ME WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO WORK TO THE POINT OF EXHAUSTION" - HERRICK'S HARDEST LESSONS, PAGES 97-98

IN NUMBERS:

£29M



Amount that has been loaned to Service families so far under the Forces Help to Buy scheme, which was launched in April last year.



Picture: Graeme Main

ARMY INSPIRES FIRM'S ASSAULT ON 'BIG SIX'

■ AN independent energy company run by a group of ex-Gurkhas has celebrated a successful year operating as an alternative to the bigger names in the industry.

Gnergy is headed up by Tikendra Dal Dewan (pictured), a former major in the Royal Gurkha Rifles, and is attracting an average of 50 new clients per month.

"Because of our background we have a military, family-friendly approach, which means that if people have a problem or want to discuss something they can visit us and chat over a cup of coffee," explained the chief executive officer.

The firm promises a hassle-free switch from other gas and electric providers without the need for contracts.

"We are confident that we have the best rates in town so people will stay with us," the veteran added.

"Being in this industry is like David versus Goliath but we just want to make things simple and offer a good deal."

CALLING ALL POETS

■ CREATIVE personnel are being urged to put pen to paper for a new book of verse to be sold in aid of the Royal Hospital Chelsea.

Poems from Heroes is being compiled by John Montgomery, who is looking for musings on various conflicts. To get involved email johnmontgomery57@yahoo.co.uk



HOME TRUTHS



A personal view from Catherine Spencer, chief executive of the Army Families Federation...



Buying doesn't always add up

IT'S good to hear that many soldiers and their families are benefiting from the Forces Help to Buy scheme, which should see them better prepared for life on civvy street.

But before you click onto Rightmove it's important to work out whether you can afford to purchase a property.

Will your salary cover the mortgage repayments and maintenance, for example?

Four years ago, after living in Army housing for 13 years, my soldier and I bought – and it has been a steep learning curve ever since as the realities of ownership have come home to roost.

We are both in full-time work but still found it financially challenging. So think hard before you are persuaded that it makes life better.

Firstly, before you have even stepped through the door, the process of purchasing a house is significantly more complex than getting a Service property allocated.

Then there's the frustrating process of securing a mortgage and accepting the gap between what you want and what you can afford.

Having an offer accepted and hoping that the sale completes is also a nail-biting experience, with solicitors' conveyancing fees making it considerably more expensive.

All in all, managing our budget has been a sobering process.

Money for nights out is much reduced and there is no doubt that, despite the current low interest rates,

I have far less in my pocket than I did when we lived in Service families' accommodation (SFA).

Our mortgage is more than we used to pay in rent and maintenance costs, no longer the preserve of CarillionAmey, have been eye-opening.

During the first month in our new place I felt as though I stood by the front door with my wallet open to any passing tradesmen.

Finding reliable and affordable plumbers or electricians was a minefield and understanding the cost of carpets, kitchens and new bathrooms made me pretty sentimental: maybe the kitchens and carpets in my SFA weren't that bad after all.

You may be a great tank driver or a brilliant shot but if you can't bleed a radiator or hang wallpaper your skill in the field counts for nothing as a homeowner.

We bought a Victorian property that is full of character but cold in the winter and very costly to maintain – do yourself a favour and buy a modern house with double glazing and efficient heating.

While we are fortunate to live in a friendly village with good transport links, my children miss living on a patch where friendships are easier to come by and, for me, despite having good pals locally I have noticed a difference when my soldier goes on tour – camaraderie is missing.

www.aff.org.uk

We've helped secure pension rights for all Armed Forces widows

Join us and see how we can help you



After seven years of careful and thoughtful campaigning we have finally **succeeded in persuading the government to change**

the rules so that all Armed Forces widows can now retain their pension on remarriage or cohabitation from April 2015. This will affect the lives of an estimated 400,000 women over the next 40 years.

As the pension watchdog for the Armed Forces community, **we exist to protect your interests and help you get the most from your pension.**

HOW WE CAN HELP YOU

Armed Forces Pensions are complex and we can **help you by advising** when to leave (and when not to), commutation, how to deal with pension troughs, the impact of AFPS2015 from next April, the implications of redundancy, divorce, how you might be able to top up your pension; and if you are a reservist, **what the new pension rules mean for you.** Help is available from our acknowledged Pension Advisory Service experts.



VALUABLE MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

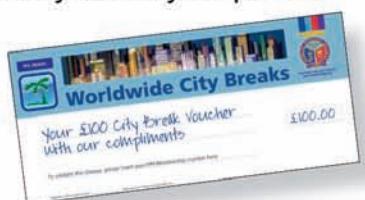
Our Members also have access to **valuable through-life services** with significant discounts from trusted affiliates in Travel, Legal & Financial, Healthcare and Motoring.



**Major General
John Moore-Bick CBE DL**
General Secretary of the Forces Pension Society

NOW IS THE TIME TO JOIN

April 2015 sees the introduction of the new Armed Forces Pension Scheme and you need to know how it affects you and your family. And if you join us online now (membership for you and your partner costs just £35 p.a.), **we'll send you a City Break voucher worth £100** (T's & C's apply); just visit our website at www.forcespensionsociety.org quoting Promo Code SOL2015.



JOIN US AND GET THE MOST FROM YOUR PENSION

Forces Pension Society

68 South Lambeth Road, Vauxhall, London, SW8 1RL
Tel: 020 7820 9988 - email: memsec@forpen.co.uk - www.forcespensionsociety.org



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THE BIG PICTURE



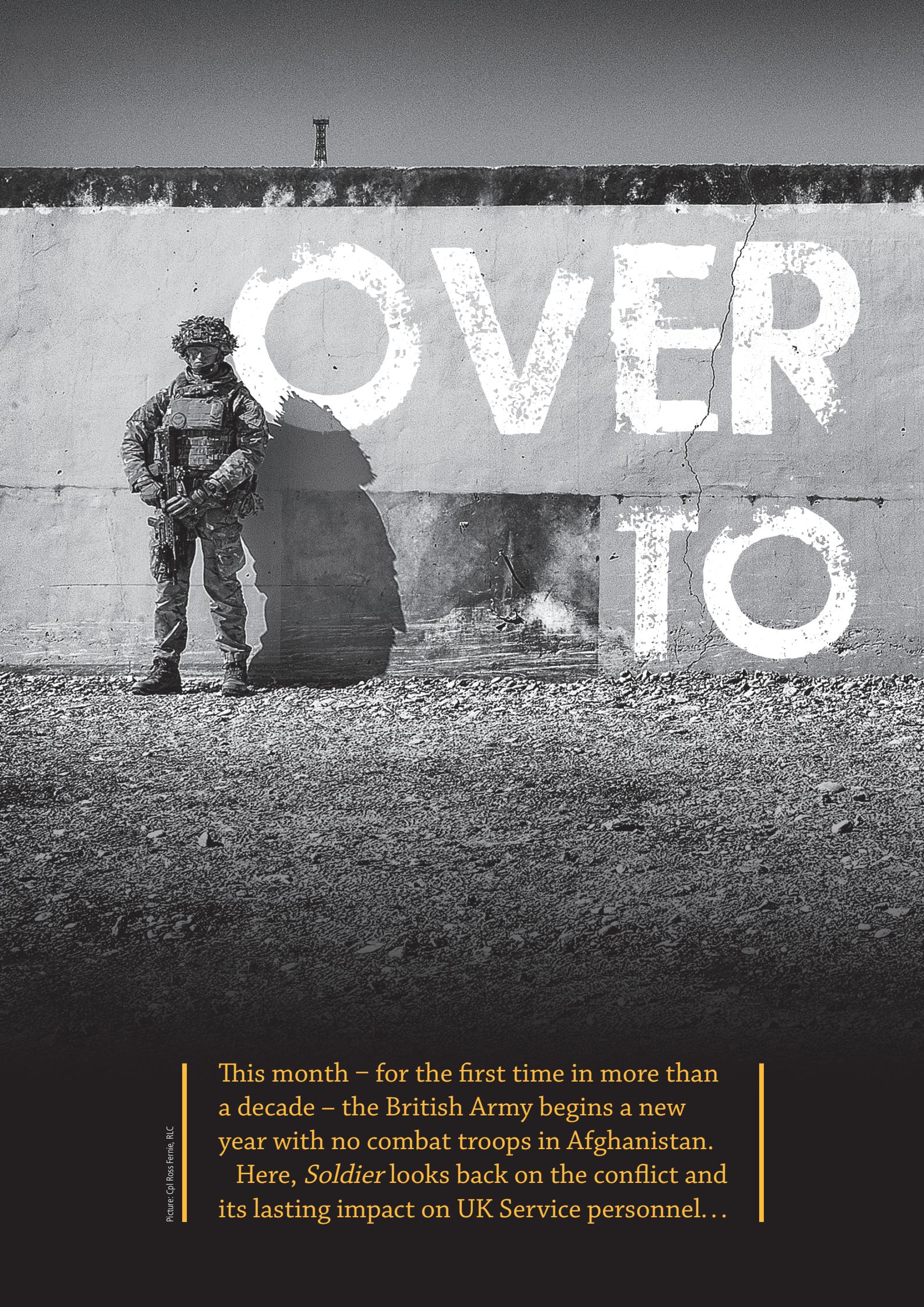


> AFGHANISTAN

'ENDEX'

THIRTEEN years after British personnel first deployed to Afghanistan, the combat mission is over. Throughout the campaign Service photographers were on hand to capture the action, as this selection of some of our favourite images shows.

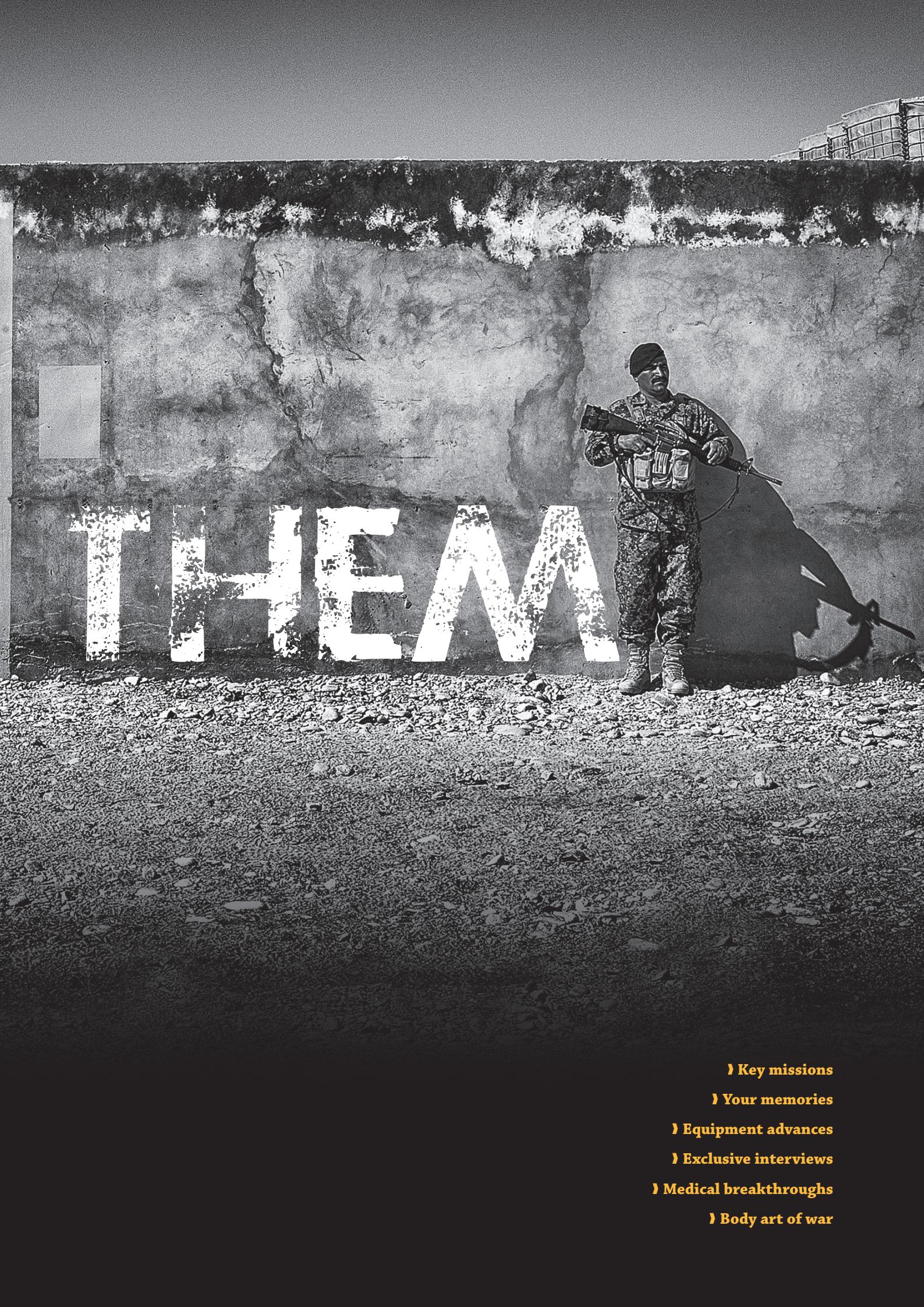
Pictures clockwise from left: Sgt Adrian Harlen, RLC; Sgt Wes Calder, RLC; Sgt Rob Knight, RLC; LA (Phot) Gaz Faulkner, RN; Sgt Rupert Frere, RLC



Picture: Cpl Ross Ferrie, RLC

This month – for the first time in more than a decade – the British Army begins a new year with no combat troops in Afghanistan.

Here, *Soldier* looks back on the conflict and its lasting impact on UK Service personnel...



HEAVY

- » Key missions
- » Your memories
- » Equipment advances
- » Exclusive interviews
- » Medical breakthroughs
- » Body art of war



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Support. You'll have a personal tutor to guide you through, and feedback on your studies.

Quality. The OU is ranked amongst the top UK universities for the quality of its teaching.

MISSION MEMORIES

Key moments from the war in Afghanistan, in soldiers' own words



| 2001

September 11 terrorist attacks in America.

“

I don't think many of us who were serving will forget that day in a hurry. I watched it unfold on TV with absolute incredulity. That was soon replaced with anger and a sense of foreboding. I only had a few months left, but remember turning to my then wife and saying 'I might not be leaving as soon as we thought'.

”

Rodge Tapply (ex-RE) on 9/11

October – Op Enduring Freedom. The first UK troops are deployed following an operation by 40 Commando, Royal Marines to secure the airfield at Bagram. The US-led mission targets the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

December – Battle of Tora Bora. Allied troops move into a cave complex in the east of the country, where they believe Osama bin Laden is hiding.

| 2002

January – The first contingent of Isaf troops deploy to the country, led by the UK and including soldiers from 18 other countries.

March – Op Anaconda. A US-led mission targets Taliban and al-Qaeda fugitives in the Paktia province.



May – Op Jacana. UK Royal Marines lead a deployment to the mountain regions to hunt out the remaining fugitives following March's operation.



"It's not like Kosovo or Bosnia, where you have nice Gucci showers," Sig Craig Smith (R Signals) told *Soldier* in 2002. "Here it is shower bags from water heated in burners and hand-washing of clothes. Your admin has to be spot on. "This is what we call a 'dot' deployment. By that we mean we do everything from scratch because there was nothing when we arrived here."

| 2003 | 2004

OP HERRICK 1

March – Op Telic begins in Iraq, jokingly referred to by personnel as standing for "tell everyone leave is cancelled".

April – First Herrick tour begins and members of 1st Battalion, The Green Howards deploy to the cities of Mazar-e-Sharif and Kabul.

September – The Provincial Reconstruction Team in Helmand opens, initially led by US.

From the *Soldier* archive...

November 2004

MILITARY policeman LCpl David Hogg (AGC (RMP)) was among the soldiers who witnessed the birth of democracy in Kabul.

He said: "There weren't that many vehicles on the streets during the elections but there were still lots of people out and about.

"They seemed to be very happy and there was almost a carnival atmosphere as people went to vote – it was amazing to be a part of that."

October – 1st Battalion, The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment deploys to Mazar-e-Sharif and Kabul.

November – Hamid Karzai is elected President of Afghanistan.



Sitting in a fully air conditioned cockpit and wearing my helmet, I couldn't hear any of the fighting below or even my rockets firing. But that cannon was awesome. It was like a sledgehammer coming through the floor with every round it fired – and it fires at ten rounds per second.



Apache pilot WO1 Ed Macy (AAC) describes Nowzad



I drank more than ten litres of water a day. Sweat comes out of you as quickly as you put it in; it's crippling.

Cpl Richard Astin (AGC (RMP)) recalls his tour in 2006



I remember the first initial contact with the enemy lasted for 36 hours non-stop; we fought through the night and it was pretty bloody. Back then it was really man against man and we were fighting at grenade-throwing and bayonet range.

Capt Doug Beattie (R Irish) recalls his earlier Herrick tours in the British Army Museum exhibition, Unseen Enemy.

2005 | 2006

OP HERRICK 2

March – 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles deploys to Mazar-e-Sharif and Kabul.

September – Afghanistan's first parliamentary elections in more than 30 years.

October – 1st Battalion, The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment deploys to Mazar-e-Sharif and Kabul.

OP HERRICK 3

January – UK announces that 3,300 British troops will deploy to lead Isaf in Helmand province.

Osprey body armour comes into service.

April – 16 Air Assault Brigade deploys as Task Force Helmand.

May – UK assumes lead of Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team from the US.

Insurgent activity steps up in southern Afghanistan, with the town of **Nowzad** coming under attack by the Taliban. Fighting between the opposition and British Forces escalates by the end of the year and into 2007, with troops nicknaming the region "Apocalypse Nowzad".

August – Cpl Bryan Budd (Para, pictured below) is killed while leading an attack against Taliban gunmen, an act that would see him awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Paying tribute to Cpl Budd at the time of his death, his CO, Lt Col Stuart Tootal, said: "Bryan was proud to call himself a paratrooper and we were proud to stand beside him. One of the very best in all respects, he will be sadly missed."



I drank more than ten litres of water a day. Sweat comes out of you as quickly as you put it in; it's crippling.

Cpl Richard Astin (AGC (RMP)) recalls his tour in 2006

OP HERRICK 5

September – Nimrod MR2 aircraft crashes, with 14 UK personnel killed. A review later criticises the MoD for sacrificing safety to cut costs.

October – 3 Commando Brigade deploys while Task Force Helmand Brigade HQ moves to Lashkar Gah.

December – The Mastiff arrives in theatre.



OP HERRICK 6

March – **Op Achilles**, Nato's drive to push the Taliban out of Helmand, begins.

April – 12 Mechanized Brigade deploys.

The first day of the operation was the most aggressive and intense. RPGs were flying around and we had two mine strikes within 24 hours. It was a long op but the lads coped very well.

”

Sgt Michael Woodrow (R Anglian) describes Op Lastay Kulang

Op Silver expels Taliban fighters from the town of Sangin. It is followed by **Op Silicon**, where British-led forces remove the enemy from Gereshk and surrounding countryside. Royal Engineers set up three camps in the area for the Afghan National Army. **Op Lastay Kulang** at the end of the month sees the removal of a Taliban force from the village of Kajaki Sofla by 1,000 UK troops plus Isaf soldiers and elements of local forces. On May 30, one of the US Chinooks crashes, killing a UK soldier and several US troops.





2008

OP HERRICK 7

June – Establishment of police mentoring groups. Isaf and Afghan forces isolate pockets of insurgent fighters in the the Upper Sangin Valley.

October – 52 Infantry Brigade deploys.

December – **Battle of Musa Qala**, a joint UK and Afghan bid to end Taliban occupation of the Helmand town. The fierce encounter involves more than 2,000 British troops, including Scots Guards, Household Cavalry and Royal Marines.

April – 16 Air Assault Brigade deploys.

May – Op Eagle's Eye. A two-month mission involving The Parachute Regiment and 5th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland, plus Afghan and Danish troops, to disrupt insurgents in the Upper Gereshk Valley.

August – Op Eagle's Summit. Isaf and Afghan National Army (ANA) troops transport a 220-tonne turbine to the Kajaki Dam through Taliban-controlled territory. It involves some 3,000 British personnel and is said to be one of their largest logistical operations since the Second World War.

October – 3 Commando Brigade deploys.

December – Op Red Dagger to capture four Taliban strongholds sees fierce trench battles around the town of Nad-e Ali. British soldiers were involved in intense firefights that lasted from a few minutes to several hours.

OP HERRICK 8

From the Soldier archive... September 2008 BATTLE-HARDENED soldiers based in the badlands of Helmand province have been involved in daily clashes with the Taliban.

According to reports from the front-line, troops from 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment at Forward Operating Base Inkerman in the Upper Sangin Valley have been engaging enemy fighters on eight out of every ten patrols mounted.

Platoon commander Lt Wes Smart said: “Fear lives in every man and dealing with that is part of soldiering. It is a cold courage that the boys display every time they step out on patrol.”



OP HERRICK 9

2009

OP HERRICK 10

April – 19 Light Brigade deploys.

Jackal 2 – An upgrade to the WMIK Jackal arrives in Afghanistan.



June – Op Panther's Claw. A large and bloody British-led offensive to secure various canal and river crossings and drive the Taliban out of Helmand's most populated areas. After a large air insertion into Babaji, spearheaded by 300 troops from 3rd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland, and five weeks of intense firefighting soldiers drive the enemy out.



Mk 7 helmet is introduced.

“I expect that 19 Light Brigade’s tour will be remembered for the hardest fight the British Army has encountered in Helmand province,” said Brig Tim Radford, commander of the formation, in 2009.

“But to selectively remember the sacrifice without the progress would be to forget the reason that so many laid down their lives.”



For what seemed like ages the air filled with the sound of gun fire and the sonic cracks as Taliban bullets whizzed past our heads. As we pushed them back an RAF Tornado flew in low drowning out every noise in its wake, reinforcing how serious we were in our intent that day. The team had been awesome. We pushed back the Taliban, swept through their compounds and captured a raft of components destined to make deadly IEDs.

