

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

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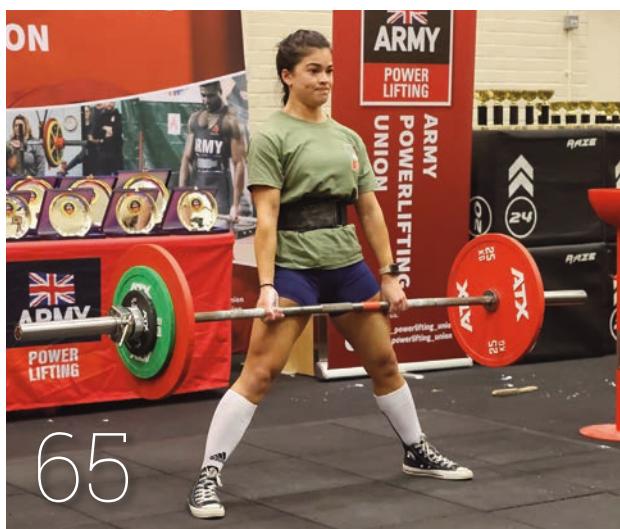
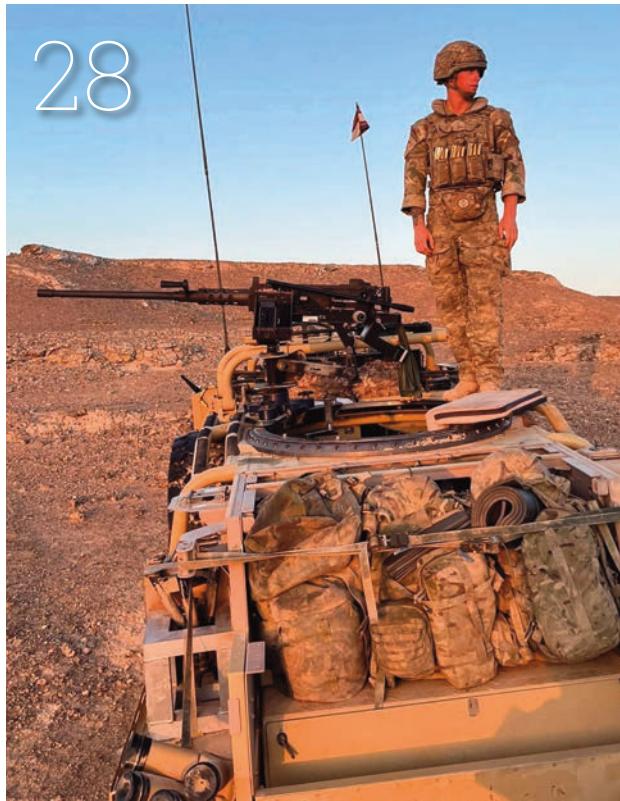
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“ Operating in a pitch-black environment is a challenge in itself ”

New highs – page 40





THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF WRITES...



Picture: Sgt Chris Morgan, WG

Welcome to 2023

SEVENTY one years ago, Her Late Majesty The Queen wrote to the British Army.

In a short article in *Soldier*, at that time still a relatively new publication, she wrote of her admiration of the Army and the “devotion to duty... good-humoured acceptance of hardship when necessary, and undefeatable endurance in adversity” of her soldiers.

As I reflect on 2022, I can say with great pride that those characteristics are still at the very heart of what it means to be in the British Army.

Last year was a tumultuous year, one marked by change, insecurity and uncertainty. We have seen war return to Europe. We are feeling the bite of the rise in the cost of living. And we said farewell to our sovereign and commander-in-chief.

You, our soldiers, have been at the very heart of the United Kingdom’s response to these momentous events.

Whether supporting in the training of more than 9,000 Ukrainians as part of Op Interflex, working to ensure Op Bridge was a fitting conclusion to the truly remarkable reign of Her Late Majesty, or tirelessly working on operations abroad or in the UK, you have never let our country down.

I have no doubt that 2023 will prove just as demanding. We will continue to support Ukraine. We will continue

to protect the United Kingdom, in the homeland and overseas.

Through Op Teamwork, we will continue to ensure that we foster the culture needed to maintain the trust, respect and affection of the population that we serve.

The new year will also see us play our part in the coronation of King Charles III.

The event will be watched by millions and will serve as another reminder of the Army’s place at the very heart of our nation; it is a reminder that you represent the very best of British.

Those traits that Her Late Majesty observed in our soldiers are ever more relevant today.

And, it is knowing that they are still to be found in abundance across the British Army that gives me the confidence that you all will play your part, no matter how small, in helping our great institution meet the challenges of the year ahead.

I wish you all the very best for 2023.

Gen Sir Patrick Sanders,
Chief of the General Staff



Where to find *Soldier*

► Printed copies

THESE are distributed to every Army site at the start of each month.

► Facebook, Twitter and Instagram

ALONG with news and glimpses behind the scenes at *Soldier*, we publish a link to the latest magazine at facebook.com/soldiermagazine and on Twitter (@soldiermagazine).

► Online

DIGITAL versions of current and past editions are available on the Army website at soldiermagazine.co.uk. Just click on the “read it now” tab.

► Purchase

If you’re not in the Army you can buy *Soldier* from your high street magazine retailer or directly from us at subs@soldiermagazine.co.uk (£23 for 12 issues in the UK).



The Duke of York's Royal Military School

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Picture: Shutterstock

Another hangover from Covid?

Bad lockdown habits could be behind a rise in Army drink-driving figures

ALAX attitude to boozing fuelled by Covid lockdowns may be behind a disturbing trend in the number of Army personnel caught drink-driving, it has emerged.

Top brass and lawyers fear that soldiers who developed a habit of hitting the bottle at home during the pandemic could now be doing so before heading out in a vehicle.

Latest stats from January to October last year show 51 soldiers were pulled over for the offence – a six per cent hike on the same period in 2021 – with officers and NCOs making up more than a quarter of the figures.

Anyone convicted of drink-driving faces being banned from the roads for at least 12 months plus a fine, with more serious offences attracting community service or prison terms.

Meanwhile, military careers can be sent into meltdown – with promotion prospects and earnings taking a hit.

While commanders admit being puzzled by the reasons for a recent increase in conviction rates among troops, Army master driver WO1 Richard Ockwell (RLC) cited the coronavirus pandemic as one possible explanation for the change.

He believes the outbreak may have altered the mindset of soldiers who had previously shunned alcohol if they were driving on a night out.

The warrant officer added: "During the lockdowns, people had no choice but to drink at home – obviously pubs and clubs had to shut their doors.

"In terms of behaviour, it might be that Service personnel are now continuing to consume alcohol in their accommodation before going out and driving their cars."

He urged troops to use alternatives such as taxis or designated drivers, adding: "There can be no excuses for drink-driving.

"It is against the law and totally incompatible with military values.

"As well as putting lives at risk – which should be reason enough – a conviction will mean disqualification from driving and higher insurance premiums too.

"It could have a serious effect on your career, potentially with loss of rank and the substantial reduction in pay, as well as pressures on personal and family life."

Lucinda Dore, a solicitor specialising in road traffic law who represents Forces personnel at her West Sussex practice, shared the view that lockdowns had changed attitudes.

There seemed to be more drink-drive cases in court as a result, she said, adding: "I think the working from home culture has altered habits.

"The issue with troops is that they will inevitably be dealt with more severely than Joe Public – being punished in the civilian courts and by the Army.

"My suggestion to anyone who has knowingly been a drink-driver is to plead guilty at the first opportunity and take any rehabilitation on offer." ■

Hand over the car keys once you've had a drink – that's the message to Service personnel

SOLDIER

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GLOBAL SITREP



1. BELIZE JUNGLE TEST BECKONS

A BATCH of new kit will receive a robust once-over in arduous conditions as the troops of 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team head for the jungle this month. Soldiers from 216 Para Signal Squadron are flying to Belize at the end of January, where they will be trialling the new multi-role radio and other situational awareness kit on Exercise Mercury Canopy.

Picture: Steve Dolk

2. PERU

HIGH ACHIEVERS

MORE than a dozen personnel from 2nd Medical Brigade hit the mountains of South America for an arduous expedition that saw them working at altitudes of nearly 5,000 metres.

The team braved the dizzying Andes heights during the five-day hike along the Salkantay Trek to Machu Picchu – facing freezing temperatures at the peaks and humid jungles on the lower slopes.

LCpl Georgina Preston (RAMC) said the expediti had helped develop leadership qualities and lay the foundations for further training.



3. FALKLAND ISLANDS

SPUD U LIKE

A BIZARRE potato-launching competition formed a special occasion for troops with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers stationed down south.

Personnel led the celebration of St Elgius Day – honouring the patron saint of their corps – by locking horns with other soldiers in a spud-flinging contest.

The unusual event was won by troops from 3rd Battalion, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment – serving as the islands' Roulement Infantry Company – before a more conventional five-a-side football tournament took place.

In addition to his attachment to the REME, the much-celebrated St Elgius is the patron saint of goldsmiths as well as horses and those who work with them.



Picture: British Forces South Atlantic Islands



Troops test tech in California – page 35

4. UKRAINE

ROUNDS INCOMING

TROOPS defending their homeland against attacking Russian forces are being provided with extra ammunition and a kit bonanza by the UK government.

Some 10,000 extra artillery rounds are being despatched to the front line of the conflict in the Eastern European country as the war continues to rage.

The ordnance boost came after British PM Rishi Sunak visited the capital Kyiv before Christmas and

confirmed a £50 million package of defensive aid.

The bundle includes 125 anti-aircraft guns plus radars and electronic countermeasures to combat Iranian-supplied drones used by Russian forces.

Sea King helicopters – previously operated by the Royal Navy – have also been delivered, with British personnel training Ukrainian crews in the UK.



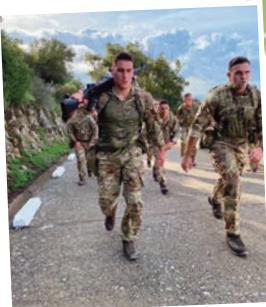
Picture: Graeme Main

INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

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5. GIBRALTAR ROCK AND ROLL

A LUNG-BUSTING uphill tab capped off a busy year for members of The Royal Gibraltar Regiment.

Around 100 troops took part in the latest Regimental Sergeant Major's Challenge – an arduous march with weighted kit.

Starting at Devil's Tower Camp, the soldiers climbed to Princess Caroline's Battery in the Upper Rock – all while carrying 17kg on their backs.

Designed to push competitors to their physical and mental limits, the 10km route also aims to foster leadership skills.

6. JAPAN A NEW SUN RISES

GUNNERS demonstrated the UK's commitment to working in the Indo-Pacific region – completing a second historic exercise with a key partner.

Personnel from 7 Parachute Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery, as well as 29 Commando Regiment and 104 Regiment, Royal Artillery, trained with the Japanese Ground Self Defence Force in a move aimed at boosting mutual understanding.

The British soldiers also helped to develop the Land of the Rising Sun's forces – leading six reconnaissance teams in a scenario based around island defence.

Held in Gunma prefecture, Exercise Vigilant Isles built on new ties between British and Japanese forces that started with bilateral drills four years ago.

Capt Wes Schorah (RHA) said the package was an excellent opportunity to practise long range recce and joint fires alongside allies.

"A shared understanding of equipment and procedures is crucial to increasing interoperability with one of our closest strategic partners in the region," he added, before praising the hosts for ensuring their guests had a chance to experience the culture of a rarely-visited country.



Picture: Cpl Charles Clare, RLC

7. GERMANY WING COMMANDERS

SEASONED troops from the German airborne forces flew over from their base in Wunstorf to drop in on British counterparts for joint manoeuvres.

Exercise Atlas Despatcher saw jumpmasters from Fallschirmjaegerregiment 31 train allies from 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team in the finer points of their parachute protocols and equipment.

The package – at RAF Brize Norton – culminated in 31 Brits earning German wings after a descent onto Salisbury Plain under their colleagues' T-10 canopies.

Instructor Flt Lt Chris Wilce (RAF) said the training had been an invaluable opportunity to "mix and match" capabilities while rehearsing how to operate seamlessly with another Nato power.

He added: "For the individual paratrooper the benefit is experience – understanding the different procedures and operating parameters of a different parachute system stretches their skills."

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Inspired actions on ops

Select few awarded for their work on Op Newcombe in Mali

THE courage and determination of British troops fighting insurgents in Mali have been recognised in the latest operational honours and awards.

They include a Mention in Dispatches for **Sgt Adam Humphreys** (QDG, shown below) who demonstrated bravery in the face of the enemy on three occasions.

Twice, his actions resulted in the detention of armed men and the seizure of weapons. On another, he helped save the lives of two colleagues who were pinned down by machine gun fire, directing the driver of his Jackal to head straight into the firefight while shooting his general purpose machine gun to enable the soldiers to escape.

Together with personnel from 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment and attached arms, 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards formed the Long Range Reconnaissance Group (LRRG) in Mali to gather intelligence and help the UN respond to threats to the population.

Lt Col Will Meddings (R Anglian, right) commanded the formation and has been awarded an OBE for going further and staying longer in the field than any other previous task force,

as well as finding new ways of using surveillance and reconnaissance kit.

"My award is an honour to receive, but it represents the outstanding work of all the soldiers of the LRRG, a group I was privileged to lead," he told *Soldier*.

"The evidence of the work is shown by the number of awards and commendations from across the task group, from medics responding to a vehicle-borne IED attack to junior soldiers patrolling in stifling heat."

Their number includes **Sgt (now WO2) Meghann Bradbury** (QARANC), who was given a Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service for triaging peacekeeping troops injured by a suicide vehicle-borne explosive device at a UN camp in northern Mali.

When coalition medical staff requested urgent support from the British team, her swift and calm action resulted in the saving of many lives and one patient's limb.

"Staff Bradbury was the glue that held the team together, coordinating medics from three nations over 24 hours of constant surgery and care in temperatures that reached more than 45 degrees Celsius," Lt Col Meddings said. ■



“
It's a group
I was
privileged to
lead
”



Lt Col Will Meddings
(R Anglian) received
an OBE

EYES EVERYWHERE

■ MEMBERS of the Army's Global Response Force say recent training has helped them prepare to deploy anywhere – not just the regions hitting today's headlines.

As reported by *Soldier* last month, Exercise Jebel Sahara saw members of 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment hone desert warfare skills alongside their Moroccan counterparts.

But as Maj Ash Neve, OC A Company, explained during the package, troops are keeping an open mind as to where they may be required in 2023.

"The eyes of the world are on Ukraine, but we have to be ready to operate anywhere, and exercises like this keep us relevant," said the officer, shown far right.



"What we'll take [from Ex Jebel Sahara] is having replicated the challenge of deploying somewhere unfamiliar to work with new partners, while refreshing and adapting our skills in a different environment."

LCpl Charlotte Wrigley (RAMC), a combat medic with 2 Para for six years, added: "We're in the desert now, we were in the mountains a few months back, and we're preparing for the Arctic early next year."

"I like the variety and pace of life." With overseas activities showing no sign of letting up, those at the sharp end of operations stand ready for whatever 2023 throws at them.

BEST OF THE REST: OPERATIONAL AWARDS

Army recipients named on the Armed Forces Operational Awards List number 58 (covering operations for the period from October 2021–March 31, 2022)

MBE

Maj Ben Attrell (RE), officer commanding of 33 Armoured Engineer Squadron, for leading construction of a new battlegroup camp in Estonia for 1,100 troops and 100 armoured vehicles, completing the project weeks early.

Maj Steven Howard (AAC), for his exemplary diplomacy while part of the UK's contribution to the UN peacekeeping force in Cyprus.

QCVS

Capt Andrew Macbeth (RTR), for his work on Op Cabrit managing the battlegroup's technical equipment, stores and real-life support.

Cpl Toyah Palmer (Int Corps), in recognition of her exceptional

contribution to Op Shader, including timely advice that saved lives.

Capt Helena Richardson (RA), for deploying to Kyiv at very short notice to support and protect British Embassy staff while facilitating military engagement with Ukrainian forces.

A/Cpl Stefan Cole (RAMC), for saving a seriously ill heat stress casualty while serving with 667 Sqn, AAC in Brunei by conducting a highly skilful winch recovery through the jungle canopy and stabilising him during the flight to hospital.

QCB

LCpl Fraser Gee (RTR), for calmly conducting triage and providing first-aid to casualties at a serious road traffic accident.

NEWS IN NUMBERS



Picture: Maj James Beckett, Ranger



EASE OF MOVEMENT

THE British Army can now transit through Europe more easily thanks to an initiative led by the Netherlands government.

