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OCTOBER 2007
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MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

SOLDIER

in this issue

October 07 Vol 63/10

17 Deliverance

Convoy troops brave constant threat

21 Dogs of war

Four-legged friends prove their worth in Iraq

25 Biting back

Bulldog is unleashed on Basra

29 Helmand home life

Soldier samples camp conditions in Sangin

32 Afghan remedy

Clinic offers more than pills for Helmand's ills

35 Mercian might

Latest super regiment reports for duty

39 Diamonds in the rough

Sierra Leone's élite inspired by best of British

42 My Army: Gary Rhodes

Chef takes the heat of a front-line cookhouse

45 Picture perfect

Focus on Army's sharpshooters

72 Legion of legends

Sir Ben Kingsley's battle for Rome

81 SoldierSport

Regulars

7 Update starts here

27 Chuckle with Chip

49 Talkback

57 Home Truths

62 Bulletin board

74 Games

76 Music

78 Books

90 Vox pop



Cover picture (left): Award-winning image of a section 2iC receiving radio instructions as a wounded soldier is evacuated by Chinook in Garmsir, Helmand. See Pages 45-47

Picture: Spr Ian Chapman, 299 Para Engr Sqn RE (V)

Background image: Home for the soldiers of Sangin. See Pages 29-31 Picture: Mike Weston



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SOLDIER is published by the Ministry of
Defence and printed by St Ives (Andover) plc.

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"Not good enough, Bruno! AWOL again, chasing those flighty bitches in the village.
Ten days confined to kennels AND no Bonio treats. March him out, Sergeant Major."

● Dogs of war – Pages 21-23

Thanks for all your support

THE families of 1 Mechanized Brigade soldiers have been thanked by the head of the British Army for their "unstinting support" of their loved ones serving in Iraq.

"As both a soldier and as a father of a soldier, I know only too well that it is the 'not knowing' of families that is all too often harder to shoulder than the separation", wrote Gen Sir Richard Dannatt, Chief of the General Staff, in an open letter to the brigade. "What I can say, with absolute certainty, is that I for one am immensely proud of everything that our soldiers continue to achieve."

Gen Dannatt said troops were facing an enemy whose chosen weapon was terror with a resilience and robustness "that never ceases to amaze me when I visit". "So, if I may ask anything more of you than you are already giving in bucket loads", he concluded, "it is this: continue to be really proud of what your soldiers are doing, be absolutely certain that every single one of them is doing a sterling job and please be aware the vast majority of people within the country really respect our people for what they are – soldiers."

NEW research into what the public thinks of the Army reveals that almost everyone associates courage, loyalty and discipline with its personnel, and most

FIRST SIGHT

think selfless commitment, integrity and respect for others are values reflected in today's Army.

The Populus poll of more than 1,000 adults, conducted across Britain, also found that the overwhelming majority reckoned the nation was proud of its army. Less positive were the widely-held perceptions that the Army is not properly equipped and not fittingly housed.

HOLLYWOOD has opened a new front in the war on terror as Tinsel Town goes gunning for Oscars. Military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have spawned a new generation of war movies and more than 20 films about the post-9/11 conflicts have already been shot, are in production or about to start filming.

With this assault on the silver screen in mind, *Soldier* has added movies to our popular reviews line-up. Sir Ben Kingsley, star of *The Last Legion*, assumes the lead role as we takes our first foray into film. Grab some popcorn and turn to Pages 72-73. ■

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Picture: Cpl Steve Follows RAF

Palace pull-out: British troops return to the contingency operating base following the handover of Saddam's former stronghold to the Iraqi security forces

Change of guard

Rifles roll out of Basra as palace outpost is handed over to Iraqi control

BRITISH troops have been reflecting on the sacrifices made to restore peace to Iraq after pulling back from their last remaining outpost in Basra city.

Soldiers from the 4th Battalion, The Rifles battle-group quit Saddam Hussein's former palace on the banks of the Shatt-al-Arab to return to the contingency operating base at the

airport outside the city. They handed over responsibility for the location to the Iraqi security forces in a move that evoked mixed emotions in the soldiers pulling back.

Lt Col Patrick Sanders, CO of 4 Rifles, paid tribute to the troops who had served at the base since 2003 and the "great sacrifices" they had made along the way. He said: "I am very conscious that although it

falls on this particular battle-group to hand over Basra Palace to Iraqi control, we are the last of many who have served here. All have invested a huge amount of hard work and commitment. We have done our best to live up to that legacy. Since we arrived in May, we have fought hard. We have been subject to frequent and heavy attacks but those who have attacked us have suffered significant losses."

Lt Col Sanders went on to pay tribute to the 11 soldiers from the battle-group who had been killed and the 43 who suffered serious injuries during the tour.

The handover of the palace is a significant milestone in the transfer of Basra province to Provincial Iraqi Control. The three other southern provinces for which British soldiers were responsible – Al Muthanna, Maysan and Dhi Qar – have already been handed back. Dr Mowaffak Al Rubai, Iraq's National Security Adviser, praised the troops for their contribution to providing stability and paving the way for reconstruction.

"Thank you to the British Army for liberating this country, liberating Basra and maintaining law and order and security," he said.

Mission continues

THE handover of Basra Palace does not spell the end of the mission in Iraq and important work remains to be done, the head of the Army has emphasised.

In a statement to troops, Gen Sir Richard Dannatt, Chief of the General Staff, stressed that responsibility for Basra province had not yet been handed over to Iraqi control and that British troops were still needed in theatre.

He added: "While responsibility for Basra Palace has been passed to Iraqi Security Forces, we still retain overall responsibility

for the security of Basra province. Provincial Iraqi Control for Basra province will be declared once the conditions are right and when we, our coalition partners and the Iraqi Government are confident that Iraqi Security Forces can operate routinely without our support."

Gen Dannatt praised British troops for their commitment to operations in Iraq and said that the 168 Servicemen and women who had given their lives during the campaign – and those who had been injured – would not be forgotten.



Charity calls for fair deal

New identity

THE Educational Training Services (ETS) has unveiled its new cap badge, 15 years after the Royal Army Educational Corps badge was mothballed in the Army's dress draw.

The cap badge was awarded in recognition of the ETS's work in addressing troops' educational needs and undertaking extra roles in media, Cimic, information and psychological operations in barracks, as well as in theatre. Wearing the badge on the ETS beret and matching staple belt at Camp Bastion, Maj Fabrice Landragin, media ops officer for 1 R Anglian, told *Soldier*: "I'm very proud we have our own cap badge. It shows we are an integral part of the Army, which we serve everywhere as officers first and educators."

Diversity action

LONDON'S Union Jack Club will be the venue for the third annual tri-Service conference on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual issues. Hosted by the RAF, the event takes place on November 1-2. The conference will update personnel on developments in the Services' diversity programmes and will include presentations and workshops covering key areas. For more information contact Maj Sam Little, S02 Diversity, on 01980 615351.

Birthday honour

A MEMORIAL wall was dedicated to the Army Air Corps' fallen in the presence of the Prince of Wales last month during a day of celebration at the corps headquarters at Middle Wallop.

Prince Charles, Colonel-in-Chief of the AAC, and the Duchess of Cornwall, joined the Colonel Commandant, Gen Sir Richard Dannatt, the Chief of the General Staff, for the corps' 50th anniversary, during which historic and modern aircraft put on a pageant of flying displays.

The AAC's newly-decorated Guidon was paraded in public for the first time since the Queen gave permission for it to be emblazoned with the battle and theatre honours of its predecessors, the Glider Pilot Regiment, including Sicily, Pegasus Bridge, Merville Battery, the Normandy Landings and Arnhem.

● See photograph on Page 51

Troops deserve better, Legion tells politicians

THE Royal British Legion has raised concerns with Defence Ministers that Service personnel are being short-changed by the Military Covenant.

In launching its latest campaign, the Legion maintained that the Armed Forces had been let down in areas such as health care, compensation and support for their families.

Speaking at the launch of the Legion's Honour the Covenant campaign, the charity's Director General, Frances Done, insisted that the situation had reached a "critical stage" and that politicians needed to do more.

She added: "Thousands of our Servicemen and women are putting their lives on the line for us at this moment. They do not hesitate to fulfil their duty and neither should we."

"A career in the Armed Forces is unique. Those who join know they will have to follow orders, even if it leads to their death."

"This bravery should be recognised and rewarded."

The Royal British Legion is calling for a "just" compensation scheme, a greater commitment to support the health of personnel and their families and more support for bereaved loved ones should the worst happen.

Responding to the campaign launch,

however, Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth said he had consulted military commanders and did not believe the covenant was being broken.

But he added: "Making sure the covenant is upheld, particularly when we are asking our people to do so much, is very important."

"For this reason we keep the support we provide to our personnel and their families under constant review."

Mr Ainsworth pointed out there had been "significant progress" in improving the package for personnel with the introduction of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, which is currently being reviewed to examine multiple injury payments.

There had also been work to speed up inquest results while moves were in hand to overhaul Service accommodation, with a £5 billion cash injection over the next decade (see below).

Mr Ainsworth added: "Fulfilling our part of the deal is not always easy and takes time and money."

"Clearly as a Defence Minister I accept that I have a role to play in leading this debate, in partnership with other Government departments, with charities, with the public and with the Armed Forces, to make sure the covenant is upheld."

Cash injection for homes

SENIOR Government ministers have admitted more needs to be done to improve homes for soldiers and their families after a critical report from an influential group of MPs.

In accepting there were "problem areas" with housing, Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth said there would be a step change to create better accommodation.

He emphasised that the Government was spending some £5 billion on housing over the coming decade and stressed the issue was being taken seriously.

Mr Ainsworth was speaking after a report from the House of Commons Defence Select Committee raised a number of concerns about military accommodation.

While the committee accepted that Defence Estates – the part of the MoD that has

housing among its remit – was doing some good work, MPs felt key improvements were needed. The document was particularly critical of accommodation maintenance under the Housing Prime Contract, citing the service as "unacceptably poor".

The MPs also believed that more needed to be done to upgrade single living accommodation and that loans to allow personnel to buy their own homes should be increased.

In welcoming the report, however, Mr Ainsworth said ministers were fully committed to making sure troops and their loved ones had good quality housing. He added: "I acknowledge there are problem areas of the estate that require significant work."

● Home truths – Page 57



Picture: Steve Dock

Fearsome fighters: Soldiers from 1 RGR, pictured training in Brunei, are set to join their 2nd Battalion comrades in battle against the Taliban this month

Ultimate warriors

Gurkhas join battle against Afghan insurgents in aggressive new action

TALIBAN fighters in southern Afghanistan felt the full force of the British Army after coming under attack from two newly deployed assets.

In a fresh assault on their presence in Helmand province, insurgents found themselves hit with the double blow of soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles and Warrior armoured fighting vehicles crewed by the Scots Guards.

More than 2,500 soldiers from the International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) and the Afghan National Army joined the latest offensive – codenamed Sledgehammer Hit – aimed at driving the enemy from the Upper Gereshk Valley.

It was the first time the Gurkhas had seen action in southern Afghanistan since they arrived as part of the Isaf Regional Command (South) battle-group in September. The Warriors and their Scots Guards crewmen also lived up to their fearsome reputation.

Having initially secured a bridge head across the Helmand River, the Isaf troops succeeded in smashing into Taliban-held areas and hitting the enemy hard.

British Army spokesman Lt Col Richard Eaton said the operation was an important step in helping the Afghan

government to remove the terrorist threat from the region. He added: “The next phase of the operation is designed to protect areas within Helmand province where we have made gains against the Taliban.”

“The first phases have been conducted over the last few weeks across the province, from the Garmsir and Now Zad areas to the Upper Gereshk and Upper Sangin Valleys.”

Lt Col Eaton added: “It is crucial that the Taliban are prevented from intimidating and terrorising the local people so they can go about their lives in peace.”

“The presence of the Taliban in Helmand province denies local people the security and stability they so desperately want and hampers reconstruction and development projects that are important to improving their quality of life.”

Blast kills experienced NCO

AN experienced and much-respected sapper was killed in an explosion as he ferried vital equipment to a forward operating base in Afghanistan.

LCpl Ivano Violino, of 20 Field Squadron, 36 Engineer Regiment, had been commanding a FL12 dump truck near the settlement of Gereshk, Helmand province, when his vehicle was caught in an explosion on September 17.

He was evacuated to the main British military base at Camp Bastion but was pronounced dead on arrival. Known as Sean, LCpl Violino enlisted

in the Army in 2002, joining 36 Engineer Regiment the following year. He had quickly

forged a reputation as a capable sportsman. The 29-year-old Salford-born NCO served during the war in Iraq on Op Telic 1 and had been selected for promotion to corporal before deploying to Afghanistan.

A married father-of-two, he had been in theatre just over two weeks when he was killed. His CO, Lt Col Richard Wardlaw, said: “LCpl Violino was the epitome of a modern professional soldier.”

● Mercians mourn – Page 12



● LCpl Ivano Violino

UNDER BigBen

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

Brown focuses on Iraq's future

PRIME Minister Gordon Brown will spell out the future plans for British involvement in Iraq when Parliament returns this month.

In a statement, Mr Brown said decisions on the future size and strength of the British military presence in theatre would "depend on conditions on the ground" and would be made in consultation with Iraqi politicians and coalition allies.

The Prime Minister added: "I intend to make a detailed statement when Parliament returns."

"I agree with President Bush that it is essential Iraq achieves a more stable and confident political process. Iraq's neighbours must lend their support."

Land Rover deaths: Five personnel have been killed in WMIK Land Rovers since they were deployed to Afghanistan in the summer of 2006. In a written answer, Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth confirmed that all of the deaths had been due to explosions caused by enemy action. "Investigations are continuing into some of the incidents and it is not possible to say definitively in each case whether they were caused by mine or IED strikes," Mr Ainsworth wrote.

Making a claim: Defence Secretary Des Browne has launched a review of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. In a written answer, Mr Browne said the rules relating to personnel with multiple injuries in a single incident were being scrutinised as part of an ongoing monitoring process and "in light of recent operational experience". He added: "I hope to be able to announce the outcome of the review shortly."

Exercise restrictions: Only one military exercise has so far been cancelled as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak, Mr Browne has confirmed. He said the annual weapons test for members of the Honourable Artillery Company had been rescheduled.

Nobody left out of pocket

JPA staff's cash-back vow to underpaid soldiers

SENIOR officers have conceded that there have been "isolated cases" of pay errors under the Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) system.

In a frank interview with *Soldier*, military chiefs were adamant that the introduction of the new scheme had been a success, although they conceded there had been a small number of problems.

But they stressed that anyone who was underpaid could have a cash advance fed directly into their account by their regimental admin officer (RAO). They also said that troops who had incurred bank charges as a result of going overdrawn because of the new system could apply for the reimbursement of charges.

The pledges were made after *Soldier* received letters from soldiers complaining that they had been incorrectly paid under JPA. Col Danny McCulloch, responsible for JPA at the Army's Directorate of Staff and Personnel Support, said that out of the 300,000 Service personnel administered, only a small number of soldiers were being paid incorrectly. But he admitted that every case was "a crisis" for the individual concerned and reiterated the determination of his team to rectify any pay problem as soon as possible. He added: "If somebody is in financial difficulty because they have been underpaid, they should immediately

see their RAO who can transfer money into their account.

"Nobody should suffer hardship as a result of a problem with JPA. The first point of call should be the admin officer, who should then be able to take up and resolve the issue."

Col McCulloch said that soldiers with JPA related problems could also call the system's helpline, but he stressed that they needed to have a clear idea of what was likely to be causing the glitch.

In the majority of cases, problems had arisen because data imported from the old system was out of date or incorrect, although errors coming to light were steadily being corrected.

Col McCulloch said: "Some of the information picked up from the old Legacy systems was not 100 per cent correct and, in some cases, we did not realise there was an error until the individual concerned told us of a problem. We established a specialist 'tiger team' in mid-September, which will deal with any issues as they arise and make sure that they are decisively resolved."

"Getting to grips with a new system and culture has been a challenge but there is no complacency. We fully expect to see a reduction in issues as both individuals and unit administrators become more familiar with the system."

Auf wiedersehen Germany

GERMANY will continue to be a major base for UK troops despite the planned withdrawal of 30 per cent of personnel over the coming years, ministers have pledged.

After an announcement last year that options to pull soldiers back to the UK were being considered, Defence Secretary Des Browne confirmed the headquarters of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) had been earmarked to return between 2009 and 2014. In addition, the 1st Signal Brigade and HQ 102 Logistic Brigade were also set to depart for home soil along with the 4th Mechanized Brigade, paving the way for the barracks in Osnabrück to be handed back to the Federal Republic.

Rhine Garrison and Münster Station would be shut, with troops in Germany concentrated in three remaining garrisons – Bergen-Hohne, Paderborn and Gütersloh.

Ministers have identified Innsworth, Gloucestershire, as the leading contender for the HQ ARRC base while RAF Cosford in Shropshire has been selected as a suitable location for 102 Logistic Brigade and 1 Signal Brigade. If given the green light, the move would slash troop numbers in Germany by 30 per cent. An Army statement said around 15,000 soldiers would remain in Germany "for many years to come".

Maj Gen Mungo Melvin, General Officer Commanding of United Kingdom Support Command (Germany), said he would keep the German authorities updated.

He added: "A key role for me and my staff is to ensure all interested parties, not least the local authorities and our collective local workforce, remain engaged as we move towards the implementation of this work."



Picture: Steve Dock

Mud-plugging: The Boxer, one of three designs undergoing Fres trials, makes a splash as it is put through its paces on Bovington's demanding dust bowl

Army's Fres approach

Change in procurement process will speed deployment of new armour

AN all new line-up of armoured vehicles will be rolled out to troops at the sharp end of operations in record time, senior politicians have pledged.

Introducing the three contenders for the utility vehicle variant of the Future Rapid Effects System (Fres) initiative, Defence Equipment and Support Minister Lord Drayson said the programme would break ranks with the traditional way of procuring kit.

The Boxer, which is produced by the Dutch-German Artec Consortium; General Dynamics' Piranha; and the VCBI design, presented by Nexter, have all been undergoing rigorous scrutiny

by military specialists. And speaking as the trio were put through their paces at Bovington, Dorset, Lord Drayson assured British troops that they could expect a decision on which of the three designs would be chosen within weeks.

"The Fres programme will deliver 3,000 vehicles across 16 different roles, from reconnaissance to utility vehicles and through to a small tank," he said. "I look forward to announcing the winners of the trials in November."

"My responsibility is to make sure that these vehicles are excellent, that they meet Army needs and are delivered as quickly as possible."

The company that will work with the designer of the chosen vehicle to fit key systems will also be announced in November, said Lord Drayson.

The procurement agenda for the new vehicles marks a key departure from previous processes.

Crucially, the companies behind the vehicles had to relax their intellectual property rights.

This paves the way for the MoD to beef up the platforms with the latest equipment without having to seek permission from the manufacturer.

It is anticipated that they will be in service for more than 20 years.

The first public appearance of the Fres contenders at Bovington came just months after the initial announcement of the programme's acquisition strategy late last year.

Companies involved in the initiative had to offer high levels of protection in their designs as well as making them light enough to be deployed by air.

While defence chiefs are hoping to select a single vehicle from the trio on offer to join the ranks, they have not ruled out picking one other if it makes the grade.

Dragoons make tracks

SCIMITARS from The Light Dragoons have clocked up more than 40,000 miles in four months during a rigorous and testing tour in southern Afghanistan.

Operating at the limit of helicopter range and watched by Taliban observers, troops from B Squadron have been in action north of Musa-Qaleh, supported ops around Gereshk and been active in the Lower Sangin Val-

ley. The Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked) vehicles have proved a valuable weapon against the enemy.

Squadron OC Maj John Godfrey said morale among the troops was sky high. He added: "The sense of achievement we all share at the end of a patrol is something that I have never previously experienced on an operational tour."

Mercians mourn

Newly-formed regiment loses four men to hostile action in Afghanistan

RESOLUTE troops from the 2nd Battalion, The Mercian Regiment have been pressing on with their tough role in southern Afghanistan despite losing four colleagues.

Pte Damian Wright and Pte Ben Ford were killed on September 6 after their vehicle was caught in a blast during a routine patrol near Lashkar Gar in Helmand province. The explosion also claimed the life of an interpreter and wounded one other soldier.

Sgt Craig Brelford and Pte Johan Botha were killed two days later during a firefight with Taliban forces (see below).

Pte Wright, who was 23 and a father, signed up for the Army in 2002, joining the 1st Battalion, The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment, which became 2 Mercians on September 1.

Originally from Mansfield, the experienced soldier was on his second tour of Afghanistan and had previously served on operations in Bosnia and Northern Ireland.

Pte Ford was on his first overseas deployment having joined the Army in 2005. The 18-year-old, from Chester-



● Pte Damian Wright



● Pte Ben Ford

field, was remembered as a proud soldier who was enthusiastic and hard-working on operations.

Lt Col Simon Banton, CO of 2 Mercians, said both soldiers had maintained the highest professional standards and would be sorely missed.

The commanding officer said of Pte Wright: "Quick-witted, able and professional, he had already been selected to attend promotional courses where he would have excelled.

"Always ready to stand firm and be counted, he was a young man who could be relied on in the tightest of situations and he will never be forgotten by those

who loved him, worked with him and fought with him."

Of Pte Ford, Lt Col Banton added: "He was a tremendous young soldier.

"Fit and enthusiastic, hard-working and committed to his comrades and a career in the Army, he will be sorely missed but never forgotten by all those who had the honour of serving alongside him," the CO concluded.