Diary extract from Maj Paul Smyth (Rifles) reflecting on Christmas in Helmand in 2009



“
My team dealt with a lot of amputees and gunshot wounds. Some of the injuries were awful and seeing things like that was quite shocking.

“
Lt Col Sharon Stewart (QARANC) describes Camp Bastion's Role 3 Hospital during Herrick 13



“
At the Koran readings people can see that we're not here to occupy the land, we are here to help people get back on their feet.

“
Gnr Ishan Mahmood (RHA) speaks to *Soldier* about his tour in 2011



2010

OP HERRICK 11

October – 11 Light Brigade deploys and President Hamid Karzai wins second term. UK announces deployment of 500 extra troops, taking its total to 9,500.

November – An inside attack at Shin Kalay police station leaves five UK soldiers dead.

“Every day you went out on the ground and tried to not go into an area that would have an IED.

“On patrol for four or five hours you'd be thinking 'what's everyone doing, where are they standing?' and praying you didn't hear that noise.

“You didn't want it happening on your patrol.”

WO2 Paul Baines (Coldm Gds) recalls Herrick 11



“These poor guys had been betrayed by the very men they were there to help. The dead and wounded hadn't stood a chance.

“They had been caught completely unaware after returning from patrol. They'd got back to the assumed safety of the compound, thrown off their helmets and body armour and put down their weapons for a break as all of us had done hundreds of times before.”

Extract from *Helmand to the Himalayas* by David Wiseman (ex-Yorks) describing the Shin Kalay police station attack

OP HERRICK 12

OP HERRICK 13

OP HERRICK 14

February – **Op Moshtarak**. The largest joint offensive to date, the mission sees 15,000 British, American and Afghan soldiers eliminate the Taliban from their strongholds in central Helmand.

Husky tactical support vehicle enters service in Afghanistan.

April – 4 Mechanized Brigade deploys.

New multi-terrain pattern uniform is introduced to provide better camouflage in Afghanistan.

October – 16 Air Assault Brigade deploys and Nimrod begins to be withdrawn from theatre. Wolfhound enters service.

November – Nato agrees to hand over security to Afghan forces by end of 2014.

Osprey body armour is heavily revised.

The weight of the SA80 weapon is reduced by a kilogram.



December – Warthog tracked and armoured vehicle arrives in Afghanistan.

April – 3 Commando Brigade deploys.

May – Osama bin Laden is killed by a US commando during a Navy Seal raid on his compound in Pakistan.

July – British troops hand over security of Lashkar Gah to Afghan forces.

“
I just wanted to say that it was an honour to serve alongside every one of you. It sounds very cliched but commanding riflemen on operations is the greatest honour that I can imagine. To a man brave and committed, I only hope at the time of writing that I was able to live up to this for however much of the deployment I survived.

“

Letter from Lt Daniel Clack (Rifles) to his comrades in the event of his death. He was killed in action on August 12

October – 20 Armoured Brigade deploys.



2012

OP HERRICK 15

OP HERRICK 16

OP HERRICK 17

June – LCpl James Ashworth (Gren Gds) dies while making a lone advance on insurgents in Nahr-e Saraj. The Serviceman would later be awarded the second Victoria Cross of the campaign.



LCpl Ashworth showed extraordinary courage to close on a determined enemy.

His professionalism under pressure and ability to remain calm in what was a chaotic situation is testament to his character.



Platoon commander, Capt Mike Dobbin, pays tribute to his soldier

The first of the Army's new Foxhound protected patrol vehicles enters service.

September – Insurgents attack Camp Bastion. Eight UK personnel and a civilian contractor are wounded.

October – 4 Mechanized Brigade deploys.



February – The Black Hornet unmanned air system is introduced.



April – 1 Mechanized Brigade deploys.

June – The ANA takes control of all military and security operations in Afghanistan.

October – 7 Armoured Brigade deploys.

He was so close I didn't get a chance to swing my rifle and injure him, but I suddenly realised I had my kukri knife in my Osprey so I took it out and started to hit him with it.

When I saw him I thought, I don't want to die, I want to live.

If I am alive I can save my colleagues. I have to do something. So, like a madman, I did everything.



Military Cross winner LCpl Tuljung Gurung (RGR) on fighting off an insurgent who attacked Patrol Base Sparta in Nahr-e Saraj when he was on guard duty on Herrick 17

2013

OP HERRICK 18

OP HERRICK 19

OP HERRICK 20

October – Official end to the conflict in Afghanistan as Camp Bastion is handed over to local forces. Combat troops leave the country.

No matter how much I bathe, the blood remains thick; I've been to my doctor, yet I remain sick; I try and be normal but my mind refuses to let me; I left the war but the war never left me.

Poem extract by Gary Green, ex-Rifles



Gearing up for change

Mastiff's impact
on the urgent
operational
requirement
process will have
a lasting effect on
Army equipment

Report: Steven Muncey

Oall the urgent operational requirements that were undertaken during the Afghanistan campaign, few will have more influence on the future of the British Army than the Mastiff programme.

Developed in response to the need for a blast-resistant patrol vehicle, the resulting behemoth not only allowed infantry troops to move around combat areas more securely than before, it introduced a new category of vehicle to the Service.

"Mastiff was the first platform of its type for the Army," said John Douglas, a member of the development team at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).

"We had combat logistics vehicles such as trucks and Land Rovers and there was armour, but Mastiff represented a whole new class that sat somewhere between them."

The first version was delivered to troops in Afghanistan in 2007 and it has been revised twice since then, siring several pups such as the similarly sized Wolfhound cargo variant and the smaller and more mobile Ridgback.

When the Mastiff first arrived in theatre, troops quickly realised that wheeled patrol platforms not only offered a less threatening presence to the local populace than tracked vehicles but they had certain operational advantages as well.

"It literally changed the Army's tactics," said Maj Alan Paramore (RLC), who was a logistic support manager on the Mastiff project from its inception in 2006.

"It reduced the need for so many combat logistic patrols, for example, partly because it can do four miles to the gallon."

"The patrol platforms being used at the time were tracked and heavy, like the Warrior. That's a fine vehicle

Faithful friend:
When the Mastiff arrived in Afghanistan it transformed the safety of soldiers out on patrol

in certain roles but it does one mile to the gallon – if you're lucky.

"When Mastiff arrived it meant forward bases required maybe a third less fuel to be delivered, which cut down logistic patrols and the number of personnel exposed to danger through supplying that fuel."

Fitted with a V-shaped hull, internal protective liners, advanced blast resistant armour and seats that helped absorb the shock of an IED detonation, the Mastiff transformed the fortunes of soldiers out on patrol, with incidents recorded of vehicles being blown off their wheels across to the other side of the road and the personnel inside walking away virtually unscathed.

So successful was it in Afghanistan, the Army has decided to keep the Mastiff in its order of battle to equip three protected mobility battalions as part of its Reaction Force armoured infantry brigades.

But even more important than the vehicle's influence on the way the Service does its business was its effect on the whole urgent operational requirement (UOR) process.

"It's fair to say the Mastiff project changed the perception of what was possible," said Maj Paramore.

Ed Hyland, part of the protective mobility team at DE&S, agreed.

"Before Iraq and Afghanistan, UORs were generally quite small in scope, consisting of individual or personal equipment and minor modifications to vehicles," he said.

"There had been nothing before on the scale of going out and designing a new and complex vehicle."

At the start of the project in August 2006 a total of 108 new American-built Cougar platforms, used extensively by the US Marine Corps, were purchased.

These hulls were devoid of anything but basic equipment.

The target was to fully adapt them to the British Army's particular needs and have them ready for deployment

by the end of 2006.

Some 57 alterations were required, such as bolstering the armour, introducing the Bowman communications pack, adding upgraded electrical systems and 306-degree surveillance cameras as well as turret modifications including weapons mounts.

Yet, incredibly, from receiving the first hulls in early December 2006, the initial batch were deployed to Iraq in just 23 days, with all alterations complete and operators and maintainers fully trained. The remainder were fielded in Iraq and Afghanistan by July 2007.

"To put that in perspective, a vehicles programme of about 100 platforms or more would, in previous years, have taken about four to five



years," commented John Douglas, DE&S's through-life support manager for the Mastiff fleet.

Echoing his colleague's remarks, Maj Paramore added: "The time frames we pushed for back then mean that the multi-year periods normally slated for this type of project on core equipment programmes are now being seriously re-evaluated."

Another huge influence the Mastiff project had on equipment procurements was the emphasis placed on servicing and repairs. ▶

Mastiff was the first platform of its type for the Army



Mastiff firsts

Innovations that made their way into other vehicles

The 'tell tale'

● MASTIFF'S blast shielding seats have what's called a "tell-tale". This metal bracket bends to indicate the force of the blast on the seat and its occupant. After an IED strike the vehicle commander looks at all the tell-tales and, if bent, the crew concerned are ordered to get checked by a medic, regardless of whether they think they're hurt or not.

Vehicle emergency lighting

● WHEN the platform stops at a steep angle or is immersed in water the exits illuminate in white light, the handles in green and battle locks in red. It's now a feature on nearly all patrol vehicles.

Roll-over trainer

● SOLDIERS deploying with Mastiff complete three sessions in a simulator that looks like a giant tumble dryer. The mounted hull, introduced in 2011, rotates so that personnel can learn how to escape safely when the vehicle comes to rest at different angles. All future vehicle programmes will include roll-over training.



“Our experience in developing this vehicle represented a shift in thinking from before Op Herrick,” the Army officer explained.

“Blast repair and logistic support became vital and central to the way we thought through the project.

“It’s all very well having a great platform out on operations but if you can’t repair it it’s of limited use.

“The project really changed equipment support in theatre because up until then any vehicle hit by an IED had to be shipped back to the UK.”

The starting point for the development team was to standardise many of the components for the Mastiff and its derivatives such as the ambulance version, Ridgback and Wolfhound, among others.

“We wanted complete logistic compatibility of the fleet from day one, by design,” said Maj Paramore.

“We ensured they all had the same make and size of tyres, the same axles, blast attenuating seats, interiors, engines and gearboxes. That’s important when you’re getting so many vehicles damaged by IEDs.”

One of the most significant innovations in this area was the development of blast packs to speed up the repair of damaged vehicles.

The introduction of these in late 2010 meant that if, for example, the back of a vehicle was ripped apart by an IED the repair crew could obtain one pack to rebuild the whole section.

“Before, personnel out in theatre would have spent a week searching for the part numbers they needed to replace the components,” explained Maj Paramore. “But the packs sped up the repair process immensely.

“The record for making an IED-damaged Mastiff ready for operations again – and it was a case where the whole front axle and suspension was blown away – is eight hours.

“I know of Mastiffs that were rebuilt many times due to IED strikes and, statistically, every one in Afghanistan was repaired three times because of this damage.”

The Army now has 35 separate blast packs for the fleet of Mastiff-derived vehicles, and each one is labelled with just one part number, making the whole repair stage as efficient as possible.

“Thousands of soldiers have survived bomb blasts in these assets,” added Maj Paramore. “But if we hadn’t had this streamlined process in place we would have run out of vehicles in months.”

With adaptability and agility being among the Army’s most important priorities as it looks to 2020 and beyond there seems little doubt that the lessons learnt through the Mastiff UOR programme will feature heavily in the Service’s core equipment strategy for years to come. ■



Timely additions

Some of the most significant UORs that made it to Afghanistan

CVR(T) armour

In 2011 the armour on all five vehicles that make up the CVR(T) family – Scimitar, Spartan, Samson, Sultan and Samaritan – was upgraded.

Foxhound

This light protected patrol vehicle arrived in Helmand province in June 2012. It offers unprecedented protection for a vehicle of its class and an ability to perform well in many different terrains.

SA80 upgrade

In 2010 its weight was decreased by around a kilogram through the use of a polycarbonate magazine. A detachable cover offered protection against sand and a clear window showed bullets that remained. A rail system replaced the plastic hand guard allowing external attachments such as the latest laser light module to be fitted.

Mastiff

In a process of constant evolution, Mastiffs 2 and 3 were introduced from 2009, featuring more advanced armour, increased crew capacity, uprated axles and suspension for Afghan terrain along with a new electronic turret traverse mechanism. A situational awareness system incorporating a thermal imager was also added.

Osprey body armour

Introduced in 2006, Osprey represented a major improvement over its predecessor. Since its initial release it has gone through several design modifications after feedback from serving soldiers, including the introduction of new armour for the pelvic region in 2010.



Night vision goggles

In 2010, a UOR was placed for 11,000 sets of third generation night vision goggles, providing every soldier in Afghanistan with this highly effective piece of kit that combines thermal and infrared imaging.



Husky

Designed to be operational on almost all terrain to act as a supply and fire support vehicle. It entered service in Afghanistan in 2010 and is able to carry one tonne of supplies.

Jackal

Developed to directly replace the WMIK Land Rover in 2008. It was specifically designed for Afghanistan and armed with heavy machine gun or grenade launcher. An updated version – Jackal 2 – arrived in 2009.



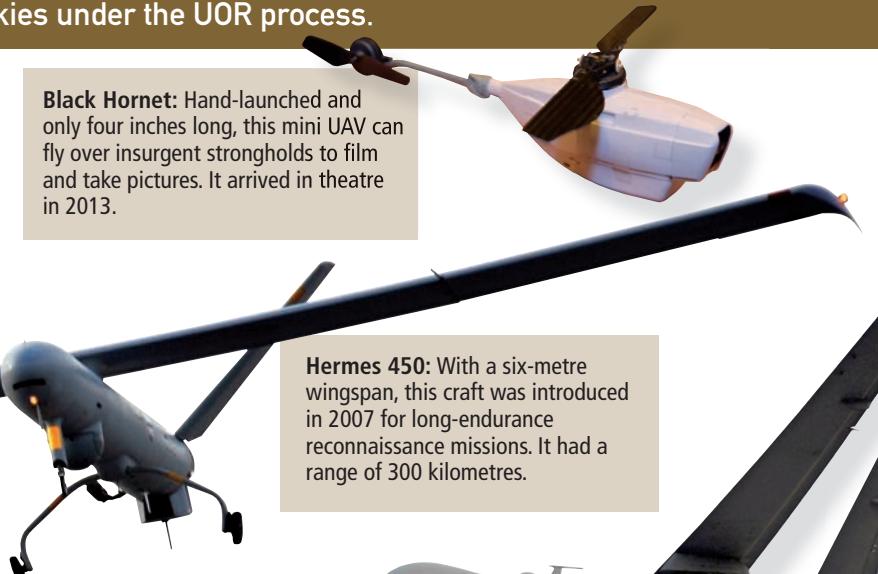
ISTAR

The complex terrain in Afghanistan saw a raft of unmanned air systems take to the skies under the UOR process.

Tarantula Hawk: A vertical take-off and landing device to examine possible IED sites. It entered service in 2010.



Black Hornet: Hand-launched and only four inches long, this mini UAV can fly over insurgent strongholds to film and take pictures. It arrived in theatre in 2013.



Hermes 450: With a six-metre wingspan, this craft was introduced in 2007 for long-endurance reconnaissance missions. It had a range of 300 kilometres.

Desert Hawk: A small plastic UAV with a 1.3m wingspan used from 2006 for tactical surveillance over a range of 14 kilometres.



Reaper: Operated by the RAF, Britain's only armed remotely-piloted aircraft was introduced in 2007 to provide all-weather, intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance.



Interview: Steven Muncey

IT HERE has literally been a revolution in military medicine as a consequence of our work in southern Afghanistan," said Brig Tim Hodgetts, the medical director at Defence Medical Services, based at University of Birmingham Research Park.

The senior officer believes the raft of changes instituted during the course of the campaign in Helmand province led to seriously wounded British soldiers being treated by the most advanced and effective trauma care units the world has ever seen.

"Helmand was transformational for us in terms of the volume and complexity of the injuries we were dealing with," he told *Soldier*. "We had to take enormous steps but Camp Bastion's hospital became a leader in the field."

The journey to the top had taken around a decade, beginning in 1999, in Kosovo, when the Army started measuring itself against the NHS.

"We deployed specialist emergency teams for the first time and we compared our data with Frimley Park in Surrey," explained Brig Hodgetts.

"The figures proved that for the first time we were as good as a major NHS hospital at home."

By 2009 the picture had changed significantly, with all the evidence now showing that the Service's medical teams in Afghanistan were pulling well clear of their civilian counterparts.

Coincidentally, this was the bloodiest year of the whole campaign, when 108 British personnel were killed and 157 seriously injured.

Of the wounded, a staggering 25 per cent were categorised as "unexpected survivors".

This classification is based on an internationally recognised model used by clinicians to calculate the likely rates of survival for particular wounds, taking into account age, gender and the patient's response to their injuries.

At the time, the best rate among NHS facilities was just six per cent.

The Army was benefitting from a number of inspired medical innovations – and nearly all were introduced in Afghanistan in direct response to the huge influx of troops very seriously wounded by improvised explosive devices.

Brig Hodgetts, who completed three Herrick tours and was medical director of Camp Bastion's main hospital in 2009, was the architect of many of these transformations.

Here, he talks us through the key changes at every stage of the trauma care process that have made the British Army the envy of the medical world...

Brig Tim Hodgetts



1. AT THE SCENE

"IN 2005 we introduced a fundamental change to the way we taught first aid and resuscitation to soldiers.

We stopped teaching ABC – airway, breathing, circulation – and switched to CABC, or catastrophic haemorrhage, airway, breathing and circulation.

From 2006 troops were issued with tourniquets because what kills them avoidably on the battlefield is bleeding, usually from the limbs.

If you've lost one or more and you're losing out blood the first thing you need to do is get a tourniquet put on – you can deteriorate to a critical point in seconds.

Also, for the first time, we set about teaching Army personnel how to apply their own.

I know of one soldier who lost three limbs to an IED explosion and still had the presence of mind to stick a tourniquet on one of his damaged limbs with his remaining arm while his mates rushed forward to treat him.

When I started to talk about CABC to the military medical community it was considered heresy at first because it flew in the face of 20 years of dogma, but we proved it was right for us.

Our patient survival data proved that tourniquets saved lives. "

RESCUE REVOLUTION

How the British Army's experiences in Afghanistan led to world-beating standards of trauma care

2. INITIAL TREATMENT

“ IN 2006 we introduced combat team medics. We felt there should be someone with first aid skills between the standard soldier and highly qualified personnel.

These Servicemen and women have additional training and an extra pouch of kit, including special dressings impregnated with substances that stick to damaged blood vessels that you stuff into a deep wound.

They were a huge innovation because they can control bleeding in areas with major blood vessels like the groin, armpit and neck, where it is just not possible to apply a tourniquet.

Initially, the requirement was to train one in four soldiers to be team medics but it proved so popular among troops that it progressed to around one in two during the later tours of Afghanistan.

This scheme has also produced a different attitude to first aid among the ranks too.

Ten years ago it would have been, ‘yeah, whatever’, to medical training but, especially in pre-deployment exercises, you see people absolutely concentrate on this stuff.

They ask the right questions and take it very seriously because they know it could save them or their mate.

That’s down to experiences in Afghanistan and the very practical training we now provide in place of the previous theory-based courses. ”



3. EVACUATION



“ IN EFFECT, WE WERE TAKING THE TREATMENT ROOM TO THE INJURED SOLDIER ”

“ THE Medical Emergency Response Team (MERT), a Chinook helicopter carrying highly specialist medical personnel consisting of a consultant, an emergency nurse and two paramedics, evolved substantially in Afghanistan from 2006.

In effect, we were taking the treatment room to the injured soldier

because this team was capable of undertaking advanced resuscitation in the back of the helicopter.

This was vital because we all know about the golden hour.

Soldiers who would have died were now surviving because of more advanced first aid and better emergency and pre-hospital treatment. ” ”





4. IN-FLIGHT

“THROUGH our experience of treating soldiers in Afghanistan we’ve taken enormous steps in understanding blood clotting and the factors that affect it.

In 2007 the MERT helicopters started carrying blood but by 2009 they also carried plasma, which enables blood to clot.

In previous campaigns, injured personnel would have been given saline initially, which has no oxygen-carrying capacity or clotting factors within it.

All it does is swell your volume of blood. It’s a very short-term measure. But one of the main things that determines your survivability after serious injury is how abnormal your blood clotting becomes and how that is treated.

When you are very badly injured not only do you lose lots of blood but what is left doesn’t clot well.

Because of detailed studies conducted in the civilian medical world, we knew there were hugely increased mortality rates among those with abnormal clotting.

So we decided to attack the problem as soon as possible by providing plasma onboard the helicopter to enable the patient’s blood to clot properly and enable it to plug damaged vessels quickly.

By pushing the plasma supply forward in the treatment process we started delivering people to the hospital in a much better state than had been seen previously.”

“ON Op Herrick 12 it was very busy. There were nearly 1,600 patients in three months and we were working 18-hour days.

“In many ways that was easier to manage. Trying to stay motivated when there is not much going on is quite difficult.

“There is a lot of honour in working here. It has become the best trauma unit in the world and we sustained that despite the number of injuries coming through.

“We have improved military surgery beyond recognition in the space of ten years and that is something we can all be proud of.”

Maj Ian Davies (QARANC), officer in charge of theatres

5. AT THE HOSPITAL



“IT was during the Herrick tours that we first started using what is called three-dimensional resuscitation.

In the NHS you still go down a two-dimensional route, where the patient arrives in the emergency department, receives some form of resuscitation, moves to the imaging area for an X-ray or scan before going back to the emergency department to wait for surgery.

Basically, the patient moves in a line and this is what we used to do.

But in 2009 we changed this so that critical patients went straight to the operating table and everyone came to them, much like a Formula One pit crew attending to a racing car.

We would pull in a team to continue the resuscitation while the surgeons scrubbed up and prepared their kit.

Meanwhile, the nursing teams would be squeezing the blood and plasma into the patient at the same time as the anaesthetist was putting him to sleep.

The radiologist would be in there too, leaning over the patient to do X-rays and other scans deemed necessary.

Blood samples would have been taken as soon as the wounded soldier had entered the hospital so the lab team would also be busy tailoring blood products to his condition to maximise his or her survival chances.