The UK has joined the EU's military mobility project, which cuts red tape for personnel and equipment to travel through member states by road, rail, air or sea.

It is part of a wider plan to enhance defence cooperation and also includes the US, Canada and Norway.

Defence Minister Ben Wallace said the move was crucial for greater security and closer working between the EU and Nato.

"Russia's war against Ukraine has further demonstrated that being able to move troops and military kit swiftly across Europe and beyond is essential," EU foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, added.

A DECADE OF DISCOUNT

THE Defence Discount Service, which offers the Forces community exclusive savings on popular brands and attractions, has celebrated its tenth year. The organisation now boasts 650,000 members.



FEARLESS FUNDRAISING



SALUTE TO CYCLISTS

A SADDLE-SORE sapper team is celebrating after pedalling for a good cause. The seven soldiers from 39 Engineer Regiment took a break from their usual work routine in Cyprus to embark on a punishing 3,200-mile static bike ride. Operating an hour on, and one off, the troops and a few visiting colleagues took a share of

Funds raised:
£4,000
For: Sapper Support

the punishing total to complete the 48-hour test. Team boss SSgt Robert Ledingham (RE) praised everyone who had taken part at Dhekelia Garrison. He told *Soldier*: "It was physically tough and mentally exhausting."



Reunited after 78 long years

A SECOND World War sapper who turned to *Soldier* to help trace a child he assisted amid fierce fighting after the Allied invasion of Europe, has spoken of his joy at being reunited with her.

Reg Pye, who served with 224 Field Company, Royal Engineers, gave a hungry 14-year-old girl called Huguette Geoffroy his jam sandwich in June 1944 while on a convoy near Normandy.

The next morning, he awoke to find a picture of her along with her name and a message of thanks on the back – while his mess tin had been half-filled with milk.

In our July 2022 magazine (shown) the 99-year-old explained how he longed to find Huguette again. And after sharing his story during a pilgrimage organised by the Taxi Charity for Military Veterans, she was tracked down and his wish came true.



The former Serviceman was reintroduced to Huguette and her family in Normandy, where they sipped champagne and he symbolically brought jam sandwiches – as per their wartime encounter.

And there was not a dry eye in the room as he produced her black-and-white photo.

The veteran, who is from Berry Port in Wales, said he had been left deeply moved "by a small bit of human interaction in the bleakest of times".

He added: "I have carried her picture in my wallet for 78 years hoping we might meet – I cannot believe she has been found.

"I wish to thank everyone who has made my dream come true."

Speaking through an interpreter, Huguette said she was extremely touched by Reg's efforts to find her.

"We got older but we are still the same," she commented. ■



Urban systems put to test

Pictures: Chris Winter and Graeme Main

THE integration of artificial intelligence into military systems was a standout feature of the annual Army Warfighting Experiment (AWE), according to infantry troops who attended the event.

Staged at His Majesty's Naval Base Portsmouth, its trials give industry access to Service personnel to test ideas and gather user feedback.

"Protect and sustain in urban areas" was the theme this time around. And while eye-catching drones, unmanned ground vehicles and a robotic dog equipped with CBRN detectors were available to play with, it was the more routine-looking equipment that caused the biggest stir.

One was an anonymous-looking box with a small mast that contained an electronic brain linked to a network of cameras (pictured) and can be rapidly deployed across a wide area to enhance perimeter security.

Thanks to its AI technology, the system, which can be solar-powered, is programmed to identify specific objects, including weapons or vehicles, and send alerts to commanders with stills or video clips.

"It was really interesting to see that in the defence space," said Capt

James Goble (Para), part of a section from 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment attending the trials with an eye on 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team becoming the first robotics and autonomous systems enhanced brigade in 2025.

"As the most rapidly deployable force in the Army, it's good to get involved in developing new kit – all too often the tech we have in our pockets at the weekend is superior to what we use at work."

Service personnel were also impressed by a box called the Universal Power Charger.

"It can retrieve, store and supply power and has universal inputs and outputs so you can plug it into a car battery, solar panel or radio batteries," explained Cpl Wesley Foster (Para).

"We can only jump with a limited amount of kit and are carrying more electrical items these days so anything light that helps us be self-sufficient at reach is particularly useful."

Another system with potential was Footprint, a situational awareness tool for dismounted soldiers (right) which allows them to be tracked via an ankle-strap transmitter when an enemy jams GPS. ■



A SUPER-FIT medic will hand over a healthy sum to a school for special needs pupils after a punishing physical challenge. Catterick-based Sgt Alex Broadley (RAMC) had hoped that a 130-mile tab around North Yorkshire would secure a minibus for her autistic four-year-old son's school. However, she was hospitalised at the halfway point. But donors nevertheless gave £2,200 towards the vehicle for the Dales School. Sgt Broadley said: "It has been great that people have still been generous." Search for Alexandra Broadley at [justgiving.com](https://www.justgiving.com) to donate.

CHANGING THE GAME
– page 35

“
It's good to get involved in developing new kit
”



Some of the other tech on trial at the AWE...



▲ **Mission Master XT** can evacuate casualties autonomously over virtually any terrain



▲ **Hippo Hybrid amphibious carrier** can be driven or operated robotically and carry up to 1,000kg



▲ **Cerberus** has a swappable payload based on the threat, such as CBRN and explosive detectors

THE RIGHT NOTE

THE Band of the Brigade of Gurkhas treated concert-goers in Salisbury to a spectacle of music and dancing in aid of Nepalese veterans and families in need.

They played a mixture of military and band pieces, while new members donned traditional outfits and performed dances from their homeland, with the £5,010 raised destined for the Gurkha Welfare Trust, which supports communities in Nepal.



HOPE FOR PTSD PATIENTS

■ CUTTING-EDGE research on how brain cells of PTSD patients react to stress could lead to advances in diagnosis and treatment.

The study on US veterans revealed genetics make some people more susceptible to trauma-induced mental health problems.

The boffins are now looking into which drugs could be used to reduce the "fight-or-flight" response.

'VETS CAN FILL SKILLS GAP'

■ SENIOR politicians have urged businesses to employ veterans to alleviate a nationwide talent shortage.

Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families, Andrew Murrison, said they were "work ready" with soft and hard skills to offer.

He asked businesses to consider the benefits that ex-soldiers could bring to their organisation.

Addressing the Career Transition Partnership conference, Murrison said: "If you haven't considered Service leavers, we urge you to find out more."



PTE JOSHUA KENNINGTON

35 SQUADRON,
5 MEDICAL REGIMENT
DIED NOVEMBER 24, 2022

HEARTFELT tributes have been paid to a popular and professional young soldier following his death at Catterick Garrison.

MoD officials confirmed Pte Joshua Kennington (RLC) died in Darlington Hospital following a "non-operational incident".

An investigation is ongoing and no further details had been released as this issue went to press.

In a statement, the soldier's family described him as a highly compassionate individual who had "died doing what he loved".

Unit CO Lt Col Catherine Masling (RAMC) said Pte Kennington was a "superb soldier" who had a bright future ahead.

She added: "He had an ability beyond his years – a true professional, determined to do well and who was keen to take advantage of everything the Army had to offer."



■ MEMBERS of 1st Battalion, Scots Guards celebrated St Andrew's Day with a series of Highland Games-style events at their base in Catterick Garrison. Events included welly throwing, porridge eating, tug of war and a gun run. Picture: Cpl Becky Brown, RLC

Service justice shake-up

Rape and sexual assaults will be dealt with by new unit

“It will give personnel reassurance”



AN INDEPENDENT tri-Service organisation is being set up to investigate serious crime as part of ongoing reforms to the military justice system.

The Defence Serious Crime Unit (DSCU) replaces the Special Investigation Branch (*Soldier*, July 2022) and will deal with offences such as rape and sexual assault within the Armed Forces.

It operates under the umbrella of the Defence Serious Crime Command, established in April 2022 – a body that sits outside the single service chains of command to ensure operational independence.

The DSCU is designed to deliver a more effective policing service with officers trained to the same

standard as civilian counterparts.

"All members of the Armed Forces should have the confidence to report a crime and know that it will be fully investigated," commented Chief of Defence People, Lt Gen James Swift.

"The Defence Serious Crime Unit will give our Servicemen and women reassurance that their concerns will be taken seriously, investigated independently and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

Based in Southwick Park, Hampshire, the unit investigates crimes committed by persons subject to Service law in both the UK and overseas.

It will contain a dedicated victim and witness care section that is being set up in consultation with specialist external organisations, including The Survivors Trust and the office of the Victims Commissioner.

The MoD says this is to ensure that victim care is central to every stage of the investigative and judicial process.

DSCU is due to become fully operational in early 2023. ■



Union Jack Club under threat

Proposed office block would be 'catastrophic' for the Forces digs

FURIOUS Service personnel and veterans have attacked proposals for a huge office complex next to a military haven in London.

They claim plans for a 20-storey building in Waterloo would block out the light in rooms at the Union Jack Club and wreck the area's character.

Under the scheme by developer Bourne Capital, large-scale demolition works would be followed by construction of a 70-metre structure.

But bosses at the club – a charity offering low-cost accommodation for more junior members of the Armed Forces community and their families – are adamant the development would have "a catastrophic impact" on their ability to operate effectively.

They also claim it would impede the club's own potential for development.

Chief executive Hugh Player (shown) said: "It will have a savage impact on the local area and the services and environment we can provide to non-commissioned members of the Armed Forces and emergency services.

"We do not object to redevelopment of our neighbour's site, but are shocked and deeply alarmed that the scale, height and mass proposed is both architecturally incongruous and commercially excessive.

"This is sadly a missed opportunity for long-desired improvements and a masterplan for the whole Waterloo triangle and surroundings."

Nearly 1,400 objections to the



Pictures: Graeme Main

planning application – many of them from club members – had been registered on the Lambeth Council website at the time of going to press.

A member of the Royal Army Medical Corps wrote that the proposed development would have a "major impact with the loss of daylight" into the club.

Another recalled how he had first used the venue "as a frightened 15-year-old who had travelled down from Scotland en route to start his training at Pirbright". The venue had been "a safe haven" in the capital ever since, he added.

Other objectors flagged the club's importance as a social hub and focal point for the Armed Forces community during times of national mourning.

Bourne Capital had been approached for comment. ■

■ AIRBORNE craftsmen topped off a gruelling test of vehicle repair skills and physical fitness by pulling an SV truck into position at the finish line. The competition at Merville Barracks, Colchester, saw Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers from 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team pitted against each other, with 8 Field Company (Para) claiming the bragging rights.



“
It will have
a savage
impact on the
local area
”



MEDICAL FACILITY OPEN

■ A NEW health centre for both military and civvy communities around Salisbury Plain is open for business.

The Larkhill Medical and Dental Centre is the first facility in Wiltshire to offer joint MoD and NHS care under one roof.

The complex boasts two GP practices, a state-of-the-art defence dental centre and treatment rooms.

It will also act as a training outlet for Armed Forces medical personnel.

Commander Defence Primary Healthcare Brig Phil Carter said:

"The commitment to provide top quality care and treatment is epitomised in this facility."

IN NUMBERS
£17,128
Average amount of unsecured debt among troops with financial struggles, according to research by Creditfix – seven per cent more than the national average. To get help with debt turn to page 50.



WIN
A Nintendo Switch Lite – worth £200



LAST month's spine line clues – (Capt Preet) Chandi, (Cpl Jack) Jarvis, (WO1 Mike) Owens, (Gnr Heather) Stark – were all the names of individuals marked out in *Soldier's* end-of-year awards – a salute to those who brought us some of the most inspiring stories and moments of 2022.

This month we have teamed up with GameMill Entertainment (gamenmill.com) to help one lucky reader start the New Year in style – with a **Nintendo Switch Lite in coral worth £200** plus a copy of our four-star games lead, *Dojos Rising* (page 57).

Ideal for handheld gaming on the go, this superb gadget is a great piece of kit for versatility with a raft of titles on offer.

If you'd like to be in with a chance of winning this blues-busting January prize, tell us what links the clues on the spine of this issue.

Answers, including phone number, to the usual address or comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by January 31. Good luck!

GameMill
entertainment

SPINE LINE COMPETITION

View from the
GROUND



Pte Nicole Debenham from 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment explains the difference Teamwork has made to the day job...

"I WAS pretty cynical going into my first Teamwork event last year.

I thought it was just going to be another one of those tick-box exercises. And for a while that's how it was. We did the All Stop Day and then carried on.

But then our regimental administrative warrant officer asked me if I'd like to become a facilitator for future events.

The idea is to get groups of about 15 together, and learn more about each other as human beings.

My group is a mixture of ranks from across the battalion, and includes private soldiers, senior NCOs and direct- and late-entry officers.

We started talking, with some basic questions such as 'how are you feeling today?'. But people started opening up, and I got into some quite deep conversations, on everything from suicide to alcoholism.

A lot of things come up that you don't expect.

I know people in my company a lot more deeply as a result. And it's built relationships more quickly, which has helped on both sides.

After all, if I can trust you with the deepest secrets of my childhood, I can trust you to make the right choices on the battlefield.

A captain told me it had helped them empathise with their soldiers. Leaders can make decisions knowing who we all are, and that develops a strong foundation for trust."

DIARY MARKER

FEBRUARY

*Teamwork
All Stop Day*

MAKING THE DREAM WORK



Picture: Graeme Main

Why downing tools for the day next month will help the Army win wars

SOME 150,000 people across the British Army – including Reservists, contractors and civilians – will down tools for the day next month in an effort to make the Service a better place to work.

The All Stop Day, as it is known, will take place on February 8 and see troops removed from the day job to talk about the way business is done in their team, air any grievances and get to know each other better.

Now an annual fixture, it follows a similar event last year – and others at Field Army level – intended to tackle attitudes that can prevent soldiers working well together.

It is part of the Teamwork programme – an ongoing effort to overhaul working culture across the ranks – and will include talks from senior leaders and the Army sergeant major, before units embark on local discussions covering topics such as feeling valued and how to challenge senior ranks.

Lt Col Vickie Warrington (RE), an officer overseeing the Teamwork programme in Army HQ, said the initiative had a direct link to Op Mobilise and the Service's efforts to improve readiness.

"If our people can open up and talk to each other, regardless of rank, they will become better teams," she told *Soldier*. "And if they are better teams, they win wars better."

"Right now, people in the Army feel slightly beaten up by the diversity and

inclusion stick.

"There's lots of talk about bad behaviour. But in fact the majority of our people are going to work every day and doing an absolutely gleaming job.

"There is so much good that we do. Teamwork is about celebrating those positives, but also recognising there's a slice of that pie that's slightly negative."

She said that Armed Forces continuous attitude survey stats suggested more personnel felt proud to serve than they did valued. This showed work needed to be done, she added.

"This is not a wholesale change of culture, nor is it about trying to alter the Army's purpose or any of our sub-cultures," the officer continued.

"There's so much that's brilliant and forms so much of our identity."

But she said building trust in teams who do not come together very often would also be central to activities on the All Stop Day.

"It comes back to being the most professional we can be," she added. "Life has become very complicated and digital recently."

"What with more working from home, and deploying in smaller teams on operations, some units are together for less time."

Army Reserve personnel, and those on ops, have until April to complete the day's activities. ■





Ground view

Army Sergeant Major, WO1 Paul Carney, offers his take on Service life...

WHEN I picked up my pen to write this column before the Christmas period, I warned that we would face challenges in the New Year – and 2023 is now upon us.

In addition to ongoing world events – Russia's invasion of Ukraine being a case in point – we are all facing a deep cost-of-living crisis.

And I think the extent of this problem will only become fully apparent in the coming months.

The hard truth is that energy and food price hikes will affect everyone – soldier and civvy alike – as we all feel the squeeze on our finances.

I appreciate it is not a welcome message, especially in the depths of January, but this is the reality.

I have been asked about my priorities for 2023 – my second full year as Army sergeant major – and ensuring we look after our people is certainly at the top of the list.

It is important everyone is in the best position to weather the storm.

So there are a couple of points I'd like to raise.

The first is a plea to anyone with financial problems to speak up.

The chain of command is there

to assist and there are a number of organisations ready to offer help and advice (pages 50-51).

Our military charities can also offer support to those most in need.

But if you are in trouble, be honest. We need to know if you have a problem.

In addition, I'd like our NCOs to step up to the plate and stand ready to help those under their command.

While I am available on social media and always happy to engage, units obviously have a much better understanding of the local situation.

Keep an eye on your soldiers and make sure you listen to them.

As someone who was in serious debt earlier on in my Army life, I am only too aware of its destructive effects.

