

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

MOST LETHAL

What every soldier
must do **NOW** to
be ready for war




ARMY
BE THE BEST

FEBRUARY 2025

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02 >



Judo call + Navigation + Basketball finals + Cadets in crisis?
Letters + Rugby league + Photo comp last chance + PNCO
tips + Recce in Brecon + Reviews + *Soldier* on screen + WIN



This New Year, think long term. Act now. Join us. Job done.



**IT PAYS TO UNDERSTAND
YOUR PENSION**

As New Year Resolutions go, this one couldn't be easier. All it involves is becoming a Member of the Forces Pension Society to find out how to make the best pension choices so you and your family can look forward to a financially secure retirement from the Armed Forces.

There are numerous ways you can influence and enhance your pension. Making the best choices over the course of your career at key pension decision points; considering buying pension top-ups (one of the benefits of AFPS15); understanding how changing tax regimes can impact you; dealing with changing personal circumstances and even choosing the best time to leave - these can all make a significant difference to what you'll receive.

You also need to appreciate the value of your Armed Forces pension - one of the best in the public sector. At today's values, an annual pension of £20k would require funding of at least £400k. From this you can see that your pension represents a serious part of your personal wealth.

As a Member of the Forces Pension Society, you'll have access to our expert team of Forces Pensions Consultants included in your membership fee. They provide guidance on a personalised basis to help you make the best pension choices.

So don't delay. Act now. Join us this New Year.

Independent, not-for-profit

As an independent not-for-profit organisation, any surplus revenue helps fund our support for the Veterans' Community, our Roadshows and Webinars, our attendance at CTP Employment Fairs plus our vigilance in challenging governments whenever we spot injustice or unfairness in the system.

And importantly, we provide the whole military community with a voice that counts on the representative bodies for Armed Forces and Public Sector Pensions.

Visit: forcespensionsociety.org/join-now/

Annual membership for you and your spouse/partner is just **£47**. You will have exclusive access to our Forces Pensions Consultants, our informative Members' Webinars and you'll receive our bi-annual newsletters and our magazine, Pennant.

You'll also have access to our wide range of membership benefits from discounts on new cars to insurances, including our latest range of travel policies.



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IT PAYS TO UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF YOUR PENSION

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STRONGER TOGETHER

TEAMWORK 25

5 February 2025

TEAMWORK 25 aims to tell a story about creating environments where everybody can thrive and contribute to increasing Fighting Power. The overarching narrative is to build a winning Army by creating thriving environments where we can bring our best selves, strengths and capabilities to the table; make effective use of them; and ensure everyone has a voice.



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Cover picture: Graeme Main

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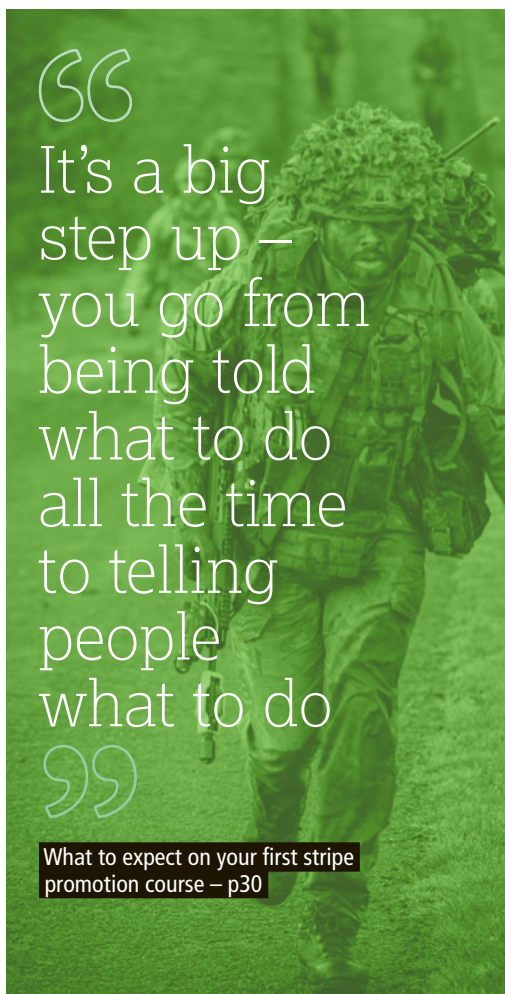




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“

It's a big step up – you go from being told what to do all the time to telling people what to do

”

What to expect on your first stripe promotion course – p30



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Fighters on film

THANKS to Rfn Andrew Peters (Rifles) for agreeing to be dragged away from his duties in Bulford to be our February cover star.