Around 2009 we introduced a machine that could analyse a patient’s blood in near real time so we could alter the balance of it very quickly.

Back in the UK, this technique had only ever been used in liver surgery because that operation nearly always requires continual blood replacement.

Without it, seriously wounded personnel can experience a very rough ride during the days following surgery because the medical teams would be struggling to manage their blood clotting, but now it can be almost normal by the time they come off the operating table.

So by 2009 we were doing the lifesaving stuff very quickly rather than having to process the patient down a line and wait for surgery to get underway.

Overall, this three-dimensional approach has made an enormous difference to our performance markers.

For instance, the best NHS survival rate for traumatic cardiac arrest, where the heart stops because of serious injury, was recorded by the London Helicopter Emergency Medical Service, with 7.5 per cent – although where the patient bled out profusely the figure was lower.

But thanks to our changes we recorded a 24 per cent survival rate for this type of patient, and most of the personnel we treated had suffered extreme blood loss.”

HEALING HANDS

Medics lift the lid on their lifesaving role

The Role 3 hospital at Camp Bastion propelled standards in trauma care to a whole new level during the Herrick campaign and *Soldier* was lucky enough to have a behind-the-scenes tour during the magazine’s last trip to theatre in May 2014.

For many personnel, postings to the centre fell on a regular basis and they shared their reflections on life at one of the military’s premier medical facilities during some quiet time on the wards.

“WHEN it was at its peak this place was pretty full-on. We were dealing with everything from the usual non-battle injuries to IED strikes.

“I certainly feel as if I have benefitted professionally from coming here and working in such challenging circumstances.”

Reservist Maj Ernie Dagless (QARANC), 2iC of the operating department



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Forces TV video journalists report from operations, military exercises and live events to provide news and features from the UK and overseas.

The channel works with charities and organisations that support the serving and veteran communities to cover areas such as welfare and policy changes.

Both Sky and the BBC are supporting Forces TV with content, and programmes from specialist documentary-makers are also on the schedule.



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~~EXPLOSIVE ACCOUNTS~~

The stories of two British soldiers who took on and defeated Helmand's deadly IED threat. One survived his experience, the other was not so fortunate...

THE IED defined Op Herrick," says Capt Adam Galloway (RLC), who was heralded for defusing 22 bombs in one compound in Lashkar Gah and whose work was captured in the BBC documentary *The Bomb Squad*. "Everything we did as British soldiers was pinned heavily on countering this threat.

"But as soon as we worked out how to defend against a certain type of device the Taliban would alter the weapon.

"Each bomb was hugely different, which is why Afghanistan was not the same as Northern Ireland or Iraq where IEDs were quite standardised.

"It was an ongoing cat-and-mouse scenario."

This recollection will be familiar to all Service personnel who served on the front line during the war in Helmand province.

After being used only occasionally at the start of the conflict, the IED soared in popularity to become the weapon of choice against coalition forces in 2009.

By the end of last year some 226 UK troops had lost their lives to the deadly devices, with many more suffering life-changing injuries.

However, the tireless work of Britain's soldiers in trying to clear these bombs meant that a huge number were discovered and destroyed before they could harm civilians or military personnel.

Here, we reveal the stories of two bold Servicemen who confronted the danger head-on during the Army's bloodiest year in Helmand province.

WO2 Paul Baines narrowly survived a double IED strike that killed his friend during a patrol in Taliban territory.

He was later awarded a Military Cross for his bravery that day.

SSgt Olaf Schmid (RLC), a counter-IED expert, wasn't so lucky.

He died on October 31, 2009 – just 48 hours after being interviewed about his high-risk job by *Soldier's* Joe Clapson at Forward Operating Base Jackson.

Here we reveal his never-before-published words.

Together, the two accounts show how, even in the toughest of times, British troops refused to be defeated by the IED threat – even if that meant having to make the ultimate sacrifice.

RESCUE EFFORT

Interview: Becky Clark

● WHILE explosive ordnance disposal experts waged a war against the Taliban bomb makers one device at a time, Infantry troops conducted daily patrols under the constant threat of death or injury from the hidden menace.

In 2009 WO2 Paul Baines (Coldm Gds) was on the ground in a Taliban stronghold when a double IED strike killed his close friend, Sgt John Amer (Coldm Gds), and left another colleague a double amputee.

The then platoon sergeant's section had followed another multiple down an alleyway but the soldier operating the Vallon detector triggered a device, which took off his leg.

As the group attempted to stretcher him out, another bomb detonated, blowing off the first casualty's other leg, as well as both of Sgt Amer's.

"This was the very pinnacle of the IED threat," recalled WO2 Baines.

"All the Taliban were doing at the time was planting devices to catch us out and then following it up with an ambush.

"We had an engineer lose both legs, a bloke lose one leg and a medic lose both legs just outside camp before the incident with John but that day really showed that we could go down a route we thought was clear and there would still be devices there.

"People could walk over an area, not set an IED off and then the next bloke could trigger it.

"There were no rules – they were totally indiscriminate."

As the only member of the stretcher party left relatively unscathed in the explosion, WO2 Baines gave lifesaving first aid before carrying one of his injured comrades to safety across ground potentially littered with IEDs.

"That scenario taught me so much about what to do and I put it into practice later on," he continued.

"After that it was my mission that I wasn't going to lose anyone or take another casualty."

Recalling a later incident he added: "One day we went into an area to clear some bombs from the junction of a road that the civilian population were using.

"The Royal Engineer search team cordoned it off and went in to start clearing it.

"I was sat in an irrigation ditch about 50 metres away.

"We heard a boom and we all knew it was the sound of an IED – you feel the explosion come up through the ground.

"I thought there would probably be casualties so straight away I was running to where they were, down the track they'd already cleared.

"Four months of doing this quite regularly had created a thought pattern so immediately we all knew exactly what to do.

"By the time we got there the section commander had applied a tourniquet to the injured guy, who had lost an arm and a leg.

"We stretchered him back to the holding area while we waited for the helicopter.

"The young lads were in front of me working on the casualty and it was like he was lying on an operating table.

WE HEARD
A BOOM
AND KNEW
IT WAS
THE SOUND
OF AN IED

"They were writing things on his head, making sure the field dressings were in place – these are infantry soldiers, not medical corps.

"It was so fluent. From the moment it was called out, the American Pedro helicopter took 11 minutes to come to us and deliver him back.

"It was like doing a scenario on exercise for people to watch, but for real.

"It was like clockwork."

However, such well polished drills came at a high price.

In the hospital on the day Sgt Amer died, WO2 Baines and the other walking wounded were given the chance to say farewell to their comrade as doctors switched off his life support machine.

Recalling the harrowing moment, he said: "The injuries were too severe and they couldn't save him.

"I touched my fist to his and said goodbye. It was so strange.

"This was someone I had spent my whole career with and woken up next to that morning.

"But although John died, it saved more lives. It definitely saved mine and those of the people I was working with, because I made decisions for the rest of the tour based on what took place that day.

"I didn't want it happening again on my patrol." ■

Harsh lessons: WO2 Baines and his men learnt how to deal with the IED threat through bitter experience

ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

Interview: Joe Clapson

● YOU only realise what genuine courage looks like when you come face to face with it.

And a Serviceman who worked tirelessly to thwart a vicious enemy's strategy, personally rendering safe 64 IEDs with his own hands, fits that description perfectly.

Just weeks before WO2 Baines' ill-fated patrol, SSgt Olaf Schmid, a high-threat IED operator, paused during a game of cards with his mates to speak to *Soldier* in Sangin on October 29.

The fearless Royal Logistic Corps soldier, surrounded by colleagues in the counter-IED team, spoke casually about his passion for infuriating the enemy and the thrill of tackling lethal devices to ensure safety for his friends and the Afghan nationals.

"You have to have your wits about you, but it's a great adrenalin rush. Each time it's one less bomb on the road," he said.

Two days later the self-deprecating ammunition technician, who learned his trade with the bomb squadron in Northern Ireland, was killed instantly by an IED.

During the course of his tour, which had started in June, the Serviceman had attended 11 finds of bomb-making equipment.

Explaining his intensely hazardous role within the IED disposal team, SSgt Schmid – known as Oz – said: "On average, a device will cause injuries to anyone in a 50-metre radius if it goes off.

"For someone on top of it, like me, it's game over."

At Forward Operating Base Jackson, SSgt Schmid and his colleagues talked through their vital role at the epicentre of the deadly environment in Helmand province.

Whenever the beep sounds on a patrolling soldier's detector, these personnel would walk out to render the threat safe.

"We are right in the most dangerous part of what's going on out here, but it's good. It's one of the only jobs in theatre where you get to directly ruin the enemy's plans," he continued.

The unflappable soldier went on to describe the region he had found himself in.

"In Sangin there's not too far to travel as there's lots of IEDs," he said.

Whenever a suspected bomb was found the advance search team moved in.

On confirmation of an IED, SSgt Schmid's men would go forward to disrupt the device, before retreating and detonating it safely.

This tense process, which saved innumerable lives, was a typical day at the office for the man known by all at

Battlegroup North as "a legend".

Each time he successfully dealt with a Taliban bomb he would walk into the smoke, just to ensure it was completely safe.

Such actions meant that it was not long before British counter-IED teams became famed the world over for the manner in which they operated.

Not only did they risk life and limb to make IEDs safe, they took extreme care to extract information and evidence from each tiny component.

"People think we're nuts but at the end of the day we get the best training in the world – what I learnt while I was in Northern Ireland was the gold standard," SSgt Schmid told *Soldier*.

"All I want is to disrupt, render safe and exploit.

"Because of our training we're able to do that, whereas other teams just blow them up."

The death of SSgt Schmid resulted in the loss of an impressive skill set as well as an irreplaceable character.

But the legacy of his relentless determination to destroy the Taliban's plans lived on to the end of the operation.

As IEDs fast became the principal threat to troops in Afghanistan, the units defeating the devices were in higher demand than ever before.

Smiling over the top of his cup of coffee, SSgt Schmid explained that most high-threat operators carried out about 100 IED jobs on a six-month tour.

Three years previously, three jobs in the same amount of time was the average.

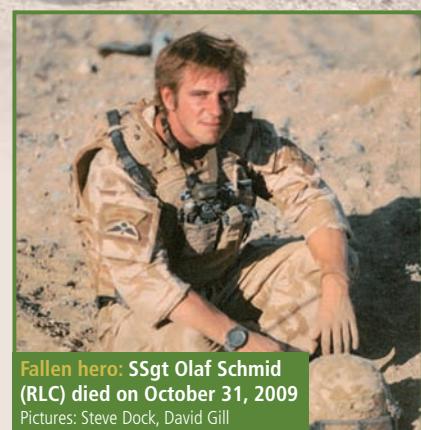
SSgt Schmid served for 14 years and from the moment he saw his superiors at work disposing of bombs, he knew it was a role he could excel in.

He died carrying out a task he thrived on and will forever remain a hero in the eyes of all who met him.

"We've been shot at and blown up but every time we render an IED safe it frustrates the enemy and I love that," he added. "My job is to get rid of everything."

"Because we're the best in the world, we keep going out."

And that they did, right up until the end of last year – by which point the work of SSgt Schmid and his colleagues had helped to save countless lives. ■



Fallen hero: SSgt Olaf Schmid (RLC) died on October 31, 2009
Pictures: Steve Dock, David Gill

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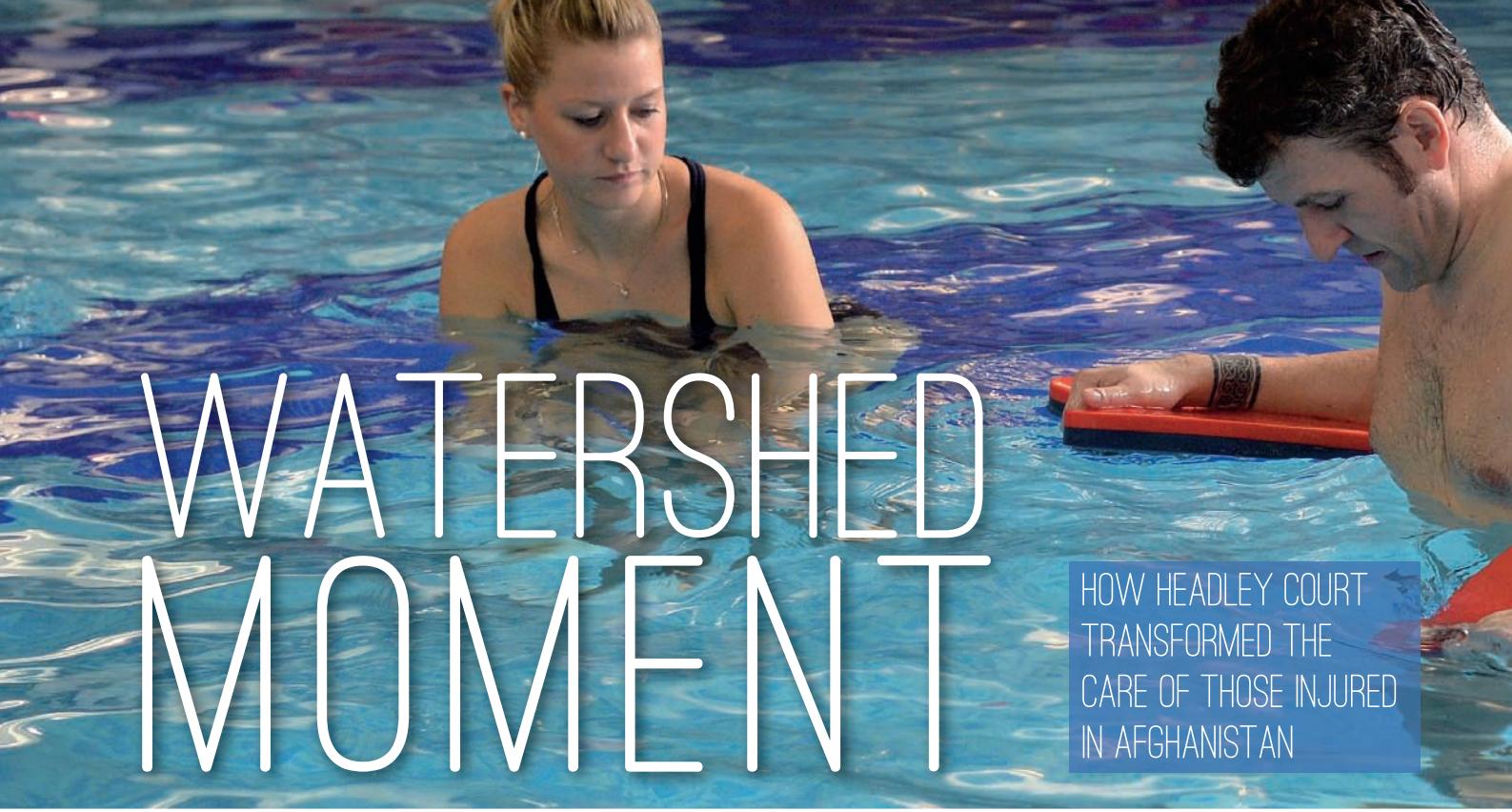
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WATERSHED MOMENT



HOW HEADLEY COURT TRANSFORMED THE CARE OF THOSE INJURED IN AFGHANISTAN

Report: Richard Long

HAVING been at the forefront of defence rehabilitation for more than 60 years it was perhaps inevitable that Headley Court would be called upon to offer its services to personnel who were injured in Afghanistan.

With that aim in mind the Surrey-based centre underwent a dramatic transformation as the Herrick campaign gathered pace, with new infrastructure, cutting-edge technology and highly-skilled staff coming together to give soldiers the best possible care.

Treating wounded Servicemen and women was obviously nothing new but the Army's exploits in Helmand province and beyond created a significant challenge for those charged with heading up the process.

While the number of patients passing through the doors was manageable it was the complex nature of their injuries that offered the biggest test to medical staff, as the facility's clinical director and consultant Col Alan Mistlin (pictured right) told *Soldier*.

"These guys are risk takers," he said. "We have always had to deal

with complex patients but what changed was the use of IEDs in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The complexity of the damage, particularly around the time of Operation Panther's Claw, was not like the typical surgical injuries found within the NHS.

"We adapted to the different types of patients that were coming in and we also had to expand.

"We were very lucky in that we are so close to London and could recruit locum physiotherapists, social workers and other professionals with the right skills."

Integrating people back into the wider world meant that a stable base was needed for both staff and patients to work from.

"At the beginning of recovery it was fine to bring the families to Birmingham for a bedside vigil but when these guys got to Headley Court it was considered work," the senior officer continued.

"So they needed to concentrate on the problem and then go back to their loved ones at the weekends.

"That worked very well. It meant family members knew where they'd be and the patients could focus on rehabilitation."

WE WOULD EXPECT THE AFGHANISTAN TAIL TO LAST ANOTHER THREE OR FOUR YEARS FOR SOME PEOPLE

Col Alan Mistlin

However, such turnarounds required a lot of commitment from medical experts as well as those on the receiving end.

To put things into context, Col Mistlin had just discharged his final Telic veteran at the time of *Soldier*'s visit and he expects the legacy of operations in Helmand province to stretch for a similar time frame.

He said: "The guys getting injured in mid-2010 were not arriving here until the end of that year; they would have surgery in Birmingham and then come to us.

"Some have been back and forwards between the two for a number of years, with certain individuals having 20 admissions.

"The number of patients may not look huge but the volume of readmissions makes the tail very long. We would expect the Afghanistan tail to last another three or four years for some people."

But the wounds were not just restricted to those that could be seen. The facility's medical teams were also dealing with issues such as nerve damage, traumatic brain injuries, mental health concerns and any other areas that required intense treatment.

Before the Afghanistan



2018

– the year when the new Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre at Stanford Hall near Loughborough is due to replace Headley Court as the main treatment facility for wounded personnel

campaign Headley Court boasted 36 beds but an increase in demand saw the site expand to include new rehabilitation centres and wards. The capacity now stands at 140 nurse-led bed spaces.

"We wanted to maximise the care pathways available," the Serviceman explained.

"A lot of business cases went forward and we often got the new buildings just in time. At no point did the government say 'no' and accommodation has always come from MoD funding.

"Rehabilitation is relatively low-tech but the prosthetics have developed no end.

"There have also been advancements in the rehab world and our therapists are skilled in adapting to new research and the change in thinking that is out there.

"In complex trauma the barriers have been broken down. We now have prosthetists, physiotherapists and other departments all working together. We have also recognised the importance of having good administration staff.

"I think the team has developed and pushed the boundaries of rehabilitation in the UK to a level nobody expected it to reach." ■

Back on track: Medical staff based at Headley Court were quick to introduce new treatment protocols that allowed injured personnel to make rapid strides in recovery

Pictures: Graeme Main and Sgt Steve Blake, RLC



ARTIFICIAL ADVANCE

ONE of the biggest demands on Headley Court has been the need to fit fully functioning prosthetic limbs to amputees wounded in the Herrick campaign.

Lead prosthetist Mark Thoburn is in charge of delivering this service and after arriving at the centre seven years ago he was involved in some of the busiest periods stemming from the Afghan conflict.

"When I joined in February 2008 we had 60 patients who had gone through the system," he told *Soldier*. "Now it is something like 350 or 360.

"We had just had our first triple amputee and were not certain of the best way of treating such individuals. Over the last seven years we have really nailed that down so we can give the best possible care.

"This group of patients had not existed in the same place since, probably, the Second World War, when injured soldiers were turning up at Roehampton.

"So it took a while to be sure about the treatment protocols."

For example, a double above knee amputee would be given a set of "stubbies" to walk on and had to use them until they were able to spend a whole week on the devices. Only then could they consider a progression to full microprocessor knees.

This was one of a number of systems introduced by the team and as the tempo increased their expertise grew.

"Within six months of being here I was seeing four or five double amputees a day," Mr Thoburn said.

"It was a very steep learning curve and we developed quickly as there were so many opportunities to try different things.

"Now we are achieving fantastic outcomes and when you see these guys in trousers you have no idea they are using artificial limbs."

Mr Thoburn hails from a background in the NHS and when he first joined Headley Court he was only working two days a week. But that pattern soon changed. ■



» "We went from sharing a room with other departments to having 12 full-time prosthetists," the expert explained.

"With operations like Panther's Claw we had to expand as required and provide whatever the MoD needed.

"Our patients do not have to think 'I cannot do that as I have no legs'. They can do whatever they want."

British personnel also benefited from the introduction of the Genium prosthetic limb – and its waterproof variant the X3 – which came as an upgrade to the hydraulic systems already in place.

It was developed as a collaboration between the US and the device's German manufacturer and some impressive results across the pond ensured it soon arrived in the UK.

And the success of the project was witnessed first-hand at last year's Invictus Games, where Mr Thoburn presented commemorative medals to the athletes at the closing ceremony.

"What these people have achieved is unbelievable and I could not be prouder," he said. "It is the reason why I get up in the morning.

"When we were working 12-hour days to fit all the prosthetics we were knackered, but it was a good knackered.

"One of the first patients I treated was younger than my son and that put things into perspective."



INDIVIDUAL CARE

'TOP NOTCH' TREATMENT

WITH HEADLEY COURT BOASTING A PROUD RECORD OF REHABILITATING INJURED PERSONNEL SOLDIER SPOKE TO TWO PATIENTS ABOUT WHAT MAKES THE CENTRE SO SPECIAL AND HOW IT HAS HELPED THEIR RECOVERY

● DOUBLE amputee LCpl William Reeks (RTR, pictured below) was discharged from the Army nearly four years after he was seriously injured in an IED blast in Afghanistan.

He was flown back to the UK in the immediate aftermath of the incident and was placed in an induced coma before having a leg amputated. The ex-soldier then returned to hospital for a second amputation.

"When I was a single amputee it was a case of learning how to walk as best as possible," he said. "I was never going to walk perfectly so it was all about doing as well as I could.

"But I came on leaps and bounds after the second amputation. I now have huge efficiency when walking and I've just started running.

"When I still had one leg I never imagined that would be possible but I have surpassed all my targets."