With significant amounts owed on several credit cards, I tried to manage the load alone until my partner, now my wife, pointed me towards assistance.

This changed everything.

Please do not be afraid of stigma or worry about the impact on your career.

Problems can – and will – be resolved, but being honest is the first step in finding a solution.

Don't suffer in silence.

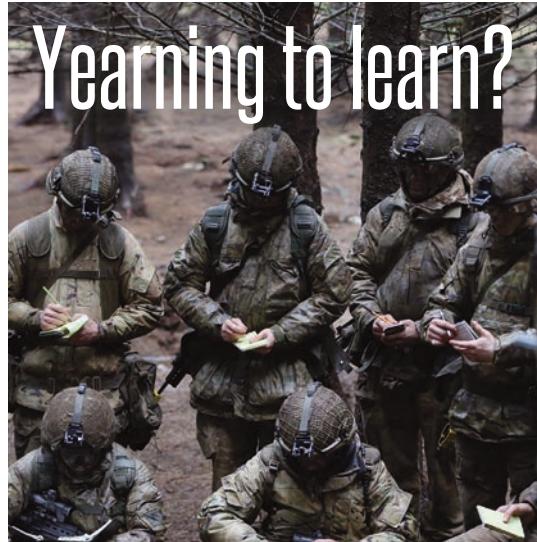
I was in serious debt – don't suffer in silence

“ ”

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Q Got any New Year resolutions?

A Nah – Army life encourages enough daily improvement!



ANOTHER item at the top of the action list for the coming year is the future education framework for our NCOs.

We need to build on the progress made.

There is now a dedicated group of people working on the project and we have looked carefully at other militaries that already have well-developed initiatives of the same

sort – including the academy established by the US Army.

It is important to me that we strike the right balance here – most soldiers do not join up because they want to sit in a classroom, but they should have the opportunity to take some ownership of their professional development.

I'll keep you posted.

STAYING ON TOUR...

■ AS A FINAL note this month, I wanted to thank you all for your continued support – and I'm looking forward to working with you in the coming 12 months.

I have also just accepted a year-long extension to my tour in this role – which means I'm going to be Army sergeant major until the summer of 2024.

Being effective, however, means I need to know the issues impacting you, so stay in touch. I'm on Twitter or you can contact me via Defence Connect.

We'll make a difference together.



THE BIG PICTURE

Somogahara, Japan

Alert in East Asia

BRITISH soldiers dismount from a Chinook helicopter to hone their tactical skills alongside members of Japan's Ground Self Defence Force during Exercise Vigilant Isles. The package – which was first run in 2018 – saw personnel conduct infiltration and exfiltration drills on the Somogahara training area. Among the UK units represented were 7th Parachute Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery; 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment and 4/73 (Sphinx) Special Observation Post Battery, Royal Artillery.

Picture: Cpl Charles Clare, RLC

Got an image to share?
Send it to news@soldiermagazine.co.uk





WEED TO

DRILLS

SKILLS

NUTRITION

KITBAG

FITNESS

Train HARD,

Army PTIs are on a mission
to help troops hit top form
in 2023 – here's why...

► WITH personnel under orders from the chief of the general staff to make sure they are ready for whatever operations lie in store, fitness remains very much front and centre – and the Royal Army Physical Training Corps are all over it.

Four years since they led a comprehensive overhaul of the Service's approach to phys, they are relaunching the Army Physical Training System (APTS) to better support Gen Sir Patrick Sanders' Op Mobilise initiative and the ongoing Future Soldier restructure.

As Sgt Fabion Walker from the corps headquarters' Training Development Team explained, the changing times make it more important than ever that units engage fully with every element of the programme to ensure troops are fit for

their roles.

"Our Service personnel need to be more agile and expeditionary more of the time, requiring persistent levels of physical and mental resilience," he said.

"So we want to simplify the application of the APTS and make sure it's at the forefront of everyone's minds so they understand how it works and the benefits it brings.

"It is a science-based

Profile

Name: Sgt Fabion Walker
Age: 37

Military career: Joined the Royal Logistic Corps in 2003 before transferring to the RAPTC in 2015. Has served in Afghanistan, the Falklands Islands and Germany

Sport of choice: Athletics – 100-200m sprints



fight EASY



How it works

Each element of the APTS combines to maximise performance and deployability

- Soldier conditioning review
- Physical employment standards and role fitness test (soldier)
- Reduction in musculoskeletal injuries



approach to strength and conditioning that is progressive, safe and effective, and has been designed to optimise human performance and operational readiness.”

Another key objective is reducing the incidence of musculoskeletal injuries across the Service and while data is still being compiled, Sgt Walker said anecdotal evidence points strongly towards success in this area.

“We do hear from units that have fully embedded the APTS that their soldiers are not only more robust, but passing mandated physical assessments better,” he added.

Regardless of what 2023 holds for you in terms of deployments or fitness goals, the RAPTC staff are there to help. Speak to your local PTIs or physical development team if you need advice or have any questions. ■

In numbers:

7 number of functional movements the soldier athlete must master under the APTS: **pull, lunge, push, squat, brace, hinge and rotate**

SIX

core components of physical fitness: **aerobic and anaerobic conditioning, explosive power, strength, muscular endurance** as well as **flexibility and mobility**

“More ready, more of the time”

With batteries deployed on an almost constant basis, troops from 19 Regiment, Royal Artillery are living the mantra of Op Mobilise.

Soldier dropped in on a phys session to find out how the APTS underpins their operational effectiveness.

What does a typical week entail for you, PT-wise?

On a Tuesday and Thursday we alternate between things like strength and conditioning in the gym, or a maximum aerobic speed session on the sports pitches or maybe a steady run to Stonehenge and back, which is about four miles. On Wednesday afternoons I do orienteering and on a Friday it's CO's PT. We've been building up to the role fitness test, so we've been doing a few loaded marches or 2km best-effort runs with the weight we need to carry. I enjoy the new system – it's more realistic and is no longer about plain endurance but about the mechanics of how your body would be moving on ops.

Sgt Chris Hazell, AGC (SPS)



How does the APTS compare to the old system?

It's scientifically based and about you being the best soldier you can be – not about thrashing people, but having fit and deployable soldiers who aren't broken. Instead of you just chasing after a PTI and not getting very much from it, like in the past, it's aimed at you getting the maximum amount out of the session – and the instructors are cutting around like sharks making sure you do the exercises correctly.

Afterwards you definitely notice you've worked hard – especially in your core and hip flexors.

WO2 Liam Milne, REME



What is the regiment's ethos when it comes to phys?

We support a variety of battlegroups across two brigades, so we have people at different states of readiness and have to make sure we are all in a position to deploy at all times. It's about being more ready, more of the time – and we are trying to push ownership of that down to the very lowest level. The one thing everyone is in control of is their own fitness. There is a narrative to training – sessions lead into each other and you can see a clear chain of development, plus we are seeing less frequent musculoskeletal injuries.

Capt Jack Mann, REME
Unit fitness training officer



How do you implement the APTS?

We do three organised sessions a week, focusing on the whole spectrum of fitness – not just aerobic conditioning – and including educational elements. In addition, with so many batteries in and out of the door at various times it's not unusual to run the role fitness test four times a year, even though it's an annual assessment. We also put on the soldier conditioning review every two weeks to make sure everyone is current. Rather than saying to troops "you will do PT", we are now equipping them a lot more to focus on their own personal phys – with help from tools like the *My Fitness* app.

SSgt Richy Ingles, RAPTC
Staff sergeant instructor, physical training



Want to know more?

Follow the QR code to visit the APTS page on the Army Knowledge Exchange

'All you need is

The Herrick-inspired fitness tool that could be coming to a gym near you

► SITTING in a forward operating base in Afghanistan back in 2009, Chris Leare (ex-RAPTC) was struck by the lack of robust fitness equipment for deployed troops.

A PT instructor attached to the Grenadier Guards, the staff sergeant decided to find a solution – setting in motion a chain of events that more than ten years on has resulted in a civvy street venture making exercise gear that meets the demands of military life.

With his product, The55 training bag, now in use at several Army locations, he recalled what sparked the idea.

"I was getting fed up with kit splitting and breaking and I was thinking it would be great if there was something reliable troops could take with them anywhere in the world to train with," he explained.

"We first came up with the idea of filling normal sandbags and putting webbing straps on them, but it wasn't until a couple of months later when I was rolling up my weapon cleaning kit that I realised that was the design I needed.

"That was my lightbulb moment."

The first prototype was a repurposed pillowcase fashioned by his mum, but his breakthrough came when he teamed up with a business partner – a fellow veteran – who provided the all-important funding and helped him navigate the complex world of patents and intellectual property.

Together, they set about refining the product into its current form – a system of four training bags with removable inserts to configure the weight to an individual's needs.

As well as being developed with the carry elements of the Army's new role-based fitness tests in mind, Leare hopes the deployable version will become a go-to tool for those serving on overseas exercises and operations.

"It can be taken around the world because you can fill the inserts up wherever you are," he continues.

"All you need is sand. Commanders won't have to worry about their troops having no kit to train with." ■

The spec:

- Four training bags offering variable weights up to a maximum of 35kg. The deployable version (pictured) can be emptied completely for travel and filled with sand in situ
- Can be used for progressive and regressive training – according to the user's fitness level and goals
- Robust construction, with secured inserts to minimise load shift during movements



sand'



Front squat



Shoulder press



Deadlift



Weighted lunge



Rip-through

Profile

Name: Chris Leare

Age: 46

Military career: Served for 20 years, first in The Devonshire and Dorset Regiment, then the RAPTC reaching the rank of warrant officer class one. Deployed on operational tours to Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Afghanistan and wrote the *Army Operational Fitness Guide*

Is this the world's

The Army's ski mountaineers think so
- and they're recruiting now

► COMBINING the thrill of downhill skiing with the lung-busting slog of mountaineering, "Skimo" is the ultimate workout. But as Service team member Lt Miles Hill (R Welsh, pictured below) explains, certain elements make it particularly good for military types...

Main picture: David Cattler

Lt Miles Hill, R Welsh

best phys?

An all over workout

It incorporates all major muscle groups and gives a full aerobic, endurance-based cardiovascular training session, with the added bonus of getting some anaerobic sprints or steep ascents in too.

It's as hard as you want to make it – you can shuffle along chatting, admiring the view, or thrash yourself to the absolute max. And providing you avoid falling into a crevasse, it's low impact and kind on the joints.

Altitude adds intensity

Except for in Scotland, Skimo is mostly done at elevation, so your body is always acclimatising and adapting. For example, the Patrouille des Glaciers race in Switzerland (pictured) is roughly 60km with 3,500m of ascent. The calorie burn is huge.

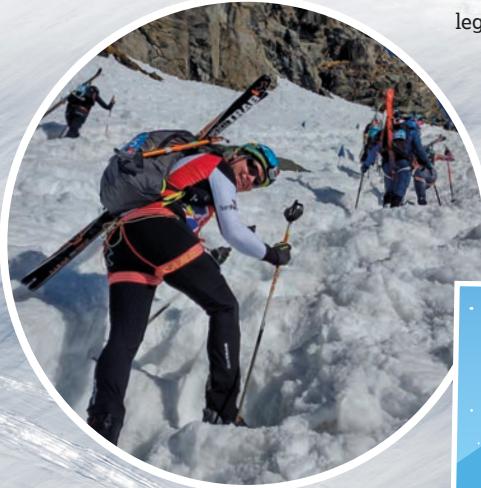
Admin is key

On a race, you could be out for 15 hours in conditions ranging from burning sun to -35 degrees Celsius with windchill, dark and whiteouts. **Being self-reliant and having good field skills is essential because it's a genuinely dangerous environment.**

Similarly, you've got to be able to manage your own nutrition and hydration.

Teamwork

Operating in pairs or threes, success only comes if you work together. On long climbs, if someone's flagging, the team will go "on tow", physically helping to pull each other up the hill. All the skiing in glaciated terrain is done roped up, so learning to ascend and descend without pulling each other over and ending up in a massive tangle is essential.



The element of danger

Some races take place in relatively safe terrain, but others require serious mountaineering skills – such as abseiling down cliffs, attaching to safety lines and using ice axes. You learn technical rescue drills – if someone falls in a crevasse, the other team members must be able to get them out. Similarly, you've got to make decisions about route finding around avalanche terrain as well as being able to carry out a fast and effective recovery if the worst happens.



Funding, well-being... and Lycra

The military gives soldiers the chance to take part in the sport without the usual overheads faced by civilian competitors – kit, travel, food, accommodation and so on. There are demonstrable **mental health benefits to being outside in the mountains, with your mates, trying hard.** Finally, and arguably most importantly, you can legitimately wear Lycra. ■

Get amongst it



The Skimo team are building up towards the next Patrouille des Glaciers race in 2024 and are looking for all ranks to join the fold.

For more information read DIN 2022DIN07-127

Food to go

Army chef explains why prior planning is the key to keeping up New Year health goals

► WITH healthier options on offer in cookhouses and packed meals these days, maintaining a balanced diet while on camp or on exercise has never been easier.

But good intentions can go out of the window when work or downtime takes you on the road.

Chef and fitness enthusiast Sgt Pardeep Kaur (RLC) has some tactics for staying on track – and away from those golden arches – when out and about.

“Planning ahead is so important when it comes to a healthy diet,” says the senior NCO.

“If you know you are going on a long drive, take some lean protein – such as eggs or grilled chicken – with you.

“It’s not only more nutritious, but also much better for your wallet than the stuff available in service stations.”

Here, she shares her go-to recipe for meals on the move...

Quick chicken stir-fry

1 Cut two chicken breasts into strips and brown in one teaspoon of olive oil



2 Add onions and any other vegetables you like – the more colourful the better – along with a dollop of tomato puree



3 For flavour add garlic, herbs and spices to taste – I use a lot of ginger because it’s healthy and good for digestion. Don’t use too much salt



4 Serve with brown rice or pasta, or in a wholemeal wrap with salad

5 Eat it fresh or store it in the fridge overnight in an air-tight container so it’s ready for your journey the next day

Why it's a winner

Cost: In total, this comes in at around £5 – or £2.50 for two different meals – much cheaper than anything you will get out and about

Nutritional balance: It’s packed with minerals and vitamins, low in saturated fat and takes care of your micro and macro nutrients. You also know exactly what’s gone into it, unlike additive-laden fast food

Convenience: This is quick and easy to prepare on just a hob, which most cooking facilities in single living accommodation now have

3 more reasons to avoid junk food snack attacks

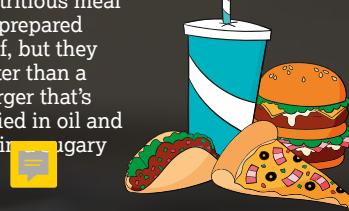
1 **Fast food is high in calories, salt, sugar, preservatives and additives and full of saturated fat** – which is linked to a host of health conditions including obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes

2 **It's a false economy.** A meal deal may seem cheap but because it's not nutritionally satisfying you will quickly be hungry again, costing you more money in the long run

3 **Finally, it's environmentally unfriendly.** Fast food uses lots of packaging and has often been shipped thousands of miles, so has a high carbon footprint

But when all else fails...

If you do find yourself caught out and a service station is your only option, most fast-food outlets now do some version of a grilled chicken wrap. Alternatively, go for a wholemeal sandwich with an egg filling, or a ready-made pasta and lentil salad from a supermarket’s healthy range. None of these are as good as a nutritious meal you’ve prepared yourself, but they are better than a 99p burger that’s been fried in oil and served in a sugary bun.



In numbers

SEVEN

types of nutrition that make up a balanced diet, including vitamins, protein, fats, carbs, minerals, fibre and water

2,000

recommended daily calorie intake for women, depending on activity level. For men it's 2,500-3,000

56

recommended daily intake of protein, in grams, for men of average body weight (45g for women). Carbs should be between 225-325g and healthy unsaturated fats 44-47g



Profile

Name: Sgt Pardeep Kaur

Age: 33

Military career: Joined the Royal Logistic Corps in 2009 and has served on ops in South Sudan and Estonia, as well as exercises around the world

Current role: Instructor at the Food Services Training Wing of the Defence School of Logistics and Administration, Worthy Down



For more recipe ideas, as well as health and fitness tips, follow Sgt Kaur on Instagram via [@british_army_chef_kaur_pardeep](https://www.instagram.com/british_army_chef_kaur_pardeep) or [@pardeep19922328](https://www.instagram.com/pardeep19922328) on Twitter

► SKILLS & DRILLS

5 to follow

The social media fitness fanatics turning heads online

► EVER since the pandemic, even the most dedicated fitness enthusiasts have found themselves turning to social media for inspiration. Some have even been motivated to start up their own accounts and channels.