His shot, captured by the talented Graeme Main, will be added to the *Soldier* hall of fame – a colourful record of Army life over the last 80 years that is now the subject of a new film gallery at the National Army Museum. Check it out if you're in London before July (details on page 10).

Speaking of stunning pictures, this is your final call to enter the Army Photographic Competition before February 10 (page 45). Don't miss the chance to showcase your smartphone spoils from the last 12 months. We'll put our favourites out to a public vote on social media before announcing the winners in the next magazine.

Inside this issue, we ask Army experts what personnel can do to be ready for war. Turn to page 24 to find out how hammering the basics – and being willing to innovate – could one day save your life.

It got me thinking about the problem of rule-bending.

If troops must start trialling new and better ways of doing things in order to be more lethal – will their leaders have their backs as they start finding workarounds and questioning outdated processes to get the job done?

Tell me your views.

Sarah Goldthorpe • Editor

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Where to find *Soldier*

> Printed copies

Sent to Army sites at the start of the month.

> Facebook, X and Instagram

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

> Online

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

> Purchase

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

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UK soldiers train on the beach in Brunei. Troops around the world will stop to talk Teamwork this month

Picture: Cpl Nanda Atherton, RLC

Make the dream work...

Troops urged to use Teamwork day to boost fighting power

IF YOU'RE dreading this month's Teamwork day – due to be held on February 5 – then you might just be pleasantly surprised.

The annual event sees soldiers sit down to discuss their unit's working culture and call out any bad behaviour.

But this year the initiative will also ask personnel to consider their part in the Service's plan to double lethality by 2027 (read our feature on page 24 for more on that).

Speaking in a Teamwork video address, Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Roly Walker (shown), explained that in future the British Army would need to see and sense things over "twice the distance" it does today and decide and act in "half the time".

Many of these improvements would be delivered through the Land Training System, but the chief asked troops to use February 5 to think about their own particular role within that picture and their unit.

"You need

to understand your own system and be an expert in your singular responsibility so you don't let the team down," the general said.

"It's that unrelenting pursuit of excellence, and the sense that you can never really be good enough.

"You are the agent of your own improvement – it's not something that gets done to you.

But he added: "We are only as good as the teams we're part of."

He urged everybody – regardless of who they are – to find their voice and speak up at Teamwork sessions if something was wrong at work.

"If you are not being allowed to make a contribution, you need to share that," he said.

"Sometimes people don't know by their actions that they are making it hard.

"Whatever your rank and level of experience, do not think you don't have an opinion that matters."

Download resources for the day on Defence Connect's Teamwork 2025 page. ■



“You are the agent of your own improvement”

SOLDIER

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GLOBAL SITREP

Pictures: World's Toughest Row

1. ANTIGUA ARMY CREWS MAKE HISTORY



THREE determined officers have become the first serving military trio to complete the World's Toughest Row, winning their category and overtaking several four-person crews in the process.

Capt Rob Cross (WG), Capt Charlie Newman (RHA) and Capt Rob Treasure (Rifles) – collectively known as Team V3nture – arrived in Antigua 40 days and 17 hours after setting out from the Canary Islands.

Meanwhile the Force Atlantic outfit (pictured above, right) became the first all-female Army team to complete the 3,000-mile crossing,

finishing second in their class at just over 46 days.

And the Oarsome Army Educators – made up of officers from the Adjutant General's Corps' Educational and Training Services branch – notched up third place in the mixed fours category with a time of 44 days, six hours and 38 minutes.

Commenting on the experience shortly after their arrival in English Harbour, Team V3nture's Capt Newman said: "We learnt what humans are capable of."