Reeks explained Headley Court's mix of military and civilian staff created the perfect recovery environment and he believes the typical squaddie mentality also helps.

"You have to get on with it," he added. "I joined the Army as a front-line soldier and it would be foolish to think I would not get shot at.

"It's a case of this has happened so let's get up and move on. There's no point dwelling on it.

"With operations in Iraq and Afghanistan treatment levels have really ramped up and this place is second to none. It has got bigger over the years and the level of care is top notch – even when it is near maximum capacity."



● THE IED threat in Afghanistan claimed another casualty in the shape of SSgt Stuart Gemmell (RE, pictured below), who lost his leg after he triggered a device that was hidden in a clay oven. Within 16 minutes he was on a helicopter bound for Camp Bastion and 24 hours later he was at hospital in the UK.

After undergoing 13 operations he arrived at Headley Court on July 2, 2013.

"I realised early on that I needed to get going again," he said. "When you get here you see that everything is dedicated to you.

"When I arrived I remember thinking 'why is this not like the Army?' and 'why have they got long hair?'. But once you get used to that everything is a lot simpler.

"This place is beyond anything you would expect to find anywhere else. You are afforded things that other people do not get when they are injured.

"You can wait months and months for a referral on the NHS but it is all done for you here.

"However, you have to be pragmatic about things; it is your rehab and nobody can do it for you."

SSgt Gemmell is also planning for the future and is currently undergoing courses in English and maths to prepare him for future studies at degree level.

"If recovery was just about the physical side of things you would soon get bored," he added. "There is an education centre here that can push you down different pathways.

"It is surprising what is available. If you have the drive and determination you can do whatever you want."



spread throughout the UK and Germany.

Further residential facilities known as personnel recovery centres were constructed near to major garrison towns, where serving troops and veterans can continue their rehabilitation in a supportive military environment.

Lilleshall's Battle Back centre was also set up to encourage recovery through sport.

Operated in partnership with Help for Heroes, The Royal British Legion and other charities, these establishments are funded until at least 2021.

The publicity generated by the creation of Help for Heroes in 2007 led to an unprecedented swell in support for UK soldiers among the civilian population – another legacy of Operation Herrick that the military community will hopefully benefit from for years to come.



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The figures provided are as a result of official manufacturer's tests in accordance with EU legislation. A vehicle's actual fuel consumption may differ from that achieved in such tests and these figures are for comparative purposes only. *Finance is subject to status and only available to serving members of HM Forces only, aged 18 and over and resident in Mainland UK and N.Ireland. Indemnities may be required.



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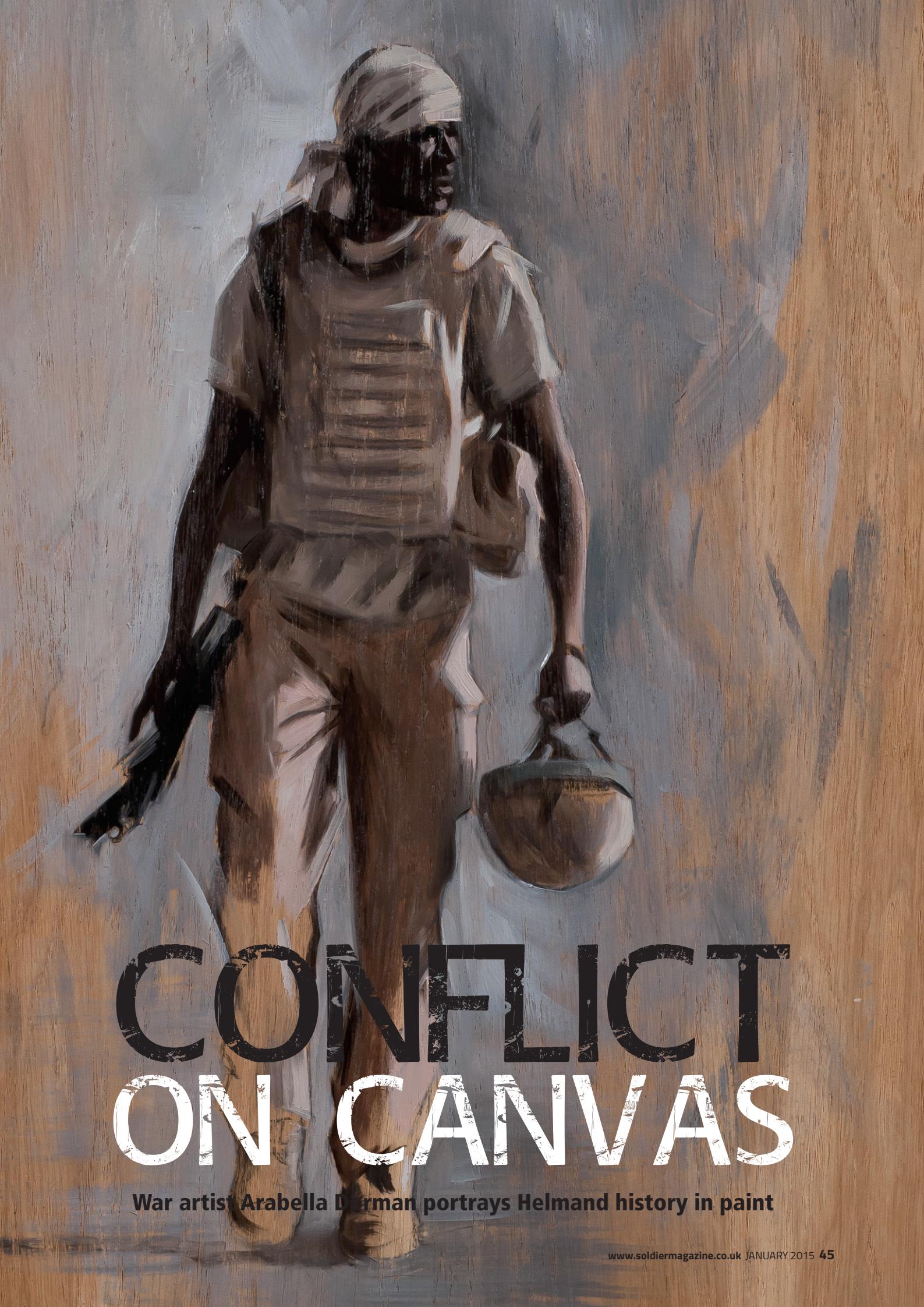
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CONFLICT ON CANVAS

War artist Arabella Durman portrays Helmand history in paint

Interview: Joe Clapson

AHAUNTING series of paintings depicting the wide-reaching impact of Op Herrick has been showcased by an acclaimed war artist.

Arabella Dorman lived and worked alongside British soldiers and local civilians across Afghanistan over a five-year period to chronicle their lives in her *Before the Dawn* collection.

The canvases show how the campaign touched everything in the war-ravaged country, from troops fighting and young children living in besieged villages to the vast and sparse dusty landscape.

"I've always been fascinated with conflict and what it tells us about what humans are capable of in terms of strength, honour and sacrifice," Dorman explained.

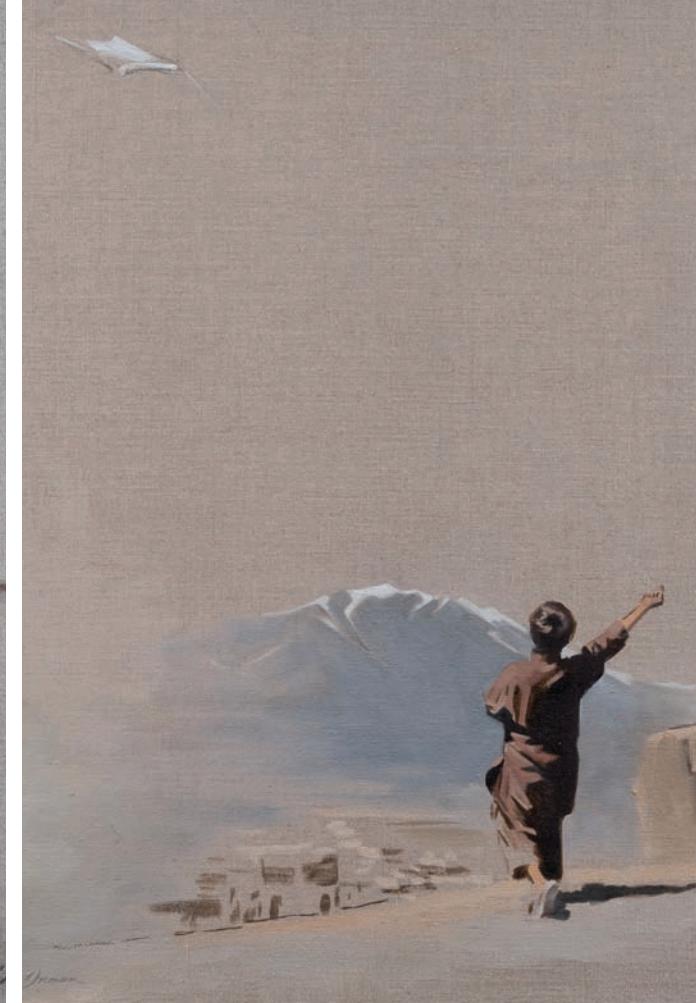
"I don't know anybody that hasn't been moved or affected by the loss of life and bravery during the operation.

"I visited Afghanistan a number of times to see what progress had been achieved and my work is trying to show the hope that exists there.

"During my time in Helmand I came across a lot of gratitude towards British troops from the Afghan community because they really have accomplished an enormous amount."

Clockwise from top left, Unseen stories: Holding on; Crossfire; Above the City; Medical Emergency; Faces of the Fallen were all painted by Arabella Dorman





● An exhibition of *Before the Dawn* was staged at London's La Galleria Pall Mall last November, with a percentage of sales going to Afghanaid and Walking with the Wounded. Prints of the paintings are also available to buy at www.arabelladorman.com

WAR OF WORDS

Report: Becky Clark

IN 2011 war artist and former paratrooper Derek Eland set up a series of diary rooms at forward operating bases in Afghanistan and invited soldiers to record their thoughts about life on the front line.

Jotted down on whatever scraps of paper were to hand, some entries described the fear and exhilaration of coming under contact, while others revealed the boredom of routine, the pressure of command and the sorrow at seeing comrades killed and seriously injured.

As this selection of troops' memoirs shows, their words painted a very personal picture of conflict.

"R&R in just over two weeks...."

JUST OF STAG, FIRING ILLUMS FOR TALIBAN AND MINI FLARES AT BARKING DOGS. LOOKING AT THE UNPOLLUTED SKY AT NIGHT, MORE STARS THAN YOU POSSIBLY IMAGINED, LIVING IN LONDON OFFERS LITTLE IN THAT RESPECT, R&R IN JUST OVER 2 WEEKS, GOTTA STAY STRONG, FOCUSED, SWITCHED ON, SKILLS AND DRILLS GOT BE PERFECT, KEEP FIGHTING, OUT-TANK THEM, OUT-SMART THEM, OUT-WORK THEM. [REDACTED] MY LOVE I'LL SEE YOU AT BRIE IN 2 1/2 WEEKS.
GDSM McGEOWN 1ST BATTALION IRISH GUARDS

3/2/11

2 COY
TO GDSM McGEOWN, 1ST BATTALION IRISH GUARDS
SORRY IT HAD TO BE
YOU MUCKER "G", NOW YOU CAN BE WITH
YOUR LOVE AND BABY AND NEVER
COME BACK TO THIS HELL HOLE!
SEE YOU SOON, STAY STRONG

ONE OF THE BRAVEST MEN I KNOW, FACT!
(HERO)
LCPL BROWNLON (MEDIC)

Diary project reveals poignant snapshot of Operation Herrick



The diary rooms, such as this one at Patrol Base Kalang, were located where fighting was most intense

"Barking orders like your life depends on it"

Days after writing his entry, Gdsrn Colum McGeown (IG) lost both legs to an IED blast

This could be a beautiful walk in some forgotten world that time has merely neglected, but then a burst of reality strafes across my platoon and the rounds smash into the ground around us.

Everything clicks into place: why the endless platoon attacks across Brecon; why the countless estimate tasks; why the ceaseless physical tasks.

Your mind clicks into a gear that you never knew you had and you bark orders like your life depends on it... and guess what, it does!

And you can't help but smile to yourself, for the last 18 months of training has worked.

FOB KNK, A Red Arse

"His eyes told me the whole story"

[...] The young soldier was brought to me following an IED blast.

His injuries were serious though the medic in his patrol had already saved his life.

All I could add to this was a reassessment of his injuries and an offer of stronger analgesia. He declined the latter and lay in silence on the stretcher amongst the dust.

I didn't need to ask many more questions – his eyes told me the whole story. As wide as possible and conveying such a sense of bewilderment, uncertainty and terror that I shall never forget them.

Capt, Medical Officer,
D Coy, 2 Para



"One of the coolest days of my life"

My first contact was very exciting and scary at the same time the rounds cracked over my head and landed in front of me they kicked up dust I knew they were close all I wanted to do was make sure my mates were ok I had a look every one was fine then I started firing my weapon in the enemy's direction then mortars came in the ground sh**t it was one of the coolest days of my life.

MOD AIR DROPPED USF ONLY

"Far from home"

My abiding memory of Afghanistan?

[...] It will be a humble local farmer, who one day took me by surprise by asking after my family.

"You are far from home. You must miss your family very much. We are very grateful."

Doc Richards

"Can you save him?"

You see a local national. Elderly. A nomad.

He complains he is weak and cannot have sex with his wife.

He insists on tablets. You tell him he is 70 and this is normal.

You argue with him until he gives up.

You're on patrol. An ear-splitting explosion 20 metres away. A guardsman has set off an IED. You run over to him, you see his legs gone, his arm hanging by a sinew. His rifle smashed. He's dying. You're in line of sight of a Taliban position. You're the medic. You're appalled by the sight.

Can you save him? [...]

Average medic

Troops wrote their stories on bits of paper, cardboard ripped from ration boxes or blank medical forms

"I owe you a pint"

[...] Taliban fighters were now boxing around us and rounds were coming in from the front, side and behind.

I thought it was it. Any second and a round would hit me.

Then, to my thanks, the sound of an Apache was overhead and even better the beautiful purr of the 30mm cannon was singing to us all.

[...] Dirt and branches sprayed everywhere.

The AH truly saved our ass that day and still we never met the pilot.

But if he's reading this, I guess cheers mate – I owe you a pint I think.



“I did my best”

The sniper with a man in his sights:
“Can I fire?”
Watch a man blown three metres
into the air on a route you selected.
See a man shot on the roof you
ordered him to occupy.
This Afghan wants my trust but the
Taliban will kill him for it.
To hold a man’s innocence, his sanity,
his life, his future in your hands.
Sorry Chris, and all the others who
have suffered.
I did my best. Quis separabit

An officer

To An Officer,

Your Best Is More than Good
enough. we would follow you
to the Gates of hell and back.

A Soldier

QS

Very Much Seconded.
You Share The Same Risks With
A Seemingly INFINITE CALMNESS.
Very Proud To Have Served Under
You.

“Leaving my son”

CPL GAV MARTIN 1 ROYAL IRISH
CP MANGOO

THE HARDEST THING FOR
ME WAS NOT FIXING
BAZONET'S
BUT LEAVING MY SON
WHO I ONLY GOT TO
SEE FOR 1 WEEK

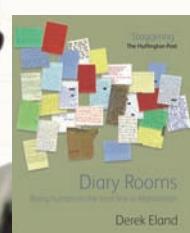
I Miss home!

Never again!

“They are far from their families”

ISAF and ANA⁽³⁾ will not
allow the enemies to
destroy again this land.
They are far from their
families to serve the Army
Joe. Finally I'm greatful
of ISAF to help us in every
case.

Thanks
ANA soldiers



● *Diary Rooms* by Derek Eland is out now, priced £12.99. Proceeds from its sale will go to Combat Stress.

An exhibition of the original work is also on display at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art until the end of February.

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BATTLE SCARS

Troops tell the story of Herrick on their skin

Report: Sarah Goldthorpe
Pictures: Graeme Main

WHEN the Army decided to relax its policy on tattoos last year, the growing popularity of body art among Service personnel was cited as one of the reasons for change.

So as Operation Herrick is consigned to history, it is perhaps no surprise to see the mission's many battles lingering on the skin of British soldiers in the form of illustrations, poems and tributes.

Rather than being a symbol of thuggery or rebellion, these tattoos have come to provide an important medium for troops to express poignant experiences and emotions that may otherwise go unrevealed.

For many, their inkings are a sign that they will never forget their deeds and comrades in Afghanistan, even if Army operations in general are moving on at pace.

One individual who understands the desire to permanently document front-line stories is ex-Royal Engineer Chris Moss (pictured right), owner of K2 Body Art in Richmond, North Yorkshire.

Located within spitting distance of Catterick garrison, his small and unassuming tattoo parlour looks somewhat out of place on the quaint, cobbled streets of this historic market town.

But with at least 50 per cent of his customers hailing from the Forces, the 42-year-old has etched his fair share of Herrick-related images in the eight years he has been in business.

"You get an itch for tattoos," Moss told *Soldier*.

"When I joined the Army, I went to get one on my first day off. I had just lost my granddad and wanted to do something to remember him."

Paying respects is certainly a theme for many Service personnel who visit K2 Body Art.

"I have tattooed quite a lot of guys who have been injured and you hear some very hard stories," admitted Moss.

"Tattoos are almost like a form of therapy."

"I've been sitting in the studio with a customer and the next minute a guy has been pouring his heart out about a lost friend."

"It dawns on you that this might be the first time they have talked to anyone about it."

"For some we may be the first link to them getting help."

"I have approached a bloke's OC before and told him that I think his soldier has post-traumatic stress disorder."

Among the tales Moss has to share is the chilling story of a young private soldier who requested a tattoo of an Afghan compound. Just weeks later the Serviceman was killed in exactly the same sort of location.

"Troops' skin is their mobile mantelpiece," the entrepreneur continued.

"If you are migratory, which the military is, then you can take that mantelpiece with you."

"The old saying that a man wears his heart on his sleeve is true."

"If you put that in your head when looking at soldiers' tattoos, that's when they really do become interesting." ■

TROOPS' SKIN IS THEIR MOBILE MANTLEPIECE

YOUR TATTOOS

WE ASKED YOU TO SHARE YOUR BODY ART



"I had this done in 2012, before deploying to Afghanistan. It's the Ode to Remembrance and is my personal tribute to every soldier that has paid the ultimate price." **Sgt Sarah Partington (REME)**



"This memorial sleeve tattoo is in memory of the fallen. I will wear it until I die and have also written a poem to explain it." **Craig Badley (ex-RMP)**



"I had this done to remember the fallen heroes of the recent Lynx crash in Afghanistan." **James Smith (ex-AAC)**

"My husband's name is on my wedding finger because I found taking my rings off so hard after he was killed in 2009. I wanted to make sure he was always there." **Nikki Scott**





★ The tattoo that means the most to K2 customer Pte Callum Parker (RLC) was done during his first operational tour, Op Herrick 14.

"My dad wrote a poem about me and my family while I was away so I got that tattooed on me during R and R," the Serviceman explained.

The airframes on his arm were later added in memory of the fatalities he witnessed as an ambulance driver at Camp Bastion's helicopter landing site on Herrick 18.

"Pretty much everyone I know in the Army has a tattoo," he added.

"A lot of the lads have religious symbols such as angels. But I haven't just got these because of the tours. I like them and wanted to link it with stuff that meant something to me."



★ Ex-paratrooper Gary Kay left the Army two-and-a-half years ago after serving for 22 years.

"I have always been interested in the way tattoos tell a story," the former warrant officer, who has The Parachute Regiment cap badge tattooed on his back, explained.

"The way I look at it, they explain your life."

"Many people have stopped me and asked if they could take photos of them."

THE RULES

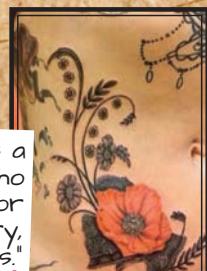
Although Army regulations on tattoos have been relaxed, personnel must still not display body art that is visible on a passport photograph, or which contains offensive or obscene images.

For the full rules read [2014DIN-01-155](#).

WITH US VIA FACEBOOK. HERE, READERS EXPLAIN WHAT THEIR OWN TATTOOS MEAN TO THEM...



"I wanted a tattoo that would respect the fallen."
Andy Smith (ex-RA)



"I wear this poppy as a reminder of all those who have lost their lives or way of life through injury, wounding or sickness."
Cpl Ellen Taylor (QARANC)



"Members of my family served and suffered during the two world wars and the theme of my half-sleeve is the In Flanders Fields poem."
LCpl Jordan Burke (AGC (RMP))

"I have lost family and friends so got this tattoo done to mark their sacrifices, plus I have served myself."
Jason Sinclair (ex-RA)



Mail mania

How Herrick postal deliveries stacked up... and up

WITH the withdrawal of combat troops following the end of Op Herrick, regular postal deliveries to serving soldiers in Afghanistan have dwindled to a daily dribble.

However, at its peak in 2009 the British Forces Post Office (BFPO) was handling around 4,000 bags of mail every month.

The exact amount of letters and parcels shipped out to personnel deployed in the country since 2001 will probably never be known, but the number and weight of the bags that have been handled were recorded – and the figures are simply staggering...



Since 2002, BFPO has processed and delivered in excess of

1.25 million

bags of mail.

The volume of mail handled would fill

100

Antonov An-124 aircraft, the world's largest cargo plane, or

266

fully laden RAF Voyagers.

As well as letters, nearly

10 million

parcels, averaging two kilograms in weight each, have been delivered.



The weight of the mail sent totals just short of
10,000
tonnes, equalling the weight of a Type 45 Destroyer
carrying 22 Challenger 2 main battle tanks.

The peak year was in 2009, when almost
200,000
mailbags were despatched.



In 2012 the
millionth
bag was posted, ten years after
operations commenced.