● A SENIOR NCO who was killed during operations in Iraq had "set the finest example" to his fellow soldiers. Sgt Eddie Collins, of The Parachute Regiment, died in theatre on September 5.

No further details have been released by the MoD.

His commanding officer, who has not been named, said: "He died a warrior on the battlefield, leading from the front and doing a job he loved in the service of his friends, regiment, family and his country. He will never be forgotten."

● Mercian might – Pages 35-37

Casualty of courage

NCO dies in heroic bid to rescue colleagues injured by Taliban gunfire

A COURAGEOUS senior NCO was killed while attempting to rescue wounded comrades during a ferocious firefight with the Taliban in southern Afghanistan.

Sgt Craig Brelford, of the 2nd Battalion, The Mercian Regiment, died while attacking a well-defended enemy position in a bid to evacuate injured troops.

He had realised that one of his soldiers, Pte Johan Botha, had fallen behind enemy lines and had been determined not to leave him behind.

Pte Botha, a South African-born soldier, died from his injuries.

Friends recalled how 25-year-old Sgt Brelford, who had already served on one Afghanistan tour, had taken decisive action after his patrol came under fire in Garmsir, Helmand province, in the early hours of September 8.

Described as the "perfect infantry commander", he had repeatedly braved withering fire to rescue casualties and was hit on his final attempt to find Pte Botha.



● Pte Johan Botha



● Sgt Craig Brelford

Pte Botha had continued to engage the enemy despite his own serious injuries. A number of other British soldiers were wounded in the action, two seriously.

Originally from Nottingham, Sgt Brelford enlisted in the Army in 1999, joining the 1st Battalion, The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment, which recently became part of The Mercian Regiment. He had served on operations in Northern Ireland and taken part in exercises in Belize and Kenya.

Pte Botha, who was married with a daughter, signed up for service with 1 WFR two years ago. He had proved highly capable in Afghanistan and had been recommended for a junior commander's cadre.

Lt Col Simon Banton, CO of 2 Mercians, said that both men would be sorely missed. Both had acted with courage and professionalism in Afghanistan.

He said of Sgt Brelford: "He led from the front and it is unsurprising that he fell while attempting to rescue wounded soldiers under fire.

"He was assured a bright future and had an enormous amount of potential."

Of Pte Botha, Lt Col Banton added: "He was a mountain of a man; fit, strong and robust. He was a model soldier and a proud citizen of South Africa.

"A keen and talented rugby player, he was eagerly looking forward to the Rugby World Cup. He was devoted to his wife and daughter, and our thoughts are with them at this terrible time."



Picture: Cpl Jon Bevan RLC

Viking valour: Soldiers from 1 R Anglian have been in constant action against Taliban forces in Kajaki, a remote region troops have dubbed the Dead Zone

Friendly fire fatalities

Three Vikings lost during firefight with Taliban forces in Kajaki area

AN investigation has begun after three British soldiers were killed in a friendly fire incident following a request for air support in Afghanistan's Helmand province.

Pte Aaron McClure, Pte Robert Foster and Pte John Thrumble died when a US F-15 jet, providing close air support, dropped a bomb during a battle with Taliban fighters near Kajaki on August 23.

The trio, all members of 7 Platoon, B (Suffolk) Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment, had been in a fierce contact when the bomb struck.

Two other soldiers were injured and evacuated to the main British base at Camp Bastion for treatment.

Friends and colleagues remembered the three who died as capable and professional team players who were determined to make a difference in southern Afghanistan.

Pte McClure, who was 19 and from Ipswich, joined the Army last year and had been on exercise in the UK and Kenya. Nicknamed Troy, he had already proved to be a first-rate soldier in more than 40 contacts with the Taliban.

Pte Foster, who was from Harlow, signed up for an Army career in 2006



● Pte John Thrumble



● Pte Aaron McClure



● Pte Robert Foster

and had seen significant action since deploying to Afghanistan in March.

The 19-year-old was remembered as an accomplished rifleman who worked hard and whose sense of humour helped lift the morale of those around him.

Pte Thrumble, who was 21 and from Chelmsford, joined the Army in 2004 and deployed to Iraq the following year, serving with distinction on Operation Telic 6.

Known for his quirky sense of humour, the machine gunner was remembered as a competent and professional infantryman who loved military life.

Lt Col Stuart Carver, CO of 1 R Anglian, said that the loss of the three men had been keenly felt, adding that his thoughts were with their families

and many friends. The commanding officer said of Pte McClure: "Loyal, hard working and highly professional, he constantly surpassed the standards expected and his loss is a bitter blow."

Of Pte Foster, Lt Col Carver added: "He had seemingly limitless reserves of courage.

"He had the rare quality of always seeing the bright side of any situation and a mischievous sense of humour that made him hugely popular."

And of Pte Thrumble he recalled: "He was one of the mainstays and leading characters in the battalion.

"Proven in combat on countless occasions, his raw courage and ability to raise a smile were invaluable in these testing times."



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Picture: Steve Dock

Enforcer: LSgt Craig Bunn, Coldm Gds, trials NLAW during an exercise at Imber Village, Salisbury Plain

Law and orders

Army to take delivery of new anti-armour missile

BRITISH troops are limbering up for the arrival of a new handheld missile system developed to give them a lethal punch on the battlefield.

Fired from the shoulder, the Next Generation Light Anti-Armour Weapon (NLAW) launches a powerful projectile capable of penetrating the best-protected vehicles and bunkers.

The system, which was designed by Swedish Defence giant Saab Bofors Dynamics and is being built by Thales Air Defence in Belfast, will replace the existing Light Anti-Armour Weapon when it comes into service next year.

NLAW boasts a number of hi-tech features that will give troops a lethal edge in combat. By firing over a tank, troops can literally stop the vehicle in its tracks by blasting a shaped charge directly downwards into the turret.

Soldiers can also use the weapon in a side attack mode, blasting bunkers

and other fortified structures at ranges between 20 and 600 metres. Crucially, troops do not have to estimate and compensate for range, target speed and wind speed and can wreak havoc on a would-be aggressor in seconds.

British soldiers demonstrating the weapon at the Defence Systems and Equipment International Show at London's Docklands were impressed with the capability.

Features, such as being able to fire the weapon in an enclosed space and the lightweight disposable launch tube, would provide a versatile addition to the armoury, they said.

They were also confident that it would work well with the Javelin missile, which has been a lethal success against Taliban targets in southern Afghanistan.

Weighing in at just 12kg, NLAW is easy to carry, and can be made ready for firing in just five seconds.

IN BRIEF

● **MORE** troops will be eligible to serve until they are 55 under the new Versatile Engagement policy, which comes into force next year. As of January 1, the Open Engagement will be replaced and troops will have short-, full- and long-career stages in their life with the Army. Further information is available via the secure ArmyNet website or by emailing the Army's Director of Manning at dma@armymail.mod.uk

● **JUNIOR** officers have been warned not to start studying old modules of the Military Knowledge e-learning assessments because substantial changes to the system will appear on November 1. Those studying or mentoring MK assessments for officers have been urged to get up to speed with these alterations and to make sure they are fully aware of the revisions. Further information is available at mkhelp.dcmtd@defenceacademy.mod.uk

● **ANYONE** who has donated items to the officers' and sergeants' messes at ATR Lichfield has been urged to reclaim them with the closure of the training facility – and its move to Pirbright – scheduled next year. Any items unclaimed by the end of November will be passed back to the regimental associations. All enquiries should be directed to CSgt Mack McGuinness on 94422 4277.

● **HOT** zone cuisine has just become tastier following a ration rethink on Afghanistan's Helmand province front line. Five extra items from the hot climate menu are being issued in ration packs, including chicken noodles and tuna pasta sealed in ready-to-eat packs and a dessert of poached fruit puree. A spokesman for the Defence Food Services said: "We are working very hard to identify and develop a suitable long-term solution for rations."

● **THE** first woman boss of 47 Air Despatch Squadron RLC was given a high-flying send-off by colleagues who dropped champagne from a passing Hercules. Maj Lucy Giles, who is moving on to Deepcut after two years at Lyneham, said she was delighted with the five-star treatment she had been given. She handed over command to Maj Mark Lemasurier, RLC.

● **BRITISH** soldiers have never had a reputation for mincing their words but Maj David Hamilton decided to put his to paper. The Rifles officer has been writing poetry all his life and the trooper-turned-bard recently decided to publish some of them in his first book. Available to buy on amazon.com for £9.80, *Manic Verse* contains reflections on places as far afield as Africa.

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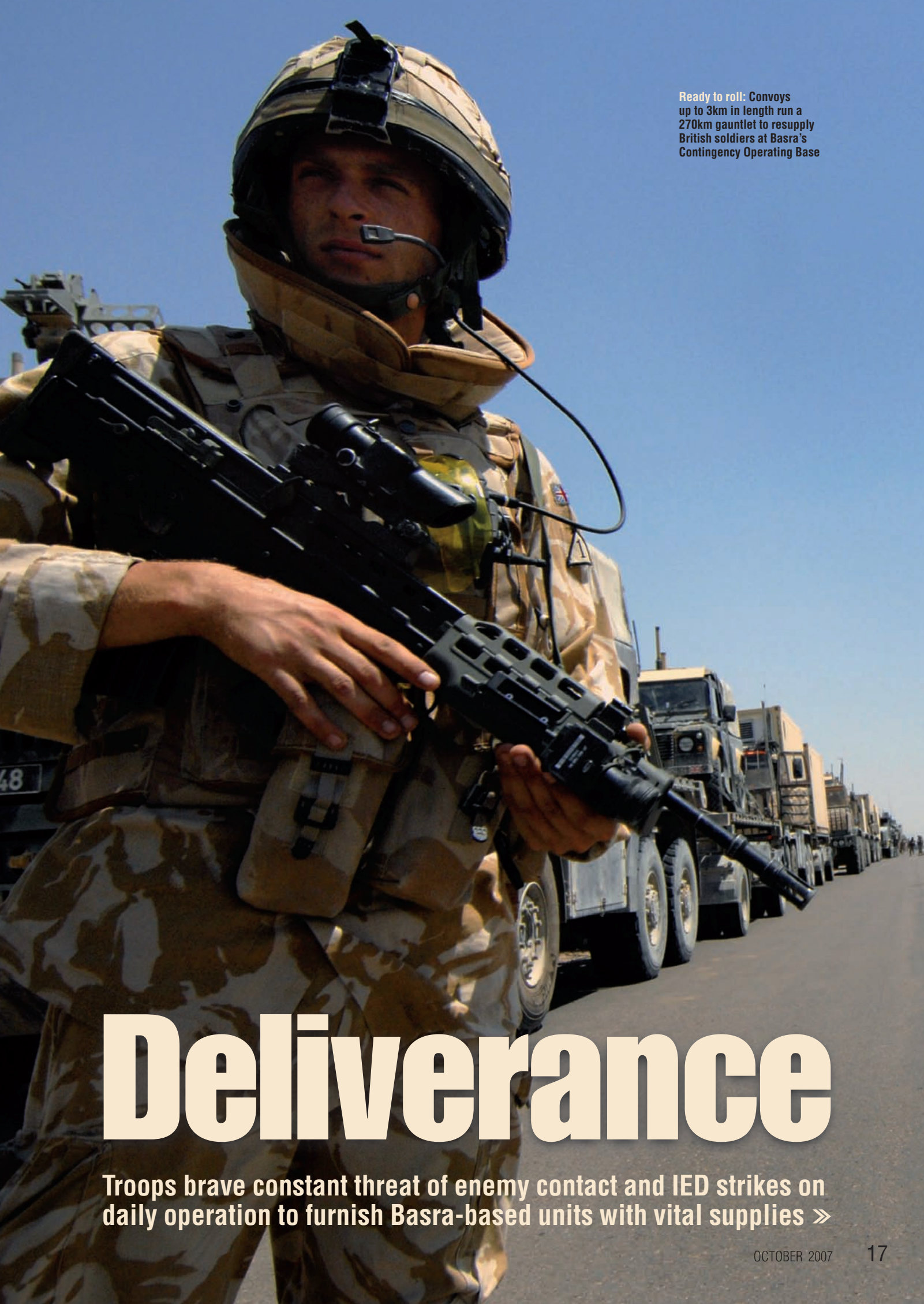
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Ready to roll: Convoys
up to 3km in length run a
270km gauntlet to resupply
British soldiers at Basra's
Contingency Operating Base

Deliverance

Troops brave constant threat of enemy contact and IED strikes on daily operation to furnish Basra-based units with vital supplies »

Report: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Cpl Dan Harmer RLC

AS darkness falls over Basra's Contingency Operating Base (COB) and thousands of troops grab some well-earned sleep, 36 empty contractor trucks flanked by imposing Mastiffs rumble into position at one of the airfield's exits.

Over the border on an American base in Kuwait, a similarly mammoth fleet of vehicles, this time loaded with everything from food to fuel, is also preparing to move onto the open road.

The two convoys are heading in opposite directions and will pass each other somewhere along the 270km route which has been set up as a conduit for Operation Inala, the daily mission to furnish the COB with vital supplies.

As logistical ops go, Inala is as challenging as they come. The convoy has to travel around 500km every 48 hours under constant threat of contacts and IED strikes and has no option but to complete its mission.

But thanks to a mix of new technology, multinational cooperation and ever-growing experience, troops at the COB

can sleep soundly knowing that the soldiers responsible are willing and able to get the resupply job done.

"This is a physically demanding job when you look at the size of the vehicles and the weight of the equipment," said Maj Zak Scott, OC of 35 HQ Squadron, RLC. "Add to that the fact that they are doing eight hours worth of driving, having a sleep, coming back and doing it again day on, day off in a high threat environment and you can see that it is mentally challenging as well.

"They are dealing with a convoy that can stretch from between two and three kilometres in length, so there is a lot of responsibility resting on some young shoulders."

The resupply convoy for Basra used to run directly south past Az Zubayr and into Kuwait near Safwan, but the closure of the nearby border crossing rendered the route obsolete.

The obvious need for deliveries to the COB to continue meant another route had to be found immediately and the best available option involved using purpose-built roads west of Basra normally used

by American troops to take supplies north to Baghdad.

Rather than a quick journey south, the new 270km route means the convoy now takes a minimum of eight hours to reach its destination without taking into account breakdowns and stops to deal with suspected IEDs.

"These guys have got to strike a balance," continued Maj Scott. "If you stop every time there's something suspicious then the 270km is going to take 48 hours to cover.


"They have to balance the risk to complete the convoy on time."

Keeping the vehicles moving at a decent pace is made easier by a vanguard of well protected, heavily armed Mastiffs patrolling ahead of the rest of the convoy and helicopter cover provided by an Army Air Corps' Lynx and a Danish-crewed Fennec.

The Fennec comes equipped with ISTAR capabilities including thermal imaging sights and a laser pointer which is used to spot any suspicious items in the convoy's path and highlight them to the vanguard.

‘There is a lot of responsibility resting on some young shoulders’





Soldiers in the convoy's forward vehicles can utilise their own technology – including the thermal imaging Sophie scope usually used by infantry forward observation teams – to decide whether to stop the trucks behind them so they can investigate further.

Forward section commander Sgt Adrian Myatt, RLC, said: "The Sophie is unbelievably good. You can see a lot clearer for a greater distance than the Viper rifle sights and you can close right in on specific target areas, which helps us make quick decisions.

"We integrate very well with the Danish helicopter call signs and we also have a very good working relationship with the Americans on the border as well."

The cooperation between the Danish helicopter pilots and the troops on the ground was also praised by Maj Scott. "It's new technology for them and we are just learning how to integrate it with the convoy, but it has been absolutely fantastic," he said. "If ever

you wanted an example of an effective multi-national working relationship, this is it. These guys are fantastic and we really appreciate their support because it provides a real lift to our lads on the ground when they hear the helicopter flying overhead."

Despite covering the same ground on such a frequent basis, working long hours and having to catch up on sleep during the unforgiving heat of the Iraqi day, convoy troops show genuine enthusiasm and appreciation for the importance of their role.

Vehicle commander LCpl Bonnie Simeon, RLC, told *Soldier* that the camaraderie she shares with her colleagues makes working 29 hours out of every 48 – allowing for 16 hours sleep and three for personal admin – much more bearable.

"The route is very long, but it goes quite quickly because of the banter with the guys around you," she added.

In addition to the loggies and

helicopter crews, the convoys also benefit from the additional skills and experience of attached infantry soldiers from the 4th Battalion, The Rifles and the Irish Guards.

Maj Scott hopes that working side-by-side has been mutually beneficial in allowing the troops to gain a better understanding of each others' roles.

He said: "Clearly our soldiers have had a lot to learn because while we have guys who are used to being good drivers or good suppliers, we are employing them in a very much more dynamic environment.

"The Irish Guards and the Rifles are more aware of things like the correct fighting position and our guys have taken that on board.

"Likewise I think they realise that being in the RLC is not just about driving big trucks from one place to another."

With the size of the COB bolstered following the handover of Basra Palace to Iraqi security forces, it is comforting to know that the vital task of providing supplies is in such assured hands. ■



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Dogs of war

Four-legged friends prove their operational worth after taking on a front-line role in Basra »





Clockwise from top right, Bath time: Cpl Gary Rutherford, RAVC, keeps search dog Paddy 6819 cool in the oppressive heat

On the prowl: Search dog Alfie sniffs for explosives under the watchful eye of Sgt Tac Thompson, RAVC

Physical threat: German Shepherd Rocky and handler Pte Alex Wright, RAVC, provide a strong deterrent for would-be trouble-makers at Checkpoint Delta

Trained nose: Paddy 6819 and Cpl Rutherford patrol waste ground near the boundary of the COB

Report: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Graeme Main

WHEN *Soldier* asked troops serving on Op Telic 10 what pieces of kit had made the biggest difference on front-line operations, the humble dog received an extraordinary amount of votes.

Upgraded technology and vehicles such as Bulldog all received a big thumbs up, but the work of canines in the Royal Army Veterinary Corps was spoken about with genuine enthusiasm across the contingency operating base (COB) in Basra.

Although the sterling work of the animals and their handlers may have escaped the public eye in Britain, it is recognised as operational gold dust by commanders and troops in Iraq.

"The soldiers find it really comforting when the dogs go out with them," said Capt Laura Holmes, RAVC, OC of the theatre military working dog support unit. "I am always getting reports back from the guys on the ground saying they appreciate everything the animals and the handlers do."

A total of 23 dogs – ranging from snarling German Shepherds to less ferocious but equally important collies – are looked after by a team of 21 staff at the dog unit, which is situated at the heart of the COB.

Each of the animals has a dedicated handler who is responsible for everything from feeding and grooming to exercising and providing basic veterinary first aid.

And as every dog and handler pair currently serving in the unit trained together before deploying to Iraq, the resultant professional and emotional bond makes them a formidable team.

"It's good because we are out here doing exactly the job that we trained to do back home and you can't help but get attached to the dog and vice



versa,” explained Pte Alex Wright, RAVC, whose bond with dog Rocky is so strong that the animal stopped eating during his handler’s last rest and relaxation break.

“I always wanted to work with dogs and it’s so rewarding doing it here. The soldiers are always pleased to see you and feel a lot better when we are on ops with them because of the extra safety the dogs offer.”

The dogs’ training and innate skill set makes them the perfect addition to search and detain teams on operations. Capt Holmes said that four IEDs, including one containing 45kg of explosives, and “countless” weapons caches have been uncovered by RAVC animals leading from the front in and around Basra city.

Fugitives hiding in outbuildings have also had their covers blown by the dogs, whose assets on operations are just a small part of the arsenal of skills they bring to the table. Indeed, their ability to track intruders from a faint whiff of a scent as much as 300m away makes them invaluable tools for patrolling the COB perimeter at night – a task completed seven days a week and one which has in the past helped track four unauthorised people lurking inside the base.

Capt Holmes said: “Because of the work we do we don’t fit in as an on or off-base asset – we fit in with both. Our search capacity and force protection capacity overlap. The dogs provide a vital extra level of search capability, whether they are looking for people, explosives or arms.”

The cunning canines’ keen sense of smell is also utilised on a daily basis at permanent vehicle checkpoint Delta, the main entrance to the COB for the 1,000 locally employed civilians who

work on the base. Every vehicle that passes in or out of Delta is subjected to a thorough search by a dog which has been trained to sniff out tiny traces of explosives and signal any find to their handler by sitting down obediently by the side of their discovery.

The sheer presence of the dogs at Delta is also a huge deterrent for would-be trouble-makers, both because of their intimidating size and because Iraqis are generally scared of the animals.

“It’s a cultural thing that has certainly been used to our advantage,” said Sgt Tac Thompson, RAVC. “For many Iraqis, dogs are considered dirty, filthy animals and they don’t want to go near them.”

The RAVC’s strength in Iraq is currently composed of a variety of cap badges, but the sheer attraction of becoming a dog handler has led to a steady stream of new recruits which will allow future deployments to consist entirely of RAVC soldiers. The surge in popularity of the dog handler position has

also resulted in Capt Holmes receiving a number of enquiries from people serving on Op Telic about the possibility of switching cap badge.

Speaking from the unit, which includes a full operating theatre, qualified vet Capt Holmes said: “There has been a massive interest and I have had a flood of people wanting information about transferring.

“Some have known they wanted to transfer for some time but didn’t know how but others have got in touch with me after seeing what we do first-hand out on operations.”