"I don't think any of us knew how far we could push ourselves."

2. UK READY FOR ACTION

BRITISH troops bound for the biggest Nato drill of the year ensured their urban combat and live-firing skills were on point prior to departure.

The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards took to Arbroath to rehearse fighting in built-up areas, while 4th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland honed day and night-time marksmanship on Warcop ranges (pictured below).

Both units are part of the new Allied Reaction Force (ARF), a high-readiness multinational task force.

They will be put to the test again in Bulgaria and Romania this month during Exercise Steadfast Dart, the alliance's largest scale manoeuvre of 2025.

"As members of the ARF we must be ready to engage in the full range of operations, from peacekeeping to conventional high-tempo warfare," said Lt Rob Boylin (Scots DG).



Pictures: Matt Allen



3. PORTUGAL HIGH ACHIEVERS

RECCE pros from the UK and Germany dropped in on Lisbon – rehearsing a range of joint tactics and techniques during a parachute masterclass.

Soldiers from the Pathfinders and counterparts of the Fallschirmspezialzege, Luftlandebrigade 1, hit the Aerodromo Militar de Tancos – taking part in 12,000ft drops from a Luftwaffe A400 transport aircraft.

In all, Exercise Deep Infil saw the British personnel, part of the 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team, and their European colleagues tackle nine days of serials.

Commanders from both nations were satisfied with the performance of the high-altitude drop specialists and described the manoeuvres as an opportunity to refine joint working protocols. The training showed the growing military cooperation between the two nations after the signing of the Trinity House Agreement in October, they added.

1. ANTIGUA

4. AUSTRIA SKI SCHOOL UNDER WAY

MORE than 250 Royal Engineers are hitting the slopes as part of Exercise Snow Sapper.

Staged in Alpendorf, the month-long adventurous training package had reached its midpoint as this issue went to press, with more than half of participants new to Alpine skiing and the rest building on existing skills.

Chief instructor Capt Mike Owens (RE) said novices and intermediates would train at a level designed to push boundaries and resilience.

"We also want to ensure longevity by fostering the next generation of ski leaders," the officer added.

INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

Brief the team now:



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Facebook: facebook.com/soldiermagazine
X (formerly Twitter): [@soldiermagazine](https://twitter.com/soldiermagazine)



5. JAPAN ORIENT EXPRESS

AIRBORNE personnel teamed up with Asian counterparts after heading east for a demanding package of manoeuvres.

Around 100 troops from B Company, 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment were involved in Exercise Vigilant Isles, honing core skills and joint working protocols.

The Colchester-based soldiers operated alongside counterparts from the Japanese Ground Self Defence Forces during the annual training package.

The exercise, on the island of Kyushu, also showed growing ties between the two nations while underscoring a joint commitment to security in the Indo-Pacific.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "With increasing instability across the world, it is important that we strengthen cooperation with international partners."

Read future issues of *Soldier* for more on this story.

Picture: Sgt Tom Evans, RLC

6. POLAND MISSILE COMMAND

ROYAL Artillery crews are back on home soil after a series of back-to-back tours defending Eastern European airspace.

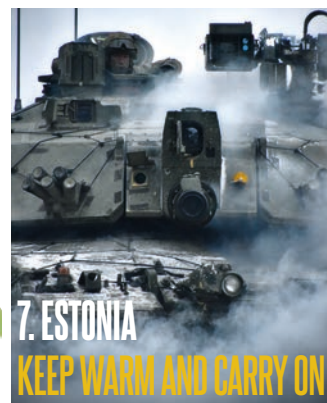
Troops from 16 Regiment operating the Sky Sabre system have been scanning Polish horizons for the last two years following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

They have been working closely with counterparts from other Nato states during the tours, which began back in 2022 and had initially only been scheduled for six months.

Their tenure ended at a ceremony with Polish colleagues in Rzeszow.

Defence minister Luke Pollard said defending the alliance's eastern flank remained a priority, with Royal Air Force Typhoon fast jets due to arrive in the state in the coming year.