The e-bluey was often the
only means of communication
with loved ones back home
and personnel in theatre sent,
downloaded and read more than

**five
million**
during the Herrick tours.



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► TAKE ME HOME, COUNTRY ROADS

John Denver

“ WHILE in Nad-e Ali on Herrick 15 I felt depressed and homesick, and I had this on my iPod. I just remember listening to it and thinking ‘I want to leave Afghanistan’. I was working with Mastiffs. My vehicle hit an IED on the day I was going on R and R – we were lucky that no one was injured but things like that can get to you. ”

Pte Omar Sey, Scots

DIAMONDS

Rihanna

“ THIS video provided eye candy for the ops room in 2012-13. Never was a pop video on so much! ”

WO2 Kevin Cross, RAMC

INFINITY

Guru Josh Project and BLACK AND GOLD

Sam Sparro

“ THESE songs take me back to the calm before the storm on ops in 2008. I’d listen to them after missions and to chill out. ”

Pte Chrisy Taggart, Scots

BORN TO DIE

Lana Del Rey

“ AFTER a busy day dealing with incoming and outgoing stores on the flight line on Herrick 15 we finally got the time to sit down and relax, drink some coffee and listen to BFBS. This song came on and it was the first time I’d heard it. It was just an engrossing tune. ”

LCpl Steven Hoskins, RLC



▲ CALEDONIA

Dougie MacLean

“ THIS song reminds me of home, of Scotland. We played it when we lost two of our boys. Now when it comes on memories of Afghanistan spring into my mind. ”

LCpl Alan Glen, Scots



DESERT DISCS

Soldiers reveal their personal soundtracks to the mission in Afghanistan

FEW troops would deny the importance of music when it comes to boosting morale on combat operations.

Whether listening to adrenalin-pumping rock on their iPods or absorbing the stirring anthems of the Army bands as they toured forward operating bases, tunes of varying sorts helped soldiers to bond and stave off boredom on Operation Herrick.

So we asked veterans of the conflict to name the single song that defined the mission for them...

What did we miss?

Tell *Talkback* which song defined Op Herrick for you: mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk



▲ SEX ON FIRE

Kings of Leon

“ THIS song reminds me of Cpl Michael Thacker (R Welsh) who died on June 1, 2012 in Afghanistan. It was a favourite of his. He was always singing at the top of his voice and his platoon loved him for it. He is missed so much and loved by so many. ”

Marilyn Walton-Rayner, relative

▲ I AM THE RESURRECTION

Stone Roses

“ I LISTENED to this song on the way to Brize when I deployed in 2013 and couldn’t stop playing it out there. The tour was quiet and my iTunes hadn’t been working so it was the only thing I could download. I’m a big Stone Roses fan. I was supposed to see them on their reunion tour but I was on pre-deployment training. ”

LBdr Daniel Downes, RA

NOTHING IN MY WAY

Keane

“ I WAS working as a ward master in the Role 3 facility at Bastion when my colleague produced a movie on the department. This track was used in it and if I hear the song on the radio now it makes me reflect on my experiences on the tour, the people I shared it with and those who passed through the facility. ”

WO2 Kevin Cross, RAMC

I'VE GOTTA FEELING

▼ The Black Eyed Peas

“ I WAS working with the aviation assault battle group on Herrick 10 and we had a wee radio in our tent. We used to crank this tune up before we got on the helicopter to do the job. It still gives me a buzz when I hear it now – it was a tough tour. ”

Cpl Graham Johnson, Scots





HERRICK: THE SEQUEL

Report: Sarah Goldthorpe
Main picture: Graeme Main

AFTER the blood, sweat and tears of a 13-year operation, the future success of Afghanistan now rests on the shoulders of a select few.

And among those individuals, the British Army mentors at the Afghan National Army (ANA) Officer Academy outside Kabul carry a heavy responsibility.

While their colleagues back home face a fresh challenge in the form of exciting overseas missions and new exercise opportunities, these troops have remained on the ground to ensure that the country turns out the very best military leaders it can.

"Like any job there are frustrations here and we wouldn't wish to hide that fact, but there is a quantifiable sense of progress,"

explained Brig Charles Page, chief mentor at the academy.

Speaking to *Soldier* from Kabul, the officer and his team painted a promising picture of the facility's development, which has been based on the ethos of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

"Our first intake commissioned in September and we think this model can be sustainable," added the senior officer, who took up his post last October.

"The role here is very much a people-focused job, and any success depends on how well the soldiers get on with the academy instructors we're training.

"The ANA is now growing towards 195,000 personnel. That has happened very fast, but we believe we are providing a professional stream of new

Above, Aiming high:
Officer cadets

practise infantry drills at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy near Kabul

Below, Military mentor: Sgt Lee Lane (RLC) provides support to an Afghan sergeant at the training centre

officers into the force."

Service personnel working within the academy's 100-strong international support team – drawn from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark and Norway – echoed the officer's words.

"Our cadets are literate, bright and enthusiastic," commented Reservist Sgt Lee Lane (RLC), mentor to a platoon sergeant at the facility.

"The kandaks are advancing each time in what they are learning and I have seen improvements every term."

On working closely with Afghan troops away from the heat of combat operations, he added:

"The main challenge is getting to know your team, their religious and ethical beliefs.

"What might be considered normal for us is not for them.

"So you always have to bear that in mind.



FURNISHING FEMALE LEADERS

● AS British defence chiefs scratch their heads over the role of women in combat formations, one soldier is flying the flag for gender equality in a far more conservative society.

WO2 Melita Jarvis (AAC, pictured below) is serving as the female today (or company) sergeant major mentor at the ANA Officer Academy, assisting cadets and their instructors with discipline, standards, logistics and administration.

"When I first arrived here I had this mindset that I was going to change the world," she admitted.

"But I have quickly realised that this is the Afghans' organisation and we are here to support them.

"I give them my views and experience and they will take that on board and adapt it if they think it's the right thing to do."

Although female officer cadets, who were admitted for the first time last summer, will not be expected to fight on the front line after they leave the academy, the inferior position of their sex in Afghan society generally means that it takes a bold individual to step up to the challenge of military service.

In a practice far removed from the country's segregated conventions, male and female cadets have had to get used to undertaking field training alongside each other.

And the intention is that women will eventually form about one tenth of the academy's overall intake.

"My role here is about taking baby steps," WO2 Jarvis continued.

"With the females, building a rapport and trust is one of the biggest things.

"Also, you have to appreciate that these cadets don't have the same military experience as some of the males.

"We are working towards recruiting more females in future and the whole process is a massive learning curve for all involved."

The ANA is now growing towards 195,000 personnel,

Troops who remain in Afghanistan are proving crucial to the UK's legacy

"But I think what we are doing is the right thing.

"They are all very confident at giving lessons now and we are a close-knit community out here. Morale is high."

Although life in and around Afghanistan's capital appears very different to the challenges of the desert, operational tours there are taken every bit as seriously as they were in Helmand province.

"What we are doing is a training task within a combat environment," Brig Page emphasised.

"We carry weapons and have received medical and force protection training, which is similar to the way many would have worked in the earlier days.

"But the focus of what we are doing is mentoring.

"Quite honestly, life carries on here as always and I don't think the end of Herrick has impacted on us too much.

470

– Approximate number of UK military personnel who are deployed to Afghanistan on the post-Herrick support mission. The figure includes academy and ministry mentors, support roles, force protection, British Forces HQ staff and an aviation detachment

"We lead a relatively comfortable existence, eat very well, get plenty of sleep and exercise and on the whole it's a pretty good life.

"When Servicemen and women look back on their experiences here I think those reflections will be positive in the main."

While the mentors wouldn't be drawn on the exact date that they will pack up and return to the UK, one thing appears certain.

For these personnel, Afghanistan is very much an ongoing mission – and one they do not intend to give up on until the academy's instructors are 100 per cent confident delivering the future leaders that the ANA so badly needs. ■



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“

TALKBACK

YOUR letters provide an insight into the issues at the top of soldiers' agendas... but please be brief. Emails (mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk) 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 get an answer via your own chain of command.

‘I can’t see why I’m being taxed twice’

FOR the past two years I have been occupying single living accommodation in Germany and paying sums in lieu of council tax.

I own a house in the UK and recently applied to my local authority for a reduction in this charge but the council refused because my name is on the deeds and, therefore, the property is considered my main dwelling.

As a result, I am effectively paying council tax twice.

Over the past two years I've made only a few fleeting visits home so is there any compensation for single Service personnel in my situation? – **Capt Andy Griffiths, RLC.**

Brig John Donnelly, DPS(A), responds: I regret that we are beholden to legislation from another government department.

The current council tax rules prevent personnel serving overseas

from receiving a reduction for their own homes in the UK.

This is because they are classed as a sole or main residence.

Many factors are considered by local authorities when determining this, including reasons for absence and security of tenure, among other things. Case law in the High Court established the principle that a person's home will be regarded as, "where you would normally live were it not for your work commitments".

This applies even if virtually all of your time is spent elsewhere.

As you are working abroad, the local authority considers your absence to be temporary because it assumes your intention is to return to your home when your overseas employment ceases.

Therefore, a reduction in council tax is not permitted.



Picture: Shutterstock

CHIPS ARE DOWN FOR RESERVIST MEALS

● MY quartermaster and administration office have told me that because I'm engaged on a full-time Reserve service (home commitment) contract I am not entitled to discounted meals. Therefore, if I wish to eat in an Army mess I must pay the full, non-entitled price for my food.

If I was undertaking a Reserve weekend I would pay discounted Service rates so why are they not available to me every day? – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig John Donnelly, DPS(A), responds: Within JSP 456 it states that all Servicemen and women, irrespective of personal status category, are entitled to receive the core meal rate, which will be set at the same rate as the daily food charge.

I am sorry to hear that you have been advised otherwise and hope this clarifies your position.



“
CERTAIN
SOLDIERS
ARE MORE
CONCERNED
ABOUT
THEIR HAIR
THAN THEIR
TASKS
”

Beret bad hair day

● REGARDING haircuts, what is the length allowed under the beret?

I have asked my chain of command and they aren't sure.

Would you be able to confirm the "if it's under the beret it belongs to them" myth and what length is permitted with this headgear?

The boy band style, in my opinion, is unsuitable for the Army, especially on physical training when certain soldiers become more concerned about the hair in their face than the tasks they are having to undertake. – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Matthew Lowe, D Pers Ops, responds: Chapter 59 of the Army general administrative instructions describes the regulations concerning male and female hair.

In uniform, hair for both sexes is to be neat, trimmed and worn above the collar.

The style and colour of it (if not natural) is not to be of an exaggerated nature. Male hair is to be cut short so its length does not reach the collar or the ears.

The hair is to be worn so that all types of military headdress may be worn in the correct manner.

It should not be visible on the forehead under the brow band nor seen on or covering the ears.

Exceptions will only be granted on religious grounds provided that operational effectiveness and health and safety are not jeopardised in any way.

DIGITAL DOSSIER

Your views from the web...



@soldiermagazine

#KAJAKI

@Thereal_MrH

Just been to see #kajaki – the most harrowing traumatic thing I've seen in a cinema. Brilliantly made

#GAME OF TRUCE

@PoppyLegion

Tonight wasn't about the final score. But just for the record British Army 1-0 German Bundeswehr

#SPORTS AWARDS

@JamesCracknell

Honoured to be presenting an award at #ArmySportsAwards. Lacking medals and spurs maybe because I lack battle experience



www.facebook.com/soldiermagazine

RELIGION IN THE ARMY

Grant Mackenzie

Religion has no place in the Forces. It's the cause of more problems than it cures. I'm not religious, what ever makes you happy, but there is a time and place, and it isn't the front line

Phil Dunn

Got to be there for those who want or need it. Shouldn't be forced on those who don't

David Symonds

Amazing...non-believers more upset when someone believes than other way round!

Ian Richardson

The vital role of religion... keeping the soldiers in work since the Middle Ages

SLICE OF SERVICE LIFE

This month's ruminations from the ranks...



“
POLITICS
AROUND
THE
MATTER
HAVE
PREVENTED
HER BEING
APPOINTED
”

Why don't women warrant promotion?

THE Army may be going through a significant restructure but a shift in attitudes is a long way behind.

For instance, when will we see the first female company sergeant major appointed at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst?

I have an interest in this because I have a female staff sergeant working for me who has been recommended for such a post following a very successful tour as a colour sergeant at the academy.

However, the politics surrounding this matter have so far prevented her from being successfully appointed. – **Name and address supplied.**

Maj Chris Sargent, Academy Adjutant, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, replies: The Royal



Military Academy Sandhurst has some of the finest instructors in the Army – and a great many of them are females.

But while we have a number of women fulfilling vital WO2 roles none are within the training companies here.

At present, company sergeant major posts are Infantry-only because of the content of the commissioning course programmes.

The policy on employing women in these positions at this facility reflects wider MoD policy on female employment in the Service.

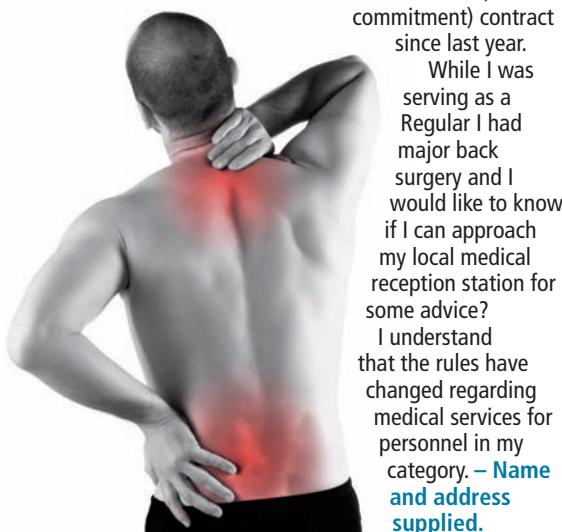
The department has been conducting an in-depth study into the feasibility of employing women in ground close combat and is due to make recommendations soon (page 12).

Reservist's medical malady

● I LEFT the Regular Army in 2011 after 24 years of service and I've been on a full-time Reserve service (home commitment) contract since last year.

While I was serving as a Regular I had major back surgery and I would like to know if I can approach my local medical reception station for some advice?

I understand that the rules have changed regarding medical services for personnel in my category. – **Name and address supplied.**



Brig John Donnelly, DPS(A), replies: There has been no change in access to primary healthcare for FTRS (HC) personnel. The NHS is still your health provider, so you cannot use your local medical reception station.

Although the injury or condition may be attributable to your time as a Regular, the Defence Primary Health Care Service cannot re-establish the management of your condition while you are engaged on your current contract.

The change in medical support for Reservists that you refer to is in the provision of occupational health, mental health and rehabilitation – but access is restricted to Reservists injured during training – and for which an application may be made through the chain of command.

“It would save time and taxpayers' expense”

TALKBACK

“
HAD WE
PUT THE
LIVES OF
OUR TWO
CHILDREN IN
DANGER?
”

Dust storm

JUST over a year ago I moved into married quarters where my housing guide stated asbestos was present so no DIY projects should be taken on.

After a few months we noticed dust appeared in the airing cupboard following a windy day.

My wife then discovered a hole in the ceiling so the accommodation management company sent someone out to examine the cavity.

We were informed there was asbestos present but it was "low grade" and "encapsulated".

We requested the cupboard dust also be tested and the result came back as positive.

This material had been falling on to bedding and towels that had been used by the whole family.

We felt devastated; had we unwittingly put the lives of our two children in danger?

Further tests were completed and, fortunately, they revealed the dust had not spread – although all the fabrics in the house were disposed of by a team of experts.

We now occupy a new property but have had the details of our case recorded, just in case one of

us suffers from an asbestos-related disease in the future.

This letter is not to apportion blame but to warn all occupants of older accommodation to be mindful of damaged walls, ceilings, or undertaking DIY work. – Name and address supplied.

**Jayne Smith,
Service Delivery**

Accommodation, DIO, replies: Unfortunately, as we have not been given your details we cannot comment on the specific circumstances of your case.

However, many public and private properties in the UK have some asbestos within the fabric of the structure, which are safe as long as they are not disturbed.

As you state, it is important for any householder, whether you live in Service families' accommodation or a private home, to avoid making contact with these materials and any



Picture: Sgt Paul Shaw, RLC

damage found in one of our properties should be reported to the maintenance help desk.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation takes the safety of its customers very seriously, which is why we have removed asbestos in major upgrade projects and have also carried out detailed surveys of its location and condition. If you would like us to investigate the issues you have raised, please email our customer services team via dioopsacn-housingcomplaints@mod.uk

'IT'S TIME TO PASS ON THE PASSES'

● WHILE I fully support the requirement for professional and controlled security, would it not be more efficient to provide personnel with a single-issue car pass each time a new vehicle is purchased which allows them into any military camp in the UK?

I am sure that some sort of networked system would be far more efficient as well as reducing the need for civilians and soldiers to be issuing car passes at considerable time and taxpayers' expense. – Name and address supplied.

Col (Ret'd) David Challes, SO1 Security, Information Superiority Directorate, replies: Car passes are mandated so commanding officers and heads of establishment have no power to dispense with the requirement for non-military vehicles to have a valid permit.

Many defence locations require visitors to be issued with site-specific passes, regardless of whether they have military or civilian ID cards or how they arrive at the site.

Individuals must already visit the reception or

guardroom and go through the process of being identified and confirmed as having a valid reason to enter the establishment.

Adding a car pass to this process is a relatively small burden but we are conducting a review of site access schemes across the Army and one of the options under consideration is a networked structure.

There are some substantial issues, one being the set-up cost and another is the security of the information held on the database.

Having chaired the first meeting of the review, I can assure you this system is not as simple to purchase, implement and manage as you might think.

We will also have to align ourselves with any MoD-wide plans for site access because it would not be appropriate for the Army to go in its own direction.



'Food not fit for soldiers'

As a health care professional I would like to express my concern for the wellbeing of my partner and other Service personnel at Merville Barracks in Colchester.

Since the advent of the pay-as-you-dine system there has been a reduction in the nutritional quality of the food provided in the canteen.

Previously, they were fed three meals a day, including unlimited fruit and vegetables.

Now, for the same cost, they are restricted on quantity and choice. Vegetables are often excluded and fruit is charged at a premium.

I would urge the government and senior Army officers to review the current food provision if we are to have a strong, fighting fit Force.

It would appear that our soldiers' health in the future is less likely to be compromised in battle than by something rather closer to home. — **Emma Ashman, Colchester.**

Brig John Donnelly, DPS(A), responds: The Army is committed to ensuring Service personnel have access to a healthy balanced diet and it has provided a wide range of educational guidance so troops can make an informed decision at the hotplate.

There was a great deal of

criticism of the old system. In particular, most soldiers complained that they had paid for seven days' worth of meals each week but they only ate on five. Many others said they only attended two meals each day.

However, unit catering managers were able to use food provided for 21 meals over 12-15 servings each week, which has left the impression that you used to get more burger for your buck.

But under pay-as-you-dine you spend out only on what you eat.

Before this system was introduced fruit was not unlimited but some soldiers were able to take more thanks to the troops who failed to attend meals but had paid for them.

Currently, carbohydrates and vegetables should be available on a self-service basis and the quality of food offered meets government standards, assuming three meals are consumed per day from the core menu.

You also have the opportunity to purchase additional meals and beverages from the supplier.

Any concerns with the provision should be communicated to the chain of command or your unit's catering committee.



CORPORALS UP IN ARMS

RECENTLY our regiment started a corporals' club.

We were told that Queens Regulations state all junior NCOs must be members but I've read through them and can find no reference to this at all.

We were also informed that we cannot opt out of joining and threatened with demotion if we try.

The club has two major annual functions – the Christmas and summer balls – and if we do not or cannot attend them the money we have paid towards their cost will not be returned to us.

This situation extends to being absent from our duty station, too, because we are expected to settle all our club bills, even if we are away for six-months on tour.

Can you provide some clarification on this issue because I feel we are being bullied into becoming members? — **Name and address supplied.**

Brig John Donnelly, DPS(A), responds: The policy for messes is due to be incorporated in Queens Regulations (Army), along with other updates to the messes and institutes chapter, later this year.

Corporals' clubs have no official standing at present although soldiers of that rank can be admitted as members of the warrant officers' and sergeants' mess at the discretion of the commanding officer who, incidentally, can create any group or organisation that benefits the soldiers under his or her command.

Corporals' clubs are local initiatives and unofficial so individuals cannot be commanded to attend or fund them.

Instances of such treatment should be reported to my team via armyperssvcs-group@mod.uk

BULLET POINTS

BITE-SIZED DATA TO KEEP YOU IN THE KNOW

⊕ APPOINTMENTS

Maj Gen Tim Radford to be appointed **Chief of Staff Land Forces, Army Headquarters** in succession to Maj Gen Tyrone Urch in February 2015.

Maj Gen Tyrone Urch to be appointed **General Officer Commanding Force Troops Command** in succession to Maj Gen Tim Radford in February 2015.

⊕ CAREERS

Employment website TipTopJob has created www.exmilitaryjob.com to help former Service personnel find work in the civilian sector.

Ex-Military Careers is a free-to-use job board listing more than 10,000 vacancies for former Service personnel. For more information visit www.ex-militarycareers.com

⊕ COMPETITIONS

Spine line winners: Cpl Shane Maughan, Kiwi Barracks, Salisbury; Andrew Weatherall, Cumberbauld, Glasgow; LCpl Steven Wood, Marchwood, Hants.

Our Girl DVD: John Taylor, Walsall, West Midlands; Rfn Paul Roche, Beachley Barracks, Chepstow; Cpl Pauline Daniels, Redruth, Cornwall; Stuart Maries, Army HQ, Andover; Robert Smith, Uckfield, East Sussex.