With a vital role to play both on the COB in Basra and at the forefront of future operations, the RAVC’s dogs pack a bark just as powerful as their brutal bite. ■

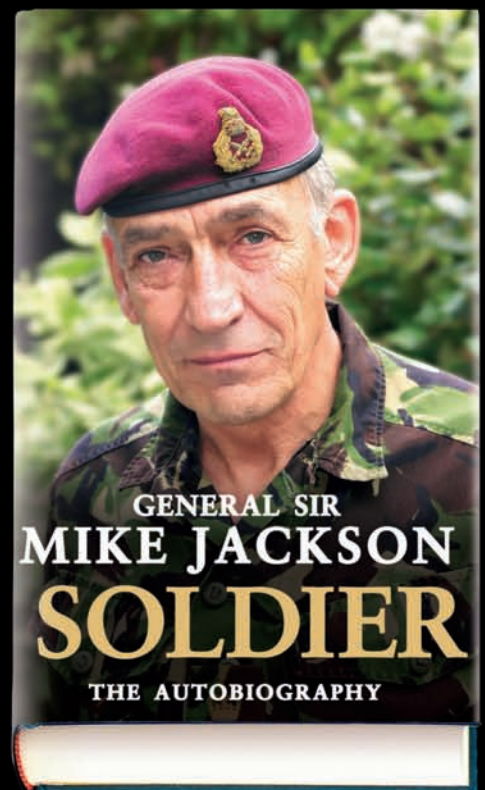
‘The dogs provide a vital extra level of search capability, whether they are looking for people, explosives or arms’






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Unleashed: The heavily-armoured Bulldog, complete with remote weapons system, prowls menacingly through Basra COB

Bitting back

Remote weapons system ensures latest Bulldog is the beast of Basra

Report: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Graeme Main

THE snarling facade of the Bulldog armoured personnel carrier has taken on a new menace thanks to the addition of a remotely operated weapons system (RWS).

Using a joystick and thermal imaging screen broadcasting pictures from a roof-mounted camera, commanders can now manoeuvre, aim and fire a .50 cal machine gun or GPMG without leaving the safety of their vehicle.

The state-of-the-art system has been given its first operational airing on the streets of Basra and soldiers from the 4th Battalion, The Rifles say the newly-unleashed technology has further enhanced the Bulldog's fearsome reputation.

Platoon commander Lt Ben Coward, 4 Rifles, who is among the first group of troops to test Bulldog's new teeth, told *Soldier*: "The RWS is an amazing piece of kit which works extremely well on operations and makes picking out targets far easier than it was before.

"The only thing we have had an issue with is a slight lack of power sometimes, but once it's up to speed it works as it

should and doesn't stop us from doing our job.

"There was a bit of worry about whether commanders were going to be overloaded with commanding, navigating and manning the gun, but we haven't had any dramas on that front because it's such a simple bit of kit to use."

In addition to allowing the Bulldog's

vehicle to a crystal clear screen in the driver's view.

Add in removable explosive reactive armour (ERA) plates that can be repaired individually without the need to remove entire panels and it's easy to see why the latest incarnation of the Bulldog is regarded as the complete package by the people using it on a daily basis.

"It is a lot better and I can get a lot more control of the vehicle," said Bulldog driver Rfn Mark Benger.

"As a driver the Bulldog lets you concentrate on actually driving because the commander can spend more time inside the vehicle doing his stuff. I would say that this feature has helped me become much better at it since I got to Iraq."

Cpl Dean Hood added:

"The modifications and the changes that have been made make the Bulldog 100 per cent better, especially with the RWS on top and the ERA on the sides.

"The old Bulldog had a human feel to it because there was someone manning the gun.

"Now people see the RWS moving around with no one controlling it and it's an intimidating sight." ■



All-seeing eye: Troops say remotely-controlled weapon gives Bulldog an extra bite

commander to stay undercover while directing fire, the vehicle's camera has also proved to be invaluable in locating potential bombs, making it easier for Bulldog crews to spot suspect devices by the roadside.

"Because we do most of our ops at night, the camera is essential and IEDs can easily be picked up on the screen."

The Bulldog has cameras feeding live pictures of the front and rear of the



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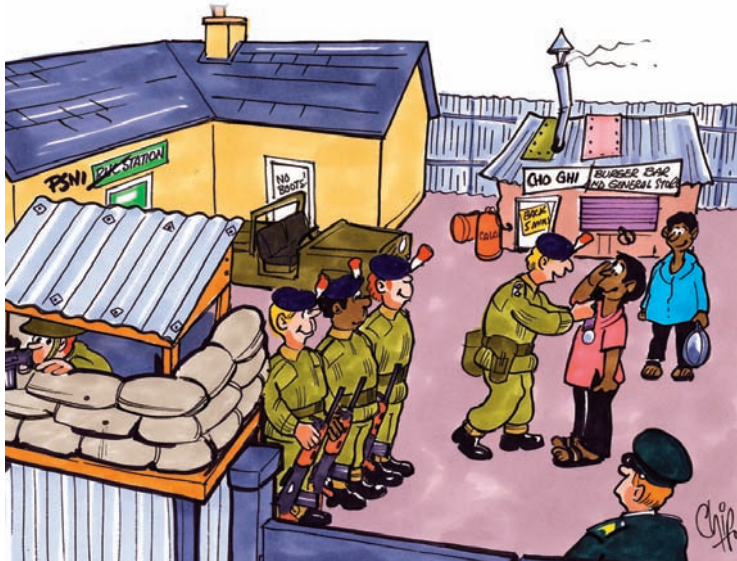
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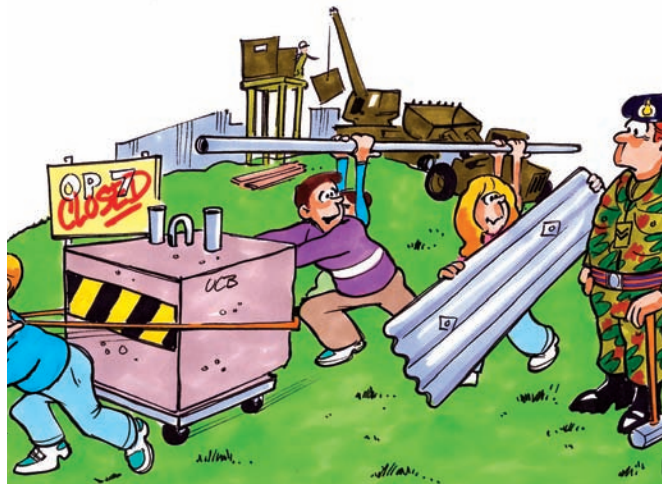
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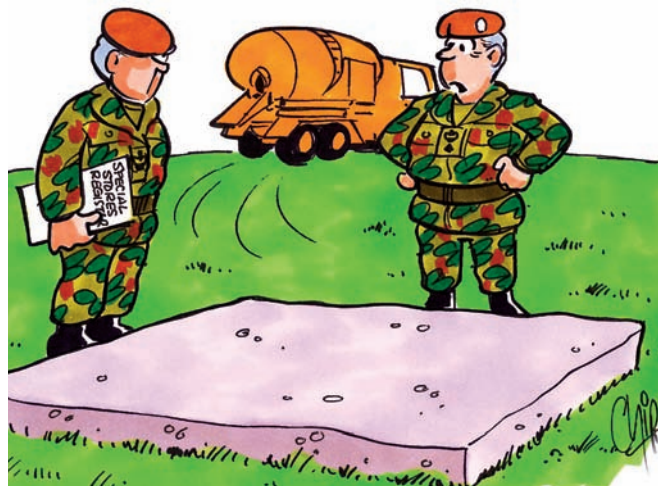
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Helmand home life

No feng shui for British troops
inside Sangin's fortified camp »





Report: Karen Thomas
Pictures: Mike Weston

SANDBAGS decorate the walls, wooden planks balanced on empty ammo boxes are sofas and the less than fragrant smell of the latrines can be detected well in advance of a sighting.

Contact with the world outside their Hesco bastion and barbed wire home at the Sangin District Centre is limited for the troops of A Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment and its attachments. Privacy inside the wire is equally tight. Mosquito nets enveloping camp beds provide flimsy screens from neighbouring cots squeezed into the few rooms before overflowing onto roofs and terraces.

Men have communal shaves in front of broken mirror shards and women sneak down to the river for a wash after dark. Quiet corners for letting off steam in a bluey home are at a premium and nobody can escape the reality of the Taliban lurking round the corner, especially when your body armour has evolved as your second skin.

Yet high spirits buoy the lively atmosphere inside the Sangin District Centre. And there are some rare creature comforts such as the filtered river water, which doesn't taste like it's been drawn from a chemistry

laboratory, and the food. Chef Pte Arun Rai, 1 Gren Gds, has just 50 unchanging items, mostly from ration packs, to cook a meal for lads to look forward to after they've sweated on a six-hour patrol in 45C heat.

"I respect what the guys do out there and I'm the person who keeps morale up or down. I can probably do more harm to morale than the Taliban, so it's

rewarding when guys come to me at the end of the meal and say it was good," he told *Soldier*, as he stacked tins on the shelves of a small kitchen before preparing dinner for the ravenous troops.

The austere routine of life reflects the daily threat of attacks troops live with in Sangin. Downtime with an out-of-date magazine or contemplative cigarette always carries the edge of having to respond to an emergency at a moment's notice.

But everyone makes the most of being in the same Army boat and of the few luxuries on offer in southern Afghanistan's danger zone. ■

'I'll never get rid of the smell of burning poo up my nose or get used to not having a shower for four days'

Clockwise from above, Big dip: Soldiers cool off in the river that runs through the camp after patrolling in 45C heat; **Fit to fight:** Royal Anglian Pte Tony Cowley, left, pads up for Pte Michael Appleton; **Scoffs up:** Dinner time at the Sangin District Centre; **Rest and relaxation:** A soldier recharges his batteries during a break in the action; **Morale boost:** Pte Arun Rai, 1 Gren Gds, prepares for dinner; **Early bird:** A soldier stretches his legs before the heat sets in for the day



Op Bronze . . . siesta time in Sangin



‘It’s harder to wash because I can’t just strip off and swim in the river but the lads are good about turning round when I’m changing. Although the blokes get lads’ mags, we don’t get women’s magazines but I play my Nintendo and text-link friends and family. It’s better here than at the forward observation bases where there were no doors on the burn-bin loos. I’ll never get rid of the smell of burning poo up my nose or get used to not having a shower for four days.’

Gnr Sarah Sanderson, RA



‘I sleep on my downtime or go to the gym. Everyone has a PSP – but I like to sleep. I miss lounging on my own sofa watching TV. Parcels are the biggest morale boost and noodles are a big thing but the mail only comes in with the choppers. We can phone home but you have to be careful what you say. Lots of my platoon write home because you can really say what’s on your mind.’

**Pte Jonathan Williams,
1 R Anglian**



‘I swim in the river to cool off and chill out before going to the gym to pump some iron on Op Massive. Then I deploy to the roof for Op Bronze on a sunlounger – my camp bed – and listen to some classic West Yorkshire music, Baseline. I’m frustrated there’s no internet here, as when I’m at Camp Bastion I like to shop online and send presents to my family and flowers to my girlfriend. But I’ll tell you what I really do miss. . . McDonald’s Rolo milkshakes.’

LCpl Christian Kisby, 3 Yorks



Afghan remedy

Heavily protected clinic offers more than pills for Helmand's ills

Report: Karen Thomas
Pictures: Mike Weston

GIGGLES from veiled women being searched echoed around the crumbling compound walls as Sangin's residents queued to see Afghan and British Army doctors.

Word had raced around town about the first impromptu treatment clinic held a couple of days previously and a sizeable crowd had been gathering outside the compound gates since sunrise. Despite the threat of a Taliban attack, curious civilians wanted to check out the clinic and excitable children swarmed around British and Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers keeping a watchful eye for trouble.

Essential health services had been almost non-existent while the ferocious battles fought between the Nato allies and Taliban had raged in this lush valley. But as enemy forces were pushed back from Sangin, the civilians had returned to their homes and were trying to pick up the scattered pieces of their daily lives.

Water and electricity supplies, as well as health and education, were inevitable casualties of fighting but they are peacetime priorities and crucial to winning the support of ordinary Afghans. Providing people

with basic healthcare had also become increasingly important to catch and treat life-threatening diseases such as diarrhoea, sickness, polio and measles.

However, the precarious peace could still be shattered by the crack of a not-too-distant Taliban rifle and numerous precautions had been taken to ensure everyone's safety at the clinic. Pte Tom Holt, 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment, kept his weapon ready, laughing as he swatted playfully at some young boys rummaging through his

combats.

"The kids always want to look through your rifle sight – I think it's curiosity," he told *Soldier* while scanning a swelling queue of men and boys for signs of a real and persistent danger.

"They like to go through your pockets and they try to get your watch off you but if I was child with a foreign army in my country, I'd probably try to get stuff off the soldiers too."

The clinic offered an opportunity for troops and civilians to mingle in a more relaxed setting, rather than having a few tense minutes to size each other up during a foot patrol. Although security remained tight, prospective patients did not appear to be fazed by the lengthy queues or soldiers handling heavy-duty weaponry.

Searching the women and children in a private corner, Cpl Bernie Durdle,

AGC, was surprised at how eager they were to talk.

"The women were laughing at us because they had nothing on them, but they weren't offended. Most of them were just as cautious as we were," she said, adding that the wives and daughters seemed keener to chat about life in general rather than their ailments. "The women got their veils off straightaway and were happy to chat. One lady with a baby said everyone in her family had been killed and she needed food and money, but the women

'The clinic is valuable not only for giving medicines but so the people can feel more connected with us'

Clockwise from left, Check-up: Afghan National Army soldiers search Sangin residents who have come to see the medical clinic for themselves

Afghan-led: Capt Catherine Fisher, R Signals, guides an elderly patient to the civilian Afghan doctors
British help: Maj Andrew Tredget, RAMC, builds a cultural bridge over his patient's X-ray



were mainly worried the Taliban would find out they had come here.

"The clinic is valuable not only for giving medicines but so the people can feel more connected with us. It's an opportunity for them to meet together, especially as they have been afraid to come out because of the fighting."

Once inside the compound, the men, women and children were free to discuss their problems with the doctors. Although most were in genuine medical need, there was little pretence that residents had twitched back their equivalent of the Afghan net curtain for a good nose at the newcomers. Maj Andrew Tredget, RAMC, the regimental medical officer for 1 R Anglian, admitted the medical demands were quite low level and largely outweighed by the need to create a "good feeling" for Sangin's residents.

"The clinic wouldn't have happened three months ago but because we have killed a certain number of Taliban, they are no longer so prevalent. But we must

be confident in keeping the Taliban away so people are confident they can come up to the compound," Maj Tredget explained during a break from the 212 patients he saw that morning, many of whom were vastly entertained at his attempts to speak Pashto.

"We would like a stable Afghanistan and only with the public's help can we achieve that. Here you can interact with them and break down barriers so they can see that you are human.

"I do the clinic as a doctor, giving unprejudiced medical care without an ulterior motive. My aim is to see if there are any medical problems I can help with and create a good feeling and rapport with the Afghan people."

Between Maj Tredget and the Afghan doctors, more than 500 residents received treatment for their aches, pains and fevers, as British soldiers gained a better understanding of the concerns and priorities of the Afghan people they are trying to help. But Sangin's civilians also took a closer



look at these foreigners who had left their own families behind to travel thousands of miles to bring peace to this troubled land. It is hoped that greater understanding will persuade the Afghan people to support the Nato allies in driving the Taliban out of Helmand for good and take the first steps on the long path of Afghanistan's reconstruction. ■





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New identity: Officers and soldiers of The Mercian Regiment on parade on Formation Day at Tamworth Castle

Mercian might

Army's latest super regiment stands proud as soldiers square up to worldwide operations »



Report: Cliff Caswell

PROUD soldiers serving with the British Army's newest super regiment have been looking to the future and celebrating their past after taking on a new identity.

The troops, recruited from across the heartland of England, were out in force when they came together under the banner of The Mercian Regiment for the first time on September 1.

They proudly donned the new

double-headed eagle and Saxon crown badges and went out on parade in Tamworth – appropriately the ancient capital of Mercia – for a special inspection by their Colonel-in-Chief, the Prince of Wales.

But the pride of formation was later tinged with sadness after four members of the regiment's 2nd Battalion, formerly The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment, lost their lives as a result of enemy action in Afghanistan. Pte Damian Wright and

Pte Ben Ford were killed in an explosion while Sgt Craig Brelsford and Pte Johan Botha died during a firefight.

As this issue went to press, a road accident had also claimed the lives of two more soldiers in Afghanistan.

But 2 Mercian troops in Helmand province remained focused on their job of restoring peace.

As well as 1 WFR, two other full-time outfits make up the Mercians, with the 1st Battalion, The Cheshire Regiment and The Staffordshire Regiment



At a glance: The Mercian Regiment

1 Mercian (Cheshire) – formerly the 1st Battalion, The Cheshire Regiment (Catterick)

2 Mercian (Worcesters and Foresters) – formerly The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment (Afghanistan, Belfast in 2008)

3 Mercian (Stafford) – formerly The Staffordshire Regiment (Tidworth)

4 Mercian (Volunteers) – formerly The West Midlands Regiment (TA)

Regimental HQ – Whittington Barracks, Lichfield

www.army.mod.uk/mercian

Clockwise from main picture:
Members of the Worcestershire and
Sherwood Foresters, now 2 Mercian,
on patrol in Lashkar Gah, Afghanistan;
TA soldiers at their battle camp after
forming as the 4 Mercian (Volunteers);
Snipers from 1 Cheshire, now 1
Mercian, at Basra's Old State Building;
Staffordshire Regiment soldiers in
Kosovo; A soldier from 1 WFR keeps
watch in Afghanistan; Troops from 1
Cheshire train at Basra Palace



respectively forming the new 1st and 3rd battalions.

The regiment's Territorial Army battalion – 4 Mercian (Volunteers) – is made up from the former West Midland Regiment (TA).

During the ceremony at Tamworth Castle, during which more than 5,000 soldiers were on parade, the Prince of Wales paid tribute to troops past and present. He said the role of troops on ops should “never be taken for granted”. He added: “This solemn and historic occasion will mark the start of another chapter in the long story of loyal service to the crown that is the history of the English county regiments.

“The Mercian Regiment is being born in an era when the British Army is displaying daily the very best qualities of bravery, loyalty and dogged perseverance in the most impossible and dangerous circumstances.

“I have nothing but the most profound admiration for the sheer resilience being displayed by all our people on operations; we must never take it for granted.”

With the Tamworth event under way, 2 Mercian troops in Afghanistan were able to take some time to reflect on their new identity. Commanding Officer Lt Col Nigel Banton said it was important to mark the historic occasion. “The significance of having a parade

in Afghanistan is probably a reflection of the reality of the British Army at the moment,” he said.

Lt Col Banton admitted that there was some sadness at having lost their old cap badge, but was adamant that troops were very much focused on the future. “We’re still going to have regional ties with Worcestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire and that’s important. We’re a regiment from the heart of England and we’re always going to be that way,” he added. ■



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OFFICIAL FUEL CONSUMPTION FIGURES FOR SAAB 9-3 CONVERTIBLE RANGE IN MPG (LITRES/100KM): URBAN 16.3-33.6 (17.3-8.4), EXTRA-URBAN 36.7-55.4 (7.7-5.1), COMBINED 25.4-44.8 (11.1-6.3). CO₂ EMISSIONS IN G/KM: 169-266.

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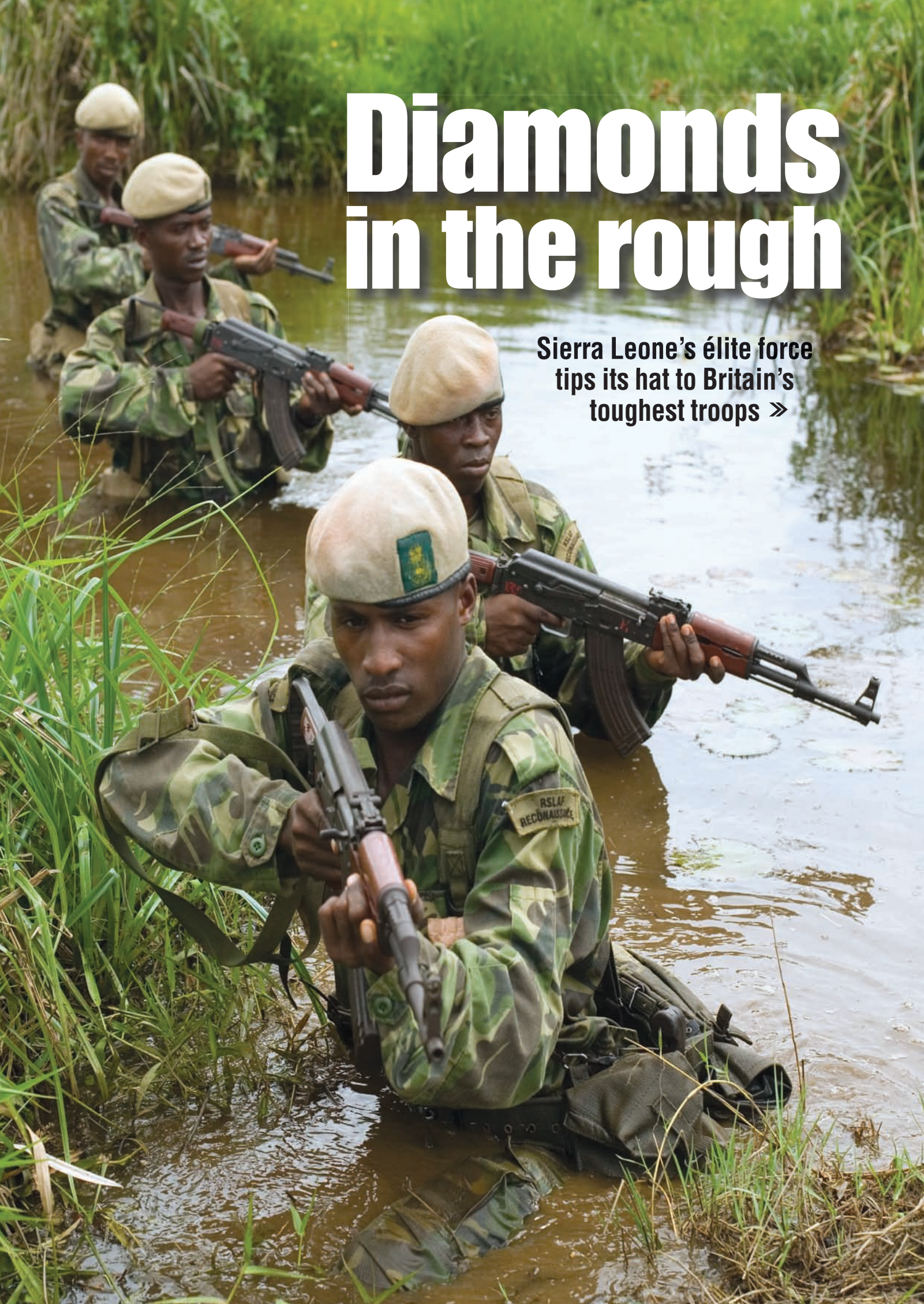
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Diamonds in the rough

Sierra Leone's élite force
tips its hat to Britain's
toughest troops »





Report: Karen Thomas
Pictures: Mike Weston

MURMURS rippled through the cream of Sierra Leone's troops as they decided how best to answer *Soldier's* question on the future of their unique Force Reconnaissance Unit.