Here, we give a rundown of our favourite military influencers, who could well be worth a follow if you are looking for a bit of moral support with – or distraction from – your New Year workout...

1

@Katr Matthews

Army physio Capt Kat Matthews (RAMC) – better known for becoming the first ever female to break the eight-hour Ironman barrier last year – enjoys more than 35k followers.



@rome_fitness
PTI Pte Rome Wilkinson (Mercian) shared his four-minute routine for building abs of steel last year (*Soldier*, July 2022) and his channel imparts other gems of gym wisdom that could help fight off the festive flab.

2



3



@Fabziy

Our cover star has his face all over the place this month – including on this weekly vlog, where he shares advice on PT pitfalls and more, with some 50k subscribers.



4

@djrxp

He hasn't posted in a while, but this channel by former platoon commander Dan Russell (ex-R Anglian) has loads of content to get stuck into, including a rundown of his various running challenges, a cycling mission through Europe and insights into joining civvy street.



5



@CraigHollman

This Household Cavalry Regiment soldier turned mortgage adviser posts an eclectic mix of home workout videos, interviews, and military tips to some 60k people.





KHANJAR CALLING

A large military vehicle, possibly an armoured personnel carrier or truck, is shown in the foreground on a sandy, arid landscape. The vehicle is angled towards the left. In the background, a group of soldiers in camouflage uniforms are standing and talking. The sky is blue with some white clouds.

Tempo picks up as desert hub takes shape

HAVING been named as one of the Army's land regional hubs in 2021's integrated review, Oman has been steadyng itself for an increase in British boots on its austere desert ground.

Rewind 12 months, and the sun was setting on Exercise Khanjar Oman, which saw more than 650 troops travel to the Gulf for a month-long examination of their ability to operate in such an environment.

The curtain recently closed on its latest iteration, which was fronted by the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland Battlegroup and fell under the wider ranging Exercise Desert Khanjar – the first chapter in what will become a persistent four-month deployment for the Service to Oman. »

» This saw personnel undertake basic and specialist training, conduct cultural and educational visits, take part in defence engagement tasks, and enjoy adventurous training packages – as well as embrace the challenges of Khanjar Oman.

Commanded by 4th Light Brigade Combat Team, the serials saw the soldiers operating alongside the Royal Army of Oman at the Ras Madrakah joint training area – a vast proving ground that easily dwarfs the combined size of the entire UK training estate.

The battlegroup had an impressive roll call of assets at its disposal, including the Wildcat helicopters of

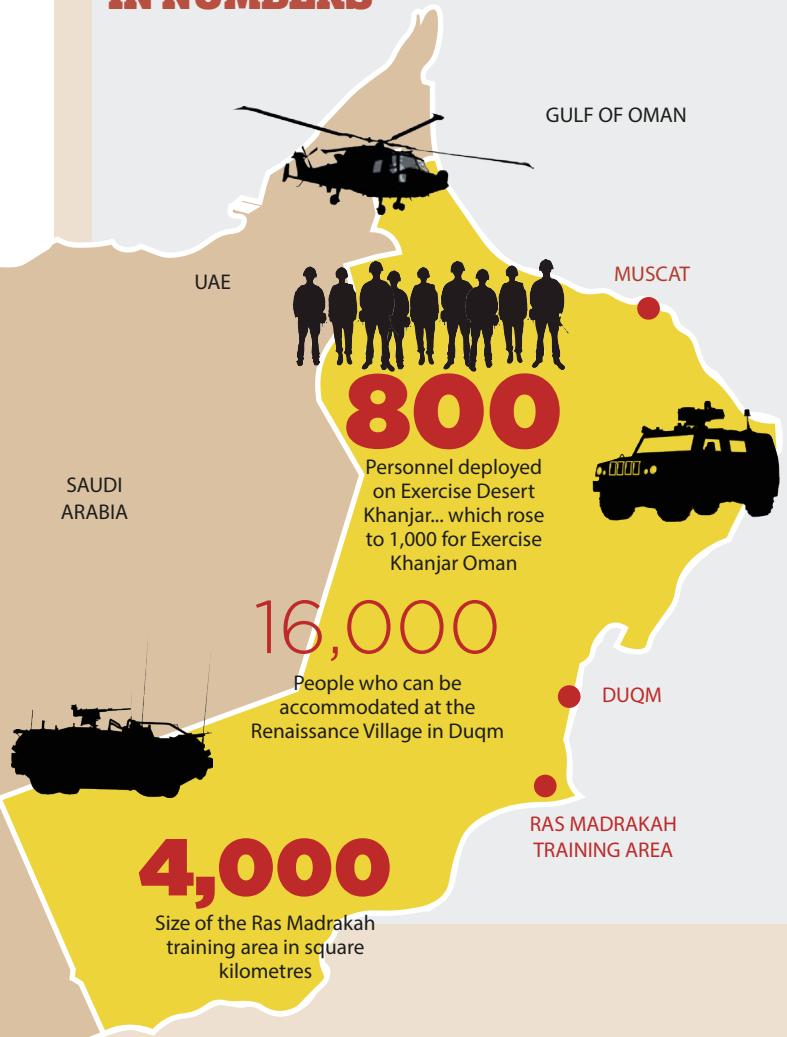
661 Squadron, 1 Regiment, Army Air Corps; the light guns of 29 Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery and reconnaissance specialists from The Light Dragoons.

The home country also deployed elements of its Western Border Security Force and F16s from the Royal Air Force of Oman.

Their combined focus was on a scenario in which personnel were supporting a host nation's government in its efforts to tackle an insurgent force.

This was formed by the 80-strong Kohima Company made up of troops from 4th Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment; 4th Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment; The Queen's Own

IN NUMBERS



“
We have taken
it seriously and
worked hard
”



Yeomanry and 6 Scots – who pooled their resources to become the first Reservists to perform an opfor role in the Middle Eastern country.

“This is not a validation exercise so there is a lot of opportunity for experimentation,” said Maj Paul Turner (SNIY), from the brigade headquarters.

“They have been working with a partner force that has very different ways of doing things and have faced a scenario involving a free-thinking enemy.

“One of the benefits of this place is that it is not overly templated. In Batus you knew exactly what you would be doing but Ras Madrakah is huge and because of that size we can be much more flexible and design things around what the individual battlegroup wants.”

With terrain varying from flat desert to deep wadis and temperatures touching 40 degrees Celsius, the training provided a stern test for the UK contingent – many of whom were engaged in their first overseas exercise.

AirTpr Katie Hall (AAC), of 661 Sqn’s groundcrew, only joined the unit in March but five months later found herself bound for Oman.

“I was lucky to get on the deployment,” she said. “It was quite daunting, but I have enjoyed it.

“We have been pushing out to forward arming and refuelling points and helicopter landing sites, and there has been mountain flying as well.

“For the pilots the hardest part is the dust landings and, for us, getting vehicles out on the area has been quite rough – we have had a lot of popped tyres.

“But it is not too difficult, and you get used to it.

“Being quite new to the unit I had to go through various courses before I could even touch an aircraft, so coming here has given me a lot of experience. I now feel much more confident in my job role.”

Having served for more than seven years, lead aviation communications specialist Sgt Jordan Martin (AAC) is at the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of experience.

That said, Oman has still offered a high degree of challenge and variation both for him and his colleagues.

“The Wildcat handles completely differently in a hot climate like this,” he explained. “With the ambient air the pilot must apply more power and they are landing in dust clouds.

“For the guys on the ground at the HLS they can hear the aircraft, but cannot see it, and it has been relentless for the light aid detachments.

“Early on we were doing helicopter insertions for fire teams and we’ve been helping 29 Cdo control their guns on the ground. 2 Scots have also been using us in a deep recce role, getting the CO up in the air to give him a picture of what is going on – that is quite rare for us.”

Sgt Martin also said the exercise had created a better working relationship between land and air assets.

“When we go away with Infantry units, they do not always know how to use us,” he added. “But we have integrated with 4 Bde and 2 Scots, so they now have a better idea.

“We have had troops in the headquarters to help with the re-tasking of aircraft on missions, so we have been very central to things.” ▶

» **View from the desert**

Out on the ground, personnel faced new challenges of their own, with 2 Scots' anti-tank platoon fulfilling an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance role from Jackal vehicles.

"In the UK we would be completely dismounted," said Fus Marco Sansonna. "The ground has been tough to move on for the drivers, and the wadis can be dangerous at times.

"Being on a major exercise as a driver is completely new for me. You must maintain the vehicle every day and carry out checks to make sure it doesn't break down, so there is a lot involved.

"But we have used them to haul all our kit, which has been good. We have been screening areas and if we see any enemy vehicles we dismount and take them out.

"It is mostly working at platoon level and then joining up with the battlegroup for missions.

"I would like it to be busier as it can be frustrating sitting in a vehicle baking in the sun, but I understand why the tempo is slow at times."

Lcpl Ryan Hitching, part of the recce element from The Light Dragoons, agreed that the pace could be quicker but insisted the exercise had given the opportunity to further evolve in his relatively new role as a Jackal gunner.

Having previously deployed to Mali on Op Newcombe he said he was used to working in extreme heat and that the vehicles had stood up well to the



punishing terrain.

"Jackal was built for the desert," he added. "This is my first year as a gunner and only my second exercise in that role, so I'm still learning.

"This is four months of constantly doing my job and back in the UK we would not get to do as much operating from wagons.

"Most of the time we have been pushing ahead to recce the ground. We dismount and patrol as close as we can to a target to gather as much intelligence as possible. In that sense, the battlegroup has used us well."

Tpr Joe Irving (LD) was another soldier sampling a first overseas exercise and he believes Oman has been a good stepping-stone to potential future deployments.

"It has been great getting out to a hot country," he added. "Most of the stuff





happening in the world is in a climate like this, but our training is mostly done in the cold.

"Out here you have to keep on top of your weapon admin as systems can get dirty very quickly and there is a lot of condensation at night.

"This is my first time overseas and it has been quite exciting – opportunities like this are what you join the Army for.

"Being here has given me a greater understanding of my job role as a Jackal operator and as you're living with your muckers 24/7 you get to know them better."

Enemy position

Places on the desert deployment were highly sought after for the Reservists of Kohima Company.

Forming an enemy force for Khanjar Oman was the primary objective, but with plenty

of time available outside the serials they were able to conduct a training programme of their own.

"There was a lot of interest, and the general feeling is that this is the perfect amount of time to be mobilised for as it doesn't have a huge impact on civvy life," Lt Matty Jackman, of 4 Lancs' C Coy, told *Soldier*.

"It has allowed us to see the battlegroup at work and be part of that, while also doing our own training that we can take back to our units. It ticks all the boxes.

"Being a free-thinking enemy made the serials more interesting and our aim was to give the battlegroup the biggest headache possible.

"I would like to think we caused some major dramas for the recce screen. We had small command nodes working independently, using their initiative, and we put a lot into our counterattacks.

"We were able to call in fire missions with mortars and try to take out helicopters in the sky, so we had quite a few useful assets at our disposal.

"This is completely new, and I've always envied those who get to play the enemy on exercises. It is good fun, but we have taken it seriously and worked hard. We gave them a good run for their money."

The personnel completed a two-week pre-deployment training package before arriving in Oman and also had to familiarise themselves with the enemy vehicle of choice – the



Toyota Hilux.

"We have a lot of young soldiers for whom this is the first significant time away from home in a mobilised state," the officer, who works for the Home Office in his day job, added.

"We also have the serial mobilisers and ex-Regulars, so it is a good mix.

"It is imperative that this model is carried forward. It is a place where the Army Reserve can have a sustained impact on Regular training, while conducting drills of their own.

"It is also very retention positive."

What next?

Lead elements for the next staging of Exercise Desert Khanjar will start arriving in Oman in the coming weeks – the first of two four-month

battlegroup deployments planned for this year.

Facilities are in place for a sustained presence in the country, with personnel housed at the Renaissance Village contractor facility.

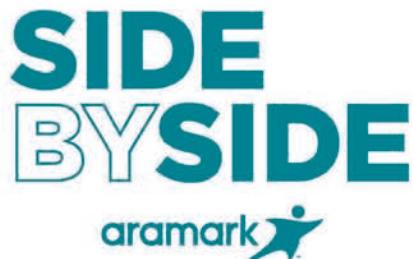
Among the amenities are gyms, football pitches, a swimming pool, shops, cafes and six cookhouses.

The British military has underlined its commitment to the region by establishing the Joint Logistics Support Base that includes hangars, office space, a medical centre and helicopter landing pads, plus other facilities.

The nearby town of Duqm has a deep-water port which can accommodate Royal Navy vessels, creating the possibility for integration of land, air, and sea forces on the same exercise. ■

Lt Matty Jackman, Lancs

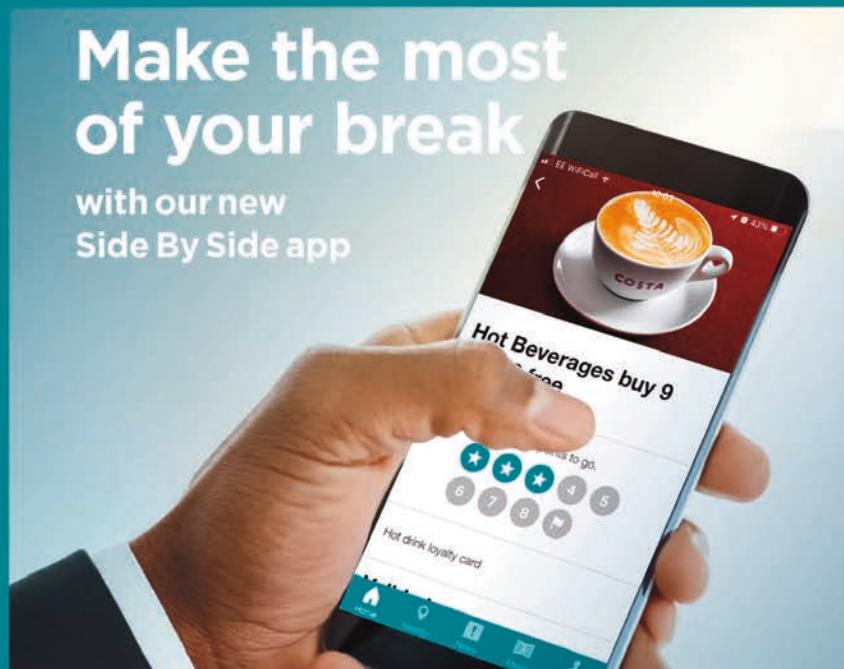




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We Move Together As One

CHANGING THE GAME

The future moves one click closer as Army experimentation continues apace

“

The more we practise the more information we can gather

”





NE day far from now, wars may be fought by artificially intelligent robots, with troops safely removed from the front line.

But before the stuff of science fiction can become reality, man and machine must first learn to work seamlessly together on the battlefield.

Efforts by the British Army to blend humans with technology are already under way and look set to gather pace in 2023 as the Future Soldier project evolves.

A number of military and civilian outfits are grappling with the complex challenge, among them the Army's Experimentation and Trials Group (ETG), which is charged with pioneering new capabilities and developing the next-generation combat team concept.

The unit's first major opportunity to press ahead with testing will come on Exercise Wessex Storm in the spring – however, it has already made some impressive gains since it was stood up in late 2022.

Having only brought its experimentation battalion – 2nd Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment – formally into the fold in September, alongside the five trials and development units it commands, the headquarters swiftly dispatched its personnel on a series of innovative drills through October and November.

on a series of innovative trials through October and November. Exercise Cerberus in Germany, followed by Project Convergence in the US, generated reams of evidence and data to take forward into this year.

And according to the formation's commanding officer, Col Toby Till, their role at the cutting edge of modernising the Army is something all those involved should be excited about.

“We haven’t had an organisation like this at our disposal since the 1920s when there was an experimental mechanised force,” he explained.

"So it's almost 100 years since we have cut a part of the British Army away from core business and given them a permanent task to think about how we want to fight.

“Technology changes so quickly that it’s only by committing resources you can actually get at how drones, new armoured vehicles, electronic warfare and long-range fires can all be integrated, to name just a few.

"We're in a sweet spot from now until 2025, where we can work out how we want to operate with all the Future Soldier capability so that when it arrives, we're already set and have worked out the doctrine and the tactics and have determined the conditions for the Army to be the best it can be."

With America doing similar work around modernisation, Project Convergence was focused on exploring interoperability of new tech with allies from the Five Eyes intelligence community.