Battle Academy 2: Eastern Front: Peter Fisher, Winchester, Hants; Maj Euan Mathieson, Army HQ, Andover; Aaron Hodgson, Worthy Down, Winchester; Cpl Simon Haggerty, Hull, East Yorkshire; Frank Johnstone, Hallow, Worcester; David Woolmer, Whitehaven, Cumbria; Debbie Parkinson, MoD Abbey Wood, Bristol; Jed Campbell, Address withheld; LCpl Angus Hendry, MPGS Strensall, North Yorkshire; Malcolm Hall, Tonbridge, Kent

⊕ DIRECTORY

ABF The Soldiers' Charity: 0845 241 4820

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

Armed Forces Christian Union: 01252 311221; www.afcu.org.uk

Armed Forces Humanist Association:

www.armedforcehumanists.org.uk

Armed Forces Muslim Association:

Chaplain 0207 414 3252; www.afma.org.uk

Army Families Federation:

01264 382324; mil 94391 2324; www.aff.org.uk

Army LGBT Forum:

www.armylgbt.org.uk; chair@armylgbt.org.uk

Army Libraries:

01252 340094

Army Ornithological Society:

www.armybirding.org.uk

Army Welfare Service:

01980 615975; www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support/welfare-support.aspx

Blind Veterans UK:

(formerly St Dunstan's) 0207 7235021; www.blindveterans.org.uk

British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association:

0208 590 1124; www.blesma.org

Career Transition Partnership:

0207 4496 661

Children's Education Advisory Service:

01980 618244; enquiries@ceas.detsa.co.uk

Erskine:

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Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society:

01372 841600; www.combatstress.com

Family Escort Service:

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UK – 0800 731 4880; Germany – 0800 1827 395; Cyprus – 080 91065; Falklands – #6111; from operational theatres – Paradigm Services *201; from anywhere in the world (CSL operator will call back) – 0044 1980 630854

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Help for Heroes:

0845 673 1760 or 01980 846 459; www.helpforheroes.org.uk

Heroes Welcome:

www.heroeswelcome.co.uk

Joint Service Housing Advice Office:

01722 436575

Medal Office:

94561 3600 or 0141 224 3600

Mutual Support (Multiple Sclerosis group):

www.mutualsupport.org.uk

National Ex-Services Association:

www.nesa.org.uk

National Gulf Veterans' and

Families' Association Office:

24-hour helpline 0845 257 4853;

www.ngvfa.org.uk

Poppy Scotland: 0131 557 2782; www.poppyScotland.org.uk

Regular Forces' Employment Association:

0121 236 0058; www.rfea.org.uk

Remount:

01451 850 341; www.remount.net

Royal British Legion:

0808 802 8080; www.britishlegion.org.uk

Royal British Legion Scotland:

0131 550 1583; www.legionscotland.org.uk

RBL Industries Vocational Assessment Centre:

01622 795900; www.rbli.co.uk

Scottish Veterans' Residences:

0131 556 0091; www.srvonline.org

Service Personnel and Veterans Agency:

0808 1914 218 (from the UK); 0044 1253 866043 (from overseas)

Single Person Accommodation for the Ex-Services:

01748 833797; www.spaces.org.uk

SSAFA:

0845 1300 975; www.ssafa.org.uk

Stoll: (formerly known as the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation)

0207 385 2110; info@stoll.org.uk; www.stoll.org.uk

The Not Forgotten Association:

020 7730 2400; www.nfassociation.org

The Poppy Factory:

020 8940 3305; www.poppyfactory.org

The Royal Star & Garter Homes:

020 8481 7676; www.starandgarter.org

The Veterans Charity:

01753 653772; info@veteranscharity.org.uk

uk4u Thanks!:

01798 812081; www.uk4u.org

⊕ INTELLIGENCE

The following Army Briefing Notes, Defence Internal Briefs and Defence Information Notices can be found online at www.armynet.mod.uk

ABN 170/14: Incorporating Reservists into the Army Dependents' Trust

ABN 169/14: Assurance of Army recovery capability

ABN 168/14: Alcohol awareness campaign

ABN 167/14: Army Reserve Group A: age of entry

ABN 166/14: Army Reserve public service employer notification policy change

ABN 165/14: The introduction of sexual orientation monitoring on JPA

ABN 164/14: Sale of Defence Support Group

ABN 163/14: Army Reserves employer notification

ABN 162/14: KCL Armed Forces health survey

ABN 161/14: Changes to Armed Forces pension scheme 1975 policy regarding widows

ABN 160/14: Promotions and appointments warrant

ABN 159/14: Tracking and planning civil engagement – a new approach for the Army

DIN 2014DIN01-223: Shared parental leave

DIN 2014DIN01-222: Changes to defence operational language award scheme and basic language award scheme

DIN 2014DIN01-220: Introduction of sexual orientation declaration and monitoring using JPA for Armed Forces personnel

DIN 2014DIN01-219: Review of JSP 757 *Tri-Service guidance for appraisal*

DIN 2014DIN01-217: TV licensing – commanding officers' responsibilities and the requirements for Service personnel, visiting forces, MoD establishments, messes and clubs

DIN 2014DIN01-216:

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 – changes to rehabilitation periods from March 10, 2014 and the impact on the Armed Forces – updated November 2014

DIN 2014DIN01-215: Recordable offences – guidance to Service personnel on which offences that are capable of being dealt with at a summary hearing will be recorded on the police national computer on conviction

DIN 2014DIN01-214: Army instructions for re-employment of personnel with previous military experience

DIN 2014DIN01-213: Reserve to Regular Army transfer policy

DIN 2014DIN01-210: Rejoiner policy following the introduction of the AFPS 15 scheme

CONTINUED ON PAGE 66

INTELLIGENCE CONTINUED

DIN 2014DIN01-208: Special leave for employees who are also Reservists

DIN 2014DIN02-017: Volunteers for specialist human intelligence duties – Op Samson

DIN 2014DIN03-028: Joint Force Command electronic warfare get-well programme

DIN: 2014DIN04-234: Provisioning of NSN: 6810-99-220-3461 water, thrust augmentation: demineralized. Def stan 68-253

DIN 2014DIN04-233: Amendments to operational medical modules contents – guidance on intraosseous needle use within medical modules and for training

DIN 2014DIN04-232: Removal from service of signal distress day and night No 1 Mk 4

DIN 2014DIN04-231: Management of obsolete radio communication test sets

DIN 2014DIN04-230: Declaration of obsolete – Anvis Mk 1A night vision goggle

DIN 2014DIN04-229: Supply contract for the provision of mechanical and avionic consumables. Contract ACCOMM/7033

DIN 2014DIN04-228: Instruction to stop using and backload the barrel,

blank firing machine gun 7.62mm GPMG, NSN 1005999633759

DIN 2014DIN04-227: Direction for calibration of data collector DI460 and DI660

DIN 2014DIN04-226: Cleanse of commonality and legacy inventory held under DMCs Z30, Z31, Z32, and Z37

DIN 2014DIN04-225: C6 weapon mounts – deletion of items no longer used

DIN 2014DIN04-224: Inspection requirements of stopwatches (NSN 6645 99 5864403 and superseded NSN 6645 99 1971125). Also NSN 6645 99 5213169

DIN 2014DIN04-223: Disposal of Hercules C130K, associated data and records

DIN 2014DIN04-222: Declaration of ALC obsolete equipment

DIN 2014DIN04-221: Surface ship configuration reports and index of abstracts issued by master record data centre (ships)

DIN 2014DIN05-035: Formation of the Joint Intelligence Training Group

DIN 2014DIN07-182: Nijmegen Marches 2015

DIN 2014DIN07-180: Joint Service adventurous training ski scheme – amendment to the remit of a ski leader 2

DIN 2014DIN07-178: The Defence Survival, Evasion, Resistance and

Extraction Training Organisation

DIN 2014DIN07-177: Joint Service Parachute Centre (Weston) parachuting course schedule 2015

DIN 2014DIN07-176: Tactical medical wing course schedule training year 2015 to 2016

DIN 2014DIN07-173: Commando Helicopter Force basic military acquaint course (Air 338)

DIN 2014DIN07-172: Joint Service Paragliding Centre paragliding course schedule 2015/16

DIN 2014DIN07-169: 2015 Nato Reserve forces integration course and senior Reserve officers course

DIB58/14: Chief of the defence staff and MoD permanent secretary write to staff about MoD Your Say survey 2014 results

Martinique Battery reunion

on April 18, 2015 at the Copthorne Hotel, Merry Hill, Dudley. For details email k.brooksusher@hotmail.co.uk

The final School of Electronic and Aeronautical Engineering RFC annual dinner and President's XV on May 8, 2015 at Arborfield. All serving and former members involved in the club are invited to attend. Please register your interest by contacting SSgt Kennedy via mark.kennedy@seae.mod.uk or Lesley Lallament on 01189 763663

SEARCHLINE

Any past members of **39 Regiment, Royal Artillery** that have made presentations to the sergeants' mess are requested to reclaim them by January 5. Some items may be slightly damaged. Contact Sgt Ross Glen via ross.glen576@mod.uk or telephone 0191 239 3340.

Andrew Copping is looking for information on **Hubert Harding, Royal Artillery (gunner number 1741365)**, who served with the **232 Searchlight Regiment between December 1940 and March 1946 near Exeter**. Anyone who can help is asked to contact him on 01252 721025.



REUNION

Operating Theatre Technician reunion, March 6-8, 2015. All serving or retired Royal Army Medical Corps operating theatre technicians, operating department practitioners and operating department assistants are invited to attend the next event at the North Stafford Hotel, Stoke-on-Trent. Guests welcome. For further details and booking form contact Ken Hannah at ottreunited1@gmail.com or visit <http://ottreunited.com>



NO. 878

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TEN details have been changed in this picture of Polish armoured personnel at a tank crossing during Exercise Black Eagle in Poland.

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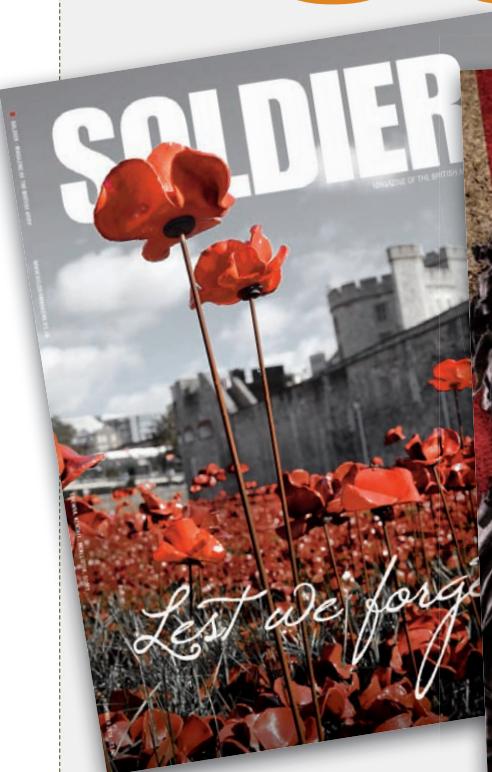
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REVIEWS

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MOVIES

PICK OF THE MONTH:
KAJAKI: THE TRUE STORY

COURAGE IN KAJAKI

TOUGH TO WATCH BUT VITAL VIEWING



Review: Joe Clapson

THE painfully tense nature of the devastating fight against hidden bombs in Afghanistan is expertly captured in *Kajaki*, with the title focusing on reality rather than big-budget effects.

There are no Hollywood names on the cast list and the action scenes are far from relentless but this true story of British troops fighting to keep each other alive while laughing in the face of extreme danger is as powerful as any.

Closely based on first-hand accounts and using soldiers' real names, the film depicts the moment when troops from 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment found themselves in a minefield at the Kajaki Dam in 2006.

It begins with a series of clips showing personnel relaxing and firing banter at each other while playing games and topping up their tans at their base.

After highlighting the strong and everlasting bonds that are formed between troops during their downtime, a seamless transition is made to them unleashing repeated fire on an enemy location just seconds later.

With the scene of a band of brothers enjoying their time at war set, the movie does eventually explode into action when LCpl Stu Hale (Benjamin O'Mahony) is blown up during what he thought was a routine foot patrol.

From this moment on, the film becomes incredibly uncomfortable to watch.

The life-changing injury triggers a desperate rescue mission for Hale's comrades, who are trapped in a minefield that was left behind following Russia's stint in Helmand in the 1980s.

However, director Paul Katis doesn't employ overindulgent special effects or a pounding soundtrack to assist with the story.

The bare facts of the hellish scenario, coupled with masterful performances from the film's entire roll call, are compelling enough.

As with the actual events in Kajaki on September 6, 2006 there is no build-up to the hidden bombs going off and no American voiceover to explain what is happening.

This is simply the reality of the mission in Afghanistan – soldiers being maimed and their comrades showing little regard for their own safety in a bid to save them.

The film also succeeds in accurately capturing the gallows humour that squaddies are renowned for even in the bleakest of moments.

Although unsure that they will survive the mission, the jokes about passing Special Forces selection with one leg and getting "legless" back at home keep coming.

It's a credit to scriptwriter Tom Williams that such spirit is captured on screen.

The tension of watching Army personnel stare death in the face just to cross a few metres of sand is agonising, and shows what life was like on the ground at the height of Op Herrick.

Numerous legacy mines are detonated and further Servicemen are left limbless and fighting for their lives.

With a fledgling cast and a small budget, this movie gives a brilliant snapshot of the traumatic events that took place and the remarkable people that dealt with them every day in Afghanistan. ■

VERDICT: An important war film that shows the reality of operations in Helmand province



BLOODSHOT out now

A GREAT film that is full of exciting scenes. As an intense psycho-thriller it bravely tackles the controversial topics of abuse and mental illness, with **Danny Dyer** putting in a solid performance. His character makes a living in the prop industry, realising that his creations mirror real life. The movie makes you think about the secrets within relationships but it could have done with a more definitive ending.

Musn Victoria Carter, CAMUS

VERDICT: A thriller that does well to draw you into the story



EASY MONEY III out now

THE confusing opening scene sets the tone for the entire film. At the start it appeared to be a love story with criminal elements as a brother looks for his sister, but this quickly switches to a gang forming up to commit its last robbery. Keeping up with the concept of the complicated raid, the sibling search and an undercover operation to snare a Serbian criminal boss proves very difficult, especially when following subtitles.

Phil Tiffany, ex-RLC

VERDICT: Unknown actors give a reasonable performance



SAINTS AND SOLDIERS out now

ITS opening credits promise much but these first impressions are false. The limited impact of this film can be partly forgiven because the issue of racial segregation is given a fine platform. However, its attempt at being anything above a straight-to-TV flick flounders with wooden acting, a contrived script and dubious continuity. It's merely a limited collection of Second World War memorabilia, posing as a serious movie.

Maj Neil Johnson, AAC

VERDICT: They didn't have whitened teeth in 1945, did they?



INBETWEENERS 2 out now

THERE are no surprises here – the toilet humour remains firmly at the bottom of the pan. The awkward foursome return for a trip to Australia to visit Jay (**James Buckley**) on his gap year. The socially inept nerds are still seeking out attractive girls via toe-curling and vomit-inducing episodes and it is still hilarious to watch. If escaping excrement on a waterslide sounds amusing to you, this is a winner.

Joe Clapson, Soldier

VERDICT: Laugh-out-loud moments from a fail-safe formula

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REVIEWS



PICK OF THE MONTH:
ASSASSIN'S CREED UNITY

PROBLEMS IN PARIS

FRANCHISE FALLS SHORT ON
FRENCH FRONTIER

Review: SSgt Lee Gibbs, REME

THE seventh instalment in the *Assassin's Creed* saga sees you stepping into the historical memories of a master killer once more.

This chapter boasts Arno Dorian as the lead, a young man born to wealth then tossed in the gutter at every opportunity only to spring back time and time again.

However, the story is somewhat dull compared to previous efforts as our young hero finds himself getting to grips with a raft of paternal issues.

Arno's father, a skilled assassin, was murdered when he was a child and then as a young adult his adoptive father, a high-ranking Templar, suffered the same fate.

So there is a double dose of revenge on the menu and once we add a splash of star-crossed lovers to the mix the plot is ready to be served.

Newcomers may enjoy this but anyone who has taken on the roles of Altair, Ezio, Connor or Edward in the franchise's earlier offerings will find Arno's adventure all too familiar.

Unity is the first title in the series to be built especially for the next generation of consoles and that leads to the most spectacular part of the game.

Its setting, late 18th century Paris at the height of the revolution, sees the power of the new machines put to excellent use and the city of love – despite being racked by hate and violence – looks stunning.

The combat has also been refreshed, doing away with counter-kills in favour of actual swordplay, while the set piece assassinations now encourage you to explore the environment looking for weaknesses.

But once the tempo quickens, the game struggles to keep up. Climbing building exteriors is faster and slicker than ever but as you start moving horizontally or hurrying anywhere around low walls or doorways the pace is often stalled.

The free running element is restricted by the title's tendency to judge where you want to go and articulate the necessary actions and this feature feels more like an overpowering and irritating auto correct.

I lost track of the number of times I found myself shouting "stop climbing on things" or "just get in the door".

On the plus side, the four-player co-op makes missions fun again and many of these have been designed specifically for this format, adding welcome variety.

Despite this high it is hard to escape the feeling that *Unity* has been rushed and remains unfinished due to its various bugs. For example, Arno will occasionally get trapped inside objects while crowd members have the power to walk through walls.

For me *Assassin's Creed* hit its ceiling with *Black Flag*, where the storyline, ease of movement and the ability to plan takedowns with stealth and cunning all felt so right.

Unfortunately, *Unity* just cannot fill these impressive boots. ■

VERDICT: Love in Paris fails to topple the series' past pirate perfection



SKYLANDERS TRAP TEAM

for Xbox/PS3 and 4/Wii

PARENTS already afflicted by the *Skylanders* phenomenon will view this fourth iteration of the popular platformer – which uses toys to unlock on-screen characters – with cynicism. However, this is not a series resting on its laurels. Building on the innovative use of technology, gamers can trap villains and choose to use them as characters while a witty commentary offers a novel twist. The mix of puzzles and adventure will appeal to young players.



Andrew Simms, civvy

VERDICT: A big hit – both on the playground and to the wallet



NBA LIVE 2015

for Xbox One and PS4

WOW. The graphics on *NBA Live 2015* are unbelievable; it's like watching a match on the television and I haven't seen anything this sharp before. The game modes are the same as EA Sports' other hit, *Fifa*, and the league and career options offer good variety. However, the gameplay is a little sketchy and with so much going on it is difficult to get real control when defending, although the attacking moves are much better. Compared to previous titles this is a step in the right direction but it's missing something special.



Ashley Swarbrick, ex-RLC

VERDICT: A big improvement but worth no more than three points



SAMURAI WARRIORS 4

for Xbox/PS3 and 4/Wii

AS the latest title in a long list of Musou games *Samurai Warriors 4* brings new characters, stages and modes in an attempt to pack a greater punch. Visually, it is right up there but the stories are poorly presented and unless you are a fan you will soon get sick of reading subtitles and waiting for levels to load. When the action finally gets under way it soon becomes repetitive as any element of skill is replaced by relentless button bashing.



SSgt Lee Gibbs, REME

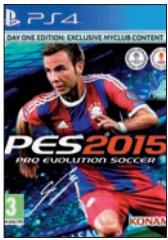
VERDICT: Not worth the thumb cramps unless Musou is your bag



PES 2015

for Xbox/PS3 and 4/PC

HAVING played both *PES 2015* and the latest *Fifa* offering I can say, hand on heart, that I prefer the former. The movement, control and shooting are all superb but the continued absence of Premier League licenses is a huge disappointment. It's just not the same playing as Manchester Blue against Merseyside Red. While it is a good game the simple fact is that my muckers will buy the rival title and virtual football is more enjoyable against real friends.



Cpl Adam Jackson, Para

VERDICT: Worth a look but may miss out on a title bid



ASSASSIN'S CREED ROGUE

for Xbox 360 and PS3

THIS release follows the same formula as last year's *Black Flag* in that it is a third-person adventure with fighting on land and sea. It tells the story of Shay Cormac, an assassin turned Templar who spends his time hunting down his former brethren. The gameplay, graphics and locations are all good but at the same time are very similar to recent efforts. There is the odd innovation in weaponry and the storyline has elements of change but on the whole there is nothing new to enjoy here.



Stephen Smith, MoD Corsham

VERDICT: Enjoyable enough but far from revolutionary



FAR CRY 4

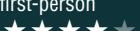
for Xbox/PS3 and 4/PC

AJAY Ghale is a man on a mission to return to his homeland of Kyrat and scatter the ashes of his recently deceased mother. However, his arrival doesn't go quite as planned thanks to the country's tyrannical king. This first-person shooter has amazing graphics, a good story and fast and furious gameplay. It's as if *Battlefield*, *Skyrim* and *GTA V* got together and had a baby. If you are skint this month invest in this game – it will easily keep you occupied until pay day.



Sgt Rupert Frere, RLC

VERDICT: One of the best first-person shooters on the market



MUSIC

PICK OF THE MONTH: THE ENDLESS RIVER

FAREWELL TO FLOYD

ROCK ICONS BOW OUT WITH INSTRUMENTAL OFFERING



Review: Lt Col Robert Philipson-Stow, RHG/D

THE long awaited "last album" from progressive rock heavyweights Pink Floyd has been 20 years in the making and has generated eager anticipation.

It ties up the loose ends from their last "last" album *Division Bell* and acts as a homage to keyboard player Richard Wright, who died of cancer in 2008.

For diehard fans this offering is a must but for those who aren't quite so sure about pinning their colours to the mast I'd recommend you don't rush out and buy it just because it says Pink Floyd on the tin.

The Endless River stems from 20 hours of unreleased material the band wrote and recorded with Wright during sessions for their last record and it takes us on a musical journey through their past in an almost chronological order.

Early tracks *It's What We Do* and *Sum* are reminiscent of the sound captured on *Dark Side of the Moon* while *Night Light* and *Talkin' Hawkin'* are more akin to material released in the post-Roger Waters era.

Some aspects of their earlier psychedelic/prog rock come to the fore in songs like *Autumn 68* and *Skins* (the latter perhaps a platform for Nick Mason to demonstrate his skills to Waters) and *Unsung* appears to be a direct reference to Wright himself which leads into a tribute-like *Anisina*.

But ultimately Pink Floyd have their own genre of music and this album can be best described as a retrospective effort, rather than anything that could be considered as progressive or looking to the future.