The 150 or so elite infantrymen are distinguished from their Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) comrades by more than their British Special Forces berets. These lads are finely tuned foot soldiers, savvy in their military trade but with a little something extra in the self-assured way they present and carry themselves.

Based at Lungi international airport, the Force Reconnaissance Unit (FRU) took its professional cue from Britain's highly-skilled infantrymen. It was here in 2000, towards the end of Sierra Leone's ten-year civil war, that rebel forces rashly took on The Parachute Regiment, which was evacuating British nationals and protecting the capital, Freetown. Now the FRU wants to be as effective in protecting its country, as well as civilians in other nations torn apart

by conflict. With the help of British troops who remained in Sierra Leone as part of the International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT), the soldiers of the FRU have almost achieved their goal.

Capt Sheku Sesay, OC, invited his men to speak candidly about their expectations and chief instructor Cpl Sankoh Abdulrahman got the lively discussion rolling.

"With the help of IMATT and our British Army counterparts, we are ready to undertake international operations," he said, outlining their ultimate aim of working on peacekeeping missions around the globe. "If our counterparts support us with logistics, we can be the best soldiers in Africa."

The hall suddenly started buzzing with the soldiers' excitement and hunger for showing exactly how good they are, especially with the British Army behind them. The United Nations deploys more than 71,000 troops on 15 peace support operations worldwide, six of which are on the FRU's home turf of Africa. It needs more quality troops for brewing hotspots such as Darfur in Sudan



and, despite coming from the second poorest country in the world, the FRU is realistically tipped for the top of the peacekeeper premier league.

Sgt Maj Liam Robertson, 5 Scots and IMATT adviser to the FRU, told *Soldier* he was confident many of the unit's soldiers would "easily" be accepted into the British Army at their current ranks.

"Their key characteristic is determination. These troops all want this to work and they really see themselves as an elite force.

"But with that comes certain standards, which they strive to achieve, and that's what sets them apart from the RSLAF. Selection is all done on merit and the FRU would be devastated if a dud got through."

Slim chance of that. Potential recruits spend 67 days trying to survive the intense training, which begins with daily 15km marches around the hot and sweaty hills of Freetown, loaded up with 50lb of kit. From there they confront three mentally and physically

demanding weeks in the jungle learning their trade, reconnaissance.

Had the FRU been patrolling the Liberian border in 1991, they might have prevented rebels from crossing over and averted the vicious civil war. Seeing the need for RSLAF to have keen eyes and ears, IMATT set up the unit in 2002 with rigorous entry requirements.

During the final selection phase recruits spend days sitting patiently in the jungle, quietly watching enemy movements before tackling a river crossing to engage their adversaries in a live attack.

Once they pass out, FRU soldiers are awarded British Special Forces berets and an extra cup of rice each day. Although a little more food seems a poor incentive for joining the finest of Sierra Leone's soldiers, Cpl Teddy "The Rock" Sesay had no complaints.

"It's great working with the best of the RSLAF," he said. "The training is also different and the normal infantry guys don't have the vast knowledge we share. The best thing I love about the FRU is the *esprit de corps*."

Capt Sesay works hard to develop the unit's identity as an elite organisation through building on his soldiers' strong sense of team spirit, but he acknowledged that their reputation had to be founded on substance.

"If a FRU private is seen to be the same as a regular private, we have no credibility so all FRU soldiers must perform to their optimum. We try to put everyone on a career path so the soldiers don't get bored with the job. IMATT is playing a vital role in training and really managing the careers of the soldiers," he added, and Sgt Maj Robertson agreed that man-management was the area where he had the most effective input

now that the FRU was self-sufficient in maintaining training standards and running exercises.

Everyone, regardless of rank, gets a chance at promotion and selection for company commander if they prove themselves capable and worthy of the respect of their peers. Hence a corporal bagging the prize role of chief instructor.

"If we get this unit together, we can filter FRU instructors out to the RSLAF battleschools and their expertise will gradually fan out," explained Sgt Maj Robertson. "IMATT sees the FRU as a success story, a glimmer of hope of what the rest of the army could become." ■

'These lads are finely tuned foot soldiers, savvy, but with something extra'

Main picture, Stealth: Cpl Alfred Demby leads 2nd Lt Patrick Kamara and Pte Farday Karzby through the jungle; **Top left, I spy:** LCpl Alloert Conteh patiently watches and waits; **Right, Contact:** Rehearsing drills for former Prime Minister Tony Blair's visit last May; **Bottom right, Pressure:** Soldier puts the FRU's future in the spotlight



Rhodes around Basra

Dash of Army spirit for award-winning chef taking the heat of a front-line cookhouse

Report: Karen Thomas

Picture: Cpl Russ Nolan, RLC

THE huge flames dancing in front of Gary Rhodes's eyes were not of the lip-smacking gourmet variety usually reserved for crowning his latest flambéed creation.

As defensive flares flashed outside the transport helicopter nose-diving into Basra air station, the enormity of cooking for 500 Telic troops struck home. Problems had already hit Rhodes in Kuwait, where he was unable to get vital kitchen kit and ingredients through customs. But after wrestling himself into unfamiliar body armour for his first flight into theatre, the cordon bleu chef now faced the possibility of Iraqi insurgents firing missiles at him. All his culinary concerns about satisfying the soldiers' voracious appetites without his usual gastronomic arsenal immediately evaporated.

"The back of the helicopter was left open and there was somebody with a huge sub-machine gun hanging out the back, and I suddenly said to myself 'I'm going into a war zone'.

"Then we had this huge explosion going off outside with these huge flames and I'm thinking 'Oh goodness me, we're being attacked'," the Kent-born master chef told *Soldier*, admitting his fear didn't diminish when he was greeted on the tarmac with the news that the base had taken seven attacks in the previous ten days.

Only the pace of operations matches the speed with which this doyen of British cuisine enthusiastically regales his Army adventure. It's not hard to

imagine a whirlwind of white-striped apron whipping up a gastronomic sensation in Rhodes's world famous *Twenty Four* restaurant in London.

Fifteen years as a celebrated chef and 13 television series, including foodie favourite *Rhodes Around Britain*, has made the gifted cook a household name. But the father of two, who commands a chain of premier eateries around the world, leapt at the chance last Christmas to give "something small" back to the troops fighting for his country.

"I have got nothing but admiration for the soldiers and how they can

suddenly adapt their lives to a whole different way of living while, at the same time, fighting a war. I found that quite inspirational."

Armed with a menu that would make most

of us drool ourselves to dehydration, Rhodes found a kindred "can-do" spirit in the Army chefs he worked alongside in Basra. His refusal to be beaten when the chips were down won him their respect too, especially when the biggest bombshell was dropped in the Army field kitchen. The chefs told their new commander they had just five hours to produce a three-course dinner for the ravenous hordes.

"We found ourselves in a situation where we didn't quite have the ingredients we wanted but it was no good crying about it.

"It was a question of giving our soldiers the best possible meal we could with what was available and the chefs responded to that. I said, 'look guys, we're a little bit in it and we're well behind time so we've got to move fast'.

But they just got on with it and nobody complained or moaned.

"It was still a war zone but the war zone was now a kitchen. We had just five hours and in that time I had to roast 250 chickens, 1,500 potatoes and make 20 large trays of bread and butter pudding," the Michelin star winner explained, vividly describing the mounting pressure as a catalogue of disasters bubbled to the surface.

The potatoes hadn't arrived, only tinned and not fresh mushrooms were available, and Rhodes's signature dish – bread and butter pudding – was under threat. His blowtorch for caramelising the sugar topping had been confiscated in Kuwait and it didn't look like there would be enough eggs for the hurriedly improvised version.

Despite the spectre of a culinary catastrophe staring him in the face, the maestro gathered his troops and fought his way through feeding the hungry masses with slap-up scoff. And the proof of his re-jigged pudding was indeed in the eating, as the customers eagerly came back for seconds.

But Rhodes's reward for taking the heat of a front-line kitchen reached deeper than his stomach.

"I felt very proud to be British and very proud to be with such amazing people. I could not believe the spirit of everybody, as I was expecting to meet 500 slightly depressed soldiers, away from home and in a war.

"How could they be happy? But they said, 'Gary, there's no point getting depressed over it as we're here to do a job, which is to protect our country and what we believe in. And we'll make sure we will do it to the best of our ability, just as you would whenever you go somewhere'. It was incredible."

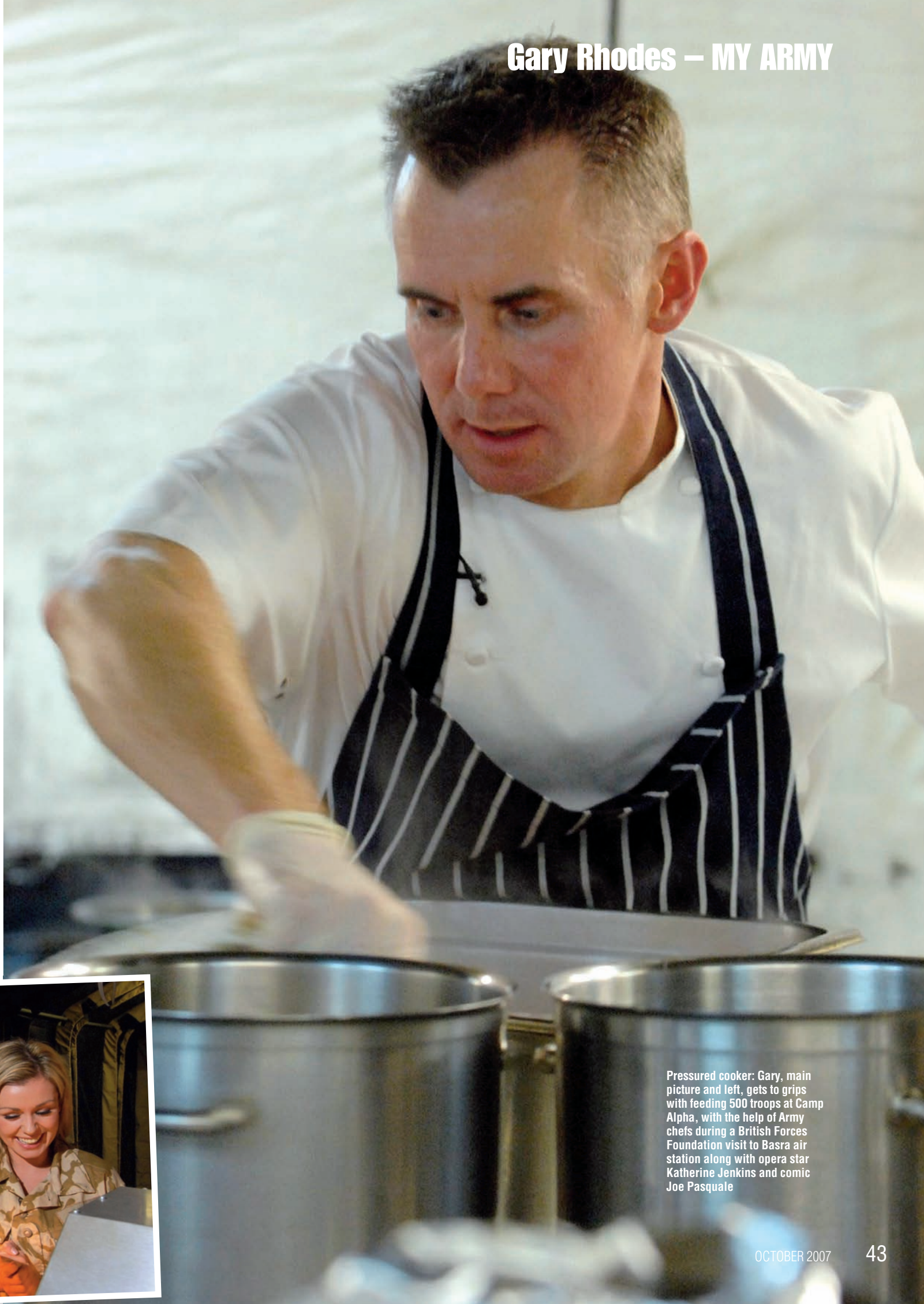
But the consummate professional, who confessed to being "a fussy old whatsit in the kitchen", took his chef's hat off to the Army cooks who took his orders and produced such a memorable meal in the heat of Basra.

"It was brilliant having the team with me," he said. "If any of them ever said 'Gary, I've had my Army days but I want to stay a chef' well, goodness me, I'd love to have them working with me. They were fantastic." ■

"I felt very proud to be British and very proud to be with such amazing people"



Gary Rhodes – MY ARMY



Pressured cooker: Gary, main picture and left, gets to grips with feeding 500 troops at Camp Alpha, with the help of Army chefs during a British Forces Foundation visit to Basra air station along with opera star Katherine Jenkins and comic Joe Pasquale

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Picture perfect

Photographic competition focuses on talents and creativity of Army's best sharpshooters »

Winged warrior: This composition by Sgt Mick Howard, RLC, won best professional digital image at the Army Photographic Competition





THE press flash bulbs were reserved for two newcomers when the winners of the 2007 Army Photographic Competition were announced during a ceremony hosted by the Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Richard Dannatt, at the National Army Museum.

First time entrants Cpl Russ Nolan, RLC, and Spr Ian Chapman, 299 Parachute Squadron RE (V), both enjoyed winning debuts, walking away with the respective titles of Professional Photographer of the Year and Amateur Photographer of the Year.

Cpl Nolan, who passed the Army Photographers selection course in 2005 and is now a member of the Army News team at Land Command, told *Soldier*: "I didn't enter last year because I only heard about the competition a day or so before entries had to be submitted. This year I had more time to put a portfolio together but I had no idea I'd win. I'm delighted but know that the pressure is now on – the only way to go from here is down."

Nolan, whose winning portfolio contained images from both Op Telic and Op Herrick, also won the professional category for best photograph of Army equipment.

Spr Chapman, who took all of the images in his winning portfolio while serving on Op Herrick 5, said: "I've always had an interest in photography but this is the first competition I've entered. I didn't go out to Afghanistan with my camera with this competition in mind – I took the pictures so I had my own record of my time there. It's only when I got back that I thought about entering."



Clockwise from above left, Resupply: Spr Ian Chapman's photograph of Chinooks dropping artillery equipment in Helmand

Into the mist: An Irish Guardsman training for Iraq is caught on camera by Sgt Will Craig

Contact: This photograph of a soldier sprinting for cover during the TA Summer Challenge was part of Cpl Russ Nolan's winning portfolio

Harry's game: Sgt Gary Tyson won best sporting image for this shot of Cornet Wales celebrating a goal against the Royal Navy at Tidworth

Boom: Cpl Nolan's image of the explosion that denied the use of the Al Jamet Police Station to rogue forces in Basra appeared worldwide

Chapman's decision paid dividends when his shot of a casevac in Helmand, which features on this month's front cover, won best overall image and earned him the Corporal Gilyeat Cup, a trophy dedicated to the memory of Cpl Mike Gilyeat, RMP, who was killed earlier this year while serving as an Army photographer in Afghanistan.

The winning images will remain on display at the National Army Museum as part of a permanent exhibition. ■



WINNERS' ENCLOSURE

BEST OVERALL IMAGE

Casevac, Spr Ian Chapman

PROFESSIONAL WINNERS

Army Experience

Into the Mist, Sgt Will Craig

Best Army Equipment

Yorkie, Cpl Russ Nolan

Best Digital Award

Close Protection, Sgt Mick Howard

Best Sporting Image

Harry's Game, Sgt Gary Tyson

Photographer of the Year

Portfolio by Cpl Russ Nolan

AMATEUR CATEGORIES

Army Experience

Casevac, Spr Ian Chapman

Best Army Equipment

Resupply, Spr Ian Chapman

Best Digital Award

Go, Spr Ian Chapman

Best Sporting Image

Reaching For The Line, Capt Chris Cox

Photographer of the Year

Portfolio Spr Ian Chapman

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TALKBACK

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

I WOULD like to thank sincerely the staff of the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC) for their quick work in getting me back home from the Falklands last month.

There was a serious incident at home involving one of my children and, after I told my chain of command and then the JCCC, they had me booked on a flight from

Mount Pleasant via Chile, Spain and on to the UK within two or three hours.

I have had to use the JCCC once before and on that occasion they were fantastic as well.

As I don't know the names of those in the decision-making process, I would like to thank everyone involved in the episode from start to finish, from top to bottom.

PRIZE LETTER

One name I would mention though is WO2 Gerry McCormack RAF, the chief clerk at the Falkland Islands Support Unit (FISU), as well as OC FISU and the company sergeant major of B Company, 5 Rifles.

My family and I deeply appreciate all of the work and effort put into getting me home and we say a very heartfelt thanks to all involved. – **Cpl Leslie Ball, 5 Rifles.**

Petrol allowances are 'laughable'

THE drop in allowance rates is laughable. Petrol allowances for home-to-duty travel (HDT) and motor mileage allowance (MMA) at private

car rate have been reduced due to the "average cost of petrol in the UK dropping by at least 1p per litre". I would like to know what garages they used for this statistic. Last November it cost me £38 to fill my car from empty, now it is £45. – **SSgt I Gorton, FSA.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: The costs of running a car are taken from data provided by the AA and RAC. It can be

viewed at theaa.com and rac.co.uk

I agree that it seems counter-intuitive that motoring costs have gone down – petrol has gone up and for those of us who do not buy a new car regularly, fuel efficiency and servicing intervals remain the same. Indeed, as a car gets older, the costs of keeping it going tend to grow.

As to monthly or quarterly monitoring, I am afraid that there are no staff to conduct an exercise. Sorry.

PS...

WITH reference to "Case for military fostering" (Sept), although generally not full-time foster care, there is a need for temporary families on the patch to help in cases where a single parent might be called away, or both parents in various circumstances.

This is promoted in 16 Assault Brigade's *Families' Welfare and Information Guide*. I imagine the usual CRB checks would apply. Service personnel interested in volunteering as a nominated temporary family for other Service families in their area should contact their unit welfare officer. – **Chrissy Rodgers, MoD Hereford.**

Medics deserve more

AS the RAMC lance corporal combat medical technician (CMT) on Op Telic 9 with an infantry unit I was responsible for the health of a company of nearly 100 soldiers, treating everything from life-threatening injuries to infections, fevers, cuts and sprains.

Yet I was paid less than many private soldiers on their first tour of duty. That seems unfair to me. Are medics going to be moved to a higher pay band? And if not, why not? – **LCpl J Squelch, RAMC, 1 Staffords.**

Maj Andrea Lewis, DGAMS, replies: Since the introduction of Pay 2000, the Army Medical Directorate (AMD) has recognised the CMT to be disadvantaged in comparison with other Army Career Employment Groups. The results of an evaluation recommended an uplift from the lower to the higher band for lance corporal, to be effective from April 2008. AMD has made a strong justification to Land for the uplift to be effective as soon as possible.

This is still under consideration and is dependent on funding issues.

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

Paying for food I don't eat

I AM writing with regard to food charges. I never use the cookhouse as I do not like the food and cook for myself with the facilities provided in the accommodation.

However, I find myself still having to pay food charges.

I have queried this with my admin person who has said he will only stop food charges if I get a letter from the medical centre.

I don't think it's too much to ask to be able to eat what I want, when I want. Surely forcing me to pay for a service I don't use is illegal and against my human

rights. – Cpl C Gibson, AGC (SPS).

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: Taking your last point first, you suggest that it is against your human rights and illegal to expect you to pay for meals which you do not take. It is neither.

Where the Army offers single personnel in barracks food and accommodation, rather like a B and B, if you choose not to take the food element you still have to pay the entire bill.

As you know, with Pay As You Dine (PAYD) being introduced you will be able to pay for what you want, when you want.



"I hear the Duke has decreed that incidental 'looting in lieu of rations' will merit 500 lashes."

My costly flight home

I ARRIVED at BATUS in Canada as temporary staff in April and leave at the end of October.