Meanwhile, the Narew programme – an industrial collaboration between the UK and Poland – will see 1,000 Common Anti-Air Modular Missiles, Extended Range, plus 100 iLaunchers delivered to the country.



MEMBERS of The Royal Dragoon Guards Battlegroup have been maintaining a brisk operational tempo despite sub-zero temperatures in the Baltic.

The formation completed a 130km road move from Thapa to Sirgala training area for Op Pikne (pictured), a series of joint drills with French, Estonian and American troops that culminated in a three-day live-fire package.

Meanwhile, Gunners were kept busy on Exercise Bengal Freeze, which saw personnel from 132 Battery, 26 Regiment, Royal Artillery conducting MLRS missions and using the latest information from current conflicts to enhance their procedures.

And personnel from across the battlegroup have been rotating through the cold weather operators' course ahead of Exercise Winter Camp, the annual test of collective skills amid frigid seasonal conditions.



Pictures: Nato

The free display kicks off in London this month...



Pictures: Graeme Main

Tracs for Jack



■ A UNIQUE charity event renamed in memory of a young Royal Welsh fusilier has raised more than £14,000 for good causes.

Fus Jack Wilkes, 21, died from a rare form of cancer in October last year.

A popular member of 5 Platoon, B Company, his regiment described him as a "loyal and brave" soldier.

His memory will live on with the Jack Wilkes Memorial Tractor Run – formerly the Tywyn Tractor Run – which takes place in Wales every December.

Cash raised at last year's event will be split between Young Lives vs Cancer and the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution.

Jack's dad David told *Cambrian News* the family were "full of pride". "Jack would be so pleased to know the part he's played in raising so much," he added.

“This is a must-see for any avid readers”

Cue the celebrations

National Army Museum launches film to mark *Soldier's* 80th

SOLDIER magazine toasts its 80th birthday next month and to mark this momentous occasion we have worked in partnership with the National Army Museum in Chelsea, London to produce a celebratory film.

The short documentary can be viewed for free inside a small, dedicated gallery on the museum's first floor from February 4 until July 6.

The flick describes how the title started out as a fortnightly news publication launched by Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery for the British Liberation Army fighting Nazi forces across Europe.

It charts how the publication evolved into a glossy monthly magazine catering to every branch of the Service and covering all aspects of military life.

It also provides unique glimpses into the production, distribution and reporting processes, as well as the milestones *Soldier* has achieved across eight decades.

"It's a must-see for any avid readers and in just a few minutes manages to encapsulate what the title has contributed to soldiers' lives, helping

improve policy at times and boosting morale," commented managing editor Steve Muncey.

Brig (Retd) Justin Maciejewski, Director of the National Army Museum, added: "As the home for the Army's history and heritage, we're delighted to partner with the magazine's committed team to reveal the remarkable story behind this much-loved publication."

"In the year we mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day, we're proud to celebrate the wartime birth of a magazine which still does so much to enrich Army life."

For more information on the show visit nam.ac.uk/whats-on/story-soldier-magazine

And to read more about some of this magazine's standout moments across decades of reporting on Army



lives, check out next month's issue. ■

Ever featured on our front cover?

Turn to pages 22-23



Zapped out the sky



The RFDEW could help front-line soldiers by downing drone swarms

TROOPS have successfully trialled a weapon that takes down drone swarms using radio waves.

The radio frequency directed energy weapon (RFDEW) can strike targets up to a kilometre away, with each shot costing just 10p.

The system can detect, track and engage a range of threats across land, air and sea.

RFDEW (shown) differs from laser weapons such as DragonFire because it uses radio waves to neutralise uncrewed aerial systems rather than a laser beam of light energy.

The high frequency output disrupts and damages electronic components inside the enemy devices, causing them to be

immobilised and drop out of the sky.

The Royal Artillery Trials and Development Unit and 7 Air Defence Group successfully trialled the demonstrator mounted on a MAN SV truck at a range in Wales.

And its high level of automation meant the system could be operated by just one person.

Defence Equipment and Support

told *Soldier* the weapon was not set to enter service any time soon and was designed to help the MoD assess the potential of such tech.

DragonFire, meanwhile, is now being refined under a multi-million pound defence programme to

transition the weapon from a research environment to the battlefield. ■



■ TROOPS aspiring to a career in Special Forces work are being urged to consider the next all-arms Ranger course and assessment cadre. Those interested need to submit their application via the outfit's Defence Connect page by February 15 and must have the backing of their chain of command.

Successful applicants will join one of four battalions, with regular overseas deployments on offer as well as plenty of opportunity to develop soldiering skills.



Ranger route

Picture: Graeme Main

“It’s been designed to help the MoD assess the technology’s potential”

SPEAK UP

■ TROOPS who have received the Army Reserve continuous attitude survey are urged to respond by March 31. The questionnaire was sent to 13,500 personnel last month.

Results will be published in July and are used to inform future policy.

NCO ACADEMY

■ SOLDIERS looking to step up are invited to attend the NCO Academy’s **level-up leadership programme**.

It includes a three-day face-to-face residential tuition package followed by three online sessions, and is aimed at ranks from lance corporal to warrant officer.

The next course runs March 18-20 at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. Subsequent events are scheduled for July 1-3 and November 4-6.

For more information go to the NCO Academy Defence Connect page.

Meanwhile, the **regimental sergeant major’s course** has two more intakes running this year.

It is reserved for selected and incumbent RSJMs and held at Pirbright.

“If you have been chosen you should aim to get on one at the earliest opportunity as there is limited capacity of 70 people at each,” NCO Academy Command Sergeant Major WO1 Matty Howarth said.

Course dates for the rest of this year are May 19-23 and November 10-14.

The five-day syllabus includes speakers, discussions and networking opportunities.

To apply, you must have access to Target through the Lums system.

LGBT PAYOUTS

■ THE government has confirmed veteran payouts of up to £70,000 for those affected by the ban on LGBT personnel between 1967 and 2000.

Following a Commons debate in mid-December, ministers agreed to double the total available cash pot to £75m with those who were discharged receiving the highest awards.

Former personnel who lost their careers as a result of the disqualification will also be able to apply to have their rank restored and reason for their dismissal amended.

A-GRADE ASSESSORS

■ THE Army Officer Selection Board (AOSB) has unveiled a brand new award scheme that will see its assessors reach standards approved by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation.

It is the culmination of a number of initiatives by the organisation to further professionalise its assessor cohort – which is comprised of a mixture of Regular, FTRS and Reserve officers, along with a core team of senior NCOs.



Here we go again...

● AN ARMY logistician runs checks in Marchwood before 730 vehicles are dispatched to mainland Europe on Ex Steadfast Dart (pages 8-9).

As this issue went to press, the Foxhounds, Jackals and Mastiffs were headed for Romania via the Greek port of Alexandroupoli, followed by 2,500 UK personnel by truck and plane.

Find out how the main battlegroup, the Desert Rats, got on with their Nato friends in a future issue.

Picture: Graeme Main

NEW YEAR HONOURS, 2025

KCB Lt Gen Tom Copinger-Symes

CB Maj Gen Alastair Bruce of Crionaich; Maj Gen Gerald Ewart-Brookes; Maj Gen Marc Overton

CBE Brig Jonathan Bartholomew; Maj Gen Oliver Brown; Col Mark Davis; Brig Lucinda Westerman; Brig Patrick Wright

OBE Col Sebastian Burn; Col Lance Foster; Lt Col David Groce, RLC; Lt Col Daniel Herberts, RA; Col Simon Hirst; Col Anna Kimber; Lt Col Ian Mills, RLC; Brig Stuart Nasse; Col Andrew Nicklin

MBE WO2 Yvonne Angus, AGC (RMP); Maj Roger Anstey, AAC; Col Russell Atherton; WO2 Lee Backhouse, Coldm Gds; WO2 Stewart Baird, KRH; WO2 Paul Barnes, AGC (SPS); Maj James Blakemore, Rifles; Sgt Alan Boyle, Mercian; Lt Col Mark Bulmer, RE; Sgt Michael Chadwick, SG; Capt Edward Clinton, RLC; Lt Col David Cotton, AGC (ALS); Lt Col Kathleen Douglas, ACF; Maj Ian Elliott, R Signals; Capt Olivia Flaherty, R Signals; Lt Col Thomas Giffard, LG; Maj Cameron Gubbins, LD; Capt Daniel Henderson, RRF; Rev Ann Hitchiner, RACHD; Sgt Gareth Jenkins, RE; Lt Col Ryan Mallin, RAMS; Maj Sean Maloney, REME; Lt Col Alexander Michael, KRH; Maj Thomas Mortensen, SG; SSgt David Murphy, RTR; Lt Col Alexander Rabbitt, R Welsh; Maj David Rainbow, AGC (RMP); Maj Mark Roberts, REME; Maj Daniel Rouse, RE; Sgt Merini Sevakasiga, AGC (SPS); Lt Col Adam Shindler, Int Corps; Maj Gemma Simister, RE; Maj Robert Smith, PWRR; Maj Jonathan Stewart-Davis, AAC; Maj Andrew Sutton, R Signals; Capt Marcus Waugh, REME; Maj Joshua Wray, RE

Royal Red Cross Ordinary

Member First Class Lt Col Lucy Gaal, RAMS
Ordinary Associate Second Class

Maj Paul Simms, RAMS

KVRM Lt Col Anita Newcourt, AAC; Maj Seán Olohan, RY; CSgt Alan Taggart, R Irish; Capt Timothy Young, RE

KCVS Cpl Brandon Blackman, Int Corps;

Maj Esther Caddy, AGC (ETS); WO2 Richard Hood, Int Corps; Lt Thomas Wood, R Yorks

Army leaders at their best

Soldiers saluted for stepping up in New Years Honours list

THE extraordinary leadership skills of a sapper officer and armoured NCO have been acknowledged in the New Year Honours list.

Maj Gemma Simister (RE, below) and SSgt David Murphy (RTR, right) both received the MBE in recognition of their roles in overseas ops and unit leadership.

The pair were among 66 hard-working British Army personnel to be given awards in the 2025 line-up.

Maj Simister assisted in two humanitarian actions in 2023 – her contribution leading to the evacuation of 2,450 people following an earthquake in Turkey and Syria – plus an escalating civil war in Sudan.

The officer, who was working in Joint Force HQ, was singled out for her professionalism, compassion and planning skills for both.

She said: “I am proud to have been able to play a small part in the work the headquarters does. It is of real comfort to know that it was of value and worthwhile.”

Meanwhile, SSgt Murphy’s citation focused on his tenure as a tank troop sergeant during which he regularly covered gapped posts – including a role that was two ranks up.

“He has had an impact well beyond someone expected of his experience,” the document added.

SSgt Murphy said he was “honoured and overwhelmed” to receive the MBE.

“As soldiers we put everything into what we deliver in the hope it helps even one per cent,” he added. ■



You may know of some of those in need. Help us locate them.

Together we can make this a happier year for the thousands of Veterans who have failed to claim the pensions to which they are entitled. Every year, some 2,000 Armed Forces pensions go unclaimed. According to the latest AFPS Annual Report, almost 15,000 pensions in total have yet to be claimed.

The Forces Pension Society Charitable Fund (the charity arm of the Forces Pension Society) has a primary aim of providing relief for those who served in the Armed Forces and are in need by virtue of financial hardship, sickness, disability, or the effects of old age. Now we're calling on the military community, and those in the wider society, to help us ensure unclaimed pensions find their way into the hands of those who earned them; in many cases, involving substantial sums.

Why is this happening?

Armed Forces Pensions are not paid automatically. Veterans have to apply to Veterans UK using AFPS Form 8. Many have left the services without appreciating they have to make a formal application. It's a system that needs reform and we will campaign for all Veterans to be notified of their pension entitlement. But for the present, anyone serving after April 1975, now aged 60 or over, could have an Armed Forces pension if they served for two years or more.

What you can do to help

You may know some of those in need. Please consider whether there is anyone you served with or you know who might not be receiving any Armed Forces pension income. And if they aren't, please direct them to the Forces Pension Society's website using the QR code below or by visiting our special Unclaimed Pensions Help page at forcespensionsociety.org/unclaimedpensions

You can also support our campaign with a donation or via a legacy the details of which you will also find on our web page.

Unclaimed Pensions and the Armed Forces Covenant

The Government has indicated its strong support for the Armed Forces Covenant. In that spirit, we invite it to do two things: update the rules so that all Veterans, current and future are notified of their pension entitlement, and to increase their efforts to identify those who have not claimed their pension to date and endeavour to contact them.



**! Help us unite Veterans
• with their pensions**

Forces Pension Society Charitable Fund

68 South Lambeth Road, Vauxhall, London SW8 1RL

T: 020 7820 9988

forcespensionsociety.org/unclaimedpensions

The FPSCF is a charity registered with the Charity Commission, charity number 264524.



SCAN ME

Picture: Cpl Nanda Atherton, RLC



■ **THE NUMBER** of payouts currently going unclaimed by ex-personnel, according to the Forces Pension Society.

Veterans must take action to get what they are owed by the Ministry of Defence – the money will not be handed over to them automatically.

If you are entitled to pension cash contact Veterans UK using AFPS Form 8, or by calling **0800 085 3600**.

Anyone who served after April 1975 – and who is now aged 60 or over – could be entitled to claim if they served in the military for two years or more.

Forces Pension Society chairman Jonathan Wheeler (ex-RAF) said: "For most former personnel, a pension makes a considerable difference.

"It is only right that the MoD pays the pension to which they are entitled."

As well as trying to raise awareness among ex-troops, his team is pushing for changes to the system so that people do not miss out in the first place.

"We believe change is consistent with the spirit of the Armed Forces Covenant," he added.

“I owe a lot to the Army - you gain a lot from the training”

”



Picture: Ross Johnston, Newsline Media

Dessert storm

Engineering skills aid ice-cream operation north of the border

A COOL-HEADED former craftsman has been whipping up business using the expertise he forged in the Army.

Having served out a six-year career with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Barry Swan (pictured) is now using his skills to help ice-cream kingpin Mackie's of Scotland modernise its manufacturing tech.

And the ex-corporal – who has also worked as a civvy contractor in Afghanistan and for several food and drink businesses – is delighted with the new challenge.

The 48-year-old is the company's engineering chief, having worked on radar for the Rapier air defence system during his service from 1994 to 2001.

"There is a lot going on at the firm," he told *Soldier*.

"I've already been in the salmon, shortbread and whisky industries, the very triumvirate of Scottishness, so to

speak, and I'm now adding ice cream to the list."

Swan's remit includes overhauling different areas such as refrigeration, moulding and various production processes in order to bolster efficiencies and green credentials.

A veteran of a deployment to Northern Ireland, he continued: "I'm really enjoying the new job so far.

"I owe a lot to the Army – you gain so much from the training on offer, particularly for industry, and you have a good route into civvy street."

Already using the likes of solar and wind technologies, Mackie's makes ice cream from fresh milk and cream drawn from its own dairy farm in Aberdeenshire. The company is currently expanding and investing heavily in its infrastructure.

Managing director Stuart Common said: "With Barry at the helm of our engineering team, we are well placed to deliver on our growth ambitions." ■



WILD CAMPING CALL

A CHARITY that boosts ex-soldiers by giving them a blast of the great outdoors is appealing for volunteers as it continues to grow this year.

Paul Shilling (right) – boss of Operation Jackdaw – is looking to attract new blood as the organisation steps up its wild camping slots in Kent.

The charity, which was featured in this magazine last year, has seen its popularity surge in recent months and now has support from celebs including former elite soldier Ant Middleton, plus sponsorship from kit suppliers.

Shilling, who served in The Princess of Wales's Royal

Regiment and whose deployments included Northern Ireland and the Balkans, said Jackdaw had also been backed by YouTubers.

The school PE teacher added: "It has gone massive in the last year or so – we have appeared on national television and featured on local radio too.

"We have gone from just a few people, to hosting 20 or 30 veterans during our monthly sessions – we also have details of specialist help for them if needed."

To get involved contact **paulandrew.shilling@me.com**



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#RedefineTheFuture