The fact this record is instrumental all the way through to the final track *Louder Than Words*, the first (and probably only) single to be released from this offering, makes this slightly unusual for the group.

Speaking about the tune, singer and guitarist Dave Gilmour said: "The music is from those final sessions, the three of us playing together with Rick's idiosyncratic keyboards reminding me now that you don't know what you've got until it's gone."

Unfortunately, any messages that were so strong in their lyrics of the past can only be guessed at through the titles and style of play on the other songs, like the ironically titled *It's What We Do*.

Indeed, Gilmour doesn't really let loose, maybe out of respect to Wright, and you spend most of the time expecting his prodigious, dazzling talent to be unleashed in the next musical sound bite.

Sum, *Allons-Y* (1&2), *Surfacing* and *Louder Than Words* among others whet your appetite, but don't expect much of the rest.

With the deluxe edition you get an extra three tracks and assorted videos. Sadly, this element ends the album in a style that one would have hoped for more of.

Nervana is arguably the most distinctive track because it is so un-Floyd in its approach, and that is perhaps a sign of what this album could have been. ■

VERDICT: For fans this is a five-star effort; others would be advised to scroll by



Storytone by Neil Young

FOR a guy in his 60s, producing two albums in the space of a year is no mean feat. This achievement deserves even greater credit



given the fact that latter offering *Storytone* has been released in various formats ranging from a solo effort to an expanded version with a 92-piece orchestra. However, this is not something I'd rush out to buy and it sounds like something you'd hear on dance night at an old people's home. But if you're a fan I guess it's one you'll want to add to your dusty collection.

Rodge Tapply, ex-RE

VERDICT: Fans will love it but way too out there for me



Black Star Elephant by Nico & Vinz

NORWEIGAN duo

Nico & Vinz

produced one of the best songs of 2014 with *Am I Wrong*.



The track opens proceedings here and hints at an exciting album; unfortunately this is not the case. The mixture of pop and reggae doesn't blend well and the inclusion of short cultural verses between each song adds to the inconsistency. There is no doubt that a lot of work has gone into this and there is a clear message about following your dreams. But it all just seems like a little too much and they have clearly overshot their goal.

Sgt Craig Backhouse, Coldm Gds

VERDICT: Great coffee-shop music but not much more



Chapter and Verse

MORE than ten years after their debut, six studio albums and numerous line-ups, *Funeral for a Friend* are back with *Chapter and Verse*.



If you're a fan then you'll be familiar with their thrashly alternative sound, for those that are not then just think *Green Day*, but on an off day. None of the 11 tracks of raw, punky rock are of particular note despite the band priding themselves on a sound that is "not easy to put in a box". My thought, however, is that a box, preferably soundproofed, is the best place for it.

Maj Fraser Dowling, AGC (ETS)

VERDICT: One for angry teenagers maybe, but I'm too old to get it



Guilty Pleasure by Attila

THIS is a band you'll love to hate. *Guilty Pleasure* is the second album from Atlanta outfit



Attila and is spitting with vengeance and arrogance. These guys leave nothing to the imagination with explicit rap and roar lyrics and textbook metalcore fret work. The title track outlines their prediction that most people will feign disapproval while secretly loving it and *Hate Me, Rebel* and *I Am Satan* do exactly what they say on the tin. Unlike many pretenders, **Attila** really are bad boys and are not afraid to put it out there.

Matt Walpole, ex-PWRR

VERDICT: An album that is the definition of all killer and no filler



David Aldo by David Aldo

WHILE unknown in the UK

David Aldo

has been busy in the States and has built up an impressive portfolio of A-list admirers



that includes **Tom Cruise** and **Russell Crowe**. His latest album is a polished affair and fans of country rock will no doubt be pleased with the outcome. *Dance in the Rain* is a power ballad with one foot in the 80s and *Grace*, with its anthemic tones, will surely delight live audiences. For me this sits so firmly in the middle of the road that we rarely glimpse Aldo's true personality shining through, which is a disappointment.

Capt Damian Hern, AGC (SPS)

VERDICT: A record that will thwart hopes of a UK breakthrough



Dublin to Detroit by Boyzone

THIS is the first themed album from **Boyzone** in their 20-year career and sees their vocal harmonies soar through a collection of updated classics from Motown's sensational songbook.



Normally I'd slate such offerings in the belief the group is simply re-recording "oldies" just to stay in the public eye. However, I have been totally converted and can't find any faults. From start to finish each track is not only sung brilliantly, it is produced flawlessly and is a fitting tribute to the original artists.

Rodge Tapply, ex-RE

VERDICT: Boyzone have scored a home run with this one



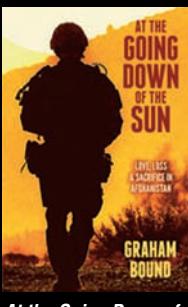
BOOKS



PICK OF THE MONTH:
AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN

STORIES OF SACRIFICE

FORMER SOLDIER WRITER PUBLISHES POIGNANT
TRIBUTE TO FALLEN TROOPS



*At the Going Down of
the Sun* is out now,
priced £18.99

Interview: Becky Clark

THE dust may be settling on Operation Herrick but for the families of the 453 soldiers who never returned from Afghanistan, life has changed irrevocably.

Lisa McKinlay had just come home from work on the evening of September 14, 2011 when officials arrived at her door bearing the news every Forces wife dreads.

Her husband Jon, a lance corporal in 1st Battalion, The Rifles, had been killed that afternoon – shot in the neck by a Taliban bullet.

"He was out on patrol and they were ambushed," the 35-year-old explained.

"Jon loved his job without a shadow of a doubt and he wouldn't have wanted to go any other way.

"He gave his life to a war they were fighting, so I will keep his memory going."

Mrs McKinlay was speaking at the launch of a new book, *At the Going Down of the Sun*, which tells Jon's story along with those of 19 other Servicemen and women who died.

The title's author, former MoD communications officer Graham Bound – who in a previous role was also an assistant editor at *Soldier* – explained why he had embarked upon the project.

"It seemed to me that telling the stories of ordinary people was important, as much as anything to show that they had lives that began and, in a sense, would endure beyond Afghanistan," he said.

"I hope their tales are preserved for posterity."

In compiling the book, Bound interviewed some 80 family members and colleagues of the fallen, as well as drawing on letters home from theatre.

Commenting on the emotionally draining process, he continued: "I was very touched by the families, some of whom were widows, mums or dads and, in some cases, children – they enabled us to build up a rounded picture of what [the soldiers] were like.

"Then we talked to some of the people that served with them, who were with them in their last moments and some of their evidence was extremely harrowing.

"What struck me is that there is no remission for the families on this misery – the depth of mourning is terrible.

"But what also really comes through is love.

"Love for comrades, love for families, love for children – it's a real force and that's incredibly moving for me."

While some of those interviewed understandably spoke out against the political strategy that led their loved ones to Afghanistan, Mrs McKinlay said she saw the book primarily as a chance to pay tribute to the husband she lost.

"I've never really taken note of the whole political palaver that goes on around it," she said.

"Jon chose to be in the Army, I chose to be his wife and what happened happened.

"The book was my opportunity for me to give my side of him and how we were together.

"But it's good that we've come out [of Afghanistan]. Hopefully no one else on British soil will have to go through this."

As Bound asks in his foreword, 453 Servicemen and women died during 13 years of conflict but, apart from those who knew them, how many people will recall their names or their stories?

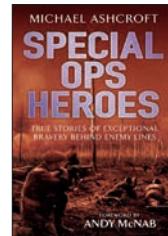
At the Going Down of the Sun will go some way to ensuring that a small number of them, at least, will be remembered more widely. ■

Interview: Becky Clark

Special Ops Heroes

by Michael Ashcroft

CONTINUING his series on gallantry medals, Lord Ashcroft looks at those won during special operations, from the Second World War to the first Gulf War via Malaysia, Northern Ireland and the Falklands. Where possible, he includes a short biography of the men concerned after their military careers ended, which I found particularly interesting. However, many of the entries are from earlier conflicts and I would have liked to see some more from modern campaigns.



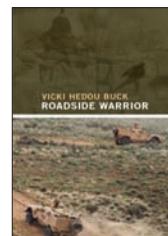
OCdt Daniel Levy, UOTC

VERDICT: A bit top heavy on the Second World War



Roadside Warrior

by Vicki Hedou Buck



THIS fictional tale about a Servicewoman in Afghanistan is well researched and written in a style of language that fits contemporary soldiering. The narrative follows the central character, Connie, as she conducts logistic patrols and it is cleverly interwoven with her family relationships. In depicting modern conflict from a primarily female perspective, it also provides a viewpoint that is largely lacking in current literature about the campaign.

Maj Jim Vincent, RLC

VERDICT: A believable story about modern operations



The Churchill Factor

by Boris Johnson



THIS is an enormously enjoyable title about arguably the greatest Englishman ever. However, Boris Johnson has turned it into an apologia. He explains away Churchill's foibles and poor decisions just by reasoning that he was proved right in the end. Luckily, the former prime minister's deeds, acts and speeches rise above the author's treatment. He was and remains one of my heroes and this text does not do him full justice – but to be fair that is hard in just one book.

Andy Kay, ex-RS

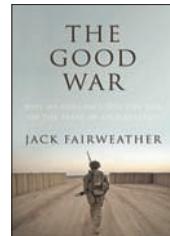
VERDICT: A must-read both for Churchill's fans and his detractors



The Good War

by Jack Fairweather

A FORENSIC account of the war in Afghanistan, this book is essential for anyone wishing to understand the conflict. Beginning in 2001 as George Bush hears news of the 9/11 attacks, the author gives a scathing account of 13 years of misguided decision making, pointless waste and incompetence as the West sacrificed a trillion dollars and thousands of lives during a war that he argues need never have been fought. Only those doing the fighting and dying emerge with any credit.



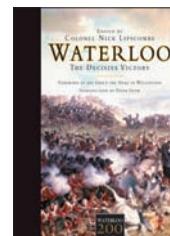
Doug Jackson, historical novelist

VERDICT: Too few maps and photos but top marks nonetheless



Waterloo

by Col N Lipscombe



WITH an impressive list of established contributors, this title provides an excellent account of one of the pivotal engagements in European history. The introduction by Peter Snow sets the tone for the dynamic action conveyed in the next 400 pages. From the strategic backdrop of the conflict to critical moments including the battle for La Haye Sainte, Col Nick Lipscombe's description and analysis is as engaging as it is fascinating.

Matthew Wong, civvy

VERDICT: Not a light read – one for keen historians



Like a Tramp, Like a Pilgrim

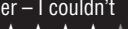
by Harry Bucknall



MOVING, fascinating and informative – a few words that sum up Harry Bucknall's account of his pilgrimage from Canterbury to Rome. The whole book is a wonderful mixture of human observations on the places and people encountered along the way, interspersed with history and trivia about his route – all described with typical British humour and understatement. The real strength of this title is that on finishing it, I now want to undertake a similar journey.

Maj Andy Shepherd, Int Corps

VERDICT: A real page turner – I couldn't put it down



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UK's Top 140 Independent Boarding Schools - 2014 Daily Telegraph % A*/A-Levels and equivalent qualifications

	= Ranking of Boarding Schools
	= % A*/A-Levels & equivalent qualifications
	= Overall National League Table Ranking

1	95%	Cardiff Sixth Form College	1
2	91%	Wycombe Abbey School	2
3	81%	Concord College	9
4	80%	Queen Ethelburga's College	10
5	76%	Faculty Queen Ethelburga's	18
6	75%	Brighton College	24
7	74%	St. Swithun's School	27
8	74%	St. Mary's School, Ascot	28
9	70%	Wellington College	33
10	70%	d'Overbroeck's College	34
11	69%	Ruthin School	35
12	69%	City of London Freemen's	38
13	68%	Headington School	43
14	66%	Queen Margaret's York	47
15	65%	St. Mary's Calne	49
16	65%	Caterham School	50
17	65%	Badminton School	51
18	65%	St. Catherine's, Bramley	52
19	64%	Oundle School	54
20	64%	Marlborough College	55
21	64%	Hurtwood House	57
22	62%	Dulwich College	60
23	60%	Benenden School	64
24	59%	St. Leonards-Mayfield	72
25	59%	Warwick School	74
26	59%	Rugby School	75
27	58%	Bromsgrove School	82
28	57%	Malvern St. James	84
29	57%	Canford School	87
30	57%	Bishop's Stortford College	88
31	57%	Loughborough Grammar	91
32	57%	Royal School, Haslemere	93
33	56%	King's School, Canterbury	94
34	56%	Kingswood School	97
35	55%	Wolmount International	98
36	55%	Ockbrook School	99
37	55%	Chigwell School	101
38	55%	Queenswood	102
39	55%	Uppingham School	103
40	55%	Woldham School	105

41	54%	Royal High Sch Bath	108	91	43%	Talbot Heath School	206
42	54%	St. Peter's School	110	92	43%	St. George's Edinburgh	208
43	54%	Sherborne Girls	116	93	43%	Downside School	209
44	53%	Mount School York	119	94	43%	King's Ely	210
45	53%	Haberdasher Mon. G	120	95	42%	Ipswich School	213
46	52%	Merchantiston Castle	121	96	42%	Queen's College	214
47	52%	Dauntsey's School	123	97	41%	Bradfield College	218
48	52%	Christ's Hospital	124	98	41%	Chetham's Sch. Music	220
49	52%	Bury Grammar Girls	126	99	41%	Harrogate Ladies' Coll.	223
50	52%	Leweston School	127	100	41%	Stamford High School	226
51	52%	Bedford School	129	101	41%	Kimbolton School	227
52	51%	Prior Park College	131	102	40%	St Margaret's Bushey	228
53	51%	Christ College	134	103	40%	Lincoln Minster School	230
54	51%	Clifton College	141	104	39%	Kirkham Grammar	231
55	50%	Ashford School	142	105	39%	Royal Russell School	232
56	50%	Burgess Hill Girls	146	106	39%	Wellington School	236
57	49%	The Leys School	147	107	39%	Loretto School	237
58	49%	Bootham School	148	108	38%	The Oratory School	239
59	49%	ACS Cobham Int.	149	109	38%	Leighton Park School	240
60	49%	Merchant Taylors' B	151	110	38%	Royal Sch. Dungannon	242
61	49%	Wells Cathedral Sch	152	111	38%	Ashville College	244
62	49%	Surbiton High School	156	112	37%	Stamford School	248
63	48%	Kent College	158	113	37%	Trent College	249
64	48%	Bellerbys Brighton	160	114	36%	Battle Abbey School	250
65	48%	St John's School	164	115	36%	St. Edmunds Cantbury	251
66	48%	Cheltenham College	165	116	35%	Bede's Senior School	254
67	47%	Roedean School	169	117	35%	Langley School	255
68	47%	Haileybury	172	118	35%	Ratcliffe College	257
69	47%	St. Teresa's, Effingham	173	119	35%	Sutton Valence Sch	258
70	47%	St. Leonards	174	120	35%	Worksop College	259
71	47%	New Hall School	175	121	34%	Box Hill School	263
72	46%	Oakham School	176	122	34%	Hampshire Collegiate	265
73	46%	Brentwood School	177	123	34%	Glenalmond College	266
74	46%	St. Mary's, Shaftbury	180	124	34%	Wrekin College	267
75	46%	St. Mary's, Cambridge	181	125	33%	Woodhouse Grove	269
76	46%	Bellerbys Cambridge	182	126	33%	St. George's Ascot	270
77	46%	Ampleforth College	183	127	32%	St. Edmund's College	274
78	46%	Moreton Hall	184	128	32%	Barnard Castle Sch	276
79	45%	The Godolphin Sch	185	129	32%	St. John's College	277
80	45%	Gresham's School	186	130	31%	Pocklington School	279
81	45%	Reed's School	187	131	31%	The Purcell School	280
82	45%	Mill Hill School	189	132	31%	Saint Felix School	281
83	45%	Welbeck College	190	133	30%	Stonyhurst College	283
84	44%	King William's College	192	134	30%	Culford School	285
85	44%	St. Francis' College	193	135	30%	St. Bees School	287
86	44%	Kelly College	198	136	29%	St. James Senior B	290
87	44%	Lord Wandsworth Col	200	137	29%	CATS College London	292
88	43%	Monmouth School	201	138	29%	Tring Park Perf. Arts	293
89	43%	St. Michael's School	202	139	28%	Dover College	294
90	43%	Sidcot School	203	140	28%	Oswestry School	295

SOLDIERSPORT

Sports Editor: Richard Long

Photographers: Graeme Main and Steve Dock



Footballing feat: LCpl Sam Agar (R Signals) celebrates at the full-time whistle as the Army beat the German Bundeswehr 1-0 in the Christmas truce commemorative match. Read more on page 89...

And the winners are...

COMMONWEALTH Games medallists topped the list of winners at the new-look Army Sports Awards. The ceremony at London's Guildhall celebrated the Service's athletic prowess in 2014 and *SoldierSport* was included on the guest list. Here we chart the peak performers in each of the eight categories...

SPORTSMAN OF THE YEAR



» AT the start of 2014 Army boxing sensation LCpl Ashley Williams (R Welsh) set himself the target of representing his country at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

Selection for the Welsh squad soon followed but the 49kg fighter faced a significant setback when he fractured his cheekbone and eye socket following a clash of heads with an opponent.

After a six-week lay-off he battled his way to the final of his first tournament back and despite narrowly missing out on a gold medal his place at the Games was confirmed.

His Scottish campaign started in superb style with a convincing win against Juliano Maquina of Mozambique. The soldier then defeated Malaysia's Muhamad Redzuan in the quarter-finals but his run was ended by world number three Devendro Laishram of India.

Williams secured a bronze medal in Glasgow and his efforts in the ring saw him crowned Army sportsman of the year.

"It was a massive honour to be nominated and to win the award is brilliant," he said.

TEAM OF THE YEAR



» AN exceptional season on the pitch that included a run to the quarter-finals of the Challenge Cup saw the women's rugby league outfit crowned team of the year.

Victories over the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force saw the squad lift another Inter-Services trophy and with 19 different players scoring tries during the course of 2014 the soldiers proved they have true strength in depth.

Injuries and the tempo of operations claimed a number of key individuals during various stages of the campaign and the team called upon a pool of 32 personnel.

"To get this award is absolutely amazing," said Sgt Amy Robinson (AGC (RMP)). "It will attract a lot of girls to our training and development sessions and I'm very hopeful about the future of the women's game."



RISING STAR

» CYCLIST Spr Alex Royle (RE) enjoyed a sensational season on two wheels as he helped the Army win the Inter-Services time trial event and also finished 35th at the British National Road Race Championships.

The soldier joined the Service set-up last year and has been competing regularly at national-level competitions.

Royle has become renowned for his attacking style and a succession of inspired performances against full-time professional riders saw him presented with the inaugural rising star honour at the sports awards.

He said: "To be recognised for doing something as simple as pedalling is fantastic."

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT



» **DEDICATION** to the sport of rugby league saw Sean Fanning (ex-RAMC) presented with the lifetime achievement award.

As a player he represented the Armed Forces at the highest level and also starred for the Great Britain Community Lions before turning his hand to coaching, where he worked with unit, corps and both Army rugby league and union teams.

He also founded the Soldiers League charity – which has raised more than £50,000 in seven years – and wrote a book of the same name to generate further funds for the cause.

But his excellence is not just restricted to the field of play. Fanning has served on numerous operational tours and volunteered for his final deployment as a multiple medic less than a year before leaving the Service.

"I'm really grateful," the former staff sergeant said. "It is a real honour to be in the same room as these athletes and I'm very thankful to the Army for giving me an opportunity to pursue my sport."

UNSUNG HERO



» THE 2014 awards also introduced an unsung hero category, with Capt Paul Greenwood (R Signals) the first winner.

Having enjoyed a fine career as a player the officer is now involved in cricket coaching and holds two key roles within the Army set-up.

As head coach of the women's team he has played a significant role in the growth of the sport and in 2014 the team won the Inter-Services' Twenty20 and 40-over competitions.

He is also manager of the under-25 squad.

SPORTS OFFICIAL



» **TIRELESS** work as the head coach of the Combined Services Disabled Ski Team saw WO2 Mark Scorgie (RE) named Army sports official of the year.

He became coach of the squad in 2010 and has since organised year-round training that has led to a number of athletes being included in the national set-up.

Scorgie also travelled to Sochi for the Winter Paralympics, where he helped former soldier Mick Brennan with his final preparations.

» **FORMER** Serviceman Charlie Walker was one of many athletes to star at the Invictus Games and his endeavours saw him win gold medals in sitting volleyball, wheelchair basketball and rugby.

But his success expands beyond action on the court. In 2014 he coached the Battle Back team to glory at the Sitting Volleyball British Grand Prix and the squad has also won international-level club tournaments in Luxembourg and France.

His efforts saw him named as the Army's adaptive athlete of the year.

"There will be people out there, guys who are injured, who have seen it and think 'I can get involved in that'; that's the main aim," said the double amputee, who lost both legs after contracting meningitis on operations in 2006.



ADAPTIVE SPORT



SPORTSWOMAN OF THE YEAR

» **BOXING** brilliance was also honoured in the sportswoman of the year category, where LCpl Alanna Audley-Murphy (RLC) took top spot following another bronze medal performance at the Commonwealth Games.

The Servicewoman was called upon to represent Northern Ireland in the ring and she defeated Valerian Spicer, of the Dominican Republic, in her opening bout to set up a semi-final clash with Shelley Watts.

Unfortunately, the Australian proved to be too strong and defeated Audley-Murphy on her way to winning gold but the soldier earned high praise as she added to her country's impressive medal count.

"It's going to be great to take this award back to show the boxing team, as well as my mum and dad," she said.

"It will sit alongside my Commonwealth Games medal and all my other boxing trophies."