I was told when I got here that I would get three weeks' leave in July, but was not entitled to a flight back to Germany, so I booked a civilian flight home, including a connecting flight from UK to Germany, at a cost of £650.

I declined the option of insurance as the policy didn't include cancellation of leave/holiday entitlement.

Now I have been told I may be able to have a flight home to Germany. My first thought was to cancel the civvy flight and get my money back, but I find I can claim only 50 per cent back if I cancel more than 29 days before the flight, leaving me more than £300 out of pocket for a flight I'm not using.

I asked my RAO if there was any way I could claim the money back. The answer was no. As I'm not entitled to a flight I'm not entitled to a claim.

I pointed out to the warrant officer that I had been screwed by the system,

only to be told that I had simply been misinformed. I had no choice but to thank the RAO's department for their help and move on to avoid further confrontation.

Should I be out of pocket for something that four colleagues are getting for free just because I booked earlier than them? – Name and address supplied.

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: You will not be surprised to hear that the information you were given on arrival at BATUS was correct and in accordance with the Mounting Instructions (MI); you are not entitled to flights back to Germany as there is no entitlement to R and R (and therefore flights) from BATUS.

I agree that it seems wrong to take temporary staff to BATUS to work and then expect them to take annual leave away from their home and family. I sympathise with your situation but cannot offer you any recompense for your expenditure. You were treated correctly according to the rules. As

a result of your letter, I have asked my staff and the staff at the Land Warfare Centre to look to revise the rules for temporary staff to avoid the situation you found yourself in. Work is in hand.

Their job to help

SOME regimental career manager officers (RCMO) need reminding that it is their job to help soldiers rather than play golf.

I put in for posts near my family, only to be fast-balled to the opposite end of the country without notice, reason or even an interview. As a result I am even further away from my wife and child who is about to start his GCSEs.

I support the need to go where the Army requires me and to RCMOs who do their job I say "well done". But there are too many cases of soldiers being mismanaged. – Infantry NCO (name, address supplied).

PS...

I WAS surprised to find in your story of the 9th/12th Lancers and vehicle recognition that you had got the identity of one of our own vehicles wrong. Under the caption "Cavalry spirit" you stated that the vehicle shown was a Sultan command vehicle. I served for ten years in the Household Cavalry and I can assure you that the vehicle shown was actually a Spartan CVR(T). – Michael Creagh, Spain.

Long service and good-ish conduct

HERE is my version of the award of a Long Service and Good Conduct Medal (Talkback, May).

On retiring as a WO2 from Regular service after 24 years I put in two pleas of mitigation which were rejected. I assumed my new post as a Non-Regular Permanent Staff soldier and was awarded the LS and GC with no further request being put in on my behalf, despite four regimental entries. Is the LS and GC warranted anyway? I believe your finishing rank tells your career story. – WO2 (SQMS) J Gardiner, Irvine.

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: Letters on the LS and GC feature regularly in these pages. I would like to remind readers that the rules governing its award are enshrined in Queen's Regulations (ch 5, para 393-395) and of the comments I made (March issue) on standards expected. Rather than take up space in your Talkback section that might be better used, can I suggest that if any soldier thinks he has been unfairly treated or his case not properly considered, he should write to the Secretary of the Army Medal Board, MoD Medal Office, Building 250, RAF Innsworth, Gloucester GL3 1EZ.



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Professional fees have cost me £600

I AM a member of Management Accountancy Services (Army) (MAS (A)), the professional body of military chartered accountants within the AGC which provides a consultancy tool for the Army.

Training takes about four years and is funded by the Army, and the prospect of a new and rewarding career is unique within the Armed Forces.

To gain promotion to warrant officer within MAS (A) a soldier must be a member of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, which costs £200 a year, but is not allowed to claim this back. The standard response is to claim against personal tax each year.

This does not recompense individuals fully and I believe that if the Army insists a soldier pay membership fees a claim should be allowed.

This issue is not unique to the AGC. The Royal Engineers, among others, have professionally qualified soldiers

not entitled to claim fees. I and many others have been asking about this for several years. I have been a member for three years and this has cost me £600.

MoD civil servants are allowed to submit a claim. – **WO2 D Donaldson, DII IPT, DE & S, Corsham.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: *There is a muddle on this subject. In the Army, doctors have always paid their professional body fees (PBFs). Lawyers had them paid centrally by the system.*

For others, PBFs were admissible until February 1, 2006 depending on the local budget manager's authority.

Now, because of a resource squeeze, none of the Services wish to pay PBFs, hence the position you find yourself in.

We are still working on the issue, but don't hold your breath.

As for civil servants, you are right, but (and I would say this) they are on different terms and conditions of service to you.

Clerk's whinge

FIND it laughable that a young member of my branch had the nerve to complain about the intellect of members of his battalion then ask why he/she shouldn't be on a higher pay band ("Baby-sitting' clerks lose out", Aug).

I've served for almost 20 years, most of them as a clerk, first as a Royal Engineer, then as AGC (SPS). I have served with two infantry battalions, with the gunners, with the Royal Signals and also with Army aviation, at all times doing my best to serve the officers and soldiers of these units.

I was always a welcome member and played an active part in sporting and social activities. I will miss the many good friends I've made over the years. The key to all this was integration, respect and, above all, the knowledge that I was there to provide a service.

Having started my career on their side of the counter, I know what it's like to need help and advice.

I was never going to be the best operator in a minefield or mortar platoon and I would never excel at operating a Stormer, or flying a Lynx. I think my ever-so-experienced colleague of five years needs to understand this.

The author would do well to remember the corps motto, *Animo et Fide* (With Resolution and Fidelity). Another way of putting that would be *With Determination and Faithfully*. Better still, loyalty. – **SSgt B Culleton AGC (SPS), Helsinki.**

AS clerks of one, four and 12 years we read the "baby-sitting clerks" letter with anger. We have worked hard to earn the trust of the men in our unit and half-baked articles such as this are counter-productive. We have very few soldiers who struggle with JPA – most are a very quick study; the needs of the modern infantry demand that.

When soldiers do struggle, we make the time to give them the help they deserve. Those who do are often the same guys who help us with our "skills and drills" and make sure we have a brew when we are knackered on exercise. We have nothing but respect for our guys and know our limitations in their role.

Do we think we are underpaid? Yes. Do we think it's the same for most of the Army? Definitely.

The writer of that letter is in the wrong job. – **Cpl S Jackson, LCpl C Carter and Pte Evens, 4 Scots.**

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Mountains of paper

WE should take a hard look at how we use the formal signal system, which generates a huge amount of paper and wastes clerical and staff officer time. Spam email is annoying but printed signal traffic is a real expense.

The three prize-winning examples in my in-tray today were a "please give this wide distribution" fax from a higher formation driven by a signal about an under-subscribed boxing judges' course (three sheets of paper in total), another covering a cancelled respirator conversion course and one telling me to amend "and 200" to read "and 2002" in the notes to an earlier signal about two types of

maritime pyrotechnic unlikely to have ever seen service with an Officers' Training Corps (OTC).

Even better was the one covering obsolete ammunition for the Multiple Launch Rocket System. I suggest that the gunners might know exactly who is likely to be holding this stuff and that the list is quite short. What on earth justified a signal distributed – doubtless printed – across the whole British Army?

Can I suggest a new competition for "Most Irrelevant Signal of the Year" along the lines of the "Darwin Awards"? – **Maj Gene Maxwell, Training Major, Tayforth OTC.**



"Don't go yet, Sir. More signals, including at least three 'priorities'."

Quarter too small for our furniture

I AM due to start a posting in Osnabrück for ten months before my new unit moves back to the UK. I put in for a house (two bedrooms, as we have only one child) as normal but when we went to look at it we found it was too small for all our furniture.

We asked them if we could have two bedrooms with a full-size basement so we could store furniture, but were told there was nothing available.

There are three-bedroom quarters empty here but we aren't entitled to one. Is the station staff officer's department being difficult? Not many more people will be

posted to Osnabrück as it is closing. My family is getting messed around because of a mad housing policy. – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: *On the information provided, I agree you would normally be allowed to have an above-entitlement three-bedroom house if one was available, but the HCSO may have reasons for not allocating them that you are unaware of.*

My staff has spoken to the HCSO in Osnabrück, who was unable to answer the specific query without knowing your specific circumstances. If you go and see him he will explain why he was unable to allocate you a Type C.

Same rank, less money

CAN anyone please explain the reason why there is a difference in pay between a long service list (LSL) soldier and a Regular soldier.

I am an LSL WO2 employed as an RQMS (A) in a support unit and am being paid on a lower band than my opposite number, the RQMS (T), who is on a normal engagement and being paid up to £10 a day more than me.

I am preparing to deploy on an Op Herrick tour, for which I volunteered, and I will still be paid at a lower level than others of the same rank. – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: *The reason you find yourself paid less is because you are on a different engagement and different Terms and Conditions of Service. This would have been explained to you and is contained in AGAI 46. A bit rough when you are doing the job of a Regular, but that is how it is.*

Longer MPGS contracts needed

BEING a regular reader, I can't help but notice the amount of letters from members of the Military Provost Guard Service (MPGS). As a member of the service, I think the problem is that, being on a Military Local Service Contract (MLSC), we are confined to three-year contracts.

Why can't we extend to fall in line with mainstream Regulars? At present we can't show commitment to our units because of this restriction. It would also solve previously addressed issues such as Long Service Advance of Pay (LSAP) and Graduated Resettlement Time (GRT). – **Name and address supplied.**

Maj (Retd) Tom Greenwood, MPGS, responds:

The MPGS recruits ex-Servicemen and women, offering a career to the age of 55. The Military Local Service Contract is mutually renewable every three years.

Last year 170 soldiers joined with a gap in service of up to ten years. The shorter contracts allow soldiers to apply up to the age of 52. If we went through the process of changing an Act of Parliament to offer longer contracts, we would place a number of those aspiring to join the MPGS at a disadvantage.

The MPGS has expanded rapidly over the past few years and now employs nearly 2,000 Servicemen and women at 79 units. The present contract allows us to retain the experience and knowledge of soldiers in a wide age range and meet the demand of manning units.

PS...

WHEN I checked my qualifications on JPA they appeared correct. Then I looked closer and discovered that whoever had transferred them from UNICOM to JPA had not understood the Scottish system.

Instead of my Scottish higher I had been put down for Scottish Higher National Certificates, a different qualification. I have asked for this to be passed up the chain of command as it probably affects Scottish personnel of all three Services. I would advise all those with higher to check their JPA qualifications a little closer. – Name and address supplied.

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Time to re-title TA?

I HAVE served in both the Regular and Territorial Armies and think there is room for improvement in the TA, including better training with our Regular counterparts and a system that promotes those who have done operational tours.

People who have never risked their lives seem to get promoted above those who have completed tours. There is also a clear case for the TA to get pension rights. And finally could our title be changed: "Territorial" does not describe what a modern Army is about. – **Bill Foy, Liverpool.**

Maj John Varley, PS TA, HQ Land, replies: I am surprised you are not aware of the changes in Territorial Army training that have been or are being introduced. The Regional Training Centres are required to provide instruction of the same quality as other ATRD units and the TA recruit instruction syllabus has been enhanced.

On promotion, TA units have to hold



"Haven't we been here before?"

annual boards at which the suitability of individuals is considered.

As to pensions, all who are mobilised are eligible to count that service towards

a pension. Those on Full-Time Reserve Service (FTRS) are eligible to join the Reserve Forces Pension Scheme (RFPS).

On your final point, I would regret any change of title. One of my grandfathers was a Royal Engineer officer in the Territorial Force during the 1914-18 war and was killed in July 1916. My father was a gunner in the TA during the Second World War and was wounded in the 30 Corps advance after D-Day.

I have been a member of the Non-Regular Permanent Staff (NRPS) for 15 years and will shortly retire after 46 years in the Army. Next year we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Territorial Force, now the TA, not I think an appropriate time to change the title.

Taking your proposal forward does not lie with me but because Soldier is read by all ranks, your ideas are bound to catch the eye of senior officers.

(A full version of this response appears on the Soldier website.)

ACCOMMODATION at St Omer Barracks in Aldershot is damp and mouldy and the windows are broken . . . and it's described by the Army in joining instructions as "four-star" standard.

SINGLE soldiers' LOA immediately drops to a reduced rate under JPA when they leave theatre. So why do married soldiers retain their full rate in the same circumstances?

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THESE and others letters, and the official responses, appear in full in the TALKBACK section of our website

WITH reference to your article regarding healthcare trainer qualifications being given to PT instructors, why aren't the

medics being given this opportunity?

MY mother pays single occupancy council tax and I have to prove that I pay a contribution in lieu of council tax for her to retain the discount. Why?

WHY do I have to do a Junior Management Qualification Course as well as a Military Proficiency Course for promotion?

Are we on a posting, or not?

I BEGAN a course at Royal Signals School, Blandford on June 18, running until December, and was told by my parent unit in Germany that this was not a permanent posting, and that I would return to my unit.

At Blandford I was told I was posted, which puzzled me because the course lasts less than 183 days and means the loss of local overseas allowance (LOA) and longer separation allowance (LSA) entitlement for single soldiers. Married personnel on the course could have brought spouses.

We were told to like it or lump it by Manning and Records. All my personal belongings are still in Germany and some of us even have BFG cars because we have been given false information.

No one has received relocation leave, which we would have been entitled to if it had been a posting. To add insult to injury, the course is now an extra

seven days, pushing it past the 183 days because a "military training week" has been added. Is this to save money? – **Name and address supplied.**

Col David Halstead, Col R Signals and Int Corps MCM Div, replies: Manning and Career Management Division (the successor to Manning and Records) has noted the issue but without personal details cannot give a specific response to the points raised. The JNCO is strongly advised to contact the Regular Careers Manning Officer (RCMO) in Blandford so unresolved issues can be addressed.

We can state that courses of more than six months do result in personnel being assigned (posted) to the Manning and Training Margin (MTM) from their parent unit. Assignment orders are specific and make this clear. Should an assignment to the MTM be made when a planned tour is some way from completion, it is likely

that an individual would return, and hence be re-assigned, to the same unit after the course. If dependants are left in Germany, an element of LOA will normally be paid so they are not disadvantaged.

PS...

HAVING just read the letter (Aug) from the frustrated soldier who complained about paying for the keys to use the gym suite at Worthy Down, I would like to point out that it is actually a deposit and, providing the key is returned, the money will be refunded. Therefore, it is actually free to enjoy the training equipment provided. – Warrant Officer, Worthy Down.

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Yet another report

Lots more cash is the only solution to the Army's substandard housing

ON reading the recent House of Commons Defence Committee report *The Work of Defence Estates* I had a distinct feeling of déjà vu. It said, among other things: "It is simply unacceptable that any of our Service personnel should be housed in sub-standard accommodation."

Yet another report recommending that something needs to be done about Service accommodation and that the only solution to the problem is to inject a large amount of cash into the system. How many of these reports have to be produced before the Government digs deep?

Since 1999, like many other agencies, Defence Estates has been "rationalising" its assets, which has ultimately meant the disposal of land and buildings valued at around £1.69 billion. What a shame that the full proceeds of these sales weren't reinvested in improving the defence estate. It appears that the lion's share went to the Treasury.

When the stock of Service Families Accommodation (SFA) in England and Wales was sold to Annington Homes for £1.67 billion in 1996, it was intended that a significant proportion of the proceeds would be used to ensure that the bulk of SFA would be upgraded to grade one for condition.

As we are all aware, this has not happened; 40 per cent are still below this standard and, at the current upgrade rate, it will take decades to significantly improve on this figure.

The MoD now leases back these

quarters from Annington at a cost of around £140 million a year, which is offset by the £180 million in rent Service families pay the MoD.

Under the contract, surplus SFA may be sold off by Annington but only after it has been brought up to a certain standard by Defence Estates.

This raises concerns that funding which should be used to improve housing for Service families, now has to be used to improve properties due to be sold.

Even though 25 per cent of the proceeds of the sale of these quarters (which by the end of 2006 amounted to some £140 million) was returned to the public purse, again it's the Treasury which profits rather than Defence Estates.

The last Continuous Attitude Survey listed 40 per cent of officers and 30 per

cent of soldiers blaming accommodation as one of the factors which had increased their intention to leave the Army. And 40 per cent of Army spouses and personnel were also dissatisfied with efforts to improve SFA.

These figures might also reflect that the effects of quarters being upgraded have not been all good – AFF has been contacted by soldiers' families who have been allocated a grade one for charge house but who can't afford the rent.

The announcement by the Defence Secretary in July that over the next three years £550 million would be spent on Service accommodation is a positive

move, but once this is spread across both single and families' accommodation it won't seem that much.

I am glad Defence Estates has scrapped the upgrade quota for SFA, which often meant it went for a quick-fix option rather than the long-term gain so as to meet its yearly target. The policy is now to upgrade the worst first.

However, this does mean that there's only enough funding to upgrade around 400 properties this year. Maintenance of SFA is still causing some confusion on the ground as there seem to be grey areas in the maintenance contract with Modern Housing Solutions (MHS) over which neither Defence Estates nor MHS want to take responsibility.

Not having local housing estate managers, who used to liaise directly with the chain of command, also means the Army feels powerless to influence the system if soldiers are having problems.

The power to resolve maintenance issues seems to have been – in the name of efficiency – removed from the chain of command and even from Defence Estates.

The Defence Committee stated damningly that "there was no sense that anyone had ownership of the problem" and that "if the problems we encountered are representative of the situation across the MoD's built estate, then it is a serious failure of policy."

I await the Government's response to the Defence Committee's report with baited breath. ■

The autumn edition of the *AFF Families Journal* is out now. See www.afj.org.uk



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

"I await the Government's response with baited breath"

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CREDIT Action has received several enquiries about the cost of buying a property, how much you can borrow and the different mortgages out there.

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Think about the **income multiplier** (how much do you want to borrow compared to your annual income) – the lower the better; length of expected occupancy (how long do you hope to live there) – the longer the better.

Income multiplier calculation: The amount you want to borrow is expressed as a "multiplier" of your income. So, if your income is £18,000 a year, and you want to borrow £54,000, the income multiplier is said to be three times. A typical income

multiplier for a single person might be three times income. For a couple it might be the higher of 3.5 x first income plus 1 times second income; or 2.75 x joint income.

To help you calculate your own, go to www.moneybasics.co.uk

The Financial Services Authority (FSA) produces tables comparing different products from various providers on their website www.fsa.gov.uk/tables

For more info, visit the **mortgages** section on the **Money Made Clear** website, created by the FSA.

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NO. 791

WIN £100 HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU?



TEN details have been changed in the latest in the series of drawings by our cartoonist, Chip. Circle the differences in the left-hand image and send the whole panel to **HOAY 791**, Soldier, Ordnance Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU by October 31.

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

Name: (Give initials and rank or title)

Address:

August competition (No 789): First correct entry drawn at random and winner of the £100 prize was **WO2 (SSM) Hindson, 8 Armd Engr Sqn, Op Herrick 6**. Runners-up **Capt V J Corkish, 8 Armd Engr Sqn, Op Herrick 6** and **Sgt Dalgity, CH Troop, 1 RHA, Op Telic 10**, each win a £25 gift voucher.

The ten differences were: Mark on sailor's chest; lifeboat pulley rope; helmet chinstrap; soldier's moustache; sergeant's shoulder badge; tactical recognition flash; funnel rivets; ammunition pouch; buttons on embarking soldier; lifeboat in water.

freeze frame

Winner of our July competition (inset)

YOU sent in a large number of suggestions for the July photo, but in the end we decided to give the prize to Maj (Retd) R A James, from Rochdale Barracks, Bielefeld, for his caption: "The MoD was not happy with the instructions for the mobile Al Qaeda passport photo machine which read 'Smile and wait for the flash'".

We also liked "Since the armourers modified his ice cream carts, Mr Walls has altered his slogan to 'You will stop me and buy one'", from Graham Paul of North Hinksey, Oxford, and "I don't know what you are used to in Regent's Park, but here in Kabul you only get one flake with your ice cream" from SSgt Marie McChesney, HQ 11 Sig Bde.

There was a strong cycling theme to several captions, including "Britain's entry into the Tour de France was ready for any drug



cheats" from Sgt A Edwards, ACIO Bridgend; "No one was going to get in the way of Pierre and a Tour de France yellow jersey" from P Clarke of Wokingham; and "Ex-Army officer demonstrates cunning plan to win Tour de



Sgt Carruthers often reflected on his decision to become a model soldier

WIN A BOOK: Write your own caption for the photo, above, from our June 1948 issue and send it to us by October 31. The best, in our opinion, will win a copy of Chris Ryan's new thriller, *Strike Back*, about the rescue of a TV reporter from Hezbollah terrorists (Century, 314pp hardback, £17.99.)

France" from Maj J M Holman, AFCD Dundee. Simon Harrison, of Ludgershall, offered "FRES prototype may lack armour, but it is environmentally friendly and air transportable".

Web watch

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www.blesma.org

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www.ngvfa.com

The National Gulf Veterans and Families Association website.

www.erskine.org.uk

Erskine, caring for ex-Servicemen and women. The charity is currently caring for more than 1,000 veterans young and old throughout Scotland.

[www.info@tnauk.org.uk](mailto:info@tnauk.org.uk)

National talking newspapers and magazines. Difficulty reading the printed word? *Soldier* can still be enjoyed in audio format. To receive a free audio sample of *Soldier* contact the National Talking Newspaper Service on 01435 866102 or info@tnauk.org.uk

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www.nivets.org.uk

The Northern Ireland Veterans' Association, providing advice, support and assistance to veterans and families of those affected by the Troubles.

www.army.mod.uk/aws

The Army Welfare Service provides confidential, comprehensive and professional support to Service personnel and their families.

SERVICES

www.armywivesunited.co.uk

Free community site with message boards on a vast array of subjects that affect Army wives. Offering advice, friendship and support. Army Wives United has been online for three years and has around 1,000 active members.

www.enterprisenation.com

Website launched by Redbrick, the UK's leading consultancy for Regional Entrepreneurial Development, to provide information and inspiration to home workers across the UK.

www.forceshomes.co.uk

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www.stft.mod.uk

The Service Families Task Force website contains useful tri-Service information.

www.remerus.co.uk

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

www.kingsownmuseum.plus.com

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www.armyaviation.co.uk

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

www.armysafety.mod.uk

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

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Army Welfare Information Service: 01722 436569/436461; www.army.mod.uk/aws

Army Families Federation: 01980 615525

British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association: 020 8590 1124. www.blesma.org

Career Transition Partnership: 0207 766 8020

Children's Education Advisory Service: 01980 618244; enquiries.ceas@gtnet.gov.uk

Confidential support lines: UK 0800 731 4880; Germany 0800 1827 395; Cyprus 080 91065; Falklands #6111; from operational theatres Paradigm Services *201; from anywhere in the world (CSL operator will call back) +44 1980 630854. Lines open 1030-2230 (UK) every day.

Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society: 01372 841600; www.combatstress.com

Family Escort Service: 020 74639249

Forces Pension Society: 020 78209988

Gulf Veterans Association: 0191 2301065

Joint Service Housing Advice Office: 01722 436575

MoD Medal Office: Medal queries to JPAC Enquiry Centre on 94560 3600 or 0141 224 3600

Mutual Support (Forces Multiple Sclerosis support group): 01666 824709

National Gulf Veterans' and Families' Association Office: (0900-1700) 01482 808730; 24-hour helpline 01482 833812; www.ngvfa.com

Regular Forces' Employment Association: 0207 321 2011; www.rfea.org.uk

Royal British Legion: 0845 7725 725

RBL Industries Vocational Assessment Centre: 01622 717202/718484; www.rbli.co.uk

Ex-Service Homes Referral Agency (ESHRA): 0207 8394466; www.eshra.com

St Dunstan's charity for blind ex-Servicemen and women: 0207 7235021; www.st-dunstons.org.uk

SAMA 82 (South Atlantic Medal Association) Falklands conflict veterans: 01495 227577

Services Cotswold Centre: 01225 810358

SSAFA Forces Help: 020 7403 8783; Western Europe 02161 472 3392

Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA): 0800 169 2277 (from UK); 0044 1253 866043 (from overseas)

Victim Support: Germany 02161 472 2272; UK 0845 3030900, www.victimsupport.org

WRVS (24-hr answer service): 02920 739016; general enquiries 02920 739016

Searchline

The Editor of the *Harrogate Apprentice* magazine wishes to locate students and permanent staff. An estimated 20,000 apprentices passed through the gates in the years 1947 to 1996. If you are not already a member of the association and wish to be, contact Jim Purdy, 54 Sywell Road, Stratton St Margaret, Swindon SN3 4BN, 01793 824346 or email jimroyalsignals@aol.com

Researcher in the preliminary stages of writing a documentary about **Vogelsang**, the Nazi training camp taken over by the British Army at the end of the Second World War and handed over to the UN in 1946, wishes to contact anyone who was stationed there during that period. Contact **Tinch Minter** on 07956 197082 or email tinch.minter@btinternet.com

Were you a CSgt or SSgt during **RMAS Cadres 76, 77 and 78**? **Jane Butler and Tom Fairclough** are trying to trace as many people as possible for a reunion in 2008. Details to butlers.shrewton@btinternet.com

News sought of **WO1 Phil Gilbert**, last known address Veterans Agency, London, prior Afghan National Army Training Team, attached to The Green Howards in Kabul. Chrissy Rodgers has lost contact and wishes to get in touch. Email christine.rodgers@virgin.net or 01432 347311 Ext 2809 or 07709 759019

Mr Nagei, living in Malaysia, ex-RAMC Military Hospital Terandak, Malacca 1956-68 is seeking an old friend, **Cpl Barney Barnham**, an operating theatre technician. Email anjay47@yahoo.com or write to K Hannah, 49 Wimblington Road, March PE15 9QN (or ring 01354 660636), who will forward information.

News sought of **Charlie Rixon** from London, 35 PSP Moasear, RASC 1955-56 by a former colleague attached to the RAVC. Also anyone who was in Agaba, Jordan, O Force, in the War Dog Section 1956-57. Contact W McDowell, 17 Willowdene Crescent, Stranraer, Wigtownshire DG9 0HE.

Reunions

28 Field Ambulance: Reunion on Oct 20 in Nottingham. Ex-members welcome. Email Graham Mottley at graham.mottley@adsl.virgin.net

10th Royal Hussars: Reunion dinner, Oct 20, Acton Court Hotel, Stockport. Ring 01405 763235, email ronxrh3873@aol.com or visit www.xrhgb.com

IBB and IJLB: Annual reunion and meeting at RGJ TA Centre, Blakelands, Milton Keynes, Oct 27, starting at 1730. Ring secretary Ken Nicol on 01978 or email him at knthnic@aol.com

Third annual tri-Service conference on lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgendered matters: To be held on Nov 1-2 in the Union Jack Club, London. For details contact Flt Lt Johnston-Davis on 95712 7332 or email philp.jd@hotmail.co.uk

2007 Devon County Festival of Remembrance: Great Hall, Exeter University, Nov 8 at 1930. Tickets: Royal British Legion members £6, non-members £8. Details from HQ Devon Country RBL, 3 Barnfield Crescent, Exeter, EX1 1QT or 01392 27311 or 272211.

South Notts Hussars reunion: Remembrance weekend, Nov 10-11. Email wstlkrcraig@aol.com

5th Inniskilling Dragoon Guards: First southern area reunion. Informal meeting and curry night on Nov 16 at UOTC, Falklands House, Oxford. Ring Steve Hunt on 07880 908050 or John Walker on 01865 863235.

Defence diary

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

1-31: Posters of Conflict – More than 300 of the most eye-catching and iconic posters. Imperial War Museum London. Tel: 0207 416 5320/5321.

5: Charity boxing night – British Army v East of England Select, ATR Bassingbourn. Tickets from £25. Tel: 01223 204363.

11: The Falklands Land Campaign: A Battalion Commander's Perspective – Lecture by Lt Gen Sir Hew Pike, Airborne Forces Museum, Aldershot from 1900. Tickets £8.50. Tel: 01252 349619.

November 1-30: 90th anniversary of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission – British leg of a special photographic exhibition (opening simultaneously in Canada and Australia) to mark the 90th anniversary of the founding of the CWGC in 1917. Imperial War Museum North, Manchester. Tel: 0161 8364000.

4: 55th Midlands Festival of Remembrance, starting at 1830 in Birmingham Town Hall. Contact Frank Manning, 22 Lambeth Road, Birmingham B44 9NS.

24-25: Birmingham Tattoo, The NIA. Tickets and details from www.birminghamtattoo.co.uk or 0870 9094144.

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

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



Stamp of approval: LCpl Thomas, RMP, models part of the Royal Mail's latest collection on Army dress

First-class collection

THE rich history of the British Army uniform is being dropped through letterboxes across the globe on the latest collection of Royal Mail stamps.

Stuck on millions of parcels and letters posted every day, each of the six stamps represent a significant stage in the development of British Army dress. The set starts with the 1999 uniform of a NCO in the Royal Military Police and ends with a buff-coated trooper from the Earl of Oxford's Horse Guards from 1661.

Brig Mike Hickson, Director of BFPO, said: "I am thrilled that Royal Mail are producing this range of stamps. The stamps perfectly illustrate the huge variety in uniforms

worn by both Servicemen and women in the Army over the past 350 years."

The British Army collection will be followed by RAF uniforms in 2008 and Royal Navy uniforms in 2009. Previous military-themed stamp issues include Crimea in 2004 and the Victoria Cross in 2006.

The stamps and commemorative products are available from post offices. Alternatively, to find out more about the collection and other stamp issues from Royal Mail go to www.royalmail.com/stamps

● To win one of 15 presentation packs of all six stamps, tell us the name of the world's first official postage stamp.

Is it a) Penny Black, b) Penny Red or c) Penny Lilac?

Write your answer on a postcard and send it to the address at the front of the magazine. Usual rules apply. Closing date is October 31.



Roadshows

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

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

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

Oct – 9, Warrington; 10, Lancaster; 11, Crewe. **Nov** – 6, Wembley; 7, Newham; 8, Bromley; 21, Sheffield; 22, Halifax. **Dec** – No presentations.

Appointments

General: Sir David Richards, late Royal Artillery, to be Commander-in-Chief Land Command, in February 2008.

Major General: G W Berragan, late Royal Artillery, to be Director General Army Recruiting and Training, in December; P R Newton, late The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, to be Director General Development Concepts and Doctrine, in January 2008; B Brealey, late Royal Artillery, to be Deputy Commanding General Multi-National Corps, Iraq, in October; C G S Hughes, late The Staffordshire Regiment, to be Deputy Chief of Staff (Engagements, Multi-National Force Iraq), in November.

British Army Badges

By Lt Col (Retd) Robin Hodges

Cap badge

ALL ranks of The Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry wear the bright metal and enamel cap badge which combines the Mercian's Imperial Eagle with the Duke of Lancaster's rose and coronet. Officers wear a wire embroidered beret badge.



Formation sign

THE badge of 160 (Wales) Brigade was designed by Maj Gen B T Wilson CB DSO and originally worn by 53rd (Welsh) Division in 1916. The design is said, variously, to be the W for Wales, a diagram of an assault, a Bardic Crown or a Welsh woman's hat. It was adopted by 160 (Wales) Brigade in 1995.



Specialist badge

THE Scottish lion was chosen as the sleeve badge for Royal Scots Dragoon Guards tank crews competing in the Canadian Army Trophy gunnery competition in 1983. The regiment has the privilege of flying the red lion rampant over the regimental headquarters and in 1986 Lt Col Marcus Coombs adopted the badge to identify the commanding officer's tank and Land Rover crews.



Tactical recognition flash

THE Corps of Army Music has adopted a tactical recognition flash designed by Lt Col Charles Webb and based on the original design of the corps cap badge, a golden lyre on a blue background. The TRF distinguishes the musicians from the medical personnel with whom they deploy on operations.



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



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Movies

OCTOBER REVIEW



The last emperor: Thomas Sangster's Romulus Augustus is gently guided by Sir Ben Kingsley's Ambrosinus in Rome



Legion of legends

Mentor role for knighted actor who hankers after military commander part

Interview: Karen Thomas

SIR Ben Kingsley's mentor to the mighty Roman Empire's last Caesar has him cracking a few heads with his staff and playing the unassuming hero in this action packed fantasy-adventure.

In *The Last Legion* the Oscar-winner is Celtic shaman Ambrosinus, teacher to the newly crowned 12-year-old emperor Romulus Augustus and sole descendant of Julius Caesar. As Rome is sacked and overrun by the Goths, the pair find themselves seeking refuge and help from the Ninth – and last – Roman legion in ancient Britain.

Parents can look forward to a few hours peace this half-term, as their children are absorbed into the mystic world of Excalibur, the legendary sword of King Arthur, in this lavish production. *The Last Legion* mixes historical fact with artistic license in portraying how the fall of the Roman Empire might have been instrumental

in bringing Excalibur and Julius Caesar's bloodline to the kings of 5th century Britannia.

Watching the film it's clear Sir Ben relished his role as a shaman-warrior battling the pursuing Goth tyrants to save the boy-emperor. A stellar cast including Colin Firth and Thomas Sangster – reunited after co-starring in *Love Actually* – in the characters of loyal legionnaire Aurelius protecting Romulus, ably supports him.

But the internationally acclaimed actor admitted to *Soldier* his longing to take on a demanding military character. A desire triggered by a day with the Royal Armoured Corps when researching his part as a Soviet tank commander undergoing a court martial during the Second World War.

"I was allowed to go to Lulworth Cove and spend a day with the tank corps. It was for a stage play called *Judgment* and I had to spend the whole play at attention and addressing fellow Russian officers," he explained,

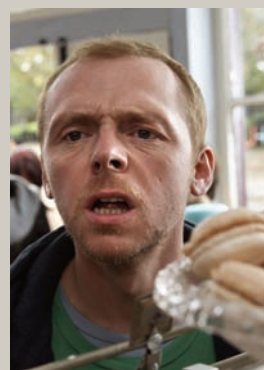
animatedly describing his experiences inside the tanks and his "enormous respect for the military".

"To this day I regret never having had an opportunity to portray a commanding officer in uniform with the responsibility of those under him and having to face a crushingly difficult decision."

Nevertheless, the celebrated thespian, best known for taking the title role in the epic *Gandhi*, challenged the former Chief of the General Staff. The two knights drew swords when Sir Ben compared soldiers to actors.

"I did have an opportunity to have dinner next to Gen Sir Mike Jackson and I had the temerity to say to him, 'you and I have one thing in common'," he recalled, with an uncanny impression of the ex-head of the British Army's gravelly voice and "amazing eyebrows" that "wiggled" at Sir Ben's leftfield suggestion.

"I said, 'nobody knows what you and I do for a living; they don't know



SICKO, coming soon
MICHAEL Moore returns to his favoured pastime of George "Dubya" Bush baiting in *SICKO* – a damning portrait of the profit-hungry US health care system, told from the often heartbreaking vantage point of everyday people. While *SICKO* makes little effort to veil Moore's disdain for the current occupant of the White House, it does serve up some damning evidence. From the opening sequence of a man stitching a gash in his leg to avoid hospital costs to the closing credits, Moore highlights the failure of the world's richest nation to care for its own.

Run Fat Boy Run, at cinemas now
SIMON Pegg returns to the big screen in **David Schwimmer's** directorial debut. The *Hot Fuzz* star plays Dennis, an overweight security guard who ditched his pregnant bride Libby (**Thandie Newton**) at the altar. Five years later he realises he made a mistake, but Libby is now with athletic Whit (**Hank Azaria**) and Dennis decides the only way to win her back is to get fit. Fans of Pegg's other films will be at home with this rom-com which keeps a nice balance between laugh-out-loud moments and sentimental scenes.

Flags of our Fathers and Letters from Iwo Jima, DVD
ONE of the final battles of the Second World War is played out from the perspectives of both sides in this excellent double bill from **Clint Eastwood** and **Steven Spielberg**. *Flags of our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima* tell the story of the fight for the infamous island through the eyes of American and Japanese troops. *Flags* follows the lives of the US personnel who raised the Stars and Stripes over Mount Suribachi while *Letters* focuses on the Japanese soldiers' suicidal defence of their home ground.

what the soldier does and they don't know what the actor does. They're two areas of great mystery for very different reasons'.

"He laughed and said, 'You know, I think you're absolutely right'," Yorkshire's finest son said, adding his belief that the silver screen has yet to accurately capture the life and work of a soldier.

As Ambrosinus in *The Last Legion*, Sir Ben and his loyal legionnaires must defend the child Romulus to their last breath. He trained in Irish stick fighting on his croquet lawn for the combat scenes although his character depends mostly on magic and cunning to escape danger. But the recently re-married father of four wants the action adventure to capture the hearts of the younger members of the audience.

"Let's guide them towards character-driven films, narrative-driven films, films that have some historic resonance and cultural resonance for them and also films that are brave enough to embrace endings and beginnings. This film begins with the terrible destruction of the Roman Empire and it ends with the possibility of this beautiful creation of the knights of King Arthur." ■

***The Last Legion* goes on general cinema release on October 19.**



WIN: Battleground Vietnam DVD box set

THE Vietnam War was one of the worst horrors of the second half of the 20th century and its causes continue to baffle people to this day. How did it start? Why was America involved? Could it have been avoided? This three disc box set, which includes a fact-filled booklet, strives to provide the answers through more than six hours of original footage. To stand a chance of winning one of five box sets, tell us who directed the Academy Award winning film *Platoon*? Send your answers to the usual address by October 31.



Flyboys, DVD

AFTER a plethora of movies dealing with the Second World War, this tale of all-American boys turned aviators takes us back to the skies of the Western Front. Set in France at the dawn of military aviation, the movie follows US mercenaries fighting for the Allies. All the stereotypes are here, from the spoilt rich kid to the maverick hot shot with the dodgy past. Yet the film is held together by a passable storyline and has some half-decent action sequences. *Flyboys* is not one for aviation purists, but it will happily fill a couple of hours.



Afro Samurai, DVD

AT first sight this action animation looks like it will deliver, especially with actor **Samuel L Jackson** voicing the lead character, Afro. Set in a futuristic but feudal Japan, Afro hones his martial arts skills and sets about avenging his father's death at the hands of a villainous samurai. But the plot offers little that's new during the short episodes, which are also short on drama. The almost exclusive use of background reds and yellows is stylish but can blur the rapid action scenes. Fans of Manga comics will enjoy this animated series but it's unlikely to stretch beyond that niche market.

Games

OCTOBER REVIEW



Sliding to success: *Juiced 2* puts players in the hot seat of supercharged automotive legends



The fast lane élite

Petrolheads get to pimp their ride for the high-octane world of street racing

Preview: Cliff Caswell

SLIDING sideways through strategically placed traffic cones with the smoke belching from your squealing tyres is something that never came up in driving lessons.

The skill required to skid stylishly between obstacles goes against all the instincts, so it is not surprising that it has never been on the test syllabus. Letting go of the steering wheel, pumping the revs to the red line and looking out of the side windows to keep your bearings is as unnatural as the terrifying scream coming from your car's engine and wheels.

If you can master these so-called "drifting" disciplines, however, there is an opportunity to join an élite club. And it is against this high-octane backdrop that THQ's latest racing title, *Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights*, is set.

From the outset, it is clear that this is not a straightforward point-and-go outing on the track. In the

world of street competition, style is as important as substance and creating an image, personalising your wheels and gaining a reputation among your peers is as important as winning itself.

Players have the choice of buying virtual vehicles from a clutch of licensed brands, including Mazda, Honda and Volkswagen, before sorting out the bodywork and introducing modifications to make them serious race contenders.

After taking part in some low-profile initiation events, you then have the pick of the field. Racing and drift competitions are a must to earn money, but you can also watch your peers race and place bets on them if you fancy a flutter.

Having performed in a less-than-spectacular fashion during a real-life handling lesson in a Mazda MX-5 on the skid pan care of Silverstone-based Drift Academy, *Soldier* was given an exclusive preview of *Juiced* along with instructors from the school – and was suitably impressed with the level of realism.

Vehicle dynamics are sound, the controls accurately recreate the feel of the throttle and steering movements needed to keep the car sideways and there are some beautifully rendered environments in which to race.

Rob Mayes, a driver with the Drift Academy display team, believed that the game provided a sound introduction to some of the basic techniques needed to skid with style.

"Obviously in real life you have G-forces on you and you actually have to have the bottle to do the moves," he said. "But *Juiced* does teach you some of the theory behind what is going on – you see the dynamics of the car.

"Drifting is all about having fun, showing off and being incredibly impressive but you do more work with the accelerator than you do with your hands.

"You have to be in tune with your car and carry out moves with finesse. I think the developers have done an impressive job with this game."



Fellow driver Andrew Bentley was also impressed with the way drifting was represented in *Juiced* – as well as the handling characteristics of the cars.

“The Nissan 200SX, which we use in displays, is not unrealistic in the game and the graphics are ace,” he said. “The throttle control is particularly accurate.”

While *Soldier* fared better with the virtual version of drifting than the real deal, *Juiced* is well grounded in the drifting culture and replicates the sport’s physics well.

A generous depth of gameplay immerses the player in the whole underground world of street racing, from customising the look of the driver to building a reputation and tweaking the vehicle’s look and handling characteristics.

Online play in particular, promises to be both competitive and fun – you can enter yourself for competitions or watch from the sidelines and bet on friends. Players can also make in-game cash by selling their vehicles and designs.

Overall action is slick and fluid, the controls easy to master and there are plenty of race locations to keep the appeal alive in one of the finest racing games we have seen since Sega’s excellent *Outrun 2006: Coast to Coast*. This one is definitely in pole position in the racing line-up. ■



Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam, Wii

SKATEBOARD ace Tony Hawk makes his debut on the Nintendo Wii after an impressive run of form on other consoles – and EA has maintained its credibility with this latest title. Making use of the Wii’s motion-sensitive controller, players get to pull off skateboard stunts in a series of downhill challenges. It’s a testing affair but achieving complex moves at lightning speed is pretty satisfying. *Downhill Jam* is a simple game, well suited to the Wii, and should fill a fair few hours of downtime.



Alien Syndrome, PSP

SEGA has thrown its weight behind supporting the PSP, and the company’s commitment to the platform certainly shows with this latest hit of times past to get the remix treatment. In a curious mix of action and sci-fi role-playing, players get to choose a weapons specialism before being thrown into the front line of a battle against vile cosmic beasts. The action is viewed from above in a similar way to *Killzone: Liberation*, although the gameplay is more ponderous rather than an all-out war. *Alien Syndrome* is a polished product.



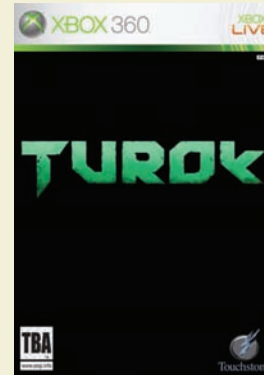
Ghost Recon 2, PSP

AFTER two outings on the Xbox 360 and a recent debut on the PS3, the *Ghost Recon* brand has finally landed on the PSP. And it makes the transition to the handheld console with aplomb. In this specially written version of the game rather than a straight conversion, players get to play their part in the elite Ghosts unit, travelling to remote areas of the world for covert operations. Graphics and sound are excellent and the enemy artificial intelligence is pretty ruthless. Controls can be a little fiddly at times but, all in all, *Ghost Recon* is a classy package.



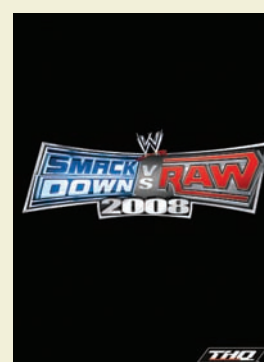
Crazy Taxi, PSP

DRIVING games are coming thick and fast at the moment but this one more than holds its own. Long a favourite on full-sized consoles, *Crazy Taxi* makes an impressive PSP game with slick action and different modes of play. Players have to drive around a city, picking up fares and delivering passengers to their destinations in the quickest time. En route you have to dodge fleeing pedestrians and other vehicles while pulling off stunts. The PSP is well suited to driving games and the simplicity of *Crazy Taxi* is its strength.



Turok, Xbox 360

A POPULAR franchise on previous generations of consoles, *Turok* has been overhauled for the Xbox 360 and PS3 and the results look outstanding. This is based on the 1950s comic and players find themselves doing battle with a shadowy enemy in a dinosaur-infested world. *Soldier* sampled a late-build demo of the Xbox 360 version of this first-person shooter, which is due for release by the Disney-owned Touchstone label early next year, and was impressed. Graphics and sound are superb while action is impressively slick. One to watch.



Smackdown vs Raw 2008, Wii & DS

THE controversial American wrestling scene makes for an interesting fighting game on the two Nintendo platforms. On the Wii, players can mimic fighting moves with the console’s controller to tie opponents up in knots, while the handheld DS makes use of the touch screen stylus to prosecute the in-ring action. Both versions of the game are simple to pick up and the control interfaces have clearly been well thought through. Judging by the late-build demo versions shown to *Soldier*, even fringe fans of the wrestling scene will have fun with these.



Top form: The London lads look out onto the world from the comfort of home in their insightful third album, *Beyond The Neighbourhood*



A global view

Athlete's peak performance in pondering the world's bigger picture

Interview: Karen Thomas

FEW of us can escape the complex issues facing humanity in the 21st century but even fewer have the talent to put those concerns to music as eloquently as London band Athlete.

Their third album, *Beyond The Neighbourhood*, has assumed a maturity and confidence that sets the foursome high on the music winners' podium. Master lyricist and lead singer Joel Pott weaves intelligent contemporary tales from war to the environment and falling in love to dealing with death, across 11 superb tracks.

Hurricane, the first single released from the album, was inspired by a *National Geographic* article on the increase of typhoons on the US East Coast and proved to be prophetic. It swept up the charts with the same ferocity as the 145mph winds of Hurricane Dean, then wreaking devastation across the Caribbean. That track set the lyrical scene for the rest of the album and the tone for an insightful but melodic feast, which provides much food for thought.

Drummer Stephen Roberts told *Soldier* the broader outlook of *Beyond The Neighbourhood* stemmed from recording

in a studio close to family and friends. The four band members have been friends since the age of 14.

"The last record, *Tourist*, was kind of introspective and concentrated on home. This time we built a studio near to our homes, which meant that while we were writing and recording this record we were around all our friends and family. So it's looking at the world from the context of being at home," he explained, agreeing with the suggestion that the album also reflects the band's concern for the future of their children without falling into the trap of preaching in a self-righteous tone.

"Maybe ten years ago it was easier to be a bit ignorant about many things, whether it was climate change or politics, but now it's just impossible. Everybody has got this global view whether they like it or not. So there is that feeling on the record where it's not necessarily giving any solutions to these massive issues but it is just asking the question: what are we supposed to think about this or do about it? The

Beyond The Neighbourhood

ATHLETE'S third album is their best yet. After the playful debut *Vehicles And Animals* and the melancholic *Tourist*, this is a more mature offering. The songs are intelligent and well crafted, proving the band is on top form musically and lyrically. The first single, *Hurricane*, has a catchy uplifting riff and is set to become a rock classic. *Beyond The Neighbourhood* takes the band to a new level, establishing them as one of today's most accomplished British acts.

Pte Patrick Jordan, RAMC



album is probably more about that frustration than about having any kind of solution."

Roberts, Pott, Carey Willets and Tim Wanstall's exemplary musical accomplishment as Athlete was recognised when *Wires* won the 2006 Ivor Novello Award for Best Contemporary Song. Now experimenting with synthesisers, Athlete firmly embraced the love of electronic music that was always bubbling beneath their tunes. Roberts described the confidence to explore from a secure music base as "a bit like going on a journey".

"We feel more confident than we ever have done in who we are. We try and write really great songs and record them in an interesting way. I wouldn't say we feel we've 'arrived' but we definitely feel we've done something we're really happy with, even if this album doesn't do as well as the last one," he said, adding that the band couldn't wait to break out of the studio and start performing live.

"It feels like quite a long time since we played and we're just kind of waiting for it to start now. This is what it's about – having new songs to play to people is really exciting."

So, fans should brace themselves for the musical storm about to be unleashed on their intellect and senses as Athlete asks the difficult questions that can no longer be ignored. ■



Gatecrasher Immortal (Ministry of Sound)

THIS bumper pack of three CDs is a superb blend of old and new tracks spun over the past 14 years on the turntables of the legendary *Gatecrasher* club. Despite being destroyed by a fire in July, the *Gatecrasher* spirit is still alive and banging. Mixed by the original DJ residents, **Judge Jules**, **Scott Bond** and **Matt Hardwick**, the listener is lead through the early trance days onto this summer's number one dance floor hit *With Every Heartbeat* by **Robyn** featuring **Kleerup**. If you are a bit of a raver, this compilation is a must.

LCpl Chris Annear, RNAS



Pop Life (David Guetta)

DON'T be put off by the somewhat cheesy title of this album, as it is by one of the most renowned producers on the continent. With names like **David Morales** and **Roger Sanchez** behind him, **David Guetta's** third album is filled with party tunes. Right from the beginning *Pop Life* starts off on the right note with *Baby When The Light* and builds like a skyscraper to *Love Don't Let Me Go*, used for the Citroen "skating car" commercials. Get some beers in, bang this in the stereo and head for a night out that begins with this offering from the French DJ legend.

Lt Jim Berry, 1 R Irish



Calling The World (Rooney)

FORMED while in high school, Los Angeles-based five-piece band **Rooney** have been together for the past five years touring with the likes of **The Strokes** and **Fergie**. The infectious *When Did Your Heart Go Missing?* is just one of many exciting tracks that infuse classic rock with modern pop, which have helped produce an anthem-filled album. Unlike the Old Trafford faithful, this **Rooney** are neither overpaid nor over-rated – bear that in mind when you are searching for something to play on your next long drive home.

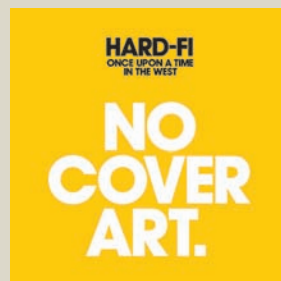
Cpl Ray Kalaker, RETDU (B)



Photograph: The Very Best Of Ringo

SHORTLY after the split of one of the most seminal bands of all time, **Ringo** launched himself into a solo career which spanned more than 30 years. Although eclipsed by the music of his former band mates, this collection of 20 tracks should not be ignored. **Ringo's** love and enthusiasm for music have stood the test of time and the passion jumps out at you, transcending a variety of genres. You also begin to hear **Ringo's** influence on some of the **Beatles'** work. As such, this one will mainly appeal to the more dedicated **Beatles** fans.

Cpl Tom Robinson, 151 Tpt Regt, RLC



Once Upon A Time In The West (Hard-Fi)

THE band's debut album quite rightly earned plenty of accolades. There's no dramatic change in the delivery of their second album but the emphasis on space in the songs brings greater clarity and diversity. The sharp acoustic guitar-led *I Shall Overcome* is pure brilliance. The moving orchestral *Watch Me Fall Apart* and the acid punk of *I Close My Eyes* are highlights of a consistent set. Like a modern version of **The Clash**, **Hard-Fi** experiment while maintaining their identity. I rate this a very worthy follow-up.

Cpl Charlie Lloyd, RLC



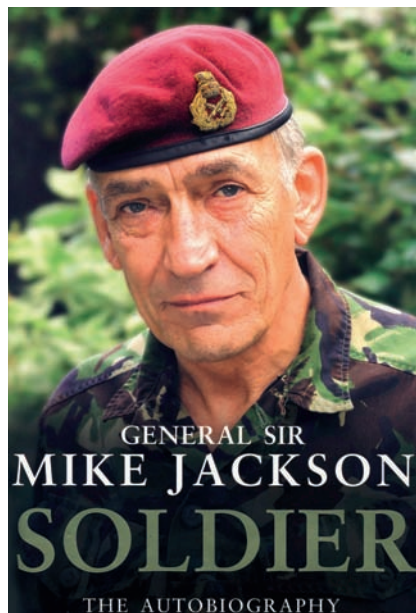
These Are The Facts (Milburn)

SHEFFIELD has two average football teams in the second tier of the leagues, but two premier bands – the **Arctic Monkeys** and **Milburn**. Not surprisingly there are similarities between the two bands – the gritty observational lyrics and melodic hook-laden guitars all delivered with a cocky assurance. **Milburn**, unlike their city cohorts, replace a bit of brashness with a subtlety that adds to their appeal. There's enough variety in the songs and lyrical subject matter to keep it interesting. This band will gain more media attention. A cheeky gem to be dug up and discovered.

Cpl Charlie Lloyd, RLC

Books

OCTOBER REVIEW



Straight-talking: The then Maj Gen Mike Jackson, main picture, commanding a multinational division at Gornji Vakuf in Bosnia, with Gen Sir Roger Wheeler Picture: Mark Owens



On the attack

No-nonsense 'soldier's soldier' who fought bitter battles in the MoD

Soldier: The *Autobiography* by Gen Sir Mike Jackson (Bantam Press, 400pp hardback, £18.99).

Review: Chris Horrocks

PERHAPS through a lack of pomposity or a self-deprecating sense of humour, Gen Sir Mike Jackson confesses that he is puzzled why he was known as the Prince of Darkness.

Surely, we are tempted to ask, nothing to do with those steely eyes, craggy features and rasping tones delivering bursts of straight-talking sense, which made him the most recognisable British military man of our times?

Jacko, as he calls himself, who stepped down as Chief of the General Staff last autumn, is a soldier's soldier if ever there

was one. As with anyone who sticks his head over the parapet, he has attracted a few pot-shots, particularly when he upset regimental sensitivities during the infantry reorganisation a few years ago.

More recently, the hero of Kosovo has been dubbed an "armchair general", saying "too little, too late" about soldiers' conditions, equipment shortages, overstretch, Iraq, Afghanistan, and so on. But it is clear from the book's dedication – to "the British soldier and his family, past, present and future" – where his heart lies.

And it is equally obvious that this reluctant Whitehall warrior wore that heart on his sleeve as he carried the Army's banner in the MoD. "I didn't always find the MoD wholehearted about the interests of the soldiers," he writes. "I was constantly battling the civil servants, and it was often very frustrating.

"I'd come back from a

visit and say 'we've got to do something about the state of those barracks,' but it was like trying to fight your way through cotton wool."

On one occasion the Army Board was told to reduce its then buoyant recruiting campaign because it had not been provided for in the budget.

"Quite absurd, but absolutely true. We all knew from hard-won experience that it would take years to recover from such a sharp application of the brakes."

Gen Jackson covers the touchy subject of soldiers' compensation, having been alarmed by civil servants' attempts to limit the Army Board's power, particularly on this issue. "I fought a long battle with the MoD to retain as much of this [power] as possible. As I stepped down, the issue was still rattling around the MoD, with lawyers arguing over the exact scope of the Board's powers.

"My determination to do what I saw as my legal duty and the 'right thing' in the face of those who cannot see beyond Government accounting rules did not

Soldier ordering service

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endear me to the mandarins.”

He adds: “The public doesn’t realise that the Service Chiefs have no direct control over the way the money is spent . . . that’s why there wasn’t enough of the right equipment in stock when the decision was made for a large-scale commitment in Iraq.”

The author’s 45 years’ service took in three tours in Northern Ireland – including Bloody Sunday – and his peace-building role in Kosovo, where American bravado met its match.

As commander of Kfor in 1999, he balked at an order to use his Nato troops to block the runways at Pristina airfield to stop a column of Russians occupying it. He told his American superior officer, Gen Wesley Clark: “Sir, I’m not going to start World War Three for you.”

When Gen Jackson, who had threatened to resign rather than carry out the order, was awarded the DSO for his leadership, the American surprisingly wrote a magnanimous letter to congratulate him.

This autobiography represents the authentic (and gritty) voice of one of the major players in a large chunk of military history. If there is an accompanying audiobook, let’s hope it is read by the Prince of Darkness himself. Delivered by anyone else, it just wouldn’t be the same. ■

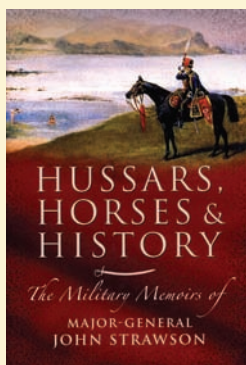
For more reviews go to
www.soldiermagazine.co.uk



3 Para by Patrick Bishop

THERE are many books on the market relating to the war in Afghanistan, but this one is way out in front, writes Maj Mike Peters AAC. The descriptions of the savage fighting around the platoon houses of Helmand province against a tenacious enemy are particularly gripping. The exploits of 3 Para and the soldiers from the many other cap badges who constituted their battle-group are recounted in a gritty narrative that brings the ferocity and heat of those opening battles to life.

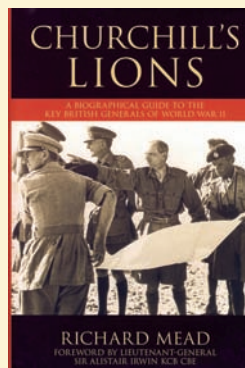
Harper, 289pp, £18.99



Hussars, Horses and History by Maj Gen John Strawson

THE title tells all; the author recounts an eventful military career punctuated with literary achievements in an entertaining and illuminating narrative, writes Maj Mike Peters. His accounts of regimental life in the Western Desert, Italy anti-terrorist ops in the Far East and Aden are engaging and humorous. His passion for travel, history and all things equine is evident throughout this light-hearted and very enjoyable book.

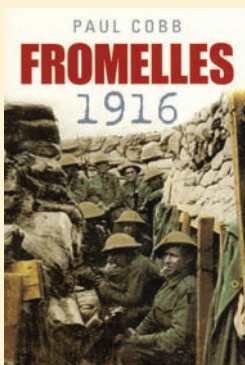
Pen & Sword Military, 246pp, £19.99



Churchill's Lions by Richard Mead

FROM Allan Adair to Orde Wingate, this compendium of 125 key British generals of the Second World War, is the fruit of 13 years of research. It includes a narrative description of each general’s wartime career, and details on the units and formations they served. Slim, Wavell, Montgomery, Auchinleck and Brook, among other major players, are given extra attention. In a thoughtful foreword, Lt Gen Sir Alistair Irwin writes: “It is good fun being a general, but done properly it is also a great burden . . .”

Spellmount, 543pp, £30



Fromelles 1916 by Paul Cobb

THE Anglo-Australian attack at Fromelles in July 1916 was one of the lowest points of the Somme campaign and indeed the First World War, writes Maj Mike Peters. This detailed and compelling account brings a futile and costly battle vividly to life. I found the scale of the casualties and the combination of bad luck and human error shocking. The bravery of the attacking troops amid the carnage is rightly highlighted throughout a thought-provoking narrative.

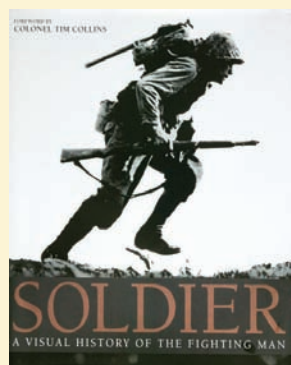
Tempus, 252pp, £17.99



Queen's Own Highlanders by Trevor Royle

A TIMELY tribute to the long and distinguished story of a regiment which embodied the spirit of some of the oldest Highland units. Now the 4th Battalion of the new Royal Regiment of Scotland, the QOH’s bloodline began with two great clans, Cameron of Lochdarroch and Mackenzie of Seaforth, and in more recent times with the amalgamation of the Gordons. Others in this series of concise histories include The Royal Scots, The Black Watch and The Royal Highland Fusiliers.

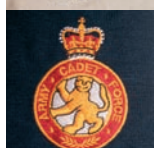
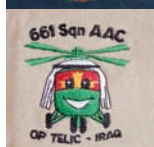
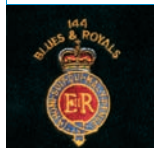
Mainstream, 240pp, £12.99



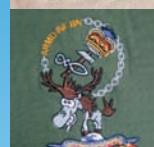
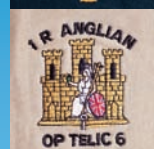
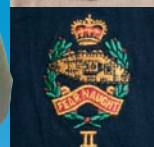
Soldier by R G Grant

HEAVYWEIGHT, large-format, glossy *Visual History of the Fighting Man* (to give the book its ambitious sub-title). The equipment, training, tactics and combat techniques of fighting men from the Ancient Greek hoplite to today’s troops fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although biased towards American forces – at least in modern historical terms – the fighting men of the title include Vikings and Mongols, medieval knights, Samurai and Mughal, musketeer and Redcoat, Zulu and Sioux.

DK/Penguin, 360pp, £25



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To register for the Fair contact Mrs Jan Attridge on Rheindahlen Mil (72) 2520 or Fax (72) 3482 Civil (0)2161 4722520 or Fax 4723482

Registration starts at 0930hrs.

Programme starts at 1000hrs in the Divisional Conference Centre, Herford
Buffet Lunch will be served with the Recruiting teams in the Divisional Conference Centre.
Dress - Working dress.

SOLDIERSPORT



MULTI-TASKING

Army pentathlete crowned best in Great Britain

Steely resolve: Capt Charlie Unwin (1 RHA) puts the opposition to the sword to win his first British modern pentathlon title

Picture: Graeme Main



Making waves: Capt Charlie Unwin (1 RHA) fired his way to the British modern pentathlon championship title with assured performances across all five events

Five-star Charlie

Unwin masters weaker events to claim national modern pentathlon glory

Report: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Graeme Main

MULTI-SPORTS specialist Capt Charlie Unwin delivered a five-star performance to secure the British modern pentathlon title.

Unwin (1 RHA) excelled in his favoured events of shooting, riding and running and added consistent performances in the swimming and fencing disciplines to become the first Army man to win the title for 13 years.

Although the experienced international expected to be among the tournament's top contenders, it was only when the crowd at Millfield began cheering for him during the final run

that he realised he was in pole position.

"When I started the run I really wasn't aware I could win it," he told *SoldierSport* from the Sandhurst headquarters of the Army Modern Pentathlon Union. "I was in third at the halfway stage, but when I heard people screaming at me I realised I might be in with a chance.

"It was a real shock. I was hoping to finish in the top three because I was competing against some very good athletes. Throughout the day I had been so focused on each individual phase that it was a bit of a surprise that I was in contention for the top spot."

Reaching the top in modern pentathlon requires athletes to master a

diverse set of skills to become proficient in each of the five events.

Unwin was already a competent rider, runner and shooter when he signed up for officer training at Sandhurst, but faced the challenge of mastering fencing and competitive swimming at the relatively late age of 21.

His inexperience in the swimming pool almost cost Unwin his break in pentathlon as an athlete's potential in the five-event competition is usually gauged on their ability in the water and at running.

"The assumption is that if you can swim and run, the rest can be built on," he explained. "It's quite an assumption to make because I would not have made



Firm foundations: Charlie Unwin boasted a strong background in shooting, equestrianism and running before taking up competitive modern pentathlon

the criteria when I started. I know where my strengths lie and I would say I'm internationally good at shooting, running and riding.

"Swimming and fencing are my weaker events, but it was only at Sandhurst that I started to learn how to fence and to swim competitively.

"I have always prided myself on my consistency and I think my results show that I have been steadily improving since I started."

Under the expert tutelage of coaches at the University of Bath's centre of excellence, Unwin earned his first international call-up for a competition in Portugal in 2003 and was also selected for the world championships in Poland at the end of the same season.

He has gone on to represent Great Britain in several more world cups and a fifth place finish in last season's Swedish Open backed up Unwin's opinion that success in pentathlon depends as much on experience as it does on raw skill.

"It is definitely an experience sport," he said. "The best Olympians are the

ones in their late 20s or early 30s.

"The first two years of competing were about gaining experience because competing internationally can be fairly overwhelming."

The newly-crowned British champion's success comes in an era when Lottery funding is allowing pentathletes from outside the Services to dominate a sport that was once the preserve of military competitors.

Unwin believes his ascent into the sport's elite was only possible because of the training time afforded to him by the Army, adding that being able to combine the expert coaching at Team Bath with solo training at Sandhurst made him the envy of his peers.

"It was ideal to get the top level coaching at Bath and then bring what I learnt back to Sandhurst.

"That's something that you could only get through the Army and a lot of people were jealous of it.

"The Army has been incredibly supportive. Modern pentathlon is historically a military sport with obvious military roots and the emphasis is as

much on the challenge of completing it as it is on performance."


Despite his lofty position as British champion, Unwin failed to make it into the world top 32 ranking required to secure a place at next summer's Beijing Olympic Games.

He has instead set about reinvigorating Army modern pentathlon from the ground up, working alongside a full-time assistant at Sandhurst to offer bespoke coaching packages in each of the five pentathlon disciplines.

"It is very heartening at the moment because we have two people who are showing huge potential at a national level. We've also got a lot of people already at a reasonable level who are constantly improving," he concluded.

"As long as we continue to have the numbers we have training and competing then there is always the possibility that they can push on and get to the next level."

● To find out more about the sport or the training programmes, contact the Army Modern Pentathlon Association on 01276 412043. ■



High times: Rich Mayfield
ponders his next move
during one of the 60 climbs
that made up the Hard Rock
Challenge

Tall order

Mountaineers tackle Britain's toughest climbs

Report: Stephen Tyler

TWO Army Mountaineering Association members have taken their place in history by overcoming Britain's 60 most difficult climbs in record time.

Capt Mark Stevenson (REME) and former soldier Richard Mayfield made it to the top of the routes listed in 1974 book *Hard Rock*, widely regarded within the climbing community as the definitive list of British rock climbing's toughest ascents.

Only two people have previously completed the odyssey – known as the Hard Rock Challenge – and it took them ten years. Stevenson and Mayfield raced their way around the British Isles in just five weeks.

"Two years ago it came to me that only two people had climbed everything in the book and it had taken them several years," explained Stevenson. "It followed that no one had tried doing it all in one month.

"If you look across all sports there are very few genuine firsts left to achieve so we decided to give it a go."

As if the challenge of making it up and down Britain's toughest climbing routes was not enough, the mountaineering duo also had to contend with one of the wettest summers on record.

The expedition was deliberately scheduled to take place over five consecutive weeks in July and August to avoid too much inclement weather, but consistent heavy rain made the rock surfaces on several of their climbs treacherously wet and slippery.

"There were a few climbs where we ended up very close to getting ourselves into difficulty because of the weather," Stevenson continued. "The worst was White Slab, a remote, long and serious rock climb in North Wales.

"Thick mist and rain prevented us from starting to climb it until after 1800, which resulted in a frantic and dangerous race to reach the top of the cliff before it was dark.

"In the end we both felt thankful to complete the routes without a serious incident.

"In normal circumstances these routes are challenging enough, but in bad weather they become extremely hazardous and nerve-wracking expeditions."

The logistics involved in the Hard Rock Challenge make for daunting reading, with the mountaineers having to cover 22,000ft of climbs, 180 miles of walk-ins and more than 4,500 miles of driving.

Starting in the south west of England at Cheddar Gorge's Coronation Street, one of rock climbing legend Sir Chris Bonington's greatest climbs, the event took Stevenson and Mayfield to Scotland and North Wales as well as the Lake District and the Pennines.

Despite taking on ominous-sounding climbs such as the Suicide Wall and The Needle, Stevenson said the pair's biggest challenge came courtesy of The Scoop, a 500ft cliff on the Isle of Harris with a daunting 150ft overhang – the largest in Britain.

The cliff is so steep that even resorting to aid climbing – ascending using pitons and carabiners rather than free-climbing on the rock face – the team only made it 200ft up The Scoop on the first day before running out of daylight and having to abseil back to the bottom.

Climbing back up the ropes to continue with the ascent the following day, the pair eventually made it to the top of the overhang more than 20 hours after starting their ascent.

Poor weather forced Stevenson and Mayfield to cancel one day from their schedule, but the pair still managed to make it to the 60th summit and complete the challenge within their five-week limit.

"We actually managed to finish the climbs with a whole day to spare, and that's not including us having to take a day off during the challenge because of bad weather," Stevenson told *SoldierSport*. "We both had a very similar feeling at the end of it all to the one you get when you make it back to base on operations. It's not so much a sense of achievement, it's more a sense of relief."

As well as completing their record-breaking challenge to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Army Mountaineering Association, Stevenson and Mayfield have so far managed to raise more than £5,000 for British Mountain Rescue. They expect the final total to exceed £10,000.

● For more information about the challenge and how to make a donation, visit www.hardrockchallenge.org.uk ■



Super slider: 2nd Lt Matt Shepherd (RLC) delivered a perfect performance at the Australian Defence Force Championships by claiming three gold medals

Wizards of Oz

Combined Services skiers dominate Down Under

B RITISH Combined Services skiers had a successful trip Down Under, sweeping to victory in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) Championships.

The seven-strong British team, which included six Army skiers, travelled to the Mount Hotham resort, near Melbourne, for a hotly-contested event.

Skipped by 2nd Lt Matt Shepherd (RLC), the captain of last season's Army alpine ski team champions 1 LSR, the British contingent performed exceptionally well to master an infamously testing international-standard slope.

Shepherd led by example and stormed to gold in all three of his events to easily claim the overall men's championship title.

Army team stalwart and fellow 1 LSR skier Cpl Dougie MacPherson maintained his good form from last

season and joined Shepherd on the podium by winning one silver and two bronze medals.

There were also impressive Combined Services debuts from LCpl Chris McCourt (RLC) and LCpl Clint Hamblett (RE), who both secured top five positions in an international field of more than 50 racers.

The Army's sole female entrant, LCpl Annabelle Franey (REME), showed promise by grabbing a silver medal before being forced to retire from the slopes by injury.

"This exceptional summer performance from our top racers confirms that ski racing is stronger than ever within the British Forces," Shepherd told *SoldierSport*. "Our attention will now be switching to the British Combined Services competition in Meribel because the Army are intent on winning back the title." ■

SPORTSHORTS

EXTREME PEAKERS

A CATTERICK-BASED team are planning to take the Three Peaks climbing challenge to the next level by travelling between each mountain on foot.

As well as ascending Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Mount Snowdon, five members of the Queens Four Training Team at the Infantry Training Centre want to become the first people to run or walk between each peak.

Platoon commander Capt David Barclay said the challenge, in November and December, will see the team cover 470 miles in just 15 days.

The runners, including Sgt Colin Dance, Cpl Ben Wakefield, Cpl Phil Sell, Cpl Steven McCowliff and Cpl Chris Barnes, are hoping to raise more than £4,000 for SSAFA Forces Help.

To sponsor the team visit www.justgiving.com/queens4



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Desert duel: England's batsmen struggle to find their form against the pacy Australian Army attack during a heavy defeat in the charity Ashes match in Iraq

Brits tumble in Tallil

Cricketers' desert dream turns to ashes against rampant Australian side

AS England's Twenty20 world cup cricket team slumped to defeat against Australia in South Africa, sides representing the two nations were squaring up in very different conditions in southern Iraq.

While the professional players took advantage of the pristine surface at Cape Town's Newlands ground, Servicemen from the British and Australian armies had to cope with an improvised wicket in Tallil during a charity Ashes match to raise money for Service charities.

Organised by Lt Tim Moore (RWY), the desert Ashes represented a chance for a 1 Mechanized Brigade XI to avenge a defeat suffered by a previous Army side against their traditional cricketing enemies.

But amid a colourful atmosphere enlivened by opposing fans, a pitchside commentator and an appearance by the Australian team's tiger mascot, the English batsmen managed just 93 runs as their antipodean rivals cantered to an eight-wicket victory.

"The Australians were very canny when they put us into bat," said LCpl Mussa Murray (4 Rifles).

"They knew exactly what they were doing. The event itself was superb and

there was a lot of banter between us and the Australians.

"We should have beaten them, but we didn't play to our potential."

Team captain Maj Giles Malec was the first Englishman to face the ferocious Australian attack, but his dismissal from the game's first ball set the tone for the rest of the innings.

An unbeaten 37 from Capt Kemplee Smith made up the bulk of England's runs, with Cpl Windy Miller the only other player to reach double figures by adding 18 before he was bowled.

Malec said: "This was not the result we were after, but the important thing is the money we have raised.

"The Aussies are doing a great job here in Iraq and it's a real coalition success. It's great to be able to take a couple of hours out of our normal jobs here in theatre to play a game with a famous rivalry."

The match was dreamt up by self-confessed cricket nut Moore as a way of bringing the summer sport to troops serving in Iraq.

He spent weeks before the event chasing sponsorship and equipment and managed to secure new bats and pads as well as replica one-day strips donated by the English Cricket Board.

And despite only scoring one run during his side's disappointing defeat, Moore was delighted that the match raised more than \$14,000 (around £6,900) for the Army Benevolent Fund (ABF) and British Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association (Blesma).

"These guys work 24 hours a day, seven days a week for up to six months. This is a chance for them to let their hair down for a couple of hours and forget about work.

"There is a serious side to this in the raising of money for charity," he told *SoldierSport*. "All our sponsors have given generously for the ABF and Blesma so it's really worthwhile."

Joining the large crowd in Tallil was Brigade Commander Brig James Bashall, who said the cricket match served as a fitting example of how the British and Australian forces were working together in Iraq.

Addressing the players after the game, he added: "The Australian battle-group is doing a great job and making an invaluable contribution to the coalition effort here in Iraq.

"The work done here helping to train the Iraqi security forces and providing security is laying the foundations for increased Iraqi self-reliance." ■

SPORTDIARY

ANGLING

October 1-3 – Anglian Water meet (Rutland); 4 – Combined Services v MOD and Civil Service (TBC); 7-9 – Army shore championships (Dover); 9-11 – Inter-Services game championships (Rutland); 31 – Uniformed Services championships (March).

November 19-22 – Inter-Services shore championships (Skegness/Humberside).

ATHLETICS

October 25 – Cross country relays (Tweseldown).

November 25 – International cross country (Sefton Park, Liverpool).

BADMINTON

October 29 – Army individual championships (Grantham).

BASKETBALL

October 6-7 – Combined Services v Derby (Grantham).

November 2-4 – Combined Services v Solent (Aldershot); 12-16 – Inter-corps championships (Grantham); 21-25 – Combined Services v Nottingham/Milton Keynes (Grantham).

BOXING

October 1 – Army v London Select (Bayswater); 4 – Army v Fitzroy Lodge (Highbury); 5 – Army v Eastern Counties (Bassingbourn); 10 – Army v Metropolitan Police (Watford); 24 – Combined Services novice box-offs (Aldershot); 25 – Combined Services championships (Richmond); 25 – Army v Wales Select (Cardiff).

November 1 – Army v North West Counties (Wigan).

CANOEING

October 8-12 – Slalom trials (Llandysul); 13-14 – Inter-Services slalom championships (Llandysul).

November 3-4 – Novice and inter-corps wild water racing championships (Barnard Castle); 17-18 – Inter-Services polo championships (Portsmouth).

FOOTBALL

October 3 – Army women v Middlesex (Middlesex); 6 – Crusaders v RAF ICARUS (RAF Uxbridge); 8 – Army v HM Prison Service (Aldershot); 13 – Army Youth v Sussex (Sussex); 17 – Army U23 v Middlesex (Middlesex); 18 – Army v RAF (Aldershot); 21 – Crusaders v TA (Aldershot); 24 – Army v Civil Service (Aldershot); 28 – Army Youth v London (Aldershot).

November 6 – Army U23 v Cambridge University (Fenners); 14 – Army women v Gloucestershire (Aldershot); 25 – Army v TA (Aldershot).

HOCKEY

October 10 – Army v RMAS (Aldershot); 16 – Women's indoor league (Aldershot); 17 – RMAS v Army U23 (RMAS); 17-18 – Army indoor inter-corps (Aldershot); 18 – Army Veterans v Hustlers (Worthy Down); 21 – Women's outdoor fixture (Aldershot); 22 – Women's indoor league (Aldershot); 24 – RMAS v Army U23 (RMAS); 31 – Army Veterans v Havant (Aldershot).

November 4 – Army women v Stafford women (Aldershot); 7-8 – Inter-Services indoor tournament (Aldershot); 13 – Army Veterans v Devizes (Devizes).

ROWING

October 7 – Pairs head of the river race (London); 10 – Army indoor championships (Aldershot); 13 – Army head of the river race (Dorney); 14 – Army sprint regatta (Dorney).

continued opposite . . .

Air assault

RAF kicking game grounds rugby league side

Report: Stephen Tyler

Picture: Graeme Main

A DISJOINTED first half performance against reigning champions the Royal Air Force cost the Army's rugby league team its chance of an Inter-Services whitewash.

Fresh from a comfortable 18-8 victory over the Royal Navy in Portsmouth, hopes were high that the Army could wrap up their season with victory at Aldershot.

But a lacklustre opening 40 minutes characterised by a string of dropped passes and a reluctance to spread the ball wide left the home team out of touch with their visitors, who survived a spirited second-half display to triumph 14-15.

Speaking after the match, team manager Capt Nav Naivalurua (REME) identified the RAF's accurate kicking game as the difference between the two sides.

"Their number six bossed the game and managed to keep them moving around the park," he told *Soldiersport*.

"It was a combination of his kicking and our inability to defend those kicks that was the key factor in us losing.

"I think that we had the initiative in the second half and they were hanging on towards the end, but our error count was higher throughout.

"That cost us field position and if you are defending three times more than you are attacking then the opposition will almost always win. That's the nature of rugby league."

Spurred on by a sizeable travelling support, the RAF started the match with the kind of purpose that has seen them crowned Inter-Services victors for the last two years.

With the Army penned deep inside their own half, the RAF tested the water by sending several diagonal kicks over the top of the Red's defensive line and the pressure finally told when one high ball was collected and touched down in the corner.

The Army replied with a penalty from a rare foray into their opponent's half, but the team continued to give possession away cheaply and a further RAF try gave the reigning champions an 8-2 half-time lead.

Much of the blame for the disappointing showing in the first half

lay in the Army's poor ball handling and an over-reliance on trying to break through the centre rather than utilising the pace and power of the team's talented wide men.

It was a relief for the red half of the stadium that the issue was addressed early in the second half as the home team began to involve LCpl Rob Kama (AGC) on the left flank and the combined powerhouses of Spr Peceli Nacamavuto (RE) and Spr Ben Seru (RE) on the opposite side.

Despite conceding two more tries, the Army began to press and Nacamavuto's quick feet and turn of pace allowed him

to carve the RAF open on several occasions.

It was a typically industrious run from the Fijian that opened up the space for a try underneath the posts, reducing the deficit to six points.

An RAF drop goal stretched their lead beyond a single score before a thoroughly-deserved try from livewire Kama brought the score to 14-15.

But just as the Army seemed to have their Service rivals on the ropes, the frailties of the first half reappeared and the Reds could find no way through before the full-time buzzer sounded their defeat.

Naivalurua added that he was satisfied with his team's effort and singled out WO2 Pud Cowburn (RE) for praise after the Army and Combined Services player paid for his own airfare back from duty in Sierra Leone to play in the match.

He added: "This team we have put together is the most experienced we have had for a long time and we have done a lot of work on using that experience to try to minimise mistakes.

"I don't want to detract from the RAF's performance because they played very well.

"I can't fault any of my players' efforts and when you take the tempo of operations and normal commitments into consideration we have no complaints over the result.

"This game was a good advert for rugby league. A lot of work has gone on behind the scenes and we were happy to see the biggest crowd we have probably ever had for one of our games."

The first 13 end their season with a friendly match against the England Lionhearts in November. ■

"If you are defending three times more than you are attacking then the opposition will win"



Hot stepper: LCpl Rob Kama (AGC) tries to evade the attention of the Royal Air Force's defence during his side's narrow Inter-Services defeat at Aldershot

Paralympic potential

DISABLED sportsmen and women are being invited to try their hands at a variety of paralympic events at a taster session being held in Loughborough this month.

Sports including archery, rowing, basketball, cycling, wheelchair tennis, table tennis and athletics will be represented at the British Paralympic Association (BPA) day, which gets underway at 1400 on October 25.

As well as being able to have a go at each event, visitors can also find out how to access further coaching.

BPA spokesman Sian Davies told *SoldierSport* that the taster day is part of the organisation's Talent ID scheme,

which aims to identify potential paralympians for the winter games in 2010 and the summer event in 2012.

She added: "The aim of the introduction day is to work with injured Servicemen to inspire them to participate in disabled sport and hopefully identify anyone who has the talent to be fast-tracked into the 2010 or 2012 Games."

● **Anyone interested in attending the day should contact performance manager Justine Willmott at justine.willmott@paralympics.org.uk or telephone 07768 796894.** ■

AGC jump into action

SENIOR AGC staff took to the sky to launch the corps' drive to create a formation skydiving team.

Three officers completed accelerated freefall training at the Joint Services Parachute Centre at Netheravon to help attract more people into the growing sport.

The intrepid trio jumped from a

plane at 15,000ft before completing a solo descent.

Brig Mike Conway (AGC) said: "People will not be disappointed if they try it."

Anyone interested in sports parachuting should contact corps secretary Maj Mark Lindsay-Smith (AGC) on 94271 2636. ■

SPORTDIARY

continued . . .

RUGBY UNION

October 7 – Army U23 v Cardiff University (Brecon); 13 – Army U20 v Chinnor U20 (Oxford); 13 – Army Veterans v Sevenoaks (Sevenoaks); 14 – Army U23 v Richmond (Richmond); 21 – Army U23 v Cambridge University (Aldershot); 30 – Army U23 v Swansea Ospreys (Port Talbot); 31 – Army v South Africa National Defence Force (Aldershot); 31 – Army women v Loughborough University (Aldershot).

November 17 – Army U23 v Esher (Aldershot).

SAILING

October 6-7 – Inter-Services asymmetric dinghy championships (ADWC); 7 – Hamble 1 (Solent); 14 – (Hamble 2 (Solent); 21 – Hamble 3 (Solent); 28 – Hamble 4 (Solent).

SQUASH

October 23 – Army v RAC Club (London); 24 – Army v Jesters (Aldershot).

November 1 – Combined Services women v Hampshire women (Portsmouth); 2-4 – Combined Services individual championships (Portsmouth).

SURFING

October 13-17 – Army championships (Newquay); 18-21 – Inter-Services championships (Newquay).

WINDSURFING

October 1-6 – Inter-Services speed championships (Weymouth).

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

Telic tales

The regular feature in which we ask soldiers for their views on a hot topic

We asked soldiers currently serving on Op Telic 10 about their experiences of enemy attacks happening on and off base in Basra

Cpl Ben Edwards, 2 RTR

At the start of the tour I was a bit apprehensive but now we know the ground and what to expect it's not so bad. I'm enjoying it and time goes quicker when you're out doing ops. Early in the tour we had RPG attacks but we didn't sustain any damage and thankfully I haven't had anything since. The Challenger 2 has been performing exactly as it should.



LCpl Karl Etherington, KRH

While providing an escort to the Provincial Joint Command Centre (PJCC), the Warrior in front got hit by an IED and the shrapnel hit our driver. I knew he was hurt so I ran around the front to do close protection, but there was no cover and I was outside for about ten minutes. It got pretty hairy and I was watching small-arms rounds bouncing off the soil around me. An RPG hit off to one side as well.



Cpl Richard Pask, 2 R Welsh

On one occasion my Warrior got caught in an explosion and my gunner and I were hospitalised. It hit my turret and the explosion blew the antenna pod off and shattered all the sighting system, but the Warrior has saved my life a number of times so it is doing its job.



Pte Eddie Luttman, RLC

I was at the palace changing a wheel and the mortar alarm went off. We hit the deck next to a blast wall and the mortar landed ten feet behind us.



A second mortar landed eight feet away and shrapnel popped ten or 11 wheels on two Drops [vehicles]. There was a lot of noise from those and shrapnel hit one of the guys in the leg. It lasted 15 minutes and about 20 mortars landed during that one attack.

Cpl Grippa Griffiths, 2 R Welsh

I've seen a lot of small-arms fire and I've been hit by IEDs four times in four weeks. The main concern is for the troops I have in the wagon. Once it happens some of them need to be reassured so we can all get back out. Considering they are so young, and that they are having to cope with the weather on top of everything else, they have gone from being boys to men in a matter of weeks.



Pte Lewis Neil, RLC

Indirect fire missed my truck by about ten metres, although it did put the windscreen through. We saw it come in and then heard the bang so we got out and crawled underneath before we jumped back in and cracked on. Another time we got hit by an IED and had some incoming from indirect and small-arms fire as I was sat by the wheel of my truck.



Pte Noel Waring, RLC

I was part of a four-man team making sure kit came in and out of the palace. There's a lot of hard cover, which was good. One mortar came in and landed dead on top of the Hesco bastion just outside my office window. It wasn't anything unusual because indirect fire was coming in every day and it was just a case of making sure you got your work done on time.



Pte Maxine Neilson, AGC

Within two weeks of coming out here I was put on a strike op with 4 Rifles. I go in to look for mobile phones, information, passports and so on. I also try and get as much information out of the women as possible. The last one we were on we got hit by an IED on the way back. It makes you realise how lucky you are when you get back to base safely.



LCpl Alan Kendall, KRH

The squadron was out on escort when we were contacted by IEDs, RPGs, small-arms fire and mortars. My wagon got hit twice by IEDs and the first one kicked up a load of dust so I couldn't see anything. When we got into the city we got hit with an explosively formed projectile. By the time we made it to PJCC we had run into 12 IEDs and 38 RPGs.



Interviews: Stephen Tyler Pictures: Graeme Main

Coming up . . . in SOLDIER

Dad's Army star Ian Lavender praises the real heroes of the Home Guard and we take a first look at Terrier, a new vehicle straining at the leash to join the Royal Engineers on the battlefield



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