Alongside the hosts and visiting Australian troops, the UK contingent comprised the ETG and personnel from across 20th Armoured Brigade Combat Team, equipped with hardware such as the guided multiple launch rocket system (GMLRS), Watchkeeper, the Giraffe agile multi-beam air surveillance radar and Zodiac – an artificial intelligence-enabled decision support tool.

As well as linking up with each other's kit, a core aim for each nation was streamlining the so-called sensor-decider-effector chain – in simple terms, the process by which information about the enemy is gathered, shared across



networks, analysed and acted upon

Success on the multinational, highly digitised battlefields of the future will depend on how efficiently this is carried out.

Col Till continued: "The key is not only to share data among ourselves, but cross-cue that data at pace with our primary ally, be that 2 Yorks passing information to the Americans' 7th Cavalry Regiment, or other elements of the Field Army doing likewise between a Royal Artillery Puma drone or Watchkeeper.

"Or we could take a feed from an American F35 to enable a long-range firing solution from a GMLRS, for example."

At the tactical end of this scale, members of 2 Yorks' Corunna Company were operating as a robotics and autonomous systems-enabled platoon.

Having become adept at working with drones and unmanned ground vehicles since being designated as the experimentation battalion in 2020, their stint in America saw them drilling down into the complexities of working with these as one entity (see panel) – part of a wider concept known as human-machine teaming.

In an ideal world, seamless communications would enable soldiers to fully exploit the capability provided by their kit – be that enhanced intelligence from a drone, or increased lethality through a robot-mounted weapon – in turn offering the “deciders” further up the chain of command better information.

But there are still significant ➤

Robot wars – what now?

TOOLED up with enhanced dismounted situational awareness devices (EDSAs), new drones and the ground robotic platoon vehicle (RPV), personnel from 2 Yorks' Corunna Company were at the sharp end of human-machine experimentation during Project Convergence.

Here, they reflect on how the kit performed and what they think needs to happen next...



Lt Ryan Booth

What worked: The EDSAs were superb and are always getting better – it's like having Google Maps on your chest. But the unmanned aerial systems

were an absolute game changer because we had eyes in the air to track the enemy and feed the information directly to our sections, rather than waiting for it to trickle down from Watchkeeper through the battlegroup.

Room for improvement: As the next-generation brigade combat team, we are still deciding how we would reorganise to fully utilise the robotic and autonomous systems – would you have an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance group at platoon level or push the sensors down to the section, for example? The more we practise, the more information we can gather to see what our procedures will be – and we look forward to progressing that on Wessex Storm.



Cpl Brandon Greaves

What worked: The drones were fantastic

What worked: The drones were fantastic. They have automatic obstacle avoidance and basically fly themselves. They also give a better idea of what's going on – everyone's involved in the picture, not like the olden days when you were told, 'right we're going in this direction for this long; head down and get on with it'. Now people know why something's happening. It also means the lowest level bod – let's say the drone operator – is making a bigger contribution to the overall plan.

Room for improvement: Moving forward I'd say we need to address training. The lower-level soldier has a bigger impact so we need to train them on the kit – whether that's aerial or ground vehicles – the same way we would train them on the rifle. Privates need to specialise in these jobs and we should make it more formal – you may as well get some qualifications out of not being a main line infantryer.



Pte Abdulaziz Switz

What worked: The RPVs take a lot of weight off the soldier. We had three and would use one for casualty extraction – we would send it in if someone was

wounded during a mission and bring them back to the platoon sergeant. The Americans also had one that you could fit a weapons system to so then it becomes like a fire support team.

Room for improvement: The main challenges were software issues and the terrain – you would sometimes lose control of the RPV until you got closer, but once we get the network running our commanders will find a way to use them to our advantage.

PROJECT CONVERGENCE IN NUMBERS



450

BRITISH TROOPS INVOLVED

3

NATIONS TAKING PART

17

TECHNOLOGIES SHOWCASED, INCLUDING LONG-RANGE FIRES, DRONES, AUTONOMOUS FIGHTING VEHICLES AND NEXT-GENERATION SENSORS



» technical hurdles to overcome. This is something Maj Sam Thomas (R Anglian) – the Infantry Trials and Development Unit's lead for command and battlespace management – and a team of experts overseeing soldier system integration are bent on solving.

"We're not talking about AI yet – this is entry-level human-machine teaming, not epic-level," said the officer. "Currently, it falls down on technology because of the amount of engineering support you require to keep the robots and the networks up and running in a harsh comms environment.

"Reliability, the quality of your links and power are the limiting factors. And soldiers need to be able to run it themselves, not rely on a software engineer.

"Unmanned systems may give troops more information on what the enemy is doing, but at the moment they are always considering, 'is my UAS going to run out of batteries, is my robot going to lose its link?'"

With that in mind, an unbroken three-week stretch at an urban training facility in California's Mojave Desert was the perfect opportunity to build and test a network fit for purpose in a close combat scenario.

"We need to move data around from soldier to machine and beyond – so across many soldiers, to many machines, all in one big grouping," continued Maj Thomas.

"But there are lots of things that make this environment really difficult for network stability.

"For one, the soldier as a platform is unpredictable – it lies down, it hides behind walls, it breaks antennas. That's not to mention the enemy – we could be jammed or forced into cover



Maj Sam Thomas, R Anglian

where the signal can't propagate.

"It's hard enough to do at the individual level – but then the robotics network needs to be at a much higher capacity in terms of bandwidth.

"And then you bring in things like the drone camera – you need full motion video over that network, requiring a lot of data.

"However, once that sensor becomes exploitable by everyone else on the system, that's a powerful change in dynamic."

Working towards this goal, Maj Thomas and his civilian counterparts were able to first establish a network to share data with a decider at company-group level, before using different software to make the information available to US colleagues.

However, as the 39-year-old pointed out, communications will always remain a vulnerability on the battlefield, rendering any technological wizardry moot at a stroke.

"Unless we come up with something that's pretty clever, there's nothing to stop the enemy dropping the jamming bomb and turning off all our comms – effectively bringing us down to their level, like the Taliban did through their use of IEDs.

"The other side will find a way to even the playing field if they can. And our job is to make the playing field uneven."

That sentiment lies at the very heart of Project Convergence and the work planned this year to build on its lessons.

In the ever-evolving technical arms race, it's vital that Britain and her allies maintain their edge over would-be adversaries.

And with the geopolitical situation as volatile as ever, it's reassuring to know the Army's boffins – and the troops on the ground – are on the case. Watch this space. ■



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“ We have done training in built-up areas before, but this is a different level

Tpr Steven O'Sullivan, RY

NEW HEIGHTS



Reservists train to the max on the Rock of Gibraltar

MILITARY exercises might have bounced back since the pandemic, but with the Army reshaping fast to meet future threats it is vital for soldiers to squeeze as much value as possible from every stint in the field.

This is especially so for Reservists, who balance military commitments with other roles.

A contingent of around 100 from The Royal Yeomanry did just that during ten days in Gibraltar on Exercise Barbary Star.

Not only did they enjoy some valuable time away with their unit, but they cashed-in on the territory's wide array of natural and man-made features.

Here, troops explain why the package provided a golden opportunity to take their skills and drills to the next level...

LOCATION

It may cover just 2.6 square miles, but size isn't everything and Gibraltar is in fact one of the richest training environments available to the British Army.

It features a port, an abundance of narrow, winding streets, an extensive network of tunnels carved into the 1,400-foot Rock, disused gun emplacements and a purpose-built training village.

All these areas, including the city streets, are available to personnel training here, making it the sort of challenging, complex environment many exercise planners dream of – especially now that commander Field Army (CFA) has instructed that at least half of all training conducted by front-line units should be urban-focused.

"We have done training in built-up areas before, but this is a different level," Tpr Steven O'Sullivan told *Soldier*.

A Reservist for the past four years and in his civvy life a postgraduate student at Bath University, the Serviceman also served on Op Cabrit in Poland in 2020.

"Poland's terrain was completely flat but here you have more factors to consider – inclines and very complex urban environments, for example," he said.

The overarching exercise scenario was for The Royal **»**

Words: Steve Muncey Pictures: Graeme Main

» Yeomanry to locate, observe and then hunt down and eliminate a group of insurgents. They began by landing in Rosia Bay on Royal Navy Gibraltar Squadron boats before patrolling through the town, setting up an observation post, moving into the tunnels in pursuit of the opfor and then conducting a final assault on the enemy's headquarters at the mock village in the Buffadero training area, high up on the southern slopes of the Rock.

"The Rib insertion was just superb," said Tpr O'Sullivan. "And the clearance of the tunnels was very challenging due to the lack of light and the tactics we had to learn. It was unlike anything we have done before."

The Royal Yeomanry's commanding officer, Lt Col Charles Field (pictured below), had no doubts about the merits of the location, despite its modest acreage.

"It's proved its value to us in bucket loads," he said.

"Having a live environment for the urban patrol work, for example, where the troops learnt about adopting the appropriate posture when moving among Gibraltar's population, and being able to roll that into an exercise scenario, was fantastic.

"Overall, it's been tremendous for morale – the soldiers all enjoyed the insertion by sea as well as the final attack on the training village. They will be talking about this exercise for years to come."

NEW THREATS

This was the first time The Royal Yeomanry had trained in Gibraltar for more than 20 years, and the opportunity was well-timed to say the least.

Normally mounted in light armoured



“

This package has been very relevant to us because dismounted skills are a core part of our job

Lt Col Charles Field, RY

”





vehicles, its squadrons are typically well-armed and highly mobile reconnaissance teams whose primary role is to recce the enemy and call in fires or an infantry assault.

However, their role is evolving as the Army adjusts its capabilities to emerging threats – and during Exercise Barbary Star all the training was done on foot.

“We might be mounted close-combat soldiers but this package has been very relevant to us because dismounted skills are a core part of our job,” explained Lt Col Field.

According to Cpl Luke Fearon, a former Regular with The 9/12th Royal Lancers, the training in Gibraltar reflected what’s going on around the world.

“Back in the days of Afghan, light cav were occasionally dropped off somewhere and expected to help clear buildings, so this type of training has been around for a while, but it’s being ramped up,” he said.

“Looking into the future, dense urban areas are likely to be the environments we will be operating in so there is an obvious need to develop our dismounted skills.

“If the Infantry do not have sufficient manpower we are expected to support them to whatever degree they require, but if we’ve had little exposure to this type of training we’d obviously be pretty useless to them.”

GOING UNDERGROUND

Gibraltar has a unique training environment at its disposal – 50km of tunnels running through the famous Rock that dominates the skyline.

Cynics might point out that fighting underground is relatively rare so valuable Reservist training time should be spent on other things, but recent conflicts suggest the discipline needs to be taken seriously.

During the Syrian civil war, rebel groups have dug tunnels to attack government forces and allied militias. Hezbollah used them to enable rocket attacks on Israel. And in Afghanistan the notorious subterranean base of the Mujahideen and the Taliban, the Tora Bora complex, extended for 25km.

“Fighting in tunnels is a skill set we undoubtedly need to know about and it’s been really good to develop it here because these sorts of training areas aren’t often available to us,” explained LCpl Jonathan Phelps.

“Operating in a pitch-black environment is a challenge in itself. Clearing buildings is relatively predictable as you know how houses or apartments are usually laid out, but with tunnels you don’t know what to expect or know what’s around the corner, and the lack of light and space further complicates the task.”

Capt Ned Mitchell said the underground system had provided an experience that’s hard to replicate.

“The chaos of battle in tunnels, extracting casualties, the cacophony of weapons discharging, the shouting and smoke grenades in a confined space really test their ability to communicate and function as a team,” he added.

“Also, the new individual training requirements mean combat medics, for example, have to do backfill casualty drills on an annual basis and we could do things like that here in a really challenging setting.

“Overall, the value we get from being here is huge.” ▶



“It’s nice to have the time to get hands-on with the gear and ensure our skills and drills are up to standard

Cpl Luke Fearon, RY



» SHARING SKILLS

Exercise Barbary Star was the first overseas manoeuvre for 1st Deep Recce Strike Brigade Combat Team – of which The Royal Yeomanry and their Regular counterparts, 1st The Queen’s Dragoon Guards, are part.

Having already supported each other on UN deployments to Mali and in Poland on Operation Cabrit, the package provided a valuable opportunity for the Reservists to develop and gauge the skills of less experienced personnel – a vital function for any unit operating with seasoned Regulars.

“We’ve got a lot of new guys, so being in a recce role the extra knowledge and experience this package provided will help familiarise them with what the Regulars do and how they work,” explained Cpl Fearon.

“It’s been a good opportunity for us because on a drill night we don’t usually have the time to set up operating procedures, like we’ve been doing here, or get all the kit and the radios out; it’s nice to have the chance to get hands-on with the gear and ensure our skills and drills are up to standard.”

One of the 14 Regular soldiers taking part in the exercise, Tpr Taylor Bennison (QDG), was encouraged by what he saw.

“I’ve been with the regiment for two years and never worked with the Reserve before,” he said.

“I found it challenging at first but as you get to know them and see what their strengths and weaknesses are you can build on that and by the end of the ex we were all gelling really well.

“The Regulars are stronger on field stuff in general, but the other night when we did close target reconnaissance reports it was really helpful to have some very smart, highly educated Reservists around to help us produce the intel very quickly.”

RESERVIST INCENTIVE

Having the chance to deploy a wide range of soldiering skills in a picturesque and challenging location is one of the reasons most Reservists sign on the dotted line – and Gibraltar certainly seemed to live up to everyone’s expectations.

“Barbary Star has been a really good experience and there haven’t been many of those over recent years,” commented LCpl Phelps.

“If you joined the Reserve to get out there and do something different then exercises like this are a great incentive for staying in,” added the junior NCO, who signed up in 2017.

“This package hasn’t been a holiday, though, it’s been hard work. They’ve ragged us and we’ve spent a lot of time tabbing and patrolling in the tunnels, which was hot and arduous, but then we get a couple of days at the end to explore Gibraltar.

“As a Reservist you’ve got to take the rough with the smooth.

“I went to Normandy for D-Day 75 and we had the chance to spend some time in France as a result, which was good.

“On Op Cabrit in Poland, the standout moments were a live-fire ex, putting Americans and Poles onto targets, »



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“I’m not sitting at a desk, I’m out patrolling and having new experiences. That’s what I joined up for

Tpr Diego Gouveia, RY



» and learning how we’d all work together if we had to defend ourselves from attack – it was a real bonus to see how they operate and the kit they use.”

Tpr Diego Gouveia, a design engineer for a renewable energy company in his civvy career, added: “This is my first major exercise since joining and I found it hard at first – we marched 16 miles in a day, through streets and tunnels, starting at 0700 and finishing at 1700.

“But I’m not complaining, this has been great for binding us and working as a team and I’ve learnt new skills like using the night-vision system effectively in the tunnels.

“Overall, it’s been a brilliant outlet for me.

“I’m not sitting at a desk, I’m doing something completely different and out patrolling and having new experiences. That’s what I joined up for.”

ROUND-THE-CLOCK IMPROVEMENT

The value of a dedicated training stint to a group of motivated personnel cannot be underestimated, said the exercise’s lead instructor SSgt Tom Biddlestone – a former Blues and Royals soldier until he switched to The Royal Yeomanry in 2014.

He believes the Reservists squeezed months’ worth of training into ten days.

“Compared to Regular exercises I’ve experienced, the tempo here has been higher and they’ve learnt quickly because

everyone who is here wants to be here – their attitude and enthusiasm is superb,” he added.

“They want loads of additional information from me all the time, even in their downtime, in order to improve as soldiers.”

The unit will be taking away some valuable lessons from the after-action review.

Buildings and a tunnel network underneath an old gun emplacement were cleared too hastily, while casualty reporting was a consistent weakness throughout the exercise.

Both aspects will be worked on and perfected in the weeks and months to come.

“This has been a good chance to demonstrate the true complexity of the urban environment and it brought out some learning points around situational awareness which has given us a basis for moving forwards,” explained Capt Rob Joles, the operations officer for the exercise.

“Training for Reservists is held at a lower baseline than it is for Regulars and you surge that when required, so one of the big successes of this package, for me, has been to see the progression from the pre-deployment urban training we did in Leicestershire through to the tunnel serials here and then, finally, the clearance of the training village.

“It goes to show that when given some consistent training in one block of time we can go from our normal jogging up to a fast run really quickly.” ■



TALK TO US

During these uncertain times, it can be difficult to ask for help.

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ADR010238



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ARMY
BE THE BEST



'Role fitness tests are a drag'

THE Army's role fitness test (RFT) is not age restricted and so is still applicable to those personnel who can serve up to the age of 60.

While I know it is variable between trades, at no time in my 35 years as a Reserve combat medical technician have I had to run two kilometres nonstop with webbing, daysack and weapon.

At 53 years old I only just made the grade. However, there were older personnel failing this and to me the time seemed very tight – you have to be basically jogging the entire length to pass.

I wouldn't be surprised if there were a lot of short- and long-term joint and back injuries in the future. – **Name and address supplied**

Col Colette MacDonald, Assistant Head, Professional Development, replies: With some exceptions, all personnel must complete the RFT (soldier) – the minimum standard of role-related physical fitness –

once a year. The transition from the legacy Army fitness test to this system for Reserves will be complete by April.

Extensive scientific trials were used to develop the standards, which reflect the requirements of specific military roles and are age and gender free.

There are no exemptions for age, but under exceptional circumstances a waiver may be granted.

To achieve the required fitness level and reduce injury risk you should prepare yourself using the Army Physical Training System (page 20) for at least eight weeks.

The load carriage element relates to moving and carrying external loads in a sustained manner.

The trials included Regular and Reserve personnel aged between 18 and 57 and no significant difference was found between the pass rates of younger and older personnel.

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'IT'S TIME MORE TOURS WERE RECOGNISED'

● I CANNOT work out why we do not issue a medal for Op Cabrit and other similar deployments.

We are awarded one by the Estonians and troops from some other nations on tour there are allowed to wear it, so why can't we?

It would go a long way to helping with retention, as would a service medal that recognises other tasks such as the Salisbury attack clean-up or Covid tasks where people spent months away from home.

I think the Army needs to re-evaluate what it gives medals for.

– **Name and address supplied**

Col Leigh Drummond, Assistant Head, Personal Services, replies:

The rules governing medallic recognition are considered against a set of risk and rigour criteria.

Service on Op Cabrit does not qualify and rules on wearing foreign and Commonwealth awards not subject to a Royal Warrant are set by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

The Nato Kaitse Medal, awarded by Estonian defence for Op Cabrit, has not been authorised for wear by the FCDO and the same applies to tours in Poland.

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

✉ mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk



CAREERS

SaluteMyJob has launched a cyber career jumpstart programme to attract, train, qualify and place members of the Forces community into jobs. Visit salutemyjob.com/ex-military-cyber-security-career-pathways

The Open University Disabled Veterans' Scholarship Fund has closed for the 2022/23 year. The initiative offers free study places to former personnel who have a disability or injury resulting from their military service – including mental health conditions. To find out more visit open.ac.uk



COMPETITIONS

HOAY winner

November: Heath Tennant, Warminster

Spine line winner

November: Adrian Condren, Betws-y-Coed, Conwy



SEARCHLINE

Armed Forces charity Little Troopers has opened a therapy programme for teenagers feeling the impact of family life in the military. It offers one-to-one sessions with a qualified therapist for those up to age 18. Referrals can be made by a parent, school, community group or welfare worker. Visit littletroopers.net

The University of Chester's Westminster Centre for Research in Veterans wants to learn more about the experiences of former British Army personnel from the Indian subcontinent and West Indies. The research – funded by charity The Forces in Mind Trust – is examining how service shaped the lives of ex-troops and their loved ones. Contact veterans@chester.ac.uk



WELFARE

If you have a problem, your **chain of command** and **unit welfare teams** are always a good starting point. They may also be able to help you find local support groups not listed below. **Padres** can provide individuals with

pastoral care and moral guidance, whatever their faith. Here are some other national organisations that can offer help:

Army HIVE

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

army.mod.uk/hives

Forcesline

A free and confidential telephone helpline and email service for Regulars, Reserves, ex-Forces and their families. 0800 731 4880

ssafa.org.uk/get-help/forcesline

Army Welfare Service

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

ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

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

Drinkline

A free, confidential helpline 0300 123 1110

NHS support

nhs.uk/livewell

BULLYING/HARASSMENT/DISCRIMINATION

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

Army Speak Out Helpline

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

Defence BHD Helpline

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

CHILDCARE/CARING/FAMILIES

Army Families Federation

The independent voice of Army families, offering confidential advice and support 01264 554004 aff.org.uk

Flexible working has been

introduced by the Army to help personnel tailor their work-life balance. This includes arrangements such as remote working, variable finish times and restricted separation. Read more in the *Flexible Working and You* guide on Modnet. Regulars can find out how this impacts pay and benefits at discovermybenefits.mod.gov.uk

DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

Forces Pension Society

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

forcespensionsociety.org

Joining Forces Credit Union

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

Money Helper

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

National Debtline

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

nationaldebtline.org

StepChange Debt Charity

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

GAMBLING

National Gambling Helpline

Free information, support and counselling for problem gamblers in the UK 0808 802 0808

britishlegion.org.uk

Advice Office

The MoD's tri-Service focal point to provide Armed Forces personnel and their dependants with civilian housing information

07814 612120

rc-pers-jshao-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services

01748 833797
spaces.org.uk

Veterans Gateway

A first point of contact for veterans seeking support

veteransgateway.org.uk

INJURY/SICKNESS

Personnel Recovery Centres

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

LONELINESS

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

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

afvbc.net

Samaritans

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

samaritans.org

The Royal British Legion

Contact the friendly team for information about local groups and support services

0808 802 8080

britishlegion.org.uk

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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

Combat Stress 24/7 Helpline

0800 138 1619

Headspace

All British Army personnel and civil servants can access this mindfulness app for free with an @armymail.mod.uk email address

work.headspace.com/britisharmy/member-enroll

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

NHS
nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters

Samaritans
116 123
samaritans.org

The Ripple Pond
A self-help support network for relatives of physically or psychologically injured

troops and veterans
0333 900 1028
theripplepond.org

Togetherall
A safe, online community where people support each other anonymously to improve mental health
togetherall.com

**RELATIONSHIP
BREAKDOWN/ABUSE**

Aurora New Dawn
Safety and support for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence and

stalking 02394 216 816
aurorand.org.uk

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

Relate
UK provider of relationship support
relate.org.uk



REUNIONS

The 25th Anniversary of the **Artillery**

Clerks' Association will be held in the Royal Artillery sergeants' mess, Larkhill on June 23-25. Visit artyclerkassn.org for further details and updates.

The Army Apprentices National Association celebrates 100 years of Army apprentices on May 13-14 at Mickleover Court Hotel, Derby and at the National Memorial Arboretum. For more information on the milestone event please contact info.armyana@gmail.com

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No. 968

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Alternatively, email a photograph of the image highlighting the differences to

comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk

The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win a superb **J2 base layer top and leggings set from Fourth Element**, courtesy of Level Peaks – a leading supplier of kit and clothing to the MoD.

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The winner's name will appear in the March issue and all the usual competition rules apply.



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12 January 2023
Time: 1230 - 1330hrs

INSIDE THE RANGER REGIMENT

For the next episode in the ASN Webinar series we are pleased to speak to women currently serving in the Ranger Regiment.

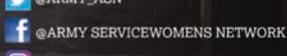
They will talk candidly about the Ranger Assessment Cadre, the All Arms Ranger Course, the training cycle, operations and the different roles in a Ranger Team.



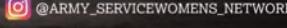
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15 x	£200
10 x	£100

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CONTACT US

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Web: www.armysportlottery.com



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REVIEWS



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PODCASTS

PICK OF THE MONTH:

Moonage Daydream

The sound and vision of an artistic legend...

► WHEN David Bowie died at the beginning of 2016, he left behind an extraordinary legacy that continues to have a profound influence on the music scene.

A cultural icon for more than four decades, his work constantly evolved as he experimented with different styles and methods of composition while embracing collaboration.

Elsewhere, he dabbled in painting, sculpture and acting – all amid an ever-changing image that refused definition.

Bowie, by all accounts, was a complex man of both sensitivity and vision. Often dividing critical opinion, he could be controversial, brazenly pushing the envelope with his image and views on human sexuality – forcing society to confront difference in a far less tolerant age.

Given his significance in popular culture, it was perhaps inevitable that his life would be the subject of a biopic at some stage. But to be clear at the outset, *Moonage Daydream* is not a docu-drama in the form of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, about Queen's work, or *Rocketman* on the life of Elton John.

Released in selected cinemas in the autumn – and now on DVD, Blu-Ray and digital platforms – it is, instead, a psychedelic trip into the artist's mind accompanied by an exceptional soundtrack and some rarely-seen footage.



MOVIES



Opening with the **Pet Shop Boys** remix of the classic *Hallo Spaceboy*, the action moves gracefully from Bowie's glam-rock genesis during the late 1960s pop scene through to his later projects with producer **Brian Eno**.

The film then examines the artist's successive metamorphoses and the later period of his life with a series of albums in the 2000s that included the likes of *Outside*, *Hours*, *Heathen* and his final contribution with *Black Star*.

While *Moonage Daydream* – a project compiled by **Brett Morgen** and backed by Bowie's family – opts for a collection of music, footage and images rather than a straight narrative, it is nonetheless successful in telling a story.

Fragments of interviews shed light on the rationale to his thinking, with reflections on his South London beginnings and his many changes covered.

Retrospective musings as well as appearances on chat shows are blended to provide a useful commentary and decent depth of perspective.

The underpinning footage of Bowie in concert throughout his life, with performances of *Space Oddity* and *Heroes* in the line-up, is exceptional.

Meanwhile, special mixes of tracks including *Sound and Vision* plus orchestral

variations on the star's work from *The Low Symphony* by American composer **Philip Glass** add to the overall experience.

Yet the film also pulls no punches in laying bare the excesses of the artist's lifestyle and his complex personality, to produce a 360-degree view.

The skilful fashioning of this combination makes *Moonage Daydream* a beautifully presented offering that tells the story of David Bowie's life more effectively than any conventional docu-drama ever could.

Great care has clearly been taken in selecting the footage while the masterly interweaving of interviews and other commentary ensures the film does not descend into a simple collection of psychedelic snapshots.

It is, however, worth buying the movie on the best possible format – such as Blu-Ray – as sound and visuals both deserve savouring in what is an essential watch. ■

VERDICT:

An exceptional and deeply emotive piece of work



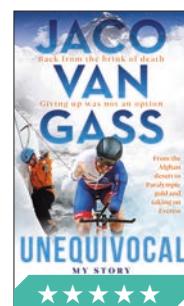
REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, SOLDIER

BOOKS

Unequivocal
By Jaco Van Gass

BEGINNING with his childhood in South Africa, this is the inspirational autobiography of ex-para Jaco Van Gass, who in 2009 was left with life-changing injuries in an RPG strike in Afghanistan. The book's title is a reference to the "unequivocals" – patients brought back from the brink of death. After intense rehabilitation, the author fought back to become a first-class mountaineer, trekking unsupported to the North Pole with the Walking with the Wounded expedition in 2011, and later becoming a world record-holding Paralympic cyclist. I couldn't put this book down.

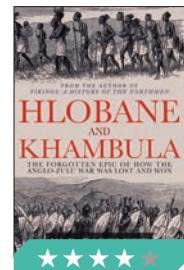
Sgt Adam Jackson, Para



If You Wake at Midnight
By Andrew Marriott

SINCE its introduction in the 1980s, Lariam – the so-called wonder drug that would protect everyone against Malaria – has become notorious for the horrific side-effects reported by patients. Psychotic or vivid nightmares, unexplained violence, suicide and even murder are implicated in its use. The MoD introduced strict new guidelines in 2016 after a House of Commons defence committee inquiry, but it had previously been prescribed more commonly for deploying troops – including to former officer Andrew Marriot. In his thoroughly researched book, he charts his quest to find out the truth behind what he believes is an outright betrayal. This account is a real eye-opener, which genuinely makes you question whether you should listen to the experts.

Scott Roberts, ex-RIFLES



Hlobane and Khambula
By WB Bartlett

MOST of us have heard of or seen the film *Zulu*, but there was more to the war than the battles of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift. And this book tells the tale of the second column sent to Zululand under colonels Evelyn Wood and

Redvers Buller – both holders of the VC – which saved the day by inflicting a crushing defeat on the enemy. Among the formation's number was Louis-Napoleon, Imperial Prince of France, whose death in a skirmish outraged Queen Victoria. However, heroes from the lower levels of society are mentioned in this account too, not just the officer class. It is a good read – well researched and written – which those interested in the Zulu wars will find very useful.

Andy Kay, ex-RS

PICK OF THE MONTH:



12



Dojos Rising

Cobra Kai series returns with further fighting action

Out now on consoles

► MARTIAL arts movies have proved a box office money spinner since the days of the iconic **Bruce Lee** – and the video-game world has never been far behind.

Over the years players have battled a host of opponents in fighting titles that have encompassed every aspect of hand-to-hand combat – from the high discipline and honour of the sporting arena to ugly back-street brawls.

It was perhaps inevitable, then, that the current Netflix series *Cobra Kai* would be followed with a console tie-in. A continuation of the 1980s *Karate Kid* films starring **Ralph Macchio** and **William Zabka**, the show follows the now adult lead characters inspiring a new generation of fighters.

Dojos Rising is the second video game based



on the story from US publisher GameMill. Having secured acclaim for the 2D brawler of the same name, the latest outing is a three-dimensional affair with a more open-world flavour.

The plot broadly follows the outline of the first game. In this case, however, there are three karate tribes fighting for supremacy, with the fearsome Eagle Fang faction joining the Miyagi-Do and Cobra Kai rivals.

The trio will ultimately lock horns in their local

All Valley competition – but must first recruit the likely fighters who might lead them to victory, and this means going toe-to-toe with the opposition in some unofficial encounters.

A series of venues such as the local high school and leisure parks around the California locality provide the backdrops for these brawls in which usual rules do not apply. Chairs, bats and street furniture all provide weapons for clashes.





Each of the 30-or-so playable characters from the TV show also have their own special abilities, which can be deployed to take down opponents. These are invaluable as a legion of fighters soon queue up to do damage.

The result is an entertaining romp with frenetic martial arts action in which a degree of team management and development are as important as having the reflexes of a hyperactive eight-year-old when it comes to all-out battle.

Action is reasonably slick throughout – with multiple opponents approaching from all directions – and there is plenty of satisfaction to be gained from a successful combo or dispatching a hapless thug headfirst into a bin.

There are a decent range of solo and multiplayer game modes too, with playable set-piece encounters in the school and car repair garage particularly well rendered, while cut-scenes are presented with some notable manga-style artwork.

A couple of downsides – the £40-plus price tag is too steep and there are some minor technical glitches, although these do not seem to detract from gameplay.

All in all, though, *Dojos Rising* is good, clean fun. Steer clear if you are looking for an adult-themed beat 'em up such as *Mortal Combat*, but fans of the Netflix series – or anyone looking for a brawler in the spirit of *Double Dragon* – will not be disappointed. ■

VERDICT:

Decent, clean martial arts fun



REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, SOLDIER

GAMES RELEASES



Missile Command Recharged

Out now on all formats

A MAINSTAY of the 1980s – when Cold War paranoia about a nuclear exchange reached new heights – this classic Atari game has been reworked into a modern gem. *Missile Command* casts players as the overseer of three defensive silos with the simple task of defending cities from waves of incoming projectiles. The 2D action is frantic, well-paced and will satisfy any aspiring Patriot battery bosses. It is well worth checking out the other games in the *Recharged* series, including the timeless *Asteroids*, *Black Widow* and *Breakout*, which are inexpensive and great coffee-break fun.

Cliff Caswell, Soldier



NBA 2K23

Out now on all formats

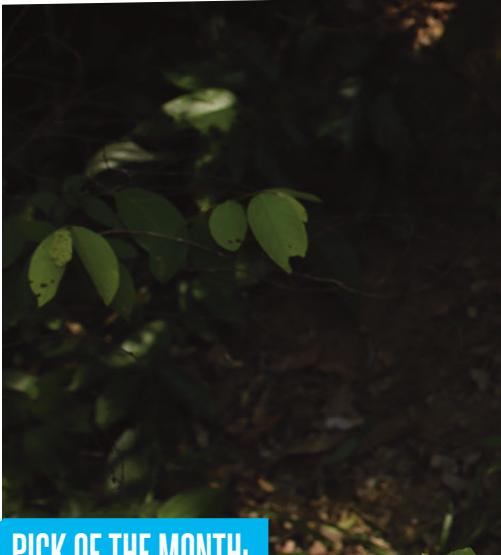
THE popular basketball franchise has come bouncing back with its regular annual overhaul. And it is showing off the capabilities of the latest console generation with style. There is plenty to keep fans entertained here, with several game modes and different ways to play while the action is slick throughout. A new stamina system for players and revised controls feature among the refinements. The Xbox version I sampled was visually very pleasing too – comparable to watching a live game on television. Followers of the US scene, and the sport in general, will no doubt be pleased.

Sgt Robert Weiderman, RLC



WIN
a Nintendo Switch Lite

– page 15



PICK OF THE MONTH:

The Unconventional Soldier

Former special observers shine light on niche units of the military world

“ONCE we start struggling to find interesting people to interview, we will finish it,” veteran Kevin O’Keeffe says as he looks ahead to another busy year with *The Unconventional Soldier*.

Launched in 2020 to chart the inception of 4/73 (Sphinx) Special Observation Post Battery, Royal Artillery and the multiple operational tours completed since, the podcast is now in its third series and covers a far wider remit.

O’Keeffe and co-host Colin Ferguson are the perfect guides for a deep dive on the Army’s long-range surveillance and reconnaissance patrols unit as both completed military careers

PODCASTS



A member of 4/73 (Sphinx) Special Observation Post Battery, Royal Artillery in the Malaysian jungle on Exercise Lateo Helang
Picture: Graeme Main

spanning more than two decades – the majority of which was spent with the formation.

"We wanted to create a verbal history of our unit as there is nothing official that looks back at its past," O'Keeffe, who left the Service in 2006, tells *Soldier* as he recalls how the series started.

"It was about capturing the key moments in that timeframe and creating an audio piece that could potentially be the basis for a book.

"Some of our veterans are getting older now so it was also a chance for them to tell their stories while they still can."

Early episodes include an interview with the founder of the special observer concept, a look at the selection and training process and a focus on those who served in the battery in years past and present.

But the scope soon widened to include reflections on the Falklands War with a veteran from 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, as well as deployments to the likes of the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Future instalments will feature the American 75th Ranger Regiment, the Royal Air Force's longest serving female Chinook crew member and a former battery commander discussing the world of private security.

"We have branched out into other areas of

the military and have done quite a lot on the Falklands War, for example," O'Keeffe continues.

"These are real-life stories from soldiers and that is what we want to get across. We do not want to big ourselves up – it is about bringing the stories of our guests through.

"The episode with The Royal Irish Regiment in Afghanistan has been adopted by the Imperial War Museum and the Royal Irish Association, and we have just recorded one with a former Royal Navy clearance diver. We like to look at those unknown units – there are a lot of non-special forces roles that are unique."

With such lengthy careers in uniform to their name, the duo have plenty of contacts to call upon when it comes to interview subjects, although they cast their net further afield to create a broader base.

"Some of it is people we know but others we email cold – if you don't ask, you don't get," the presenter adds.

"This is aimed at a civilian audience, so it needs to be user friendly and avoid a lot of the military jargon. But for Service personnel it could highlight a career path they perhaps didn't know about, such as the Navy divers – we want it to be interesting for everyone."

Audience figures average around 3,000

listeners per episode, numbers that have been well received by the duo, who describe the podcast as a "hobby more than a job".

"I enjoy the attention it is getting but we are not chasing numbers," O'Keeffe concludes. "This is non-commercial and there is no pressure to reach a certain amount of subscribers. We do it because we enjoy it." ■

● *The Unconventional Soldier* is available to download from the usual podcast providers. Follow @TheUCS473 on Twitter for updates on future episodes



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Unconventional
Soldier**

INTERVIEW: RICHARD LONG, *SOLDIER*



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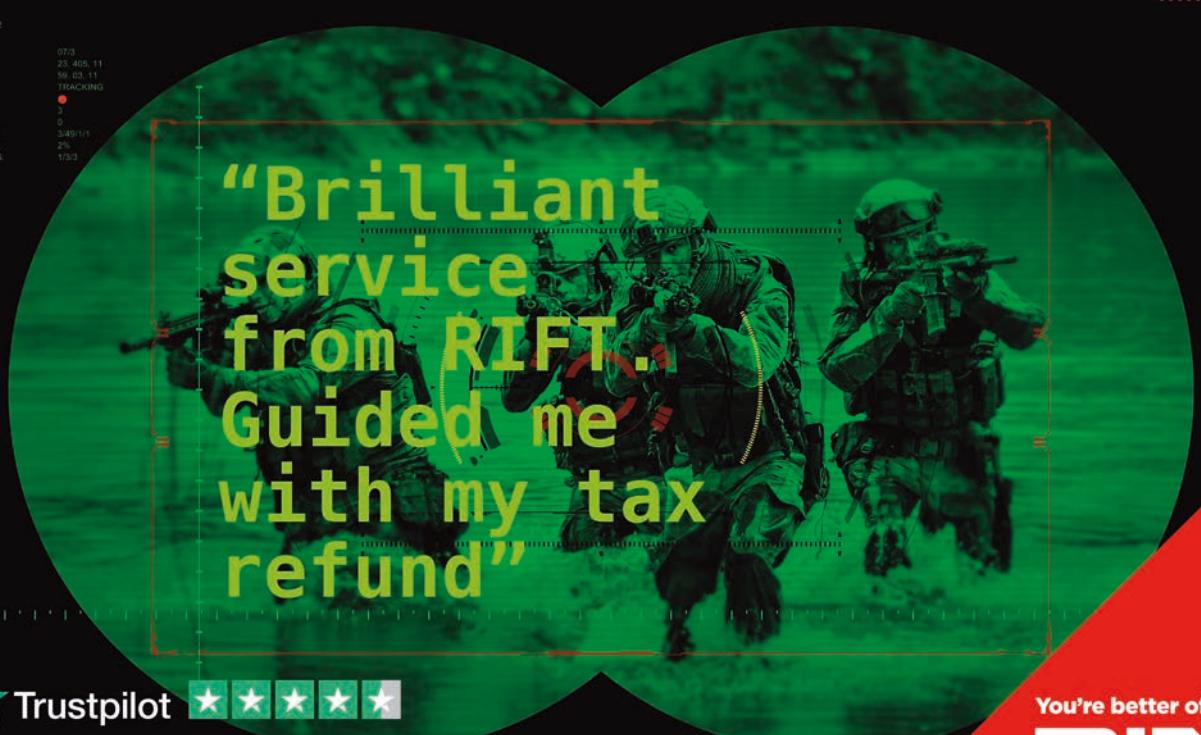
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SOLDIER SPORT



PACKING A PUNCH

YOUTH proved to be no barrier for the Army boxing team as they produced a strong display against domestic and international rivals in their latest round-robin tournament. Read more on the bouts, as well as the thoughts of the squad's new head coach, on pages 68-69...



FEMALE FIGHTERS REVEL IN BOX CUP SPOTLIGHT

DEVELOPMENT team fighters LCpl Felicity Johnstone (RLC) and Lt Rachel Rose (AGC (SPS)) topped the standings as the Army enjoyed a successful outing at the Women's Winter Box Cup.

The event, staged by England Boxing to showcase the rapid development in the female sport, saw a total of 174 athletes contest 87 bouts over the course of the weekend – with seven different nations represented, including Cyprus, Poland and Ireland.

Given the level of interest, the in-ring action was also live-streamed on the organisation's YouTube channel.

Johnstone (pictured right) defeated Merseyside and Cheshire's Rhea Kanu on a split decision in the Elite B 52kg final and told *SoldierSport* it was the perfect tonic following her defeat in the semi-finals of the National Development Championships earlier in the season.

"That result fuelled my fire," she said. "I didn't know anything about my opponent, which was probably a good thing. I could see she was shorter than me, so I tried to keep it long – it was a tactic that worked well."

"I started boxing three years ago but didn't get my first bout until early 2022. Before that I was in the gym, training constantly."

"The Army development team reached out to me after last season's individual championships, and I've now had seven bouts in a year."

"I feel as though I have really progressed. I'm thinking a lot more about my boxing and what the coaches have taught me, instead of just going in the ring and throwing punches."

"Now it's about getting further experience and a few more bouts before I have another go at the development championships."

A third-round stoppage saw Rose down the Royal Navy's



**"IT
WAS A
TACTIC
THAT
WORKED
WELL"**

Billie Matthews in the Elite B 66kg final, but there was disappointment for Pte Lily Devlin (RLC) and LCpl Terri-Leigh Stuart (REME) as they lost their respective finals.

Devlin's defeat in the Elite A 57kg ranks came at the hands of Holly Heffron, who also triumphed over the soldier on her way to becoming national champion last year.

"It was a good competitive bout," Devlin (pictured above) said. "Performance wise, I was much better than last time, and I took a lot of the stuff we have been working on in the gym into the ring."

"Female boxing is massive and it was great to be part of an event like this in a strong Army team."

"The plan now is to get a good four-week training block in at the start of this year and the focus then will be on competing in the national championships in March and April."

"I believe I can go there and win, especially with the improvements I have made."

Career courses and work commitments meant Stuart (pictured below) – recipient of the rising star accolade at last year's Army Sports Awards – only had two weeks of training under her belt before the event.

So she was in a philosophical mood when reflecting on her split-decision loss to the Navy's Sophie Colbourn in the Elite A 66kg final.

"It was a close bout that could have gone either way," she said. "If I was a bit fitter and sharper I could have done better."

"It was such a good tournament, with the live-streaming and social media, and there are not many opportunities to box at something like that."

"I had two bouts over the weekend. The first was a taller opponent with longer shots and the second came in close to box, so it was good to experience those different styles."

Like Devlin, Stuart is now focusing on the national championships and improving on her run to the semi-finals last time out.

She added: "This is only my second season of boxing and I want to go one better and make the final, and then hopefully win."

"This is the best set-up to help me achieve that. Long term, there is the opportunity to go on to the World Championships or the Olympics – that is what attracted me to the Army team." ■



BOX CUP IN NUMBERS

CLUBS INVOLVED THAT PRODUCED AT LEAST ONE WINNER – THE ARMY RECORDED TWO

35

NATIONAL AMATEUR CHAMPIONS FEATURED, ALONG WITH TEAM GB BOXERS AND JUNIOR EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS

5

PER CENT OF OFFICIALS INVOLVED IN THE EVENT WHO WERE WOMEN

55

TITLES FOR THE ROYAL NAVY, WHILE THE ROYAL AIR FORCE TOOK THE HONOURS IN THE ELITE CLASS C 48KG FINAL

2



FOCUS ON GROWTH PAYS OFF

ARMY archers capped a year of progress in 2022 by completing another Inter-Services double.

Victory at the Forces' indoor showdown saw the soldiers add to the outdoor title captured in the summer and hopes are high for further silverware this year.

Secretary and team coach WO2 Craig Cherrie (RLC) told *SoldierSport* recent performances can be linked to the success of the set-up's beginners' courses – with a raft of athletes competing at the indoor test having progressed via this pathway.

"We ran four courses last year and had a big influx of new talent," he added. "The majority of those at the indoors only started in 2022, which shows the system works."

"They were brilliant and did themselves and the team extremely proud."

WO2 Devon Barwood (RAMC) won the recurve

discipline, a result that was matched by WO2 Retief Uys (AAC) in the compound, WO2 Stu Williams (AGC (SPS)) in the longbow and Cpl Steve Wyatt (REME) in the barebow.

Their combined efforts saw the 18-strong Army outfit secure the team prize, while Williams and Wyatt both advanced to the head-to-head stages of the National Indoor Championships.

The Service hosts its own indoor competition in March, with two beginners' courses scheduled for April ahead of the outdoor season.

"After each course we also run a training camp, which is designed to take them to the next level," Cherrie said.

"We see around half the people from the courses come along to those camps, which means we have a flow of new archers coming through."

Visit the Army Archery page on Defence Connect for details on how to get involved. ■



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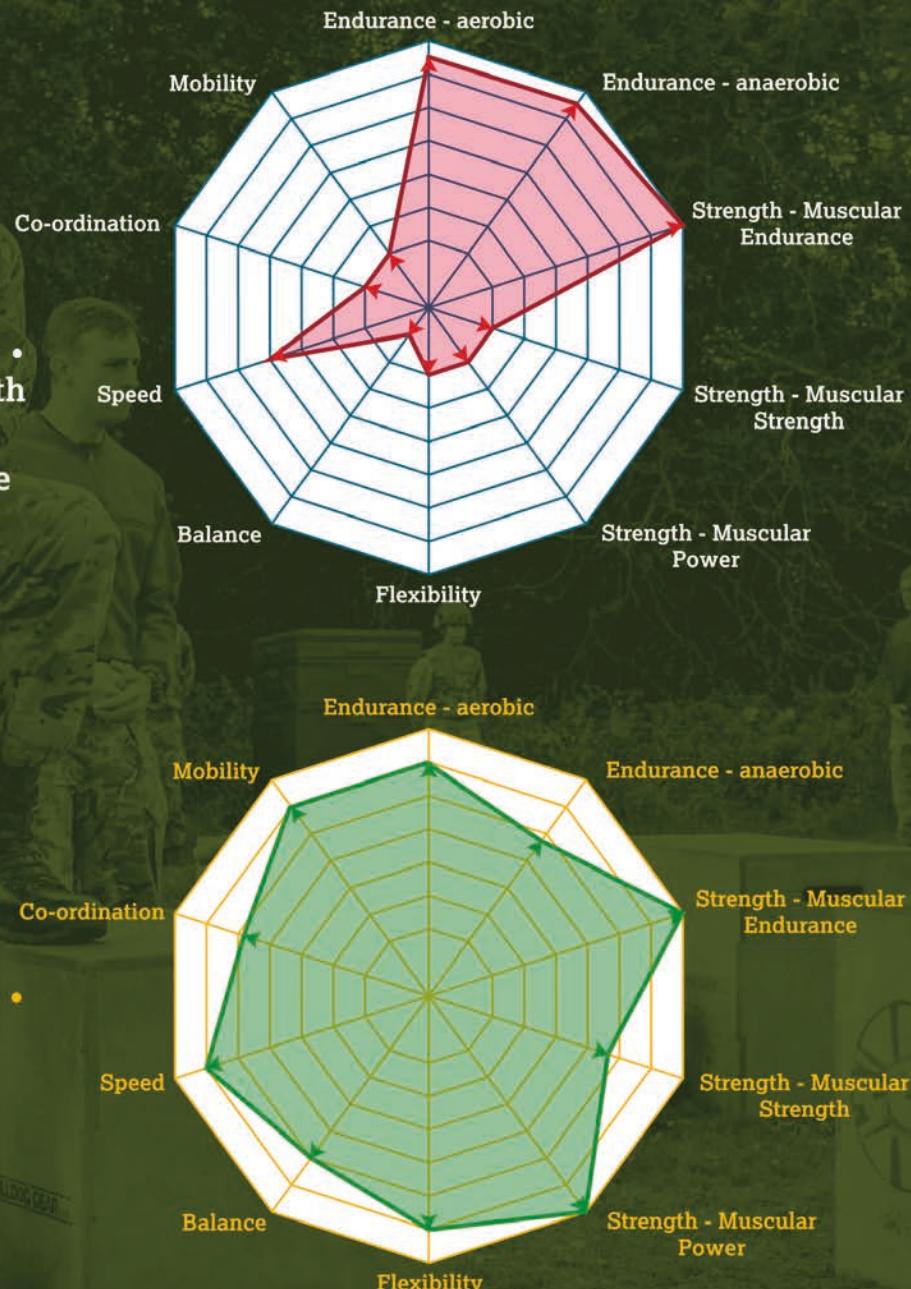
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» POWERLIFTING



FRESH TALENT RISES TO SINGLE LIFT CHALLENGE

NOVICE athletes were at the fore as the Army Powerlifting Union (APU) ended 2022 on a high at its Single Lift Championships.

More than half of the 66 soldiers in action at Minley were flexing their muscles in their first competition and those charged with running the sport hope they can continue to develop over the coming months.

"There was a lot of raw talent knocking about and they produced some impressive performances," APU secretary SSgt Stephen Baldock (RE) told *SoldierSport*.

"1 Royal School of Military Engineering Regiment brought a team of 14 along – 13 of whom had never been to a competition before. It all came from the guys running the gym asking them if they wanted to come and try the sport, which is fantastic.

"8 Training Battalion, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers also brought 13 or 14 on the day.

"As an organisation, our main aim is to promote grass-roots lifting and get more people involved. Events like this allow us to do that.

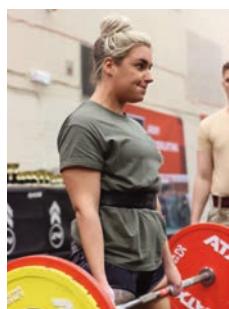
"We have 400 personnel who are actively powerlifting in the Army, and we'll have 50 or 60 at every competition.

"Around 50 per cent will be novices. We are not quite at the levels we were pre-Covid, but we're getting there. We'll have three platforms running at once, which means we are busy."

Staged at the home of 3 RSME, the athletes profited from a gym that has recently undergone a £250,000 refurbishment.

LCpl Megan Davis (RLC) had a successful day in the women's competition, winning the deadlift and finishing runner-up to Capt Michelle Margrie (R Signals) in the bench press and LCpl Kirsty Wright (R Signals) in the squat.

Pte Nti Osei (RLC) won the men's deadlift, with Cpl Jon Payne (RE) taking the bench press honours and LCpl Ben



**"THERE
WAS A
LOT OF
RAW
TALENT"**

Walsh (RE) the squat title.

The first major test of 2023 will come at the Full Power Championships in Lyneham before building towards the Inter-Services Championships and an effort to reclaim the Forces titles.

"We lost a fair bit of silverware to the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy last time out," Baldock said.

"They have immensely strong teams, and it all comes down to the individuals available on the day. We have LCpl Inderraj Dhillon (R Signals), who is an absolute best, and if he had been there we would have won the male event.

"We want those trophies back, but we know the other teams will not be taking any time off.

"The Single Lift Championships are the first event we have been looking at in terms of selection for the Inter-Services. We have seen some people we did not even know lifted; we've got their contact details and, if needed, we'll be able to call on them." ■

MONTH IN SPORT

January's key dates...



WHAT: Exercise Raging Ice I
WHEN: January 7 to 14
WHERE: Igls, Austria
NEED TO KNOW: The first of two ice sports training camps for novice athletes, the week-long trip sees soldiers sampling the high-speed delights of two-man bobsleigh, luge and skeleton



WHAT: Army Snowboarding Championships
WHEN: January 21 to February 4
WHERE: Flachauwinkl, Austria
NEED TO KNOW: Another competition primarily aimed at newcomers to the sport, Ex Snow Jack features action in open and novice classes and will be capped at 150 entrants



Inter-Services campaign step up a gear as the men's and women's teams take to the field for a double-header against their uniformed rivals



VICTORY IN VEGAS SETS SERVICES TONE



"THE GROUP GELLED SO WELL"

THE Army's netballers are setting their sights on Inter-Services glory after a successful North American tour laid the foundations for what they hope will be another title bid.

Fielding ladies and mixed teams at the US Open Championships in Las Vegas – a contest featuring squads from 12 countries and 22 American states – the soldiers walked away with the silverware in the female format as they defeated the hosts 19-8 in the final.

The battle for Forces silverware resumes in March and the players hope victory in Nevada, along with the lessons learnt in a subsequent three-match series against British Columbia in Canada, will hold them in good stead.

The team slipped to a 48-28 defeat in their opening encounter but closed the gap in their second clash, losing 36-34. The tour concluded with a 23-23 draw.

"It was a great experience," said co-captains Capt

Katharine Chadwick (RAMC, pictured left) and Cpl Melissa Price (R Signals, pictured above) at the Inter-Services).

"It's been a while since Army Netball has had an overseas tour and to win the US Open Championships was amazing.

"The group gelled so well, and it was an honour to captain them.

"We are excited for the rest of the season."

The set-up's mixed squad – playing in only its second major tournament – finished eighth in a field of 12 sides.

They also travelled north to Canada and despite failing to win any of their three games, player and tour manager Maj Sam James (RA) said the performance in a 52-48 loss second time out was their most encouraging to date.

"It was probably the best we have played," she told *SoldierSport*. "It was a super successful tour, and was a chance to show the male players what netball is all about. A lot of them are very new to the sport." ■

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YOUNG GUNS OPEN FIRE

HEAD COACH PUTS FAITH IN YOUTH AS ARMY BOXING EMBARKS ON NEW ERA

A NEW-LOOK Army boxing team underlined the immense potential in its ranks with a series of eye-catching performances in their latest round-robin invitational tournament.

The soldiers welcomed rivals from Scotland, the Southern Counties and Merseyside and Cheshire to their Aldershot base and claimed some notable scalps in three days of action.

It was also a chance for new head coach SSgt Shane Sadler (RAPTC) to assess his fighters in a competitive environment and he was impressed with what he saw.

Fus Dave Jones (RRF, main picture) claimed two wins from two bouts in the welterweight division, while LCpl Jack Power (RE, pictured far left) triumphed in all three of his clashes.

"We had four victories out of five against Scotland and a huge amount was gained," Sadler told *SoldierSport*.

"They were facing the best fighters from the counties, as well as international opponents, and in some cases we were giving away a lot of experience. But they were getting the wins, and that is great for confidence.

Dave Jones only joined the team at the start of the season, and he represents his unit so well. He went up against a Scottish international and came away with the win – technically, he boxed very well.

"And Jack Power produced great performances to beat some really good lads."

Sadler, who boxed on the Army squad for five years, succeeded Sgt James Allen (REME) as head coach over the summer and is keen to build on the foundations laid by his

former teammate.

"It is great to be back," he added. "Things have progressed massively, with the likes of strength and conditioning coaches and a GB performance coach on board – so much thought has gone into it.

"After my time on the team I coached the Royal Engineers, and then the Army development squad. I went away and did my level three course, so I put myself in a good position – that experience was so important.

"It is an honour to be here; there's a positive feeling in the team and I want to carry that on. We have got some good boxers, male and female, but they are young.

"If it means we put the groundwork in now for them to achieve in a few years when I'm not here, then that's fine.

"The opportunities are there and if anyone is going to achieve national honours, this is the place to do it."

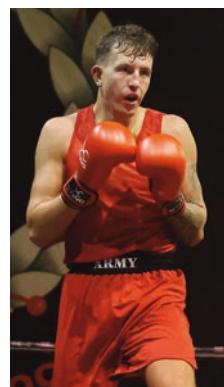
While Allen has stepped aside to lead the set-up's silver squad, Army boxing programme manager Ben Stewart remains firmly in place.

Like Sadler, the civilian – who is also a Team GB performance coach – believes the Service's new breed have a bright future and was encouraged by their latest performances.

"They are young, keen and hungry to get out and box," he said. "It is good to see them taking things on board and we saw improvements from a couple of weeks before, when we had a show at ITC Catterick.

"There were a few rematches, and we could see the boxers putting things into practice.

"When I started in 2018 the average age in the squad was



"IT IS AN HONOUR TO BE HERE"

28, and it hadn't changed much in the years before.

"After that, there was always going to be a lull. Off the back of Covid people went back to work or started families, so there has been some natural progression.

"We are now looking to lower that average age. If we are striving to get people on international programmes, we must do that – they want to be picking fighters up at 21 or 22.

"There are definitely a few individuals with promise. They are competing above their station and where they should be for their age; they have time on their side, and everything is in their favour.

"A couple of females have already had GB assessments and we continue to push our recruitment. There are young boxers who have recently completed phase two training and are now bedding in at their units – they will be part of the new cohort in September.

"So we are already planning for three or four years' time."

Stewart included Pte Owen Karau, Pte Lewis Harvey (both RLC), Pte Jordan Shaw (AGC (SPS)), Sig Lucy Kisielewska (R Signals) and LCpl Terri-Leigh Stuart (REME) among the ones to watch and said the successes of former soldier Karriss Artingstall and Scottish international Cpl Meg Reid (RLC) highlight the opportunities available.

"It shows what can happen and hopefully it inspires them moving forward," he added. ■



INSPIRED SAPPERS HIT THE MARK IN CORPS CLASH

THE Royal Engineers ended 2022 on a high as they triumphed over the Infantry in a close-fought battle to be crowned men's Inter-Corps swimming champions.

After finishing second to their rivals last time out, the sappers took to the pool in determined mood and some inspired performances in the individual events and relays saw them post a total of 164 points – 12 more than the Infantry.

Team captain Maj James Gibson – winner of the 400 and 800 metres freestyle – singled out Spr Jack Tremain, who won gold and silver in the backstroke, and breaststroke double silver medallist Spr Liam Nelson for particular praise, but insisted the collective effort was crucial to their overall success.

"I'm really chuffed," he told *SoldierSport*. "We have been close for a number of years, so it is great to finally win in what was a tight competition.

"We had a mix of old and new

on the team and, as committed sappers, they got us over the line. We came with aspirations to win and knew that if we performed well we'd run the Infantry close."

Gibson also highlighted the progress made by the women's team, who finished third in their competition – with Capt Ellie Mallinson claiming silver in the 400 and 800 metres freestyle.

However, there was a familiar name at the top of the standings as the Army Medical Services reigned supreme.

A lack of availability meant they could not field a squad at the previous competition, but they returned in style to snatch the title from defending champions the Royal Logistic Corps.

Among the highs were wins for Sgt Lorna McDonald in the 50 metres breaststroke, LCpl Lucy Doncaster in the 50 metres backstroke and LCpl Ruth Russell in the 200 metres individual medley and 100 metres butterfly.

"I'm very proud of the team," captain Cpl Kath Baker

(QARANC) said.

"We were short of swimmers, but managed to find some new talent and they absolutely smashed it out of the park."

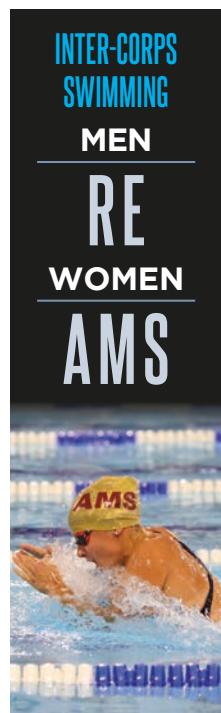
"We used word of mouth, asking friends at different units if they knew of any swimmers, which worked well. It was a team effort; we were cheering each other on and that really helped."

Baker won the 400 and 800 metres freestyle and was part of victorious 4x50-metre relay teams in the freestyle, breaststroke, and medley. And in a busy day of action, she was also scouting for fresh talent in her role as Army women's captain.

"They were not the best times, but I was happy with my swims," she added. "The three relays were tough, but I surprised myself as I'm not really a sprinter."

"In terms of the Army team, there were a couple of new swimmers that caught the eye."

"We will be in touch and hopefully they can come along to our next training camp." ■





REDS BLOWN AWAY

HEAD coach Capt Gareth Slade-Jones (RAPTC) admitted his players were beaten by an "outstanding" team as the Army slipped to a heavy defeat to the Royal Navy in the concluding match of the Inter-Services Under-23 Championships.

The Senior Service took a second-minute lead on a foggy night in Aldershot and didn't look back as they went on to win 44-3 and claim the Forces title in style.

The result capped a disappointing campaign for the Reds, who lost 8-7 to the Royal Air Force in their opening game.

"It was difficult," Slade-Jones said. "The early try caught us off guard and then a couple of quick injuries meant the momentum moved away from us rapidly.

"The Navy had good strength in the pack, were well coached and we didn't have an answer."

The focus has already shifted to next season and the officer believes he has a good base to work from.

"We've got the nucleus of a team with 17 of the boys still under 22, so we've got to build on that," he added.

"It's about creating a legacy for the under-23s and making them a viable product to go into the senior team."



MITCHELSON EYES FURTHER PROGRESS



"I NOW HAVE TO PUT MY PLANS IN PLACE"

THE new season of Army women's rugby union steps up a gear this month as the Reds face the challenge of Sweden and the British Police in the space of two-and-a-half weeks.

With places in the Inter-Services squad up for grabs, new head coach WO2 Sarah Mitchelson (RLC, pictured left) intends to field a mix of senior players and newcomers in both fixtures as she looks to identify the personnel capable of retaining the Forces trophy.

Planning for the campaign started before Christmas, when Mitchelson welcomed 39 soldiers to a three-day trial in Aldershot – where a number of fresh faces caught the eye.

"We had ten players from last season's Inter-Services, along with another ten who didn't quite make that squad," the senior NCO, who has replaced Maj Gemma Stonebridge-Smith (AGC (ETS)) at the helm, told *SoldierSport*.

"But there were 20 we had not seen before, other than at corps level. Some had not even represented their corps."

"There is potential for some of those to be involved this year, while others, with the right coaching, may feature a few years down the line."

"But it is important that those playing corps rugby know they are still being watched week in, week out."

"We will name a squad of 30 for the Inter-Services but that does not mean everyone will be involved. There may be injuries and other factors to deal with, so it is important they keep pushing."

Mitchelson enjoyed a stellar playing career with the Army, as well as civilian club Wasps, and is thrilled to continue her involvement with the set-up having served as assistant to Stonebridge-Smith last season.

"I was obviously very happy, but there was also some apprehension," she said as she reflected on her appointment.

"It was a case of 'oh my god, I've got the job and I now have to put my plans in place'."

"The Army women have made huge progress since I started playing but we have to keep pushing." ■



WARM WELCOME

UKRAINIAN refugee Sonya Matviienko was handed an opportunity to continue in the sport she loves as she joined the Army's taekwondo set-up at a training camp in Aldershot.

A European junior champion, the athlete hails from Kherson – one of the first towns to be illegally invaded by Russia – and has been hosted by a UK family for more than six months as part of the government's Homes for Ukraine scheme.

She has trained regularly with Aldershot Taekwondo and was invited to join the Army team at two camps, one of which featured a masterclass with Olympic bronze medallist Sarah Stevenson.

"Not only did it give her a level of training above what she had been receiving at her local club, but it also proved to be an enjoyable experience and respite from the other things going on in her young life," said Lt Col (Retd) Dave Campsey, secretary of Army Martial Arts.

Matviienko won a gold medal at the ITF Open Championships in September and travelled to Slovenia with the England team in October.



BRITISH J



MEDALS MOUNT AT NATIONAL SHOWDOWN

DOUBLE national gold medallist LCpl Christi-Rose Pretorius (AGC (RMP)) will be among the players taking to the mat at this month's Army Judo Championships in Aldershot.

The soldier won both the junior and senior titles in the +78kg field at the British Championships before Christmas – adding to some impressive recent performances by members of the Service set-up.

Pretorius joins Cpl Sarah Hawkes (AGC (RMP)) – who finished fifth for Northern Ireland at last year's Commonwealth Games – in Team GB's +78kg ranks, capping a swift rise in the sport.

On completing phase two training in October, she attended the Army training camp at the British Judo Centre of Excellence in Walsall and attracted the attention of the organisation's development team manager.

"SHE SHOWED HER TALENT AND ABILITY"

The athlete then wanted to test herself against the best in the country at the national showdown.

"She has surpassed all expectations and showed her exceptional talent and ability," Lt Col Jim Crompton (AGC (ETS)), secretary of the Army Judo Association, said. "We will now look at how best to help her so that she can perform to her potential nationally and internationally."

Cfn Vladimir Oleinic (REME, pictured) also achieved a bronze medal at the British Championships, a result that came on the back of him being crowned national masters champion earlier in the year.

"Army judo is in an exceptionally strong place, and we will be engaging with the athletes, their units and the British Judo Association to see how best we can support their aspirations moving forward," Crompton added. ■



● A SEVEN-strong Army contingent was in action at the London International Horse Show's Services showjumping competition as this issue went to press. The event was the culmination of a superb year for the Army Equitation Association following success in the Inter-Services.

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Final Word



I hate running but I enjoy circuits – you can just push yourself as hard as you can, catch your breath and then throw yourself back into the fight. If someone is faster than you or pushes harder that's fine, as long as you're getting your 100 per cent and they are getting theirs.

WO2 Liam Milne, REME



I like doing laps of the running track. I go all-out in three-minute windows and get what I can from it. I haven't really got a least favourite – I'll try any phys.

LCpl Felicity Johnstone, RLC



As a boxer, that sport is obviously my favourite. Although I don't really like being in the water, working at a Royal Navy base means we do a lot of swimming.

LCpl Terri-Leigh Stuart, REME



I usually cycle or run throughout the summer months, then move inside and play basketball during the winter. I prefer team sports – running in the cold and wet is not my thing.

Capt Jack Mann, REME

Before joining the Army I was really into bodyweight exercises but I've moved on from that now and play a lot of sports like basketball, which I enjoy because it doesn't feel like phys. I don't like tabbing and load-carrying because I've got short legs.

Cfn Nemar Morrison, REME



Best and worst

With the onus on troops to stay fit under Op Mobilise, we asked what kind of exercise they enjoy – or dread – the most

Ideally, I like getting out and doing a nice steady 5-10km run every other day – headphones in and switching off from the world. Personally, I'm not a fan of e-sports. It might be competitive but it's not a physical activity as such, where you're out of breath.

LBdr Thomas Marshall, RA



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