RUGBY UNION

SEASON STAT: THE ARMY UNDER-23s WON SIX OUT OF EIGHT FIXTURES IN 2014

Game brief

Date: November 28, 2014

Competition: Under-23 Inter-Services

Venue: RAF Halton

Army Under-23s

Hamilton	Hunter	Jenkinson
1	2	3
Collins	Parkins	
4	5	
Hopper	Lewis	Thomson
6	7	
Watkins	Dixon	
9	10	
Morgan	Main	
12	13	
Turaganivalu	Mercer	Petueli
11	15	14

Captain's comment

I'm extremely proud of the blokes. We really stepped up to the mark in the second half and were a completely different team.

Maybe there was a bit of cockiness on our part in the opening period but we reacted well. We overpowered the RAF in the scrum and dominated at their line-out, we were strong in defence and made some great tackles.

The Defence World Cup is being held in 2015 and some of our guys have really put their hands up for a place in the squad.

We've had lots of new lads coming in this year and they look really good.

LCpl Ross Parkins (RLC)



New breed deliver in cup finale

U23 Inter-Services

Army 34
Royal Navy 12

Royal Air Force 17
Army 28

Royal Navy in the opening match gave the soldiers the perfect platform for another trophy bid and after trailing at the interval they put the airmen to the sword.

The first period proved to be a cagey affair and a solitary penalty from Spr James Dixon (RE) offered the only points inside the opening 20 minutes.

But instead of building on their slender advantage the Army found themselves on the back foot as a quick break from SAC Liam Eaton created the platform for SAC Lloyd Hadley to crash home.

Reds wing Gnr Ben Turaganivalu (RA) edged his side in front on the half-hour mark as he profited from some quick ball to score in the corner before a penalty from SAC Andy Byrne gave the

hosts a 10-8 lead at the break.

With stern words ringing in their ears the champions-elect returned to action in determined mood.

Dixon pounced on a loose ball in midfield and his perfectly weighted pass set Turaganivalu clear on the left. After smashing his way through the RAF lines he slipped an offload infield and Watkins ran to the line.

And Dixon was in the thick of the action ten minutes later as a searing break ripped the opposition defence wide open and Watkins gladly accepted a pass to score his second try.

The airmen fired an immediate response through SAC Douglas Ireland but Dixon expertly dispatched two long-range penalties late on to seal the victory. ■

Tournament in numbers



3

Consecutive
Inter-
Services
titles won
by the Reds'
young guns



7

Tries scored by the
Army in two games



Points from Spr
James Dixon

32

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Larkhill:	11 - 22 May	Tidworth:	18 - 29 May
Catterick:	01 - 12 Jun	Paderborn:	01 - 12 Jun
Kinloss:	01 - 12 Jun	Chester (NW)	15 - 26 Jun
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On the front foot: Reds' forward Pte Matt Glass (RLC) takes the attack to the German Bundeswehr in Aldershot

Army's truce triumph

Christmas truce match

British Army 1
German Bundeswehr 0

A THIRD-MINUTE strike from LCpl Calum Wilkinson (RLC) gave the Army a 1-0 win over the German Bundeswehr in the commemorative Christmas truce match in Aldershot.

The festive fixture offered a fitting tribute to the famous ceasefire of 1914 and the 2,500-strong crowd was treated to a slick display from the Reds, who looked in fine form ahead of this season's

Inter-Services campaign.

Wilkinson was on hand to score a simple tap-in after keeper Cpl Andreas Forster produced a smart save at the near post but his early effort failed to spark the goal rush the spectators craved.

Forster denied striker Pte Matt Glass (RLC) as he raced clear following a superb run from Gnr Peter Williams (RA) and Wilkinson spurned a great opportunity when he failed to connect with a pass from LCpl Sam Agar (R Signals).

Having been restricted to long-range efforts during the early exchanges the Germans came close to opening their account in the 35th minute as a header from skipper MSgt Alexander Hess drifted just past the far post.

Forster continued his goalkeeping masterclass after the break as he again thwarted Glass from a one-on-one before Sgt Keith Emmerson (RAPTC) saw his follow-up effort deflect wide.

Agar was having greater influence as the game evolved and after driving into the area from the right wing he was twice denied by Forster.

As the clock ticked down the Army looked set for the win but the crowd was treated to some late drama as substitute keeper Capt Gavin Smyth (RA) saved from SSgt Florian Stahl, with the follow-up effort cannoning off the crossbar.

Wilkinson then had the chance to settle the contest in injury time but his shot rebounded off the post. ■



Game brief

Date: December 17, 2014

Competition: Christmas truce match

Venue: Aldershot Town Football Club

Army

Wilkinson	7	Glass	10
Emmerson	11	Agar	9
Molyneux	6	Williams	8
Haley	3	Evans	2
Paddock	5	Crawford	4
Cairney	1		

Captain's comment

“

We had plenty of chances. There were three or four one-on-ones and on another day we would have finished them off, but we are happy.

There is massive pride in representing the Army in any game but with this being the anniversary of the Christmas truce it made it more special.

We have changed a few things this season and so far it is working well. Long may that success continue.

**Sgt Keith
Emmerson
(RAPTC)**



WITH the Service's annual showdown against the Royal Navy now enjoying sell-out status at Twickenham it is rightly celebrated as rugby union's premier fixture.

But the strength of the sport spreads much further than the prestige and glamour of a full house at the national stadium.

Having seen the men's game make significant progress in recent years the women are following suit and the Army team has quickly emerged as a force to be reckoned with.

Last month the Reds cruised to a 36-0 win over the Combined Emergency Services and they will be looking to claim another notable scalp when they lock horns with the England Under-20s on February 17.

Former England star Cpl Jane Leonard (RE) is skippering the side this season and with a growing pool of international players taking to the field the success is not just based on quantity, it is about quality as well.

Capt Chantelle Miller (AGC (RMP)), a nominee for Army sportswoman of the year in 2014, has been capped by Wales while Cpl Bianca Dawson (AGC (RMP)), Sgt Rosie Haigh (REME) and Capt Gemma Rowland (RA) have all recently been selected for England's academy squad.

And with seven new caps included in the Reds' latest line-up the conveyor belt of talent shows no sign of slowing down.

"With the rise of the women's game, and England winning the World Cup, a lot of girls have been encouraged to go out and play," Wasps star Leonard told *SoldierSport*.

"We now have three squad members in the national set-up and when the others see that and play alongside them it definitely helps; it gives them

Reds reach new heights

Women's game goes from strength to strength within Army ranks





something to aspire to.

"You couldn't be in a better place to play rugby than the Army. We're professionals. This is our job – we get paid to do this and that's a huge advantage."

Wins against strong civilian opposition highlights the progress that has been made but the Inter-Services remains the number one priority each season.

Having never lost a fixture in the competition the all-conquering Reds will be strong favourites ahead of this year's showdown but Leonard (pictured top left) is not taking victory for granted.

She said: "The Navy and Royal Air Force haven't got as big a pool of players. We're at an advantage because there are lots of women within the Army who want to be involved.

"We're now also encouraging our girls to play for civilian teams, as well as corps rugby every Wednesday afternoon.

"The interest has risen massively, so that's why there's that big divide, but the RAF are an up-and-coming team.

"I was lucky enough to go on tour with them in April and they've got some talented individuals.

"They're also playing more fixtures and are upping their game massively.

"As captain of the side I'd also like us to win team of the year at the next Army Sports Awards.

"We've had three undefeated seasons, we've never lost the Inter-Services and we're a much more professional set-up.

"I think we deserve it."

One player who is ideally placed to comment on the growth of the women's game is centre Sgt Sarah Mitchelson (RLC).

She made her Army debut in 2004 and with 25 caps to her name the 32-year-old is among the squad's most experienced performers.

"At my first match we got changed in the back of our cars, we had limited kit and were lucky if a physio turned up," she explained.

"For the Army-Navy game we'd play separately to the men the day before in Aldershot. But now we're all joined up.

"There are at least two days' training before each fixture and we have a full coaching and management team on-board.

"It's a lot more professional. We've got all the kit, we're fed and hydrated properly and we all have individual conditioning programmes that we have to work on."

Front-row forward Dawson (pictured bottom left) has flourished within the system and is now combining Service commitments with her international ambitions.

"It is all very exciting," the 28-year-old said. "I'll have a training weekend with the England academy once a month, which I have to fit in around Army and club rugby – I play for Wasps and it's my first season with them.

"There are a lot of people to learn from, like Jane Leonard and Sarah Mitchelson, and I want to keep on improving my fitness and skills.

"The academy will be a great way for me to develop as a player." ■

You could not be in a better place to play rugby

“

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For more details on how to get involved in the women's game visit www.armyrugbyunion.org.uk/teams/womens

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Picture: Mike Wilkinson



Drifters aim for track success

SERVICE personnel will be looking to make an impact on the grid this year as they test themselves in one of motorsport's fastest growing disciplines – drifting.

Capt Rikki Abel (RLC) enjoyed a successful season in the British Drift Cup in 2014 as he finished 18th in a field of 50 drivers and his team – Kiaana Motorsports – boasts more than 20 members.

The set-up will enter five cars in the 2015 event while top prospect LCpl Louis Geldart (4 Scots) will be taking to the track in the pursuit's elite-level contest – the British Drift Championship.

He was the Service's only professional driver last year and caught the eye in his high-powered Nissan 200SX S14.

Drifting has yet to be granted full recognition by the British Army Motorsports Association meaning participation is self-funded and the cost of building a full-spec competition car can be in excess of £10,000.

However, newcomers can learn the basics in any rear-wheeled drive vehicle at specialist schools across the country and the team also has opportunities available in areas such as mechanics, management and logistics.

"Unlike circuit racing or rallying, which uses the fastest time to determine the victor, to win in a drift car a panel of judges score each driver," Abel told *SoldierSport*.

"They look at speed, angle and proximity to the driving

line and clipping points and the competitor is awarded a total. In the final stages individuals are paired up and race the exact same line but they will also be judged on their closeness to the other car.

"The winner is the person with the greater control."

Abel is hoping to organise training days with the sport's professional drivers to help personnel perfect their skills and drills and is also looking for further sponsors to push the team forward.



For more details visit the Kiaana Motorsport page on Facebook or call Capt Abel on 94881 2411

Mudder mission complete



ENDURANCE athlete CSjt Mark Holloway (Rifles) tamed undulating terrain, water obstacles and a 38-foot cliff jump to finish in 29th place at the World's Toughest Mudder.

The soldier completed 13 laps of the punishing Nevada course to cover a total of 65 miles in 24 hours.

Sandstorms, ice-cold wind blasts and temperatures below -6 degrees Celsius made the night-time stage particularly challenging but Holloway's training – combined with his unique race-day diet – held him in good stead.

"I got most of my fuel from a slice of pizza and a Krispy Kreme doughnut every lap," he explained. "So many people commented and laughed as I walked past them eating but that was just it – I was going past them."

MONTH in sport

January's key fixtures...



WHAT: Army/Inter-Services Nordic skiing and biathlon

WHEN: Wednesday, January 21 to Thursday, February 5

WHERE: Ruhpolding, Germany

COMMENTS: Nearly 250 athletes from 42 military and civilian outfits competed in last year's races and 1 Logistic Support Regiment will again be the team to beat



WHAT: Army v Cambridge University rugby union

WHEN: Wednesday, January 28 (1915 kick-off)

WHERE: Army Rugby Stadium, Aldershot

COMMENTS: Capt Andy Sangar (RE) takes charge of his first match since his return as the Reds' head coach



WHAT: Inter-Services Alpine, snowboard and telemark

WHEN: Saturday, January 31 to Saturday, February 7

WHERE: Meribel, France

COMMENTS: The Army face their Forces rivals in the annual winter sports extravaganza and will be looking to build on some impressive displays in 2014

SPORT SHORTS



Invictus honoured

INJURED personnel who represented the UK at the Invictus Games received the Helen Rollason Award at the BBC Sports Personality of the Year ceremony.

The honour recognises outstanding achievement in the face of adversity and was presented to athlete Capt Dave Henson (RE) on behalf of the team.

"To use the phrase 'blown away' is inappropriate, but we were," he said. "We expected Aldershot but got the Olympic Stadium."



Tickets for troops

ARMED Forces personnel are being offered free admission to matches in this season's Toolstation Western Football League.

Clubs involved in the competition play at step five and six of the FA's national league system and cover the area of Bristol, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset and Devon.

For more details visit www.toolstationleague.com



Making a splash: Army swimmers produced a string of record-breaking displays at the Inter-Corps Championships

Records tumble in the pool

A HOST of records were smashed during two days of energy-sapping action at the annual Inter-Corps Swimming and Water Polo Championships.

The Royal Signals led the charge with three team titles but it was the individual performances of the Army's new breed of athletes that really stood out.

Pte Kimberley Preston (RAMC) underlined her growing potential with a superb showing in the women's 800 metres freestyle – winning in a competition-best time of 10min 13.16sec.

Her fine form was replicated in the 400 metres freestyle,

where she shattered the existing record by 19 seconds to claim gold with a swim of 4min 58.34sec.

In the men's events, an effort of 2min 11.86sec saw Cpl James Gibson (Int Corps) take top honours in the 200 metres freestyle as he broke a record that had stood since 2008, while Lt Marcus Roberts (4 Scots) followed his Inter-Services success with a commanding victory in the 100 metres backstroke.

His swim helped the Infantry to the men's individual title and the team also won the relays.

The Army Medical Services took the women's relay crown while the signallers won the individual races to add another

title to their victories in the water polo competition.

"There were 11 records broken this year," event organiser Capt John Scott (REME) told *SoldierSport*. "At the start of the day I was thinking they needed to go as some have stood for a while.

"But I was surprised by how many went. In a normal year you see one or two and the relay times were tough.

"The standard was outstanding and that is due to a fresh injection of talent.

"We have encouraged team managers within each corps to run events throughout the year and that means we are able to identify potential swimmers for the Army." ■

Swimming leaderboard



Water polo – men Water polo – women

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. R Signals | 1. R Signals |
| 2. RAC | 2. RE/AAC |

Swimming – men Swimming – women

- | | |
|--------|--------------|
| 1. Inf | 1. R Signals |
| 2. RM | 2. AMS |
| 3. RLC | 3. AGC |

Relay – men Relay – women

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. Inf | 1. AMS |
| 2. R Signals | 2. AGC |
| 3. RLC | 3. R Signals |



Sailors sit at top table

THE British Soldier sailing team claimed four awards at the Royal Ocean Racing Club's annual dinner and prize-giving to mark the end of a fantastic season.

A best production yacht honour was followed by the presentation of the Haylock Cup (awarded to the best Service team) along with trophies for finishing second in an international fleet of 274 vessels and claiming second place in class two.

The Service outfit were just ten points behind the leaders in both categories and their achievement

marks a highest-ever placing in the series.

A total of 96 personnel sailed the yacht in 2014, covering a distance of approximately 8,000 miles. The crew has been made up of a mix of Regulars and Reserves, with a healthy balance between officers and junior ranks.

"This has been a highly successful season for the team in a mix of events including inshore, offshore and adventure racing," said Lt Col Tim Hill (Scots), of the Army Sailing Association.

"There have been numerous skippers

throughout the season ranging from officer cadet to corporal and major which highlights the real depth of sailing talent we have."

Hill reserved special praise for Maj Will Naylor (REME), who as boat captain worked tirelessly to maintain the yacht without a bosun, and Capt Philip Caswell (REME) as the offshore team captain.

But British Soldier has not just been deployed as a racing vessel; it has also been used to deliver adventurous training to five units throughout the course of the year. ■



Downhill delight

» THE Forces Mountain Biking North group staged a keenly contested downhill competition on the challenging terrain of Durham's Descend Bike Park.

LCpl Chris Borrowdale (RSMS) took top spot in the advanced riders' competition, with Cpl Ryan Smithson (1 Lancs LAD) third.

The group was set up on Facebook in 2010.



Cyprus sets sail

» A NEW sailing centre for wounded Service personnel has opened in Cyprus. Funded by the Adventurous Training Group, the £250,000 facility will offer opportunities for soldiers to take part in adaptive sailing and other water sports.

WO2 Will McKinley, of Battle Back, said: "The range of adaptive disciplines that are available, together with the climate, make Cyprus a great working environment."

SPORT SHORTS



Golden debut

» WOUNDED ex-Serviceman Matthew Richardson has become the first para skeleton gold medallist at the sport's inaugural World Cup race in the USA.

The 28-year-old, a former lance bombardier in the Royal Artillery, posted a combined time of 1min 49.4sec.

"Para skeleton is awesome," he said. "It's quick, technical and a real adrenalin rush."

IN NUMBERS

The winning scores achieved by the Army women against their Forces rivals as they claimed the Inter-Services indoor hockey title

7-1 7-2



Court date looms

» THE Army Indoor Tennis Championships will be held in Aldershot from February 4 to 6.

Open to all serving personnel (Regular and Reserve), the competition will consist of men's and women's singles formats.

Entry forms can be downloaded online at www.armytennis.org and for more details contact Lt Col Mike Thornley (RE) on military 96161 4257.



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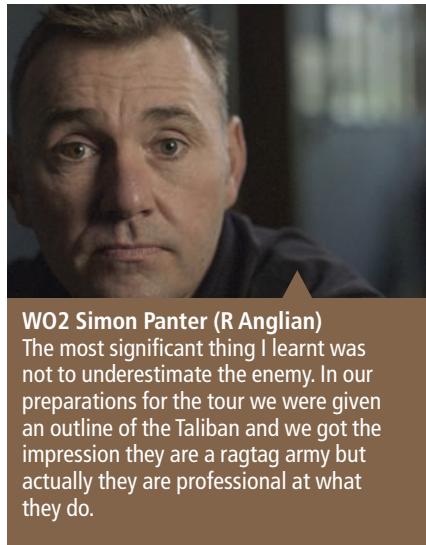
Final word

We asked Afghanistan veterans about the single most important lesson they learnt during Operation Herrick...



Cpl Kyle Smith (Mercian)

For me, ground sign awareness was the biggest lesson. A small amount of this information can paint a thousand words as to the situation you are in. Without it you might not understand the atmospherics. It saves lives.



WO2 Simon Panter (R Anglian)

The most significant thing I learnt was not to underestimate the enemy. In our preparations for the tour we were given an outline of the Taliban and we got the impression they are a ragtag army but actually they are professional at what they do.



WO2 Paul Baines (Coldm Gds)

I realised that the small things don't really matter. People whinge about the petty issues in life but until you've been out there and put your life on the line and been with individuals who will do the same for you, you don't appreciate that those things aren't that significant. I sometimes have to remember that when I'm getting stressed about trivial stuff back at work. It's not really important.



Gdsm Sam Mullen (Coldm Gds)

Doing force protection in Kabul I learnt to stay vigilant to the very end, not just to sit back and think "nothing's going to happen". When you start resting on your laurels, that's when stuff can go wrong. We were lucky to have no casualties but that could have been down to our good drills.



Cpl Carrie Roberts (REME)

I was a mentor to Afghan policewomen on Herrick 17 and what struck me during my time there was how the West is perceived. It's a different culture completely and I wasn't really expecting it. That was a big reality check for me.



Tpr John Blacklock (LD)

A key lesson for me was how to work with other nations, especially people that might not want to work with you. A lot of the locals in Afghanistan were timid about cooperating with us because of the Taliban so interacting with them and showing that we were there to befriend and not hurt them was a challenge.



Cpl Amber Coles (RE)

I was on Herrick 18 based with the works group first and then at the logistics node fitter section. I learnt a lot about command and leadership. I was promoted on the first day of the tour and was standing in for a sergeant at one point so I was in at the deep end and it was sink or swim. But it boosted my confidence and gave me plenty of trade experience.



Cpl Pralon Rai (RGR)

The main thing I drew from Op Herrick was how to work alongside other cultures. In the UK we don't often come across people of different faiths but in Afghanistan that was a key part of the counter-insurgency effort; understanding where others are coming from. That may have been easier for Gurkhas; in Nepal we are exposed to various religions and traditions. But it still took us two or three weeks to grasp a good knowledge and understanding of Afghan culture.

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 98

» FINAL WORD CONTINUED



Sgt David Price (Coldrm Gds)

On my second tour (Herrick 11) we got the perfect lesson in putting into practice something we had trained for, which as infantry is closing up with the enemy. I was a section commander and being out on the ground and coming under fire with no officers or platoon sergeants around brought me forward massively. Luckily no one in my section was injured, which was probably a combination of luck and the blokes calling on their training.



LCpl James Garsrud (LD)

Practise as much as you can before you get out there and communicate. If you know what everyone's doing and can speak to your mucker you'll have good situational awareness. Working in Afghanistan improves your skills because you have to be more switched on and you realise what it's like to do it for real.



Cfn Luke Richmond (REME)

During Herrick 18 I worked in the redeployment platoon, getting vehicles ready to be transported back to the UK. It was my first major operation and I knew it was going to be tough but it taught me what it was like to work to the point of exhaustion and about the effects that has on you both physically and mentally.



Cpl Tara McGlade (R Signals)

Three Herrick tours taught me how important the people at home are at keeping you sane. You'd get a letter from your loved ones and for half an hour you were back with them. Especially if you have younger members in the family; they're developing and you're missing out so you can feel like a bit of an outsider.



WO2 Chris Homewood (LD)

I did Herrick 6 and 10 and the biggest lesson for me was teamwork. You're operating in such a hostile and arduous environment that you have to rely on those around you. It's not a singular effort – if you work together you can achieve more.



LCpl Sam Astwood (LD)

I found that when you're working in stressful situations you realise who your true mates are. Your trust in your comrades grows, especially as the tour goes on. At the start of pre-deployment training you don't know people very well but as time goes on you get to pretty much know everything about each other so it's a closer bond than just being normal friends on civvy street.



Capt Tom Rossiter (Coldrm Gds)

Working on intelligence and security at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy I learnt about cooperating with other nations. There were a huge number of organisations working alongside us and we had to be flexible. What works for us wouldn't necessarily work well for them and vice versa. Flexibility and diplomacy were key.



Pte Hafeth Bader (Mercian)

I served on Herrick 19 as force protection at Forward Operating Base Price and there were no surprises for us while out there but that was because of the 12 months of pre-deployment training we went through. The most important thing we can learn from the mission in Afghanistan is that we must continue to prepare properly to ensure we are ready for anything.

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