

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY



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COMPETITION**
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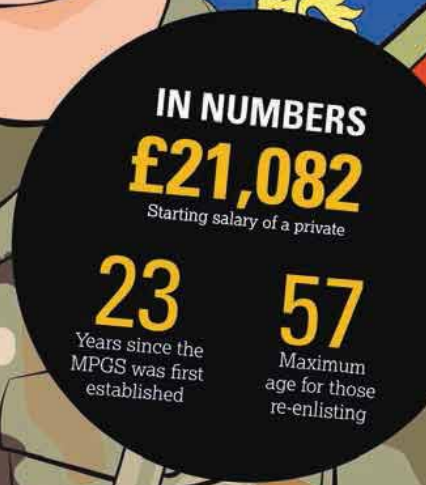
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For full details read AGAI Vol 2, Chapter 43, Part 9 or email

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ARMY
BE THE BEST

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Cover picture: Graeme Main

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Joining is tough,
but success is
100 per cent
attainable

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Rise of the Pathfinders – p35



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Farewell to a difficult year



AFTER a year like no other, the desire to be with friends and family and enjoy a welcome sprinkling of festive

cheer is high on the agenda for many as we approach Christmas.

How close we get to the normal yuletide celebrations remains to be seen, but for the Army's personnel it will be very much business as usual as far as the day job is concerned.

Their vow to serve Queen and country will see the support to mass Covid testing programmes roll into December (page 7) and, again, there will be those who sacrifice time at home with their loved ones as overseas commitments continue.

As a way of thanking you for your sterling efforts this year, we have resurrected our festive competition so check out pages 53-55 for the chance to win some fantastic prizes.

This period is also about setting goals for 2021 and career development may well form part of that. If a change of direction is needed the opportunities are out there – just ask 4/73 (Sphinx) Special Observation Post Battery (page 31) and the Pathfinders (page 35).

Wherever you are this Christmas stay safe – and enjoy the celebrations as best you can.

Richard Long ● Acting Editor

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Pictures: WO2 Jamie Peters and Sgt Paul Shaw, RLC



Troops step up during testing times

PERSONNEL have been helping to pilot new testing measures in the fight against coronavirus – while being put through their paces on a critical training package.

The soldiers, from HQ Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, were given the new lateral flow Covid procedure – which can flag positive cases in minutes – during Exercise Loyal Leda.

They were checked for the virus every few days while observing a range of social distancing measures during the manoeuvres in the west of England.

The regime was also closely monitored by NHS bosses as part of a wider pilot into how it might be used on a larger scale, such as at major sporting fixtures.

Senior officers said they were pleased with the precautions during the training package, which signed off the corps as Nato's lead warfighting outfit.

Chief of staff Maj Gen John Mead said soldiers had embraced the process as a critical part of the exercise.

He added: "They enjoyed being out on the evaluation for our new role.

"All the while we were working with the dynamic management of risk, the complexity of which goes up when you have 1,200 personnel involved."

As well as the testing, exercise planners built in a range of social distancing measures to mitigate infection risk, such as wider bed spaces and reconfigured cookhouse layouts.

"We looked very carefully at what was reasonably practical at an early stage and employed the appropriate measures," the senior officer explained.

"In terms of testing, we were going through the process every three days – it is very simple to do, and troops were given their results in 15 minutes."

Maj Gen Mead (pictured right) said three positive cases were confirmed during the exercise – all of whom were stood down for further testing and isolation protocols.

A command post examination simulating battles with a well-equipped enemy, Loyal Leda involved troops from 21 of the 30 Nato nations.

As well as the UK there was activity across mainland Europe.



“
They were
given results
in 15 minutes
”

MILITARY'S MASS TESTING ROLLS INTO MERTHYR

■ AN ARMY officer honoured for his work during the Salisbury nerve agent attack is leading the military response to Wales' first mass Covid-19 testing operation.

It follows the successful roll out of the pilot scheme in the Liverpool region, supported by personnel from 8 Engineer Brigade, The Royal Anglian Regiment, The King's Royal Hussars and other UK resilience units.

A similar programme will be staged in the town of Merthyr Tydfil, which became home to the country's highest rate of new cases.

Commander of 160th (Welsh) Brigade, Brig Andrew Dawes, will be overseeing an operation that is expected to be supported by approximately 165 Royal Air Force personnel over the next four weeks.

SOLDIER

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GLOBAL SITREP



1. BELIZE



STANDING UP TO HURRICANE ETA

MORE than 80 soldiers training in Central America have been helping to provide aid and rescue stranded locals in the aftermath of Hurricane Eta.

After receiving a request for assistance from the Belize government, commanders planned a rapid relief effort in rural areas cut off by the heavy rains.

Elements of The Royal Dragoon Guards, The Royal Lancers and The Royal Regiment of Scotland were deployed on Exercise Mayan Warrior when they were called upon to support the local authorities in San Ignacio.

Providing planning and medical advice, moving vulnerable people to safety, distributing food and water, clearing debris and using sandbags as flood defences were all key tasks.

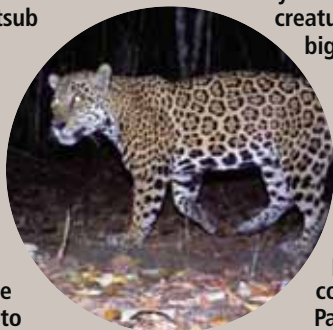
Lt Col Simon Nichols (IG), Commander British Army Training Support Unit Belize (Batsub), said: "It is not wasted on me that we are guests in this beautiful country and when our hosts ask and need a little support, it is great to be able to assist."

LIFE IN THE LENS

SOLDIERS have also been proving themselves capable conservation sharpshooters – by helping to take pictures of reclusive wild animals.

Troops at Batsub joined forces with charity Panthera to set up cameras and snap the Central American fauna.

They used their knowledge of the location to establish the lenses in remote places, replacing equipment that was damaged during fires earlier in the year.



Part of a three-year programme to ensure military exercises do not disturb habitats, the initiative has already returned images of creatures including big cats.

The scheme, which is also supported by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, has been praised by conservationists. Panthera

research biologist Emma Sanchez said: "We value our relationship with the British Army."



1. BELIZE

“
We must get
under the skin
of this country
”

Balkan mission becomes a family affair – page 48

2. FALKLAND ISLANDS

2. FALKLAND ISLANDS

BOMBS AWAY

GENERATIONS of British soldiers involved in clearing landmines from the far-flung South Atlantic territory have finally seen their work come to fruition.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace confirmed that the ordnance removal job was now finished – nearly four decades after the explosives were planted during the 1982 conflict.

The work means that 20 million square metres of land once off limits is now free for those living and working on the Falklands to enjoy, he added.

Around 30,000 landmines were left on the British overseas territory following the three-month conflict with Argentina, which lasted from April until June 1982.

Civilian contractors completed the later stages of the clearance work and the final detonation heralded celebratory games of football and cricket by islanders on the now safe areas.



Picture: Graeme Main

INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

Brief the team now:



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5. BELGIUM

PUBLIC URGED TO DIG DEEP

AN URGENT fundraising drive for £100,000 has been launched to preserve a British trench in Flanders, severely damaged by recent storms.

The Yorkshire Trench and Dug Out – named after soldiers from the 49th West Riding Infantry Division who held the fiercely contested former front line – was discovered nearly 20 years ago, along with the remains of 155 troops. It is Britain's only original renovated trench open to the public in the salient.

5. BELGIUM

3. GERMANY

4. CYPRUS

3. GERMANY

BACK IN ACTION

HAVING been largely silent since the start of the pandemic, the ranges at Sennelager Training Area are once again ringing to the sound of heavy ammunition with the arrival of the first major British unit to use the facility since March.

Some 400 soldiers from 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment were coming to the end of a six-week programme of mounted and dismounted live firing and simulated drills as this issue went to press.

Exercise Tallinn Dawn was an opportunity to hone their armoured and light role skills in preparation for Operation Cabrit next year, after learning recently that they would be deploying to Estonia instead

of Afghanistan as originally planned.

Lt Mitchell Woodward explained that it was also important some of the newer members of the battalion were getting the chance to get stuck in to soldiering.

"Those who joined during Covid-19 have had a slower start to Army life," he said.

"However, now that things have started picking up they've integrated into training very well and are good to go.

"Everyone is grateful to have something to strive towards after months of working from home and Zoom lessons."



4. CYPRUS

CONSTRUCTION TASK BREAKS NEW GROUND

INNOVATIVE sappers are experimenting with new techniques during a three-month project to improve RAF Akrotiri's Combined Water Sports Centre.

Deployed on Exercise Pinestick, around 90 members of 34 Field Squadron, 39 Engineer Regiment have converted more than 2,000 square metres of land into a vehicle manoeuvring area and built a six-boat storage facility with slipway access.

In an engineering first, they used Hesco Bastion to create a cofferdam – an enclosure that allows a body of water to be pumped dry and excavated.

As this issue went to press they were battling frequent heavy thunder and lightning storms to finish the project in time to return home for Christmas.

Officer commanding Maj Jessica Drew said heat and Cyprus's position on a geological fault line had posed some additional challenges.

"All the work has to be completed in line with seismic standards, which means ensuring a higher level of complexity and reinforcement," she explained.

"But the hands-on experience that we have gained shows that we are ready to deliver on future operations."



To help keep the trench accessible for future generations donate at justgiving.com/crowdfunding/yorkshiretrench

Picture: Aurel Seru



Ground view

Army Sergeant Major, WO1 Gav Paton, offers his take on Service life...

I HAVE always said that the Army must be ready for anything in these unusual times – particularly with a second wave of Covid-19 now upon us.

Just as with the rest of society, the coronavirus crisis has placed restrictions on soldiers. Life has been far from normal since we first locked down. But the wider world has not stopped and those who would do us harm are still in business, global pandemic or not.

The Army has remained flexible – not only have we been supporting civilian authorities at home, we have maintained both our training needs and overseas operational tempo.

All have required us to re-think our ways of working.

Take Exercise Loyal Leda, for example. Centred on Nato's HQ Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, it saw troops adapt and pioneer some cutting-edge techniques to stay ahead of the virus.

Turning up to visit the soldiers, I was immediately Covid tested with the same rapid flow procedure being used for mass checking in Liverpool.

A negative result arrived just 20 minutes later, which meant I was allowed entry. Behind the gate, the exercise planning

was nothing short of astonishing.

Putting aside the logistics of checking personnel for the virus every few days, the training was set up with a series of social distancing measures from the start.

The personal discipline displayed was equally impressive – movement flows were well controlled, and troops worked within bubbles.

The running of Loyal Leda was all the more impressive given the exercise was a complex, four-week multinational outing involving more than 1,000 people in locations across the south-west of England.

Elsewhere, we are maintaining operational commitments in the likes of eastern Europe – while closer to home troops are on Covid taskings in places such as Liverpool.

All the while our personnel – many of them junior commanders – are coming up with innovative solutions to keep our core business going. Their commitment and initiative is not only a credit to the country they serve, but it also sends a powerful statement of intent to any would-be aggressors.

We remain ready, whatever we are called to do.



Picture: Cpl Alex Scott, RAF

“
Let's hope
the new
year is
positive
”

UP CLOSE
AND
PERSONAL



Q Do you have any standout personal achievements from 2020?

A Building stronger relationships with my counterparts from allied nations.

Saluting the sacrifices

THIS year, as in 2019, I'm heading off to spend Christmas with troops on operations.

It is important for me to be with soldiers at this time of year – and especially so given the restrictions that the Covid-19 pandemic continues to cause.

People cannot take R&R and many of those based overseas are

unable to travel home to see loved ones. It is, by all accounts, an unprecedented situation.

It goes without saying that you all have my thanks for the sacrifices you are making. I hope you have a peaceful festive period, wherever you are serving.

Let's hope the new year is a more positive experience for us all.

Promising dialogue on mess matters

■ LAST month I asked whether the junior NCOs' mess should be written into Queen's Regulations and it was a question that attracted some serious interest.

I scheduled an online conference, which was oversubscribed in short order – some 300 corporals joined me to discuss the issue.

We have messes for junior NCOs across the Army – but because they are not in the regs, their quality varies depending on location. I need to know if formalising the structure is the direction our young commanders would like to take. After all, this is ultimately their decision and they will need to drive it.

While I now have some tangible views to take forward to senior officers, please be aware it is going to take time.

But I am here to help – so keep your views coming.



Picture: Sgt Tom Evans, RLC

Unmanned vehicles were trialled at the recent Army Warfighting Experiment

Funding boost for future forces

ARAFT of kit including swarm drones and autonomous vehicles are set to land in the hands of troops following a huge cash boost for the Armed Forces.

Senior MoD officials said cutting edge equipment would now be developed as a result of a £16.5 billion injection from the government.

The programmes will be underpinned by a robust research and development pipeline – ensuring the UK can meet new threats.

Chief of the Defence Staff Gen Sir Nicholas Carter said the money – payable over four years – would pave the way for military modernisation.

"It funds a pathway to the digital force for the 2030s, integrated across the domains of maritime, air, land, cyber and space," he added.

"In the near term it allows us to deter the complex threats we face.

"This settlement is very welcome –

it gives meaning to the vision of global Britain and sends a powerful message to allies, as well as opponents."

The extra cash – the largest injection of money into the Armed Forces since the end of the Cold War – will fund several projects.

As well as new battlefield kit, naval and air defence assets will be uprated with cash also pledged to help troops with personal issues such as childcare.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said further details and a wider blueprint will be released in the coming months.

The pledge was accompanied by confirmation of three other initiatives.

A new space command is being drawn up to protect the UK's interests beyond Earth's atmosphere, while a national cyber force to support military operations and disrupt hostile state activity will be formed. An agency to develop artificial intelligence will also be established.



“It allows us to deter the complex threats we face”



Picture: Cpl Andy Reid, RLC

SURVIVAL SKILLS SHOWN

■ PERSONNEL from 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards found themselves eating insects and sending smoke signals as part of a patrol and survival competition.

Staged at the Otterburn training area, the event came at the end of a two-day course that saw more than 150 troops master the basics of staying alive in a potentially dangerous situation.

This included building improvised shelters, finding and cleaning water for drinking, lighting fires and learning how to live off the land.

Exercise organiser Capt Charlie Byrd said: "Surviving in a strange environment can be extremely stressful, particularly for the younger soldiers.

"It will give them the confidence to cope in extreme situations."



Picture: Cpl Dave Blackburn, RAF

JONES JOINS CRISIS CHAT

■ ENGLAND rugby union head coach Eddie Jones was among panellists for an online conference discussing leading through crisis.

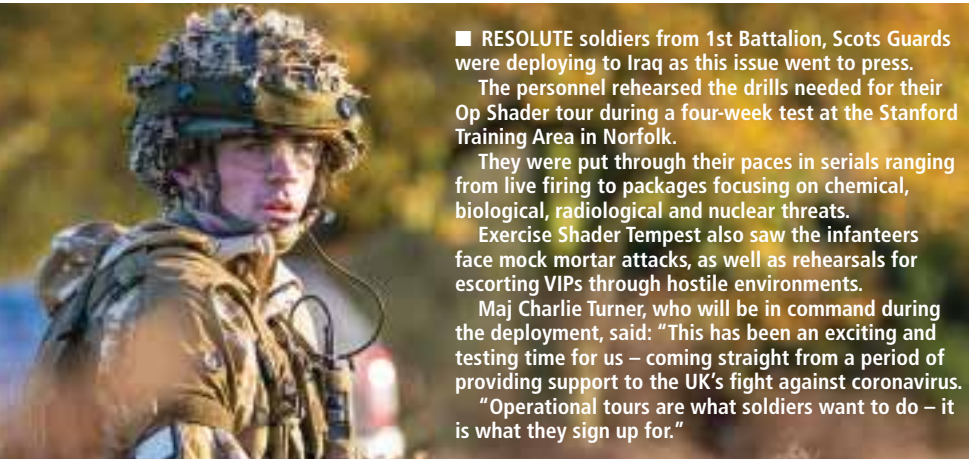
Hosted by the Centre for Army Leadership and the Foundation for Leadership through Sport, the virtual event saw senior civilian and Service figures relating their experiences of management during challenging times.

Jones reflected on the impact of uncertainty on his players following the disruption caused by the pandemic.

"You lose some motivation and all the emotional and physical work you've put into the game, so we try and work out quickly what we can and can't control because the biggest thing people want is certainty," he said.

Some 1,200 personnel tuned in.

GUARDS GEAR UP FOR SHADER



Picture: Cpl Danny Houghton, RLC

■ RESOLUTE soldiers from 1st Battalion, Scots Guards were deploying to Iraq as this issue went to press.

The personnel rehearsed the drills needed for their Op Shader tour during a four-week test at the Stanford Training Area in Norfolk.

They were put through their paces in serials ranging from live firing to packages focusing on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats.

Exercise Shader Tempest also saw the infantry face mock mortar attacks, as well as rehearsals for escorting VIPs through hostile environments.

Maj Charlie Turner, who will be in command during the deployment, said: "This has been an exciting and testing time for us – coming straight from a period of providing support to the UK's fight against coronavirus. "Operational tours are what soldiers want to do – it is what they sign up for."



'NOTHING REPLICATES IT'

■ SOLDIERS rejoining the Army in the wake of this year's unprecedented Covid-19 crisis have spoken of their satisfaction at being back in uniform.

A recent campaign urging leavers to think about resuming their military careers saw significant interest online – and has attracted some returning talent.

The Service now has a fast-track scheme to assist those who have departed in the past three years and they will typically return with the same rank and cap badge. Officers must commit for three years, while soldiers need to give a 12-month notice period before moving on.

Capt Andy Oliver (Scots) – who left the Army in 2018 to move overseas with his wife – said he was now planning on having a full career after his return.

"I had worked for a defence contractor, looking after electronic kit used on exercises – it was interesting, but I was one of those people that missed the military," he explained.

Maj Cameron Law (Scots) – a veteran of three Afghanistan tours during his first tenure – hung up his boots in 2018. The officer has since returned in short order.

"I soon realised that I wanted to be part of a team working to a real purpose," he said. "There is nothing that replicates the Army on civvy street."

"The lockdown started a couple of weeks after I arrived back and soldiers were out to assist, fully supporting the civilian authorities (pictured above).

"It is great to be serving again during a time of national crisis."

Esports provide support

“You are never alone”



CHRISTMAS can be a difficult time for some people but personnel are being offered the chance to hang out, play games and support each other during this period by joining the Service's esports community platform.

It's free to use, contains a chat function and there are no ranks or chain of command.

Army Esports will also host a series of events over the next few weeks to bring members together on titles such as *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* and *Among Us*.

Maj Tim Elliott (Scots), the officer in charge of the set-up, explained: "We have an online 'clubhouse' that individuals can access 24/7 to chat and hang out with friends."

"It's run and managed by soldiers who are passionate about esports and gaming and it is supported by the chain of command."

"No matter where you are, just login from your phone and your mates are there. You are never alone."

"You can play whatever game you want with people from across the Service or, alternatively, just find someone to chat with."

Theresa Jackson, of the Army's Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy

team, added: "This Christmas is going to be a strange experience for many of us so it's really important that we keep talking to each other and supporting our friends and colleagues."

"Army Esports is a fantastic community and its great work can provide people with somewhere to just talk if they don't have that avenue."

Find out more about the support available from the Army and other services at army.mod.uk/people/join-well/managing-stress/ask-for-help

If you want to join, go to <https://discord.gg/upHZNgYyS3> or scan the QR code left.



TESTING DIGITAL AGE ARMOUR CAMOUFLAGE

■ THE Army Trials and Development Unit (ATDU) are currently evaluating a new look for armour with the multi-coloured digital camouflage system (MDCDS).

Experts from Babcock, DSTL and Bovington's Tank Museum have worked alongside the ATDU to complete artificial intelligence-aided designs that are currently being tested to ascertain the level of tactical advantage they can offer war-fighting vehicles of the future.

With the figure denoting the number of colours used in the novel initiative, the image left shows MDCDS-5 on a Challenger 2. One will eventually be recommended by ATDU when the hide and deceive element of the trials concludes.

DURING THESE UNCERTAIN TIMES, WE ARE STILL HERE AND READY TO HELP

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SPINE LINE COMPETITION



WELL done to those who spotted the link between the names on last month's spine; Joseph Lister, James Blundell, Claudius Amyand and Christiaan Barnard were all pioneering surgeons and inspiring figures for the teams behind the medical technology we featured in that issue. This time we have teamed up with BioLite (www.bioliteenergy.com) to offer you the chance to win the portable Solar Panel 5+.

Its smart yet simple details allow you to get off-grid energy to your gear with maximum efficiency. Use the panel, which weighs just 13.8 ounces and measures less than 11 inches across, to charge your tablet, phone, lights or other devices. Power up in real time when in the sun, or from stored energy when it's not, thanks to the integral battery. It has a weather resistance IPX4 rating, as well as a USB output.

So what links the clues on this issue's spine? Answers – including daytime phone number – to the usual postal address or email comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by December 31. Good luck!

VET VILLAGE GO-AHEAD

■ THE construction of a community specifically for ex-personnel has been given the green light.

The Hull 4 Heroes Veterans Village was the idea of Paul Matson, a former Royal Artillery soldier.

"Everything that you could need when you come out of the Forces will be on site," he said.

Planning for the 22-acre facility was recently approved by officials at Hull City Council and East Riding of Yorkshire Council.

It will include single storey one- and two-bedroom lodges and semi-detached family houses, accommodating up to 120 ex-Service personnel and their families.

It will also feature a community and support hub, training and horticultural facilities, as well as a visitors' centre.

“Veterans can lose themselves”



Picture: Shutterstock

Detecting those who need help

BIG-HEARTED members of an Armed Forces metal detecting community have stumped up the cash to help a former Welsh guardsman join their ranks.

David Roberts had wanted to try the hobby for some time – but being out of work and the financial commitments of a young family had held him back.

However, after hearing of his plight Jason Massey – who runs Detecting for Veterans – paid to kit out the ex-soldier and give him the start he needed to take up the pastime.

As well as buying the latest machine to find buried objects, the former Serviceman has been furnished with a pair of gloves and a shovel among a £700 haul of specialist equipment.

"It's been absolutely amazing to be honest," Roberts – who completed an Op Herrick tour during a seven-year tenure with his regiment – told *Soldier*.

The ex-guardsman, who has been diagnosed with mental health issues including PTSD, said he was looking forward to joining the group of

enthusiasts at Detecting for Veterans.

Massey – who started his organisation after serving with 1st Battalion, The Light Infantry – said he was delighted to be able to assist a former Army colleague.

He added: "Veterans can lose themselves for several hours by going out with their detector and fully concentrating on the environment around them."

"Detecting can be a real help to people who are suffering with mental health conditions."

The 47-year-old – who has uncovered finds dating back to the Roman period – suggested anyone interested in the hobby should first join a club.

"It is vital to follow the law and obtain all the correct permissions before you start out," he commented. "A decent organisation should be able to help."

For more information visit detecting4veterans.org

● Time teams – page 24

ARMY NAMED TOP APPRENTICESHIP EMPLOYER

■ THE Army has been named the UK's premier employer in the Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers awards.

The scheme assesses organisations from the public and private sector and the Service was recognised for helping more than 8,000 apprentices gain new skills in 2019/20. More than 90 per cent of new soldiers take up the offer of an apprenticeship.

The programme has expanded to provide more varied opportunities and now offers degree apprenticeships in business leadership and management.

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Model shown is a Focus ST-3 5-Door 2.3L Ford EcoBoost 280PS with a 6-Speed Manual Petrol transmission with optional Full LED Headlamps. Fuel economy mpg (l/100km): Combined 35.8 (7.9). CO₂ emissions 187g/km.

Figures shown are for comparability purposes; only compare fuel consumption and CO₂ figures with other cars tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real-life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the accessories fitted, variations in weather, driving styles and vehicle load.

DISCOUNTED GOODS

■ ONLINE electricals retailer AO has teamed up with SSAFA to offer discounted appliances to troops and veterans in need.

The domestic devices are purchased by the charity at reduced cost and, so far, 148 items have been delivered to beneficiaries.

Johanna Kaufmann, secretary of the charity's Clwyd branch, praised the initiative and described how it had recently enabled them to provide a newly divorced client with a range of white goods for his new accommodation.

"As well as the appliances, we were able to add a laptop, which was fantastic and meant he could stay in touch with his children," she said.

The scheme is part of AO's Supported Living arm, which works with good causes and local authorities.



Picture: Steve Dock

MILITARY MORTGAGE DEAL

■ MORTGAGE adviser Matt Colley is waiving broker fees for military personnel and veterans as a way of thanking them for their service to community and country.

The 45-year-old, founder of Bristol-based Moving Experience, is offering the same deal to medical staff after his children received treatment in the neonatal intensive care unit at Southmead Hospital.

He'll be donating commission fees to SSAFA and the hospital's charity.

"I am grateful to the military community who serve us in many ways, including setting up hospitals during this pandemic," Mr Colley, whose father served in the Royal Air Force, said. Visit community-mortgage.co.uk/military

VETERANS IN EUROPE

■ SSAFA is urging members of the Armed Forces community that need help with applications for European residency to come forward.

With applications for French residency now open, the charity is working alongside the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to assist UK veterans and their families as Britain prepares to exit the European Union. Find out more at www.ssafa.org.uk



Picture: Graeme Main

Keeping up the inflow

TARGETS for new joiners are largely being met despite the planning and logistical challenges created by pandemic restrictions and national lockdowns.

Col Nick MacKenzie, Assistant Director, Army Recruiting and Initial Training Command, said a number of measures taken during the year had kept the throughput of new recruits flowing freely.

"We have adapted our processes to ensure people keep coming through the door and the pipeline stays open," he told *Soldier*.

"Reserve recruitment has taken a slight hit due to minor capacity issues at our assessment centres and these candidates also have other challenges such as managing day jobs during these extraordinary times."

However, as of the end of October, around 65 per cent of the Regular soldier target of 9,867 personnel had either started their basic training or had been loaded to a future basic training course.

The outlook for officer recruitment was equally optimistic, with both the April and September intakes to Sandhurst full and the January 2021 allocation already loading well.

"It's been challenging but we've been proactive," said the officer.

"During the first lockdown in March the recruits in basic training were sent home and then we had to get them back again in a Covid-compliant way.

"We paused all visits to the Regular soldier assessment centres, and managed to do a lot of preparation work virtually instead.

"In June we reopened them with

reduced capacity but streamlined the stage of medical, fitness and cognitive tests from two-and-a-half days down to one, to keep the numbers up.

"Also, we replaced our Glencorse assessment centre in Scotland, which was used by many recruits from northern England, with a temporary one in Strensall."

Col MacKenzie believes 2021 looks equally as bright thanks to an increase in applications so far this year compared with the previous period, as well as the advent of a brand new recruitment campaign that will launch early next year.

“We have been proactive”

COVID-19 MEASURES

- Recruits now complete an **online health questionnaire** before arriving at basic training, declaring whether they are showing symptoms of Covid-19 or have come into contact with anyone who has

- On arrival for basic training recruits are **monitored for 14 days** and form a primary household based on those they will share their accommodation with

- Personnel maintain **two-metre social distancing** where possible, but can reduce to one metre in certain prescribed circumstances

- There is an emphasis on **understanding force health protection** measures during training to ensure the pipeline stays clear



Top trainers recognised

A NEW category that recognises the valuable contribution of remote military trainers during the pandemic has been added to an annual ceremony.

Maj Scott Mather (RA) and Sgt Jason Hallam (Para, pictured above) were named joint virtual award winners at the Army Recruiting and Initial Training Command awards, which were held online and saw the top Regular, Reserve and civilian trainers and recruiters of the year presented with Amazon gift vouchers worth £200.

Described as hardworking, dedicated, competent and industrious in his citation, Sgt Hallam, a platoon commander at ITC Catterick, modernised his delivery to ensure recruits were able to continue with their courses after they were sent home during the March lockdown.

"I was shocked when I found out that I had won because I just did what

needed to be done, but it's great to have my work recognised," he said.

"I came up with an IT system that enabled instructors to carry on with their lessons online and taught them how to use it."

REGULAR TRAINER OF YEAR (JOINT)

Cpl Benjamin Griggs, AAC

Sgt Ben Swinfield, RAPTC

CIVILIAN TRAINER OF YEAR

Dr Clark Colman

RESERVE TRAINER OF YEAR

LCpl Sarah Annette Smith, RLC

VIRTUAL AWARD (JOINT)

Maj Scott Mather, RA

Sgt Jason Hallam, Para

RECRUITER OF YEAR

Cpl Katie Carter, AAC

RECRUITING SUPPORT WORKER OF YEAR

Jon Trounson

“
I was shocked
when I
found out
”

REWRITING BLACK HISTORY

■ A DECORATION that rewrites black history in the First World War has been bought at auction for £10,540.

The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Museum (Royal Warwickshire) fundraised heavily to buy the Great War memorial plaque that challenges the notion of former footballer Walter Tull as the first black officer to be commissioned into the British Army during the conflict.

2Lt Euan Lucie-Smith, of 1st Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment is now believed to be the first such individual to hold the honour.

The *London Gazette* records his commissioning date two years and eight months ahead of 2Lt Tull, on September 17, 1914, and he died aged 25 at Ypres on April 25, 1915 – two years and eleven months before his counterpart.

Lt Col (ret) John Rice, chair of trustees for the museum, said: "I am thrilled that we have been able to acquire this plaque of national importance and to be able to display it in our regimental museum for the benefit of the general public. It will help showcase the contribution of Commonwealth soldiers in our regiment."



Pictures: Dix Noonan Webb



Job holder should scan
this QR code

TRAINING FEEDBACK REQUIRED

■ ARMY Headquarters is conducting a major review of basic training to ensure it is as relevant as it can be to the British soldier's role.

Sub-unit commanders and permanent staff administration officers are being asked to encourage participation from personnel within their command.

Feedback is requested from officers and section and troop leaders who directly command private soldiers.

Private soldiers or lance corporals who have served for four years or less are also invited to participate.

The deadline is January 15, 2021. Scan the QR code left or right to go to the survey.



Line manager should
scan this QR code



YEOMANRY FUNDS ROLL IN

■ **BIG-HEARTED** Reservists have been playing their part in helping families facing hardship at Christmas during the Covid pandemic.

The soldiers – from The Royal Wessex Yeomanry – are raising cash for a church organisation dedicated to assisting those in need, plus five food banks in south-west England.

They are accepting donations via a Go Fund Me page – and will be out on the ground to deliver the provisions in the run up to the festive period.

Money will be split between areas in which the outfit's five squadrons are based – Bovington, Salisbury, Barnstaple, Cirencester and Exeter, plus Swindon.

WO2 Scott Barrie said: "Our aim is to assist those less fortunate during these uncertain times."

See uk.gofundme.com and search "RWxY Christmas food bank campaign" for more information.



CADETS FOCUS ON D-DAY

■ **DESPITE** Covid-19 precautions, training has continued at pace at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst with the campus' parkland adapted so personnel could learn about the battle for the beaches of Normandy in 1944.

The exercise placed officer cadets in the role of junior commanders and their success, and subsequent exam was, in part, dependent on an understanding of the historical context including the weapons systems and tactics of the time.

OCdt Eleanor On explained: "It's really useful to look at how things were done in the past and how much they've changed."

"It is great to be able to understand what went well, and what didn't, and learn from that so we can use those lessons in our careers."



Picture: Cpl Andy Reid, RLC

“It will enable activities to continue”

Daily swabs support Covid study

A RMY scientists have launched a study to detect the initial signs of Covid-19 in Service personnel.

Known as CATCH – short for Covid Asymptomatic Detection Using Technology – the trial will use a wristwatch to measure the body's early response to illness.

Volunteers will undergo nose and throat swabs every day for a month to check for the presence of the virus, as well getting tested for antibodies in the blood.

At the same time, a chest strap and a wrist-mounted wearable device will record physiological measurements – including heart rate, skin temperature and respiratory rate – every night during sleep.

The data will then be analysed to determine if the sensors can predict the

onset of the coronavirus.

Professor Julie Greeves, from the Army Health and Performance Research team, explained that the trial will hopefully put the military on the front foot in containing the virus.

"If Covid-19 can be detected early in those who do not show any symptoms or before symptoms appear, the Service will be able to better control the risk of infection," she said.

"By doing so, it will enable activities such as training, support to civil authorities and operations to continue in a safe manner."

Troops at Pirbright and Sandhurst are already taking part, with a total of 400 personnel from across initial training establishments set to be involved over the course of the programme, which will finish in early 2021.

PERSONNEL AIM FOR THE PERFECT PITCH

■ **TECH-SAVVY** troops are being challenged to write software to solve real-life military problems – and pitch them to judges including a former *Dragons' Den* panellist.

Personnel from both 11 Infantry and 104 Logistic Brigades are standing by for a so-called "hackathon" event – set for early this month – which will see them battle it out at a data showdown.

They will work on tasks alongside civvy colleagues before a nail-biting presentation to senior officers and multi-millionaire entrepreneur Richard Farleigh.

Split into six teams, participants will face challenges such as setting up overseas operations, as well as intelligence gathering on counter-poaching deployments (pictured).

After being given 48 hours to come up with viable solutions, they will then have just 15 minutes to pitch their final product to the expert panel.

Brig Ben Cattermole – Commander 11 Infantry Brigade – said: "This opportunity allows soldiers from a variety of trades to play a part in the development of solutions to problems we face in daily work."



Picture: Graeme Main

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THE BIG PICTURE

Salisbury Plain

On its way

A SOLDIER from 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment provides range overwatch as French paratroopers fire an AT4 anti-tank missile during Exercise Wessex Storm. Troops from the two nations are training side-by-side to be ready to respond together to international crises.

The 1,500-strong battlegroup included a company from the French 2e Régiment Etranger de Parachutistes, who are confirming their skills and readiness to serve as the lead infantry unit within 16 Air Assault Brigade.

British and French airborne forces have been training to deploy together on operations since 2013.

Read a full report from the exercise in our next issue.

Picture: Ben Shread, MoD





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Picture: © Pete Dadds/Liberty Bell

Keep calm & carry on

Stand-up comedian and historian Al Murray offers *Soldier* his musings on 2020 - and the last 100 years

So, it's been a strange year – what have you been doing with yourself?

Scratching my head and wondering what on earth's going on. I was meant to be on tour but that all fell apart, so it's been weird to be honest. I've been lucky enough to have things like writing books to occupy me, but I'm not used to having all this time on my hands. Usually I'm always on the go and that suddenly disappearing has been quite tricky to deal with.

Is there part of you that's enjoyed the slower pace of life?

No, it's totally bewildering – like, what the hell's happening? But my experience will have been totally different to someone else's. That's the interesting thing – we've all been through the same situation, essentially, but everyone will have their unique view of it.

You started touring again as your alter-ego, the Pub Landlord – what does social distancing do to the vibe at gigs?

Being a stand-up is all about responding to feedback, so it's funny because your senses are going “hang on, this room is empty”, but the audience are so pleased to be there – they're having a whale of a time and are totally up for it. The first couple of shows felt like the first ones I ever did – it's exciting in a way.

The new book is a humorous take on the last 100 years. Why did you go for that approach?

As a kid I was a huge fan of a title called *1066 and All That*, which is kind of the original spoof history. You can't try and replicate that or pastiche it, but my book is in the same spirit of a trot through history. It's meant to be funny more than anything else. And something that came to me while I was writing it was the idea of the “meanwhile” – the sense that while you're obsessing about events on your own doorstep there's always something else happening, on the other side of the world, that's just as big and important that you might not actually be aware of.

On that point, the Pub Landlord has likened Covid to the Blitz – where do you think the British fixation on the war comes from?

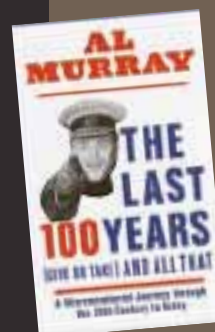
There's so much in British history where you go, “hmm, that wasn't brilliant, we don't come out of that very well, do we.” But in the Second World War you can unequivocally look at it and say, “we did the right thing; we fought the bad guys and won.” Even the bad bits, you can argue, were justified because the enemy really were the villains. And that's a fantastic thing to have in your history, so no wonder it's something we hold onto because things like that are quite rare in any national story. But it has also led to some quite serious misunderstanding about parts of it and that's something I try and address in the book.

The last chapter talks about how everything going on now – Brexit, Covid, Trump, Putin – will one day be history. Which of these worries you most?

I try and remain philosophical about the way things are and not get too wound up. Pandemics have come and gone before – when people weigh up the 1920s, the Spanish flu is never included. It's gone as a phenomenon, so maybe with Covid we'll find a way through and forget about it soon enough. At the start there was a lot of talk about, “we'll never get normal back.” From reading a lot of history I don't really think that. Though I might be wrong of course!

Finally, any Christmas messages for the readers of *Soldier*?

Yes. Keep on doing what you're doing. And thanks for doing it, so some lazy fat t*** like me doesn't have to!



Al Murray's latest book, *The Last 100 Years*, is out now priced at £14.99.

His podcast, *We Have Ways of Making You Talk*, with co-host and historian James Holland is available across most audio platforms.



Time TEAMS

The ranks of the military metal detectors community are growing, says Jason Massey (ex-LI)

► **BUYING** a metal detector and heading off to find buried treasure might sound a tempting downtime option – but your impulse could land you in trouble.

While it is true that centuries-old artefacts remain undiscovered in the British countryside, more than one individual has gone to jail for failing to take the right action with finds.

But there is a rich hobby in store for those who follow the rules and are motivated by conservation rather than cash, explains Jason Massey – boss of Forces enthusiasts' group Detecting for Veterans. Here, the ex-infanteer gives some advice for would-be seekers starting out...

Since starting out in metal detecting in 2015, Massey has made some significant finds, including...



A Roman enamel disc from 200AD



A cross-shaped brooch, thought to be Saxon or early Roman from 100AD



A 22-carat gold ring, dated 300AD, which possibly belonged to a Roman legionary leader

Get connected

Before you invest in any kit, I would suggest you join a local detecting club or group. There will be people there who can help you start out – they can also advise on the law and square away permissions from landowners

Tool up

Shop around when it comes to buying your equipment – and do your research first. There are some really good makes of detectors starting at £500 or so, and you could go up to just shy of £1,000 for something classier

Take care

It is important that you leave any land in the condition in which it was found, so seek tuition about the different ways to dig and restore the ground afterwards

Report finds

You must take the right actions if you make a discovery. Any artefact believed to be more than 300 years old should be entered on the portable antiquities scheme database. This is a system recording archaeological finds by members of the public and your local museum is a good port of call for any guidance. If the discovery is gold, silver or bronze, or more than two coins, it is classed as treasure trove. Here you must contact the local coroner's office – you are committing a criminal offence if you do not do this. Seek advice if you are in any doubt

Immerse yourself

Part of the fun of this hobby is researching different time periods, the lifestyles of those who lived in them and the types of finds you might encounter. Lose yourself in the history – do some reading and have a look online



Search **Detecting for Veterans** on Facebook for more info.



Digging it

Name: Jason Massey

Cap badge: 1st Battalion, The Light Infantry

Age: 47

Period of service: 1989-92

Postings: Included Berlin

Deals on wheels

After being scammed by a car salesman, this veteran set out to help military personnel avoid the same trap

► WHEN Steve Thornton (ex-AAC) returned from the Gulf War with his operational tour bonus in his pocket, he headed straight for the local car showroom.

It was 1991 and the then 21-year-old was stationed in Detmold, Germany, with 4 Regiment, Army Air Corps.

But what seemed like a bargain on his new car initially, quickly turned out to be far from it.

"I realised I'd got a pretty bad deal in comparison to other people," he explained. "I paid too much for the vehicle and the finance was extortionate.

"Had I been a sergeant I might have been able to negotiate harder but as a young private, I didn't know how to do that."

At the time the experience left him kicking himself, however, years down the line it would prove to drastically alter the course of his life.

In the mid-90s, with his unit due to move back to the UK, Thornton decided to stay in Germany and eventually ended up working in a car dealership in Rheindahlen.

He quickly climbed the ranks at the company and in 2001, when the opportunity came up to go into business with his former boss, he seized it with both hands.

"I settled in Lincoln and together we set up Forces Cars Direct," the ex-soldier explained.

"We began working directly with manufacturers to get discounts for tax free customers overseas.

"We weren't the first to sell cars to personnel, but we were forerunners in the way we were doing it – online and on the phone, instead of in a showroom.

"Not having ten vehicles sat in the dealership meant we could pass those savings directly on to the buyer.

"It put us on a good footing and that's the concept other people have copied over time."

Eventually the company expanded to offer veterans, the emergency services and other key workers the same discounts and almost 20 years on, has sold more than 25,000 cars, saving customers an estimated £115 million in the process. ►►



FORCES
Cars Direct
IF YOU SERVE YOU SAVE

NEXT STEPS CONTINUED

» Having been burnt by the hard-sell tactics of unscrupulous salespeople, Thornton is proud that he and his team have built their success upon an ethos of honesty.

"I wasn't told about my options," he explained.

"They just threw me at a car, at the absolute maximum amount I could pay, but that's not what a salesperson or adviser should do – we should be there to care for our clients.

"We get young lads coming in wanting an Audi, which they can't necessarily afford, so we have to identify what's available to them.

"Other people have a certain idea of the level of car they can afford, but they might actually be able to get a better one.

"There are still some car dealers out there who don't care, but for us it's all about talking to the customer and working out what's best for them." ■

Wherever you buy your car from, Thornton has this advice to ensure you don't get ripped off...



❑ **Be wary of people who say they're experts in military sales** – there are dealers who claim to offer discounts for the Service community but in reality it's probably not much of a saving

❑ **Bear in mind most salesmen are only interested in getting your custom today, not in the follow-up service or the conditions.** Six months later if something isn't right with the agreement, the chances are the person you spoke to won't even be there anymore as they tend to move on quickly

❑ **Take it with a pinch of salt if a salesman tells you there are only one or two of a particular make and model available.** Yes, there is limited stock out there, but don't let them rush you into making a decision

❑ **Make sure you buy the car you need, not one you want but can't afford if your situation changes.** Elections happen, recessions, Covid – all of these things affect the economy and possibly your ability to keep up with payments

For more information visit forcescarsdirect.com



Comeback TRAIL

How to return to the top after months on the sidelines

► **SERIOUS** injury doesn't necessarily signal an end to your sporting ambitions – just ask elite athlete Maj Rich Hunt (Rifles).

As a 41-year-old, the officer was the Army's Ironman distance record holder and set to compete in the sport's World Championships in Hawaii.

But in the second session of his 24-week training programme his knee flared up and made it impossible for him to run. MRI scans later revealed significant arthritis and little in the way of cartilage on the inside of the left joint.

The only option was to undergo a procedure that stopped just short of a full knee replacement and meant Maj Hunt would no longer be able to run competitively.

The surgery was a success, but his morale was through the floor as he went from a 20-hour training week to total inactivity.

However, he refused to let this become a full-time reality and set about the long road to recovery spurred on by the aim of excelling in a new sport – cycling.

Now 48, and with a string of successes on two wheels to his name, he shares some words of advice for those facing a similar path...

Acceptance

Only once you accept the injury, the severity of it and the surgery, as well as the implications of not doing the recovery correctly, will you realise that there can be no short cuts to the actual physical healing process. The body needs time and you will need to learn a new quality – patience. This clarity of thought, understanding and realisation enabled me to truly embrace and assist with the recovery process, which I summarise as: **listening, understanding, rest, nutrition, medical treatment, mindset and patience**

Own your recovery

It is your injury, your body and your responsibility to maximise every opportunity to get better. You decide what you put in your mouth, whether to skip a rehab session or start doing something too soon – despite being advised not to. You will ultimately either maximise and accelerate your speed of recovery or put a handbrake on it – and perhaps never get better

Have confidence in the body's ability to remember

If you have a long history of training (27 years in my case and rarely a skipped session), your body will remember how fit it was and will very quickly adapt to the training stress when you start again. I lost a third of the circumference in my left quad in five weeks, the brain just turned it off and my calf muscle wilted away. My left leg was 52/48 per cent dominant over the right pre-op. But six weeks after my return to training it was back to that level again. Never underestimate the amazing tool that is your body; give it everything it needs, and it will amaze you.

Mindset

Once I accepted I could no longer be a triathlete, I immediately thought 'what next?'. I was strong on the bike, but not really strong, so while on crutches I decided that I would be an Army-level cyclist – simple. This positivity, and having something on the horizon, will not only give you focus but will change your entire mindset. Every step, session, stretch

and pedal stroke now mattered. My mood, wellness and outlook were aligned, and my family breathed a short-term sigh of relief, coupled with a long-term groan of despair, as they thought I just might retire

Stoicism

This is a key ingredient. You have to be able to endure and even embrace pain and hardship (both mentally and physically), while the patience and forbearance to overcome adversity is a must – serious injury is adversity. Oh, and don't whinge and whine – these are negative emotions, they do not help and will annoy those closest to you. Fill your recovery with positivity



Post-op plaudits

Since his recovery and switch to cycling, Maj Hunt has achieved:

- Six consecutive seasons on the Army time trial team
- Two national 100-mile age group titles
- Six Service time trial podium finishes
- Combined Services all-time 12-hour record of 293 miles
- Army road race champion 2016
- Inter-Service indoor cycling champion 2019

He is about to undergo hip surgery on both legs but aims to be back at a similar level within eight months of the procedures



'Failure can be a positive'

This NCO's mental health battles led to him being reduced in rank – now he uses his experience to help soldiers serving time at the Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC)

► AFTER the stressful breakdown of his marriage and a lengthy court battle to gain access to his daughter, Sgt Dean Martin (AGC (MPS)) was diagnosed with PTSD.

But having overcome dark times, he now draws on his struggles in his current role at the MCTC in Colchester, where he guides those facing personal issues.

“I went on tour in 2013 and realised things at home were not as good as I thought they were. All of a sudden, the pressure was no longer there, and it ultimately gave me the strength to decide to separate from my wife.

During the break-up access to my daughter became quite sticky. I could only see her for two hours at a soft play centre, with my ex in the background, and this was still happening as recently as two years ago.

It took six court appearances in six years to get a robust order in place that gave me fair access.

During that time, I lost friends, family and had to lie to colleagues – my life started closing down.

I brought a really bad attitude to work and did not fulfil my duties. I was disciplined and reduced in rank from sergeant to corporal, resulting in a hefty pay cut and the loss of my house.

It was at this point that I was crying out for help emotionally, I kept self-destructing and destroying anything around me that made me happy. I was then referred to Army welfare.

I received counselling for six months and came out thinking the world was pretty good. But there were still underlying issues and by late 2018 I felt as if I had nowhere else to turn.

I was at my lowest point and that had

a knock-on effect with my new family.

I was angry, upset and didn't know what was going on with me – the pressure was unreal.

My wife said I needed to take some time off and see a doctor, so that's what I did. I self-referred and got some more counselling but I was showing some quite aggressive signs of PTSD.

I'm in a job where rounds and explosions can set people off, you don't associate what I've been through with battle trauma.

But, in a way, it was a good route to go down as it meant I could potentially get fixed.

Sometimes it's easy for soldiers to go AWOL, or start drinking and gambling, instead of making that step.

In the Army we are all quite proud – the last thing you want to do is take time off work because you're having a bad time with your ex.

But my bosses understood what I was going through and were happy for me to get the help I needed.

I managed to completely change my mindset through the PTSD clinic to flip from victim to being in charge of my own life.

I began restructuring how I handled situations. I started to study mindset coaching – after all it's your mind that tells you how cold and wet you are, or how fearful you should be of something.

The body's physical reactions are

“I flipped from victim to being in charge of my own life”

very similar; whether you experience fear or excitement, through positive self-talk you can reprogramme your thought process over a short amount of time.

The brain is just a computer and can be rewired to think differently. I learnt how adversity and failure can be seen as a positive.

It's in these failings that we discover new paths and how to really become a better version of ourselves.

Now, I can use what I've gone through to help in my job at MCTC.

I've done some coaching, where I've been able to apply snippets of what I've learnt along the way to help others with personal issues.

The Army offers mindfulness courses online. It has come a long way in terms of mental health and what is available, but to actually be able to interact with someone that has been down that road offers far more proof that adversity can be overcome than any online training.

I'll give them a quick rundown of everything that's happened to me and I think that is beneficial.

It would just be another job if I had not been through what I have. Yes, I would have enjoyed it, but I would not have the experience that makes it relatable.

The road to recovery has had its ups and downs, and I still have a trigger every now and then, but I am prepared should these happen and I am in control of my mind. ■



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COVERT QUEST

Personnel embrace physical and mental test on mission to join Army's surveillance specialists »

Words: Richard Long Pictures: Graeme Main

“ Motivation and resilience are key.
This is a mental test, 100 per cent
– you have got to want to do it ”

THE patrolling soldiers emerge from the woodland to be greeted by a female civilian who desperately pleads for assistance from those she identifies as friendly forces.

They oblige, but moments later she is being dragged to safety by the same personnel having sustained severe leg injuries in an ambush by enemy fighters.

The troops execute a swift withdrawal, repelling their foes' advances before retreating to a safe haven to deliver immediate medical care to the casualty, prior to extraction.

With the serial successfully completed, and feedback delivered by the directing staff, the participants quickly regroup and prepare to go again as dusk falls on Marne Barracks training area in North Yorkshire.

Similar tests follow throughout the night in what is a crucial stage of the 14-week course.

A casual onlooker would assume these soldiers are perfecting the drills needed to become combat medical technicians, but

in fact they are striving to join the Army's only long-range surveillance and reconnaissance patrol unit – 4/73 (Sphinx) Special Observation Post Battery.

Given the covert nature of their role – operating way beyond the front line and in small teams – the supporting assets afforded to typical boots on the ground are not an option, so their all-round military skills must be on point.

This is reflected in the arduous nature of the training. Physical fitness and navigational ability form the initial focus – with tests over ten miles and 18, 28 and 44 kilometres – before attention switches to the tactics and procedures needed at an individual through to patrol level.

The focus then fixes on one of the key elements of their prospective role – the creation of observation posts. This is taught and practised in sub-surface, surface and urban environments before their new-found knowledge is tested in a tactical exercise.

A formative patrols phase follows ahead of a live firing stage featuring the SA80 rifle, general purpose machine gun and Glock pistol. The programme then concludes with a two-and-a-half-week final exercise.





"They have to be physically fit," the course's chief instructor, who cannot be named for operational security reasons, tells *Soldier*. "They'll be covering eight miles on day one while carrying 25 kilogrammes and their weapon."

"Motivation and resilience are also key. This is a mental test, 100 per cent – you have got to want to do it."

It is a view that is echoed by the instructor leading the personnel in the medical serials.

"This is a very hard course in terms of intensity," the soldier, who joined the battery in 2010 and deployed on Op Herrick 18 three years later as part of the theatre surveillance troop, adds.

"It is a head game. If they are switched on, they can achieve anything but as soon as an element of doubt creeps in it can be a slippery slope."

"It is important to turn up with the right attitude and a willingness to learn; if they do that the training team will do their best to get them through."

Part of 5 Regiment, Royal Artillery, Sphinx Battery provides a surveillance, reconnaissance and joint fires capability for commanders in high-risk environments.

Usually deployed in teams of six, their mission is to push out and capture imagery and intelligence on potential targets and patterns of life from covert positions.

This is then fed to the chain of command to paint a picture of the situation on the ground.

A range of technology helps their cause and stills photography forms a crucial tool. But mental stamina is equally as important as these soldiers must live self-sufficiently for up to ten days without revealing their whereabouts to the enemy.

Given its unique capability, the unit was a mainstay of the Herrick and Telic eras and has deployed to every major theatre of operations since its formation in 1982.

The tempo remains as high today with exercises, taskings with short-term training teams – in Europe and beyond – and career courses forming their regular business. The pace of life is a big attraction to the latest contenders on the surveillance and reconnaissance patrols course – a tri-Service package that is open to all cap badges. »



» If successful, personnel initially join in a two-year posting and then have the option of transferring to the battery to extend their stay further.

"My unit seems to be in a cycle between Canada and Estonia and I wanted to break that and move up a level in terms of my recce skills," says a corporal from The Queen's Royal Hussars during a pause in training.

"I like the analytical side of the role and how it feeds into the bigger picture. You feel like you're making a telling contribution.

"I didn't know much about 4/73 Battery until I read an article about it in *Soldier* and saw its Instagram page. There was an element of the unknown and that intrigued me.

"In terms of the training, the hills stage has been the hardest part and the exercises are at a higher tempo than normal. It is all about the little things – but doing them to a higher standard."

A change in direction was also a motivating factor for a lieutenant from the Royal Artillery, who was posted to a headquarters job prior to signing up for the course.

"I wanted a change; something that is physical and mental and would improve my green skills," the 30-year-old explains.

"The training has been a challenge, but it is definitely achievable. If you are fit, strong and capable there is no reason why you cannot pass.

"Nothing here is out of the ordinary – it is just done to an extremely high level.

"I'm now looking forward to completing the course so I can see how good these soldiers are."

Having served for 13 years – including tours of Afghanistan

and Iraq, as well as completing P Company – a corporal from the Royal Engineers admitted it was time to do something different.

He tells *Soldier* passing the surveillance and reconnaissance patrols course will offer exactly that.

"As I've gone through my Army career, I've always wanted a new challenge," he adds. "You can easily get bored, especially when you're sat behind a desk.

"It has been non-stop; from the moment you get out of bed to the second you go to sleep. You have to be prepared for early starts and late finishes throughout.

"People talk about the hills phase and how difficult it can be but as long as you stay injury free it is achievable – prevention is the key to success.

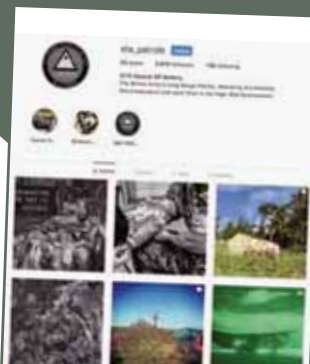
"It's not just about phys. You're out in the field with a lack of sleep and food and you have to crack on. You're also carrying a Bergen and the terrain has a massive impact.

"I'm excited about the prospect of going to new places. 4/73 deploy on real-life operations and I want to get out on tour."

With applications now being sought for the next course, which gets under way in February, Sphinx Battery looks set to welcome more troops seeking a break from the norm. And with the unit's tempo remaining high, their thirst for new challenges will certainly be quenched. ■

For more
details see
2019DIN07-117

Visit 4/73 Battery's Instagram
page [@sta_patrols](#)





RISE OF THE PATHFINDERS

Troops urged to consider their
airborne recce potential »

STRICTLY off limits to civvies – and even most British soldiers – the surreal high-altitude world is a place where the temperature plunges well below zero and bottled oxygen sustains life.

With the ground thousands of feet below blending into broad areas of mixed colour punctuated by the contours of mountains and hills, few features can be seen.

“If you picture the street view image on your phone and keep zooming out, that is the view you have,” a corporal in the Pathfinders recalled of his early jumps. “There are the shapes of fields, or just the blinking of lights at night.

“You might open the parachute early on, which means you are literally flying and picking out the other canopies as you descend – it’s pretty special.”

A descent of this type is certainly a unique opportunity. But the outfit the sapper joined three years ago excels in offering the unconventional – even by Army standards.

Part of Colchester-based 16 Air Assault Brigade, the Pathfinders are the formation’s advance force – ready to rapidly deploy and conduct operations.

They push behind enemy lines in small, self-sufficient patrols, finding and relaying vital information back to headquarters to enable it to plan and execute missions.

A key role is identifying drop and landing zones where the main body of troops can be parachuted or landed by helicopter.

And with a lethal mix of skills and kit, the unit packs a huge punch for its modest size.

“It doesn’t matter where in the Army you happen to be from – we are simply looking for candidates who are physically, as well as mentally, robust”

While it might sound the preserve of an elite band, making the grade is fully achievable for those with a dream of forging a future career with them.

The outfit is open to personnel of all cap badges who possess the right combination of physical robustness and mental resilience, matched with a drive to succeed.

Joining is a matter of passing a demanding six-week course that boxes off disciplines including fitness, navigation, reconnaissance and live-fire tactical training. The assessment concludes with a full-on final exercise during the last seven days.

According to the Pathfinders’ sergeant major, who cannot be named for operational security reasons, aspiring candidates should not be deterred from coming forward if they believe they have the right qualities and drive to succeed.

“Joining is tough, but success is 100 per cent attainable,” the WO2 told *Soldier*.

“Whether you are working in a post room with the Royal Logistic Corps or an infanteer in the Paras, you will be taught all you need.

“It doesn’t matter where in the Army you happen to be from – we are simply looking for candidates who are physically, as well as mentally, robust.

“In addition, they must be able to work well on their own initiative and in small teams – often in isolated and far-flung locations.”

Successful personnel can expect a raft of rewards. They include being trained on a range of equipment – including different types of parachute canopies – as well as courses teaching the likes of high-altitude jumps.

Members can also expect to become adept at a number of skills – among them sniping and directing air strikes, while learning life-saving medical drills.

“There are some unique opportunities in the Pathfinders,” the warrant officer pointed out. “It is certainly the place to be if you want operational deployments.

“We have had people away, for example, assisting with short-term training teams – we are at the forefront of the brigade so all doors are open.”

The three troops in the outfit rotate between being on deployments, at readiness or sharpening their skills in training in what is a constant drumbeat of activity.

The Pathfinders also operate in a unique working environment, with two selection courses each year drawing in new blood to regularly refresh the team.

Newcomers retain their cap badge identity when they arrive – adding to a unique range of experience and soldiers from a variety of different backgrounds.

Although women are now eligible to join the outfit, there has not been any female representation since ground close combat roles were fully opened up.

Those serving with the Pathfinders all maintain that the role has surpassed their expectations. While the bar was set high for applicants, they were adamant that the most committed would pass to reap the rich rewards on offer.

A corporal from 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment said that those aspiring to selection should ensure they were prepared before embarking on the course.

“A lot of the process is mind over matter,” the 32-year-old added. “I’ve seen people decide to give up early because they were not mentally ready.

“I come from an infantry background and joining the Pathfinders and going through the process was quite a big step for me – it is important to prepare.

“It has been fantastic being here – there is a great variety”

“ There are some great opportunities
– the high-altitude parachute
course is amazing ”





» of work and it has given me new experiences, while opening up options to further my career.”

The NCO added that the diversity of soldiers from a host of cap badges added to the overall experience.

“It is a real plus point that you have the opportunity to work with such a mixed crowd and people from various walks of life,” he continued.

“You have everyone from sappers to military police alongside you – it is a diverse environment where everyone has different backgrounds and perspectives.”

A lance corporal from 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards agreed the experience would stand troops in good stead as they developed their soldiering skills.

The sniper – who was in a recce platoon before applying to join the Pathfinders – also shared the view that being ready for selection was crucial.

“It is a tough course but, as the sergeant major said, it is achievable,” he added. “Although – for me – coming here was a natural progression from being at the battalion, the course does test you and you need to be ready for it.

“There are some great opportunities – the high-altitude parachute course is amazing, and I have been away a fair bit to different countries.”

The Pathfinders provide a wealth of possibilities to troops across the spectrum – with rich operational experience on offer.

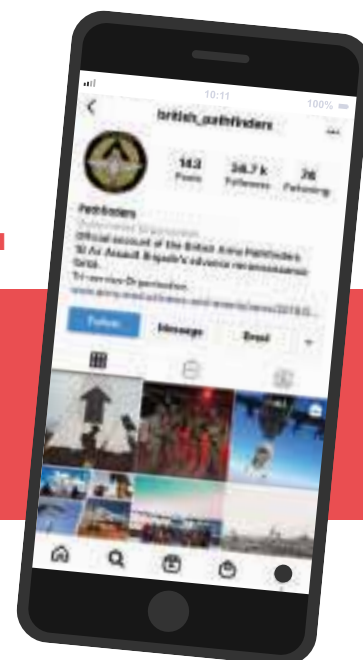
While applying might sound intimidating, preparation is the key to success – as is so often the case in Army life, hard work pays dividends. ■

For more details see

2019DIN01-014,
the **british_pathfinders**

Instagram page or email

16X-pf-recruiting@mod.gov.uk





STREET SMART

The programme to build facilities for troops relocating from Germany broke new ground in more ways than one

SOLDIERS will enjoy higher standards of accommodation, supported by better facilities that are more closely integrated within the local civilian community in the future.

That was the conclusion of Maj Gen David Southall, Director of Army Basing and Infrastructure, after the seven-year Army basing programme drew to a close last month.

The scale of the project was unprecedented, with around 20,000 troops relocated from Germany to the UK.

Barracks and other facilities were upgraded and thousands of new homes built (see map overleaf). »

Words: Steve Muncey Pictures: Chris Sturges

» The £1.8 billion initiative has been lauded in a Cabinet Office review for achieving its primary goals within the scheduled time and cost limits, but that doesn't mean the programme was without its problems.

"There's no denying we encountered significant hurdles at the start of the project," Maj Gen Southall (pictured opposite) told *Soldier*.

"Although we had a fixed budget and a hard-stop end date to enable the return of troops from Germany, we were determined to deliver significant improvements in the lived experience for our people.

"Key to its success was operating closely with county councils, local authorities and key community stakeholders – new ground for us at this scale.

"For the first time we worked to a shared vision, building new schools and health care centres for the whole community, not just military infrastructure inside the wire.

"The Army is part of society, not an isolated institution, so we wanted to deliver a fully integrated footprint to support our families and help connect to the community we draw from and the society we serve."

Around 1,500 new Service family dwellings and 4,400 additional bed spaces for single soldiers were constructed, as well as all the major infrastructure investments needed to support them.

A vital ingredient in achieving this was putting in the time and effort to engage with local councils and planners at every level, said the senior officer.

"My team, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation and industry put in hard yards to win over key stakeholders and showcase the tangible benefits a military community brings to a region; disposable income, jobs and support to local businesses," added Maj Gen Southall.

He cites the example of the new development at Larkhill (pictured right) where, working with the local authorities, 1,000 additional places in two new schools, along with a large sports centre and a community medical facility, were put in place.

"The medical centre is a superb example of our collaboration and the first of its kind designed to deliver military and civilian primary healthcare, supporting not just personnel and their families but also the wider local civilian community," the senior officer explained.

Other notable firsts achieved during the project include properties built specifically for disabled, wounded and sick soldiers, or their family members.

"We have refurbished properties before to support our wounded, injured and sick, but this is the first time we have designed bespoke new-build bungalows for disabled families," he added.

"Alongside en-suite master bedrooms and fully fitted modern kitchens, it's an example of the quality of the housing built under this programme, where we set a scale of ambition over the basic defence requirement.



Personnel Recovery Training Centre, Perham Down



St Michael's School, Larkhill



Headquarters of the Household Cavalry Regiment, Bulford



Housing development at Larkhill



Single living accommodation blocks, Larkhill

“The Army is part of society, not an isolated institution”

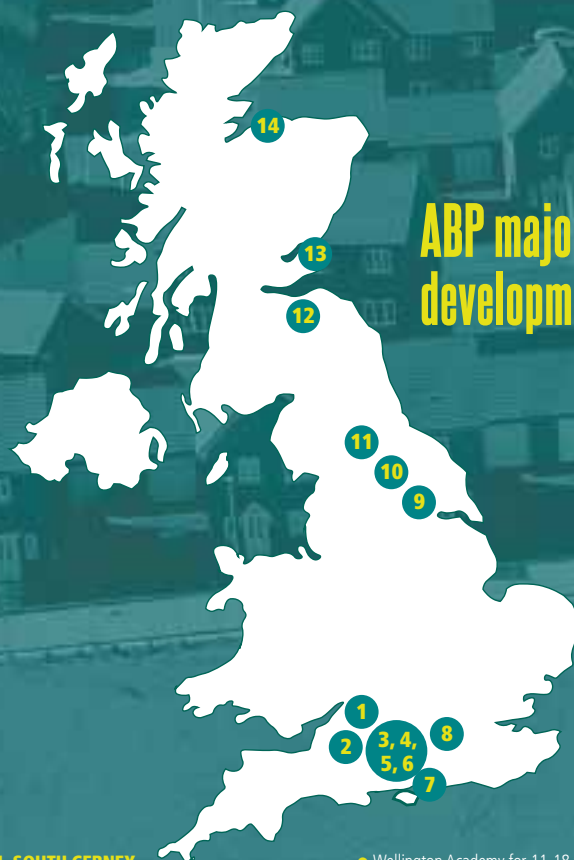
“Sustainability was another critical consideration – I was conscious we were building for the next generation so being ‘green’ was key.

“We installed more than 6,000 square metres of solar panels on roofs which will generate more than 500,000 kilowatt hours of electricity annually.”

Overall, the estimated cost of running the Army estate will be reduced by at least £240 million per year from 2023, compared to when the 20,000 now-relocated personnel were stationed in Germany.

The success of these developments and the level of integration with local planners, will strongly influence how infrastructure projects such as the defence estate optimisation programme will be delivered in the future.

“A major lesson to draw from this is that if you’re prepared to invest up front you can not only improve the lived experience for troops and their families and deliver better operational capability on a more environmentally friendly and sustainable footprint, but also save money for defence,” concluded Maj Gen Southall. ■



ABP major developments

1. SOUTH CERNEY

- SLA blocks receive 90 new bed spaces at Duke of Gloucester Barracks, refurbishment of offices, conference room, additional storage, new physical training and sports facility

2. LYNEHAM

- New SLA
- Refurbishment of the powerpack repair facility
- New armoury
- New workshops, sports and welfare facilities and offices to enable new centre of excellence for the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, with the co-location of 5 Bn REME, the Defence School of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering and the Defence College of Technical Training

3. LARKHILL

- 20 SLA blocks built
- New diner, training wing, QM stores, sports pitches, physical training facilities, messes
- Primary school for 420 pupils, 60 nursery places
- 450 new houses
- Two new GP practices
- Medical and dental centre created, a mixed facility run with the NHS housing 22 consultant rooms and six nurse treatment rooms

4. BULFORD

- New home for Household Cavalry Regiment. Includes training buildings, workshops, enhanced garaging and regimental headquarters
- New mess shared with 1 Mercian
- Two primary schools expanded for 200 more pupils
- Medical facility extended for 570 more spaces
- New intermediate health care centre for five doctors, eight consultants, seven physiotherapists and seven exercise rehabilitation instructors
- Avon Valley College secondary school expanded for additional 270 pupils
- 255 new houses built
- 242 new houses built at Ludgershall

5. TIDWORTH

- 100 houses purchased
- 322 new houses built
- Nursery built for 55 children aged 0-5 years
- Primary school created to house 420 pupils and 30 nursery places

- Wellington Academy for 11-18 year-olds expanded for additional 300 pupils
- New workshops, technical store, QM stores, Ajax training facilities

6. PERHAM DOWN

- New sports facility
- Technical storage created
- Vehicle garaging
- Mess and offices
- Junior ranks' and officers' SLA blocks

7. THORNEY ISLAND

- Refurbishment of hangars, garages, training facilities
- 144 bed spaces at Baker Barracks for 16 Regiment, Royal Artillery

8. ALDERSHOT

- 50 new single en-suite bedrooms at the officers' and warrant officers' mess at Wavell Barracks and 70 bed spaces at Keogh Barracks

9. YORK

- New 60-bed SLA and 1 (UK) Division headquarters at Imphal Barracks

10. DISHFORTH

- 149 new bed spaces for 6 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps

11. CATTERICK

- Sandhurst Block at Bourn Barracks reconfigured and modernised, providing offices and specialist high security briefing rooms
- New gym, mess facilities, QM store, offices, SLA, armouries, sports pitches

12. DREGHORN

- New explosive ordnance disposal facility and sports pitches
- New junior and senior NCO SLA blocks

13. LEUCHARS

- New temporary armoury
- Regimental headquarters
- Upgraded SLA
- Improved technical stores including provision of a police station

14. KINLOSS

- New armoury



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RAISING THEIR GAME

New recruits will soon be better prepared than ever before

THE Covid-19 pandemic has transformed the way many organisations work but it would have been all too easy for one as large as the British Army to slip behind the curve.

However, as we've reported in previous editions (see July issue, page 11), the training establishments, in particular, have shown remarkable agility and creativity in their efforts to keep the recruitment pipelines open.

Furthermore, some of the most important lessons they've learnt are now being fed into the way new recruits will be trained

in the future, with or without pandemics and lockdowns.

"The Covid-19 situation was a bit of a wake-up call as to what is possible and helped bring forward the Service's plans," says Maj Elliot Moore (R Signals), officer commanding Fowler Squadron, 2nd Army Training Regiment, based at Pirbright.

His unit, which prepares phase one personnel for non-infantry roles, is currently trialling a revised format for the 14-week common military syllabus that takes new recruits and trains them in the basics of soldiering. In the next few months a raft of modifications based on the results of these trials will be confirmed for an official April 2021 relaunch of the regime.

The main changes being evaluated are a more modular format and a greater emphasis on team building and virtual learning.

"The intention of the new syllabus is to develop physically resilient, mentally tough soldiers who do the basics brilliantly," says Maj Moore.

"Online elements are being utilised a lot more and students are being asked to do additional virtual training in the run-up to the course to prepare themselves."

The moves could potentially benefit the Service – through lower costs – and the recruits.

"This generation are very information-hungry – they »

” want to know what is going on and why, and are willing to look for the answers themselves online,” says the officer.

“As a result, the emphasis on remote education has worked well so far and it’s something that might not have been anywhere near as effective 20 or even ten years ago.”

One of the objectives of the pilot is to identify potential problems, especially as the standard of recruit can be as diverse as the units they move on to. Certain weaknesses have already been identified and will be subjected to revision.

“The virtual training for navigation is one area we’ve identified as not quite at the mark we need it to be, so we are looking to improve that,” notes instructor Capt Colette Broome (RA).

“Learning the theory is all very well but you need to be out in the field, seeing the landscape for real and navigating your way by day and by night, and making mistakes. That’s how you learn.

“To an extent we are still discovering how the recruits teach themselves virtually because there can be quite a big differences in ability levels and experience – some have completed degrees, while others are only 17 and have just left school.

“But the instructors are learning a lot through this, just as the recruits are, and we are passing those lessons back to the training establishments.”

The stream of feedback also includes how effective the new more modular training schedule is proving to be.

The recruits are being asked to cover different topics in concentrated doses, containing both coaching and assessments, rather than undertaking smaller parcels of training spread out over the course of several weeks.

“Instead of jumping around we go into a topic in-depth and then test them on it during the battle camp,” explains Capt Broome.

“This solidifies the training and allows them to really get into the soldiering side more intensely.

“For example, that means they can spend more time with weapon in hand before heading back to barracks.”

The officer adds: “We also have more instructor-to-recruit



“ This generation are much more information-hungry ”



contact time, especially at the three battle camps that we are holding away from Pirbright.

"These are part of the proposed new structure and contain a range package followed by a week in the field, where the recruits can put what they've learnt into practice and be assessed by us to see what standard they're at."

The instructors say the early signs are promising and the recruits certainly seem to be enjoying the course (see opposite), although details may be tweaked before the revised schedule is launched next spring.

But one feature that has proved faultless for both parties is the formalised team-building activity – a new addition to the syllabus.

In the first week the recruits participate in a day of problem-solving exercises, including a *Dragons' Den*-type scenario where groups of 12 personnel develop products and sell their ideas to a panel of instructing staff.

"They also create their own section's ethos, code of conduct and values and standards," adds Maj Moore.

"One group even drew a coat of arms, while another wrote out their ethos in Ghanaian because they had someone from Ghana in their team and, being the only member from a foreign country, they wanted to ensure he felt part of the outfit."

But with the trial being honed all the time and virtual learning still in its infancy isn't there a danger these recruits will suffer from being guinea pigs?

"Not at all, we simply cannot fail them," says Maj Moore.

"The bottom line is that they will leave us at the required standard, but it does mean the instructors are working longer hours and if we assess something hasn't worked as well as we'd hoped, we'll make up that ground at a later stage.

"All the instructing staff are invested in this and have provided a strong impetus for it.

"We simply want to give the recruits the best training we can so when they pass out they are better, more rounded soldiers." ■

Recruits' reactions



Rct Aaron Bailey

From: Stoke-on-Trent

Age: 20

Wants to join: The Light Dragoons

On training: "It's so fast-paced – we do a week's worth of drills and are then assessed. It is challenging but we don't have to revise much because we're tested so regularly and get loads of feedback which, I think, means we progress as fast as we can."

Highlight so far: "Firing the SA80 for the first time and meeting all the lads. I've only known them for a few weeks but they already feel like family. I'm used to, and enjoy, being in a team environment – I was employed in a workshop before I joined up and we had to operate in teams all the time."

On joining: "I've always loved the Army. My godfather is a warrant officer in the Royal Artillery. The camaraderie has always appealed to me and I love being fit – I do CrossFit and boxing – and the outdoor life as well."

Rct Oliver Slade

From: Sunderland

Age: 25

Wants to join: The Light Dragoons

On training: "So far so good. I believe we've done far more at this stage than recruits would have done in the past. There's been lots of remote learning, so it feels intense but in a good way – the lessons really stick."

Highlight so far: "The battle camps are great. I'm into my camping and have done it for years, but it's very different from what I'm used to. We're doing stags at night, packing up our stuff in the pitch black, without torches, and sleeping under a poncho, not a tent. But I'm loving every minute of it."

On joining: "I was a tree surgeon, but it's difficult being self-employed in the current climate. I've wanted to join the Army since I was a kid so I took the plunge. I have an uncle who was in The Light Infantry and he told me loads of stories that got me interested. I really want to do something worthwhile, that's part of the big picture." »



Rct Jamie Harvey

From: York

Age: 20

Wants to join: The Royal Engineers

On training: "The team-building drills have worked well, and our section has bonded really quickly. In this environment you know you have to work together, otherwise you won't succeed. I've been surprised by the amount of online learning, especially the map reading. The information is there but it's knowing how to apply it."

Highlight so far: "The fire and manoeuvre serials, and I'm enjoying the feeling of getting fitter all the time."

On joining: "I really want to travel, see a bit of the world and make a few friends along the way. Also, the Army can give you so many skills and trades. I aim to be a plant operator mechanic – the Terrier looks like an awesome bit of kit."



Rct Jack Cook

From: Reigate

Age: 27

Wants to join: The Royal Engineers – EOD hopefully

On training: "The relaxed approach works well as it helps you learn really effectively. This feels more like a coaching course and I believe it's leaps and bounds ahead of the old system as you get more from your people."

Highlight so far: "Being in the field, honing our skills. I was a tree surgeon before I joined so being out in the woods is bread and butter to me, I love it."

On joining: "I've always been attracted to the military and spent time at Lympstone with the Royal Marines but had to leave due to repeated injury. I managed to recover, it was a long road, and I'm now set on a career with the Army."



Rct Bailey Lamb

From: Leeds

Age: 17

Wants to join: The Royal Logistic Corps

On training: "It's fast paced, which I like, and we have taken on a lot in the time we've been here."

Highlight so far: "Being out on exercise, and the fire and manoeuvre drills have been really enjoyable."

On joining: "My cousin is in the Army and he's never looked back. He said I should consider it and I've decided I want to be a comms specialist with the RLC and also get my driving qualifications – I want to get all my licences, including HGV."



Rct George Bradley

From: Glastonbury

Age: 17

Wants to join: The Royal Tank Regiment

On training: "I've loved being out in the field and making some good mates along the way."

Highlight so far: "The camaraderie is great and knowing your section has your back is a brilliant feeling. The stronger your bond with them, the more you know how each other thinks – which means you have a greater chance of succeeding in the field."

On joining: "It's always been my dream job – I really want to serve my country and work with tanks. The sheer size and power of the Challenger 2 has always amazed me."

MySERIES



JPA Self-Service – Anytime, Anywhere

The MySERIES applications are Defence Gateway (DGW) based applications, available Defence-wide, that provide a Whole Force capability to manage critical aspects of service life: anytime and anywhere, this will allow SPs to conduct a variety of JPA actions from personal Internet-enabled devices.

HOW THE APPS WORK

Whilst the detail and builds vary, a large element of the MySERIES capability utilises 'Robotic Process Automation' (RPA). Effectively, when you use the apps, a virtual robot then acts on your behalf to use the core systems, in particular JPA.



MyLEAVE

Since 1 Nov 19, Army SP have been able to submit applications for ILA to JPA, via the MyLEAVE application on the Defence Gateway. This provides additional flexibility for SP in submitting leave requests, particularly those who don't have easy access to JPA. So far 30% of all leave entries are input by the Army using the app on the defence gateway. We are the leading service so far using this, let's increase and maintain that position. Benefits include, entering your leave from your personal internet enabled devices 24/7, anywhere in the world and it's a lot quicker than entering from a MoDNet terminal (now 8 clicks instead of 21). Leave can be entered anytime up to 48 hours in advance of the anticipated leave period.

Launch of MyLEAVE version 2.0 August 2020, we have improved the 'look' and 'feel' of MyLEAVE, to make the application even better and easier for SP to use.



MyEXPENSES

Launched in Aug 2020, we've made it easier for you to put in expense claims through the Defence Gateway which can be accessed from your phones and laptops without the need for JPA. On initial release, the MyEXPENSES App will allow you to submit claims for authorised duty travel and subsistence; the functionality will be increased later to allow submission of claims for other expenses.

The app is currently restricted to UK claims only. Usual approval and audit processes will apply. Claims will be associated with your current assigned UIN number.

The full version of the application will allow worldwide claims, in multiple currencies and will provide the facility to change UIN. The full version will also allow claims for other expense types and uploading of digital receipts; full details will follow in due course.

OTHER APPLICATIONS COMING UP ARE:



MyDETAILS

- will enable you to view most of your personal details held on JPA and edit the Self-Service ones. Not all personal details are available via the Application and for more clarity on what is available please use the User Guide.



MyAPPRAISAL

- will enable SP to view, acknowledge and constructively comment on their latest report.





FAMILY AFFAIR

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As Nato marks 25 years since its landmark operation in Bosnia, a son returns to continue his father's work



Report: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Soldier archive



THE Bosnian countryside is a strange place – as haunting as it is beautiful.

My thoughts are wandering as we file down the isolated country road.

It is a cold, crisp day in the winter of 1999 and the sun is lighting up the afternoon sky in a spectacular electric blue. It is warmer today; a gentle thaw under way. Rust coloured water trickles around our boots.

There is a quiet chatter among the soldiers – up ahead our interpreter is with the regimental sergeant major talking to one of the villagers. A message over the radio confirms that a batch of hand grenades has been surrendered to another patrol.

We pass the shattered minaret of a mosque lying in a field, the outline shrouded in snow. Nearby houses are reduced to facades, as if part of a film set. With a serious threat from landmines, nobody ventures off the hard standing.

I'm walking with Lt Col Patrick Marriott – commanding officer of The Queen's Royal Lancers Battlegroup – who is here as part of the Nato mission in Bosnia.

With a fragile peace holding after a three-year civil war, this patrol near the town of Banja Luka is part of a campaign to reassure local people and gather intelligence.

"I tell my soldiers to consider what we must achieve and think to the finish," the CO – who will go on to retire as a major general – asserts as we patrol through the settlement.

"We need to look ahead. While we might not achieve the long-term goals, others will follow and build on our progress.

"We must get under the skin of this country – if we do that, we can succeed."

Nearly two decades later those words now resonate strongly with his son, Capt Harry Marriot (pictured left), serving in the QRL's successor regiment The Royal Lancers. He is part of the ongoing mission to maintain peace in a region that was ravaged by fighting.

"Dad sent me the diary of his time on tour and it is a useful document," he explained. "He always said that it was really important to understand the political situation here."

Back when the Nato mission began in 1995, Bosnia was a shell of a state, shattered by conflict and a racially-motivated genocide that had shocked the world.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia following the end of Soviet communism in the early 1990s saw clashes break out between different ethnic groups of Serbs, Croats and local Bosnian Muslims as long-suppressed animosities surfaced. The result was a catalogue of atrocities in a seemingly insoluble crisis.

Although British troops had already been in the country as part of a UN presence, the eventual brokering of the Dayton peace accords between the warring parties saw Nato take control of the op, backed by the global body. »





» Having formally created the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the deal divided governance of the country among the different ethnic groups. It fell to the alliance, and its multinational soldiers, to help make the agreement a reality.

But despite the organisation's muscle – with 60,000 personnel in the initial implementation force – keeping a lid on unrest, assisting with the return of refugees and disarming the ex-combatants was a testing undertaking.

Maj Gen Marriott – who deployed as the op gathered pace and would later head the Balkans desk at Permanent Joint Headquarters – found the situation highly charged. It could be as easily influenced by a local commander's decision as international events.

"You came to understand that everything out there was interconnected," he recalls. "It was a strange dynamic in which the Bosnian people were mostly decent, but many were not talking to each other – the wounds were raw and deep."

"During our deployment as part of Op Palatine, I started foot patrols, getting troops to find out what was happening on the ground and where the metaphorical tectonic plates met."

The retired officer had always been the first to admit that a lasting peace would take time – but he could never have envisaged his son returning two decades later.

Now commanding a squadron-sized British contingent as

“The wounds were raw and deep”



IN NUMBERS: **Op Althea**



Multinational troops in theatre

Contributing nations

20

Op started

2004

part of Eufor – a European Union administered operation – Capt Marriott admits to feeling the hand of history.

He is all too aware that the conflict remains seared on the country's consciousness – but progress has been made and observation, rather than peace enforcement, is now the order of the day.

"Life is different here now," says the 27-year-old.

"During the six-month tour our personnel will be involved in monitoring work, as well as helping to maintain a safe and secure environment."

Bosnia and Herzegovina has certainly changed and responsibility for many tasks once carried out by the soldiers has transferred to the local authorities over the years.

But commanders maintain a watchful eye on the situation – and rapid reinforcements, including British personnel, can be summoned if trouble flares.

Currently overseen by an Austrian major general, Eufor encompasses troops from some 20 nations in consolidating the achievements of previous generations.

Capt Marriott is determined to play his part in building on the past success, while enhancing the Army's strong reputation as a global peacekeeper.

"My dad has unfailingly been a fantastic mentor who has always been the first port of call for help, but ultimately I must now forge my own path," he says.

Generations have passed since the operations in the former Yugoslavia were at their height. Their significance might have been eclipsed by later events in Iraq and Afghanistan, but troops deployed undoubtedly helped halt a humanitarian crisis.

The experience they accrued also continues to stand the Army in good stead with its reputation for peacekeeping excellence recognised around the world. ■



Q&A

Maj Gen Patrick Marriott

● What advice would you give to a leader on peacekeeping ops?

Try to understand as much as you can about a place and its people before you arrive. Read history, as written by those who actually live in the region.

● Are there any key lessons you learnt?

Don't believe first reports of events – be calm, as things are generally never as good or as bad as they initially seem.

● How did your leadership style develop?

I understood that I needed to delegate in order to give myself more thinking time and opportunities to innovate. This becomes more important the higher you climb in rank.



Patrick Marriott

Age: 62

Years of service: 1976-2012

Rank on retirement:
Major general

Operational experience:

Includes Israel, Bosnia, Iraq, Northern Ireland

Career highlights: CO, QRL; Commander, 7th Armoured Brigade; Commandant, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst



Harry Marriott

Age: 27

Current rank: Captain

Years of service: 2015-

Operational experience:
Bosnia

Picture: The Royal Bermudan Regiment

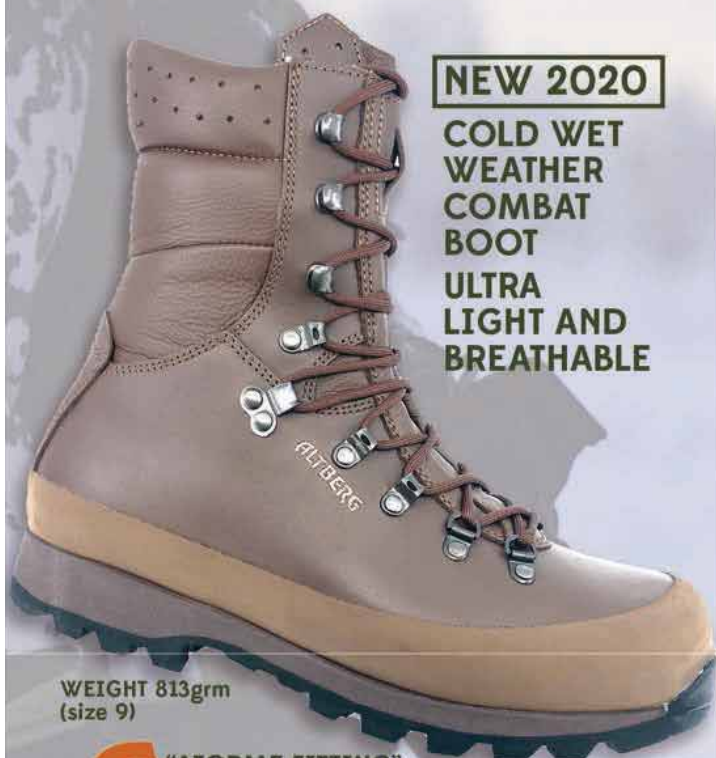
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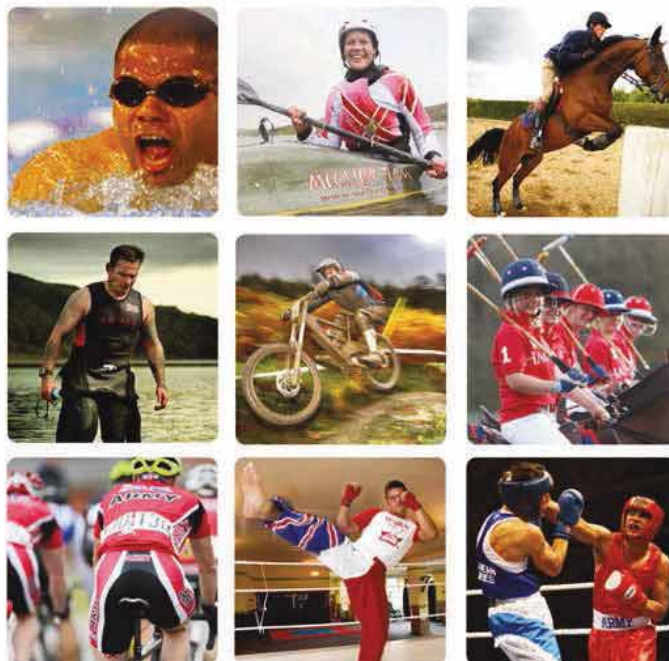


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The Army Sports Lottery is a non-profit making organisation that exists to support sport in the Army.

For further details visit our website at:
www.armysportslottery.com

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3rd Prize	£4000
4th Prize	£3000
5th Prize	£2000
6th Prize	£1000
2 x	£500
15 x	£200
10 x	£100

CONTACT US

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Fox Lines, Queen's Avenue,
Aldershot, Hampshire, GU11 2LB

Tel: 01252 787065 • 94222 7065

Fax: 01252 787066 • 94222 7066

Email: lottery@ascb.uk.com

Web: www.armysportslottery.com





**Competition
Deadline:**

Dec 14

How to enter

Send an email to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk with your full name, address and telephone number, stating "Christmas competition" followed by the name of the prize draw you want to enter in the title field.

You can enter once for every item, meaning you could bag yourself more than one.

The closing date is December 14 and winners will be drawn at random the following day. If you have been successful you will be notified by email, so keep an eye on your inbox.

● UK and BFPO entries only.

Christmas delivery not guaranteed.

The 12 days of Christmas

Glad tidings – our festive giveaway is back to spread the joy

LET'S face it, 2020 has been a slog. That's why the elves at *Soldier* HQ have been hard at work pestering companies across the country to show their support for British troops and part with some amazing prizes for our Christmas competition.

From jewellery and stylish interiors to technology, gadgets and outdoor gear, there is something to bring cheer to everyone.

But you've got to be in it to win it. Check out the panel on the right to find out how to enter.

Good luck and a very happy Christmas to all of our readers. »



Pearl jewellery

What better way to spoil the lady in your life than with some stunning silver and pearl bling courtesy of the Lido Collection? Up for grabs is a £250 gift card to spend on their range of high-quality freshwater, Edison and Tahitian pearl designs. The voucher can be spent on one special item or split over several purchases and is valid for 12 months.

Soldier readers can also make use of an exclusive 15 per cent discount. Head over to lido-collection.co.uk and use the code **Forces15** by December 31.



Gent's grooming kit

Say goodbye to sheepishly borrowing your partner's hairdryer with the first ever model designed specifically for men. Developed by Heist of London (heistof.london), the salon-quality device dries short hair in less than a minute using ionic technology and high-speed air flow. The set includes a vented hairbrush, air concentrator tip, a canvas travel bag and performance styling products worth £159 in total.



A king size bed

Drift off in style with the Darcy king size bed from Lakeland Furniture (Lakeland-furniture.co.uk), worth £350. Fully upholstered in charcoal fabric and finished off with dark wooden legs, it boasts sprung slats for ultimate comfort. Delivered in flat pack form, the bed will take approximately 30 minutes to assemble.

*Please note that this prize cannot be delivered overseas.



Vintage interiors

If unique, sustainable gifts are your thing, you'll want to bag yourself a £250 voucher to be spent on handmade leather accessories or vintage furniture at Scaramanga (scaramangashop.co.uk). Their craftspeople use traditional tools and techniques to restore old pieces, producing original interiors in an environmentally friendly way.



Amazon Kindle

This Oasis 7" tablet, in graphite, comes courtesy of AO.com and boasts 8GB of storage – enough for around 6,000 books. Its E ink screen makes for easy reading and can be adjusted from white to amber light. One charge will give you up to six weeks of battery life and the device is also water resistant – perfect for your next exercise. It has an RRP of £229.

*AO.com reserves the right to send an alternative item of the same value should the tablet not be in stock



A festive hamper

This fabulous woven basket from the generous folks at John Lewis (johnlewis.com) is stuffed full of yuletide goodies worth £250. It includes a bottle of Prosecco, a Christmas cake, gourmet popcorn and crisps, six luxury Christmas crackers and much, much more.

*Please note that this prize cannot be delivered overseas.



A weather-proof jacket

The Torrent Extreme is Snuggpak's warmest waterproof jacket. With exclusive Softie insulation and taped seams it is designed to handle everything nature has to throw at it. A detachable hood can be rolled away or removed when not in use, while deep pockets keep your hands cosy and your valuables safely stashed. Retailing for £199.95, it's available in forest green and in sizes S-XXL. Visit snuggpak.com for more details.



Men's watch

The design of the Geckota G-02 Gen 2 watch has been inspired by the robust demands of underwater exploration. It is waterproof to a depth of 200 metres and winds automatically as you move. The case is made from stainless steel finished in both brushed and polished surfaces. This blue and red version is one of only 75 produced and comes in at an RRP of £399. See www.geckota.com/watches to view the full range.



Headlamp and charger

Everything you need for your next outdoor trip, this bundle offers you light and charge in two lightweight and portable products. BioLite's (uk.bioliteenergy.com) new Headlamp 750 is a compact, pro-level USB rechargeable device combining powerful lumens with a comfortable band, as well as a rear light for extra vis. The Charge 20 power pack is lightweight and weatherproofed – great for keeping all of your devices going when out and about. RRP £99.99 and £37.99 respectively.



A toasty doss bag

Beat those cold nights on exercise with Snuggpak's Softie Elite 3 sleeping bag, worth £104.95. Adjustable in length and width, it features a built-in side baffle that when deployed allows the user more freedom of movement and better temperature control. A reinforced foot means you can keep your boots on, while an internal pocket provides somewhere to put your valuables. It has a comfort rating of -5 degrees Celsius and packs down to 26x22cm.



Bespoke soft furnishings

Update your living space with a set of three large handmade cushions from the Yorkshire Fabric Shop, worth £174. The winner can choose from nearly 200 fabrics from the stylish Freedom collection. Visit yorkshirefabricshop.com to view the range.

With thanks...

The following companies have kindly donated prizes to this year's competition: AO.com, BioLite, Geckota, Heist of London, John Lewis, Lakeland Furniture, the Lido Collection, Scaramanga, Snuggpak and the Yorkshire Fabric Shop

Talkback

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
 🐦 [@soldiermagazine](https://twitter.com/soldiermagazine)



Picture: Graeme Main

'Older chefs not past sell-by date'

I AM a 57-year-old Reservist regimental catering warrant officer in the Royal Logistic Corps and after serving for 38 years, covering five operational tours, I've recently been told that I will not be granted a career extension.

I was informed this was because a Regular staff sergeant wants to transfer across to the Reserves.

The Service is very short of trained chefs with the sort of experience I have and I believe the decision will seriously impact on the unit, which has only one corporal remaining.

I was also told I could not transfer on an over-age extension to another unit that has no chefs, which means the Army will be missing out on my experience when it comes to recruiting and training new catering staff.

One option is to find a full-time Reserve service (FTRS) post as this will allow me to retire at 60.

But I can't understand why officers in the Reserves can retire at 60 while other ranks cannot. I feel it would be good for retention to be able to retire at this time of life, especially for those joining at the maximum age that's allowed.

Surely the Army would benefit, and so would skilled individuals like me.

– Name and address supplied

Maj Mark Witham, Personnel Policy for Reserves, Army Headquarters, replies: The normal retirement age (NRA) for soldiers is 55 and for officers it is 60.

This limit on age reflects the

arduous nature of service.

The disparity between officers and soldiers is because the vast majority of officers will be in staff appointments where they are unlikely to be exposed to the rigours of life in the field.

FTRS commitments have their own bespoke terms of service, which limits deployability and this is the reason they can serve to 60.

We do have certain roles that serve longer than the NRA, but these are based on knowledge, skills and experience and the less rigorous nature of their appointments.

Musicians serve to 65 in line with their Regular counterparts, while non-Regular permanent staff and professionally qualified soldiers, such as dentists for example, can serve until they are 60.

It is better for the Army to manage the situation by exception via over-age extensions. There are currently around 800 people employed in this way, the oldest being 67.

This allows us to preserve capability in niche roles where a successor is not readily available – you highlighted your current unit has a successor.

The NRA is also a workforce lever to ensure the Army has control over the structure and dynamics of its Reserves because we need people to leave to create space for promotions and new joiners.

“The Army will be missing out on my experience”



Picture: Graeme Main

Are we ‘stingy’ with medals?

IT IS almost a running joke that medals are hard to come by in the British Army.

It’s particularly noticeable when working alongside personnel from other nations, many of whom have an entire chest full of gongs and may have only been away once or twice, while some of our people have been constantly on ops or overseas jobs.

Op Cabrit in Estonia and Poland, for instance, earns each of the other nations serving on it several medals, but we receive nothing.

I recently read that those serving on Op Turus in Nigeria are eligible for a medal and rightly so, but the various training teams working across the country are not, which is baffling – especially given that ground crew in Cyprus, officers in the United Arab Emirates and British drone controllers in the United States are eligible for the Op Shader medal.

Surely, those serving in difficult conditions and contributing directly towards Nigerian operations against Boko Haram, should be eligible.

I appreciate that dishing out medals for everything undermines the sacrifices of those who participated in high intensity operations, such as in Afghanistan, but times have moved on so is there really any reason, besides funding, for this?

– Name and address supplied

Col Jim Taylor, Assistant Head, Personal Services, Army Headquarters, responds: The current system incorporates three tiers – war stars, campaign service medals and operational/general service medals, along with the authority to accept and wear Nato, UN or EU medals.

Repeated qualification for these

is recognised with the Accumulated Campaign Service Medal.

While no system of recognition will provide a perfect solution, the UK’s process for considering new awards or the extension of established ones is robust. This is to maintain their credibility, prestige and parity with historical precedent. It is not intended to prevent the recognition of individuals.

The process considers many factors including the danger to life; the style and force of the opponent; the physical and mental stress and rigours involved; the numbers of individuals and/or units committed to the operation; the extent to which climate, weather and terrain affects the operational situation; the restrictions, limitations and difficulty in implementing the operation; the time and the number of air sorties that should count towards eligibility; and the geographical boundaries within which eligibility will count.

Consideration has been given to widening the recognition to account for the changing nature of warfare, impact of activity outside the normal concept of a “theatre of operations”, and delivery of operational effect with no defined enemy.

On your point about the disparity for awarding medals between the UK and other nations, each country has its own types of awards, processes and criteria to recognise their military personnel. Further details on medallic recognition can be found in *JSP 761: Honours and awards in the Armed Forces* and *AGAI 68: Orders, decorations, and medals*.

HAIR WE GO...

● GIVEN that the Royal Air Force has just introduced a new facial hair policy, I think it’s about time we raised the question of allowing beards again.

Why will the British Army not do the right thing? If we really care about equality of opportunity then all personnel must be allowed to grow a beard if they want to.

Alternatively, let nobody grow one; the current situation of religious and medical exemptions is divisive, especially when the evidence from the other Services (and members of our royal family) demonstrates that beards can be smart and have no effect on an individual’s output.

As a potential barrier to recruitment (and, arguably, a likely link to retention as well) why would we not address this easy, implication-free and cost-free enhancement to Service life? – Name and address supplied

Lt Col Rachel Emmerson, Diversity and Inclusion, Workforce Policy, Army Headquarters, replies:

Thank you for your letter. As you recognise, Army policy continues to only allow beards for medical or religious grounds and where tradition permits.

It highlights that operational effectiveness must not be jeopardised and facial hair must be modified if that is required to ensure the proper functioning of protective equipment.

Despite the recent change to RAF policy, the Army position remains extant. While it may be reviewed in the future, the current policy recognises the diversity of our serving officers and soldiers by allowing individuals to express their religion or beliefs through a variety of recognised symbols – including the wearing of facial hair for certain faiths.

As you alluded to, we must also ensure the Army attracts as many potential applicants as possible, while maintaining the right appearance-based policies to protect the culture and ethos from which we derive our operational effectiveness.

As such we routinely review regulations, including the facial hair element, with the last review in early 2020 deciding to retain the current policy.

“Many have a chest full of gongs”

BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know



CAREERS

Baseline UK is an innovative resettlement service that is tailored for the needs of Service personnel and veterans. The company is offering free membership to those with a military background, who will benefit from a professional network, hints and tips and training. For more details visit www.baselineuk.org

Linx Security Training is offering a 20 per cent reduction on 28 courses for serving and former personnel through the MoD-approved Defence Discount Service. The courses on offer range from technical skills to management with industry-approved qualifications. For more details visit www.linxtraining.co.uk

Interested in a career as a personal trainer? Ultimate Performance is expanding and on the lookout for more ex-Service personnel to join its growing ranks. Visit www.upfitness.com/en/careers for more information.

The Recruit for Spouses coaching programme, which helps Army partners get back into employment, has received a funding boost to help it reach more husbands and wives. To apply for a six-week course of one-hour sessions contact coaching@recruitforspouses.co.uk

Forces Families Jobs is a new platform designed to help partners into meaningful employment. Visit www.forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk to see the site, which is free to advertise on for employers who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant.



SEARCHLINE

Hollie Badrock is looking for partners of personnel who served between 1990 and 2011 to take part in research for her master's degree. The interviews will take approximately one hour and will cover life in the military community, the impact of frequent relocations and their experiences during times of conflict. To participate email hbadrock1@sheffield.ac.uk

Retired Royal Air Force Serviceman Andrew Clark is a

collector of British military tokens used in Iraq and Afghanistan and is seeking examples of pre-2007 issues to boost his collection. If you have any items of interest email amcpapermoneyman@aol.com

The Air Training Corps, now part of the Royal Air Force Air Cadets, will celebrate its 80th anniversary in 2021. To help mark the occasion, they would like to identify those who were cadets when the formation launched in 1941 and interview them to capture memories of those early days. Email al.munns@btinternet.com

The Royal Signals Amateur Radio Society is looking for newcomers to join the fold. Open to all cap badges of the British Army, it currently has 500 members but is looking to boost numbers. In addition to serving and former soldiers, the society also welcomes cadet force and Nato personnel, as well as MoD civilians. Email p25@sky.com for details or visit www.rsars.org.uk

Anita Louise Watson is trying to trace her father, James Watson, who served as a lance corporal in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers during the 1970s. Email anitawatson164@gmail.com

Hugh Corby is trying to trace the military medals and citations of his late father, Capt Eric Corby (RA), who served as a forward observation officer during the Second World War. Call 07961 606766.



DIRECTORY

ABF The Soldiers' Charity:
020 7901 8900;
www.soldierscharity.org

Armed Forces Buddhist Society:
Chaplain 020 7414 3411;
www.afbs-uk.org

Armed Forces Christian Union:
01793 783123;
www.afcu.org.uk

Armed Forces Muslim Association:
Chaplain 020 7414 3252;
www.afma.org.uk

Armed Services Advice Project:
0808 800 1007;
www.adviceasap.org.uk

Army Families Federation:
01264 382324;

mil 94391 2324;
www.aff.org.uk

Army LGBT Forum:
www.armylgbt.org.uk;
chair@armylgbt.org.uk

Army Libraries:
01252 340094

Army Ornithological Society:
www.armybirding.org.uk

Army Welfare Service:
01904 882053;
www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support

Big White Wall, now Togetherall:
www.togetherall.com

Blesma, The Limbless Veterans:
020 8590 1124;
www.blesma.org

Blind Veterans UK:
(formerly St Dunstan's)
020 7723 5021;
www.blindveterans.org.uk

Care After Combat:
www.careaftercombat.org

Career Transition Partnership:
020 7469 6661

Children's Education Advisory Service:
01980 618244;
dcyp-ceas-enquiries@mod.uk

Combat Stress:
24-hour Mental Health Helpline for service personnel and their families
0800 323 4444;
www.combatstress.org.uk

Defence Humanists:
www.defencehumanists.org.uk

Ersuline:
0141 814 4569;
www.ersuline.org.uk

Family Escort Service:
020 7463 9249

Felix Fund – the bomb disposal charity:
07713 752901;
www.felixfund.org.uk

Forcesline:
UK – 0800 731 4880;
Germany – 0800 1827 395;
Cyprus – 080 91065;
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ROADSHOWS

The Forces Pension Society is staging a number of roadshows as well as FAR (financial aspects of resettlement) briefings. See www.forcespensionsociety.org/news-events/events for the latest dates and details.

The Army Engagement Team roadshows – enquires to rc-aeg-mailbox@mod.gov.uk

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REVIEWS

MUSIC

... AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

**Kammy returns with
another selection of
festive favourites**

➤ HAVING scored a top-ten album with debut offering *Here's to Christmas*, footballer-turned-crooner **Chris Kamara** is back to spread some more festive cheer on follow-up effort, *And a Happy New Year*.

Backed by a 23-piece big band, the face of Saturday afternoon punditry delivered a selection of swinging seasonal classics that peaked at number eight in the UK charts 12 months ago.

With the formula proving so successful it formed the obvious starting point for his latest foray into the studio, which has resulted



P66

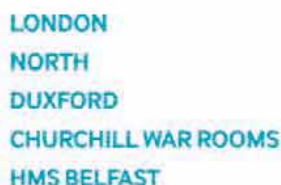
PODCASTS

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BOOKS

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GAMES



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"I'm fascinated by Second World War aviation."





» in a second collection of yuletide favourites – ranging from *White Christmas* and *In the Bleak Midwinter* to a swing cover of **Wizzard's** ubiquitous hit *I Wish It Could Be Christmas Every Day*.

"I had a wonderful experience the last time, but I thought that would have been it," the 62-year-old explained.

"But my label, Silver Screen Records, had other ideas. They were planning a 21-date tour for November and December, which sadly got cancelled due to Covid-19, and wanted a second album to go with it.

"The shows couldn't happen, but we went ahead with the record and there are so many amazing songs on it.

"When they said I was going to have a go at *I Wish It Could Be Christmas Every Day*, I did get a bit nervous, I must admit.

"It's such a beloved track and I was worried what people were going to think about me covering it. However, it's not like the original,

which is the only way you can do something like that.

"The lyrics are still the same, but it's been rearranged into something new and I think it's bang on.

"We've changed it into a swing song and out of all the tracks on the album, that's easily my favourite. From the minute I heard it, I fell in love with it."

Wizzard's hit is the mainstay of the festive playlists that seem to launch earlier and earlier each year, meaning when the big day finally arrives it has definitely started to grate.

Therefore, Kamara's reworking comes as a welcome alternative and his soothing singing style sits perfectly alongside the expert musicianship of his big band supporting cast.

The pattern repeats on the other cover versions – all of which effortlessly combine to create the perfect Christmas soundtrack.

As an added treat, the album also features original numbers *Dear Mr Claus* and *Happy New Year*, penned by the songwriting talents of **Richard Scott** and **Kelvin Andrews**, who have collaborated on tracks for **Robbie Williams**, among others.

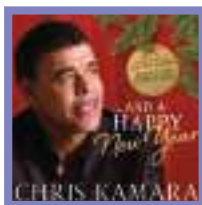
The mixing of traditional offerings and new compositions creates the foundations for a successful second outing and the artist now has high hopes for 2021.

"Obviously, the tour was cancelled but maybe we can get to do it next year when it's safe for everyone to come and see it," the former Portsmouth star explained.

"The dream of all dreams is to sing at the Royal Albert Hall, which was on the agenda at some point.

"But just to get out and do a tour with the band, to play in front of people and hopefully put a smile on their faces? I'd truly love that.

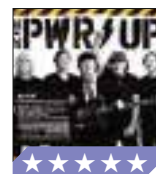
"Wouldn't that just be unbelievable?" ■



VERDICT: An ideal Christmas soundtrack if swing's your thing
★★★★★

REVIEW: RICHARD LONG, *SOLDIER*

MUSIC RELEASES



Power Up by AC/DC

DESPITE no longer being able to tour with the band, **Brian Johnson** returns on vocals for an undoubtedly classic **AC/DC** offering that evokes nostalgic thoughts of *Back in Black*. Complete with pseudo-innuendo lyrics, Johnson's distinctive singing style and **Angus Young's** now legendary guitar riffs, this is a must for any credible music aficionado. For blues fans there is *Shot in the Dark* and *Wild Reputation*, while lovers of rock guitar behemoths will be wowed by *Demon Fire*. There's even a tribute to late guitarist **Malcolm Young** on *Through the Mists of Time*. My favourite song had to be *System Down*, a classic AC/DC arena shaker that fuses bone shaking drums, ear splitting guitar solos and unmistakable gruff singing. I loved it – and you will too.

Cpl Scott Roberts, Rifles



It's Christmas All Over by Goo Goo Dolls

AS A fan of **Goo Goo Dolls'** classics such as *Iris* and *Slide*, I was looking forward to the band's take on a Christmas album. Starting off with the joyous festive jingles we are all familiar with, the record initially sounds promising thanks to an ensemble of melodies you would expect to hear from **Michael Bublé**. However, it soon merges into another 'classics revisited' offering, while the handful of new songs do not quite hit the mark as they lack the grungy ballad feel that has become the group's trademark. For die-hard fans, this will fill the Goo Goo Dolls void while bringing some yuletide cheer. But for others it will be just another Christmas Day album that will be playing in the background as the family gather round to open their gifts.

WO1 Al Brewer, RLC

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PODCASTS



PICK OF THE MONTH:

AMAZING WAR STORIES

Ghostly relics safeguard the future of military museums

▶ WHILE coronavirus restrictions across the world saw much of the traditional television and entertainment industry grind to a halt, the pandemic triggered a surge in demand as huge swathes of the population suddenly found themselves with more time on their hands than ever before.

Actors, artists and musicians unable to perform and work in their usual ways quickly realised that podcasts could easily be generated from the confines of their own homes, and the popularity of this media platform has boomed.

Voiced by former British paratrooper, television presenter and history fanatic **Bruce Crompton**, *Amazing War Stories* is a lockdown-inspired success story with a difference and one that hopes to help save the future of the country's military museums.

Soldier talks to writer and producer **Ed Sayer**, former head of commissioning at National Geographic and Discovery, about the inspiration behind his ambitious project.

What is *Amazing War Stories*?

It's a fully immersive 3D audio series of heroic

tales and inspirational wartime adventures, based on accounts and artefacts from the First and Second World Wars. The ambisonic sound really brings the stories to life, making it a truly unique experience for listeners.

Tell us about the idea behind it.

Military museums – like many other businesses in the UK – are facing the threat of closure due to reduced visitor numbers and a lack of funding during the ongoing pandemic. Each episode relates to exhibits, and we hope that through this podcast series we can inspire people to visit local museums that desperately need their support.

What impact will that have if some of these are forced to close?

If museums close, then lots of these artefacts will be sold off to private investors and their incredible stories will be lost forever. We're running a real risk of losing our military history in this country at the moment, which would be a terrible tragedy.

What's so special about this series?

We have a fantastic team behind it who all care passionately about the project and are working for free. Narrator and presenter Bruce Crompton is a former paratrooper and military history fanatic; we've got an Oscar-winning sound engineer who has created the high-end audio and there are also serving members of the Armed Forces, as well as other experts and historians, who feature in the episodes.

How have people been reacting to the series so far?

It's been incredible actually; we've made it into Apple's top 200 podcasts and into their top ten history podcasts. We've had an amazing review written by *The Times* and have had people like **Jason Fox** promoting it – the reaction so far has been unbelievable.

Why do you think it's been so popular?

Covid-19 has been life changing and something like this causes you to naturally think about other historic events, such as the Second World War, when our nation saw off another threat to our freedom. There's been a real resurgence of interest in the war-time era with lots of people seeking out stories from this period and these are really inspiring for listeners in the current climate.

Can you give us a flavour of some of the stories?

They're real boy's-own adventures based on amazing and unusual events that took place on land, by air and at sea. We had a remembrance episode based on Walter Tull – the first black officer to lead white men into battle in the Army. There's the story of a pilot of a Lancaster bomber who had to make a terrible choice to sacrifice his own life or risk killing people in a British town and another episode that features the heroes of HQ company, an American parachute regiment.

- Listen by searching for *Amazing War Stories with Bruce Crompton* on Apple Podcasts or via the website www.amazingwarstories.com



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TOP READS OF 2020

Soldier's regular review team were busier than ever this year with months of lockdown to fill. These were the books that stood out for them...

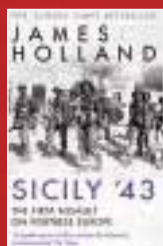


The Last Giants by Levison Wood

THIS year I'm choosing Reservist and explorer Levison Wood's study of the African elephant. Droughts and the ivory trade have seen numbers fall by a third in the

last decade, but in Botswana conservation efforts are reaping dividends. Wood worked with local trackers and camped out in the bush to get close to these incredible beasts. It's a brilliant book that really opened my eyes to the many factors involved in the protection of such a wildlife icon.

Sgt Adam Jackson, Para

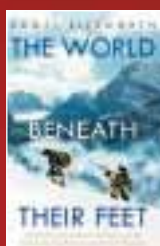


Sicily '43 by James Holland

THE Allied effort to wrest Sicily from Axis hands in the Second World War is often overshadowed by the later Normandy and Rhine crossing campaigns.

As someone who tended to focus their reading on Operation Market Garden, I was probably guilty of this approach too, so this vivid telling of what remains the largest amphibious invasion in history provided some fascinating insights. The fighting was brutal and the conditions horrendous, making it all the more unjust that the troops were sometimes glibly referred to as the "D-Day Dodgers". James Holland delivers the account in his usual engaging style and supplements it with excellent pictures and maps. An easy win at Christmas for the history buff in your life.

WO2 Mike Owens, RE



The World Beneath their Feet by Scott Ellsworth

ONE of the best non-fiction books I have seen in a long time, this was easy reading, yet filled with drama, courage and endeavour. At times I

almost felt I was on the mountainside experiencing the freezing gales whistling round my tent. The author shows huge respect for the climbers but is not shy in pointing out their foibles and faults – scaling the highest and most dangerous mountains in the world does not call for shrinking violets. Importantly, the title also charts the change in attitudes to the Sherpas from virtual servants to fellow revered adventurers.

Andy Kay, ex-RS



Fighting through to Hitler's Germany by Mark Forsdike

FOR me this was an easy choice for book of the year for several reasons, not least its open and candid

narrative style. It's a great debut publication from a young author that will appeal to the entire spectrum of *Soldier* readers. The Normandy 75 anniversary was much subdued by the pandemic and the loss of large-scale commemorations made this new history of the 1st Battalion, Suffolk Regiment stand out even more. Reading this unflinching testimony to the infantrymen who were the point of Montgomery's spear may make the debacle that was 2020 seem less awful.

Mike Peters, ex-AAC



Dresden by Sinclair McKay

RELEASED to mark the 75th anniversary of the destruction of the east German city and now available in paperback, this compelling study brings a depth of perspective to

the Allied attack in which 25,000 civilians died. McKay sets out the context of Dresden's place in the Second World War and events in the weeks leading up to the attack before launching into a harrowing account of the air raids. Using the impressions of characters including US writer Kurt Vonnegut – in the city after being taken prisoner as a soldier during the Battle of the Bulge – the historian paints perhaps the definitive picture of the awful scene and its subsequent aftermath. A landmark work, it is particularly recommended in the audiobook version, which is powerfully read by actor Leighton Pugh.

Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*

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PICK OF THE MONTH:

SNIPER ELITE IV

For Switch

► TACTICAL actioners have had something of a patchy history on handheld consoles – often let down by a killer combo of over-fussy controls and graphical limitations.

The likes of the *Call of Duty* and *Splinter Cell* series – fantastically playable on full-sized machines – proved more than a little disappointing when they were recreated on their pint-sized Sony PSP counterpart.

But thankfully the genre has fared somewhat better on the more recent Nintendo Switch, where the *Sniper Elite* games have been heading the field on the smaller screen.

Having already delivered polished reworkings of the second and third instalments in the series, publisher Rebellion has pressed ahead with delivering the fourth chapter. And it does not disappoint in the slightest.

Moving from the Second World War's North African theatre to the Italian campaign, players are again placed in the boots of formidable marksman Karl Fairburne.

This time, initially despatched to the Mediterranean island of San Celini, the US soldier is tasked with finding out about a secret Nazi radio-guided missile.

With the air-to-sea rocket proving costly to the Royal Navy, the sharpshooter must find a way of dealing with the Luftwaffe's asset while heavily outnumbered on the ground.

Stealth and concealment tactics are therefore again the order of the day in the face of Wehrmacht troops that will soon finish off anyone

engaging them in the open.

Sniper Elite IV offers a considerable step up from the two previous titles with a more open world experience matched with numerous enhancements to the gameplay.

With overtones of Ubisoft's *Far Cry* series, the environments allow players more of a hand in planning and executing missions as they see fit.

The beautifully rendered backdrop also boasts features ranging from built-up areas to countryside, where sniping from foliage is critical to success.

Elsewhere, Fairburne's newly acquired binoculars offer the option to tag enemies and check their armament before engaging. This is useful as the AI has been bolstered and the tooled-up Germans are lethal opponents.

The game is solidly underpinned with a player interface as intuitive as it is slick, providing easy access to kit and equipment even at the very height of battle.

It all adds up to a stand-out title that has been reworked to deliver a highly credible handheld experience. It is the finest military actioner *Soldier* has seen on the Switch.

And with personnel potentially being called upon for more Covid-19 related taskings away from home, *Sniper Elite IV* is well worth having in your downtime kit. ■

VERDICT:

The best Switch shooter we've played
★★★★★

REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, SOLDIER



GAMES RELEASES

Tennis World Tour 2
For Switch

OFFERING a decent serving of tennis in a year in which real-world sporting action has been in short supply, this handheld title initially looked promising. But

disappointment soon followed in the opening set where we discover the game is let down by a frustrating on-court experience and a learning curve steep enough to detract from the fun. Player responses are wooden at times, while it is far too easy to under hit and wallop shots out of the arena while attempting basic ball control. It all adds up to a mediocre experience – the promised ace does not appear.

WO1 Al Brewer, RLC

Comanche
For PC

OFFERING team-based combat with a squadron of advanced helicopters, this rotary flight sim should theoretically provide high-octane airborne drama.

But despite its on-paper appeal, the battles that subsequently unfold lack the required depth to hold the attention and the visuals are a little disappointing. That said, *Comanche* is an early access prototype and there are also some plus points, including plenty of training to ensure you are up to speed with your aerial platform. With more polish and variety, this could still be improved for PC pilots.

David McDougall, civvy

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SOLDIER SPORT

NOT TO BE FOILED >>

HAVING seen the 2020 season decimated by the coronavirus outbreak, the Service's windsurfers returned to action at the Army Championships. The week-long event featured training and action in three disciplines – including foil racing. Read more on page 72...





ANGLERS CONTINUE TO FORGE AHEAD IN COVID ERA

WHILE the coronavirus outbreak decimated the fixture lists of some Service sports, the Army Angling Federation (AAF) has been able to reflect on a successful year by the water.

After being included among the first activities to be given the green light to resume after lockdown, those at the organisation's helm wasted little time when it came to creating the platform for personnel to cast off once more.

Full Army Championships were held in each of the set-up's four disciplines – coarse, carp, game and sea – and, while Inter-Services action was in short supply, the new-look schedule proved popular.

"We are kind of blessed," Lt Col Mark Harrison (RE), chairman of Army coarse and carp angling, told *SoldierSport*.

"This is a sport that lends itself to operating within the

constraints and restrictions of Covid-19 and the government recognised the health benefits it can bring, which is very important for military personnel.

"We felt really privileged that the Army Sport Control Board (ASCB) allowed us to resume and a lot of work went into making sure our procedures complied with the relevant guidelines.

"I'm really pleased with what we managed to achieve and hopefully we have shown other sports it can be done – that they can get back and provide opportunities for younger soldiers to participate."

Single-day competitions resumed in coarse fishing at regional level in July ahead of a full Army showdown – which was decided in a series of finals over five days.

Maj Colin England (REME) was crowned individual champion, with the collective of Sgt Danny Moonesamy (RLC), Sgt Will



**"WE
HAVE
SHOWN
IT CAN
BE
DONE"**

Hodson and WO1 Mark Shade (both AGC) taking the team title. The Royal Signals secured the Inter-Corps honours.

Carp angling, which has enjoyed rapid growth in all three Services in recent years, continued to build on its momentum with a keenly fought corps competition that was won by the Royal Logistic Corps.

In a further sign of progress, the pursuit has now been formally recognised by the ASCB and plans are in place for increased opportunities at grass-roots level in 2021.

The Army's game cohort was tested at Inter-Services level but their haul of 50 fish was not enough to secure the honours at Rutland Water. Instead, it was the Royal Air Force who tasted glory thanks to their total of 53.

Elsewhere, Lt Col Richard Thorpe (REME) was victorious at the delayed spring fixture, while Capt Paul Calvert (R Signals)

won the Scottish Open.

The sea anglers returned to the boat, and shore, for a shortened season that featured competitions at national and Service level.

"A lot of fixtures were curtailed, or cancelled altogether, so the fact we managed to get people across the banks for championships in all four disciplines is a real achievement," Harrison added.

"Those events are the culmination of our season and personnel compete all year for the opportunity to participate.

"Most were fished over a period of 48 hours, rather than the usual week, but it was a great chance to link up with members of the AAF from across the UK – it was a real morale boost.

"We are now hoping for a full season in 2021. If the restrictions remain in place, we will still be able to get out and fish and we welcome anyone who wants to get involved."

Further information on the various disciplines can be found via the following platforms: coarse – Army Match Angling Facebook page; carp – the Army Carp Angling page on Defence Connect or [@Army_Carp_Angling](#) on Instagram; game – [www.soldierpalmer.org](#); sea – [@AnglingArmy](#) on Twitter, [@seaanglingarmy](#) on Instagram or British Army Sea Angling Federation Facebook page. ■



ANGLING IN NUMBERS

DISCIPLINES
WITHIN
THE ARMY
ANGLING
FEDERATION

4

REGIONAL
GROUPS IN
THE SPORT'S
COARSE
SET-UP

5

ANGLERS IN
ACTION AT
THE INTER-
CORPS
COARSE
SHOWDOWN

36

FOLLOWERS
ON THE
ARMY CARP
ANGLING
INSTAGRAM
PAGE

123

SOLDIERS
WHO WILL
REPRESENT
THE UKAF
FLY FISHING
TEAM IN
MARCH AT
THE START
OF THE NEW
SEASON

5



Picture: FinisherPix

MATTHEWS MAINTAINS FORM

WITH yet another win to her name, triathlon ace Capt Katrina Matthews (RAMC) is set to take a well-deserved festive break before targeting further success in 2021.

Following post-lockdown victories in Estonia and Nottingham, the officer topped the standings at Ironman Florida in a course record time – a result that saw her qualify for next season's World Championships in Hawaii.

"Winning is just the most rewarding achievement," she said. "I have trained consistently over the last year to put down a performance across the three disciplines.

"There have been some very tough mental challenges associated with training professionally for this distance in such uncertain times but, with the support of the Army and the BMC-Vifit team, I was in the best position possible.

"I started the swim strongly and came out with two others. I pulled away on the bike and

then held that gap, which meant I could run a controlling race in the marathon.

"I was aiming for a sub-three-hour time and ran consistently to achieve this.

"The race unfolded as I hoped it would."

Plans for the new campaign are already in place and Matthews told *SoldierSport* she will be increasing her level of low-intensity training.

"This will include quite a lot of long steady cycling as it is the best way to build the endurance base," she explained. "I will also commit to a base level of strength work in the gym.

"This training requires quite a lot of discipline and it is important not to get carried away and go just a bit harder.

"I will start to look at some goals for the season prior to the World Championships.

"I am also excited to be captaining the Army ladies' triathlon team and we will be aiming for another win at the Inter-Services." ■



BACK IN THE GROOVE

THE Service's windsurfers made a Covid-secure return to the water for the annual Army Championships at Thorney Island.

Held prior to the latest national lockdown, the event was capped at 16 entries but still offered a welcome opportunity for personnel to test their skills after a lengthy absence.

The week-long contest featured a training day followed by four days of competition across three fleets – slalom, master blaster and foil racing.

Maj Marty Gerrard (AMS) was victorious in the former and celebrated a successful all-round performance as he was crowned Army individual champion.

Capt Dave Curry (RE) and SSgt Nick Barnes (RA) won the master blaster and foil categories, while the Army Medical Services claimed the Inter-Corps honours ahead of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

"Once sport resumed, I was very keen to make this happen," said civvy Jon Metcalfe, the Army's windsurfing manager.

"There was a lot of planning involved and we really pushed to deliver something that proved to be a great success. Looking at what has happened throughout the year, it is pretty much the only Service event that has been held.

"We had to introduce some pretty heavy restrictions, but the windsurfers were absolutely buzzing.

"There was a lot of training and coaching and, in terms of foil racing, we are starting to get a good group of people who have transitioned from normal windsurfing, which is great to see."

With the action complete, Metcalfe is now turning his attention to 2021 – when he hopes a greater sense of normality can return.

He added: "We had a really good programme planned for this year but the only thing we were able to deliver was the Army Championships.

"We are hoping to run that in the coming 12 months, if we get the authority to do so, and we are confident it can be a success." ■

● ROAD race cyclist Sgt James Bevan (REME) has signed with the Saint Piran professional team for the 2021 season.

Like numerous other athletes, the 30-year-old saw his plans for this year severely disrupted by the coronavirus outbreak, although he was victorious at the Army Cyclocross Championships in January.

Bevan, who has competed for the Service's road set-up since 2013, later triumphed in the Saint Piran hill climb race and was 17th at the national hill climb championships.

His selection comes on the back of some impressive form on the road in 2019, when he recorded seven wins and a further eight podium places.

"I am really excited for the new season and hope I can offer a lot to the team," the soldier said.

"I am extremely grateful for the opportunity the Army has given me to compete as an athlete and the support I am getting from my unit and chain of command.

"I will be looking to target national road racing in 2021, with an eye on some fast and furious town centre tests as well."





TITLE BID DASHED

THE tightening of Covid-19 restrictions ended plans for a conclusion to the prolonged Inter-Services Football Championships.

The Army men, seeking a victory over the Royal Navy to retain their title, saw their hopes of taking to the field in early November dashed by the announcement that representative sport will be suspended until December 3 at the earliest. The corresponding women's fixture suffered the same fate.

Planning for the 2020/21 showdown begins in the new year.

The ongoing pandemic has also resulted in the postponement of the World Masters Games.

More than 400 Service athletes were due to take part in the event in Kansai, Japan, in May. Fortunately, their places have been ringfenced for the rescheduled competition in 2022.

And, after the early cancellation of the annual Army Sports Awards, a date has now been set for next year's ceremony – Thursday, November 18.

The period for qualifying citations has been extended to cover sporting achievements between autumn 2019 and summer 2021.



WILLETTS' DELIGHT AT RING RETURN



**"I HAD
TO
MAKE
SURE IT
WAS A
CLEAR
WIN"**

TEAM GB boxer Gnr Tori-Ellis Willetts (RA) has spoken of her thrill of returning to competitive action after she claimed a silver medal at the Alexis Vastine Memorial Tournament in France.

The flyweight scored a notable victory over world number two seed, and home favourite, Caroline Curveiller to secure the prize – a result that followed a disappointing result against another French athlete, Wassila Lkhardi, in her opening contest.

"I performed really well and thought I'd won that first bout," Willetts told *SoldierSport*. "But in a close fight you are not going to get the decision when two of the three judges are French."

"So, going up against Caroline I had to make sure it was a clear win. She was a silver medallist at the World Championships and has come down in weight from 54 to 51 kilogrammes."

"There was an expectation that she would bully me, but I did not let that happen – everything was flowing, and I felt really good."

"The result is a massive

confidence boost and puts me in good stead for when I compete in high-level competitions."

The tournament represented Team GB's first outing since March's Olympic qualifying event in London was scrapped due to the Covid-19 outbreak and, with further restrictions now in place, it looks set to be their final appearance of 2020.

Willetts completed a training camp in Turkey prior to the contest and said she was glad to shake off the ring rust after such a lengthy absence.

"It was good to come out of lockdown and get away," the soldier added. "While I was working out at home my fitness did dip, mainly because we couldn't do any sparring."

"The camp allowed me to get back in shape and when I was told I could box, I was buzzing."

"We had a lot of things in the diary for December, but they have now been cancelled – so I was lucky to get to France."

"Getting that win will help me to stay focused and I'm now itching for another bout." ■



Peel and chop the potatoes (two inches or five centimetres across) and bring to the boil. Turn down to a simmer for eight minutes, then drain well. Dust with a little flour, heat the oil in a roasting pan until very hot and then place them in one by one. Turn once during cooking and wait until golden brown. Sprinkle with salt and serve. Use goose fat for a richer flavour.

LCpl Bhimparsad Gurung, RLC



No one likes a dry turkey, which is why I roast mine breast side down for the first hour. It self-bastes and keeps the meat moist and succulent. Add the juices to the gravy with a good dollop of cranberry sauce for a touch of festiveness.

LCpl Ashley Mark Simms, RLC



Do a cold starter, so that you have more time to focus on the main meal. Before cooking your meat, let it come up to room temperature and fully rest it afterwards in a warm place. This should prevent it from going dry.

LCpl Sulayman Joof, RLC



When cooking your meat always place a trivet of vegetables underneath so it doesn't burn on the bottom of the tray. Once cooked, use the juices to make a fresh gravy.

LCpl Daniel Alexander, RLC

I cook the potatoes and vegetables with the meat, so they catch all the juices and get crispy. For the dessert, I always make a Christmas pudding or cake – do this a few weeks ahead of time to enhance the flavour in the fruits.

LCpl Becky Gibson, RLC



Festive treats

We asked six soldiers at the Food Services Training Wing for their top tips on cooking a delicious Christmas dinner...

Brine your turkey overnight before putting it in the oven – this keeps it moist and juicy.

LCpl Bijay Rai, RLC





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quality
Christmas! X

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PEAKS

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with a smile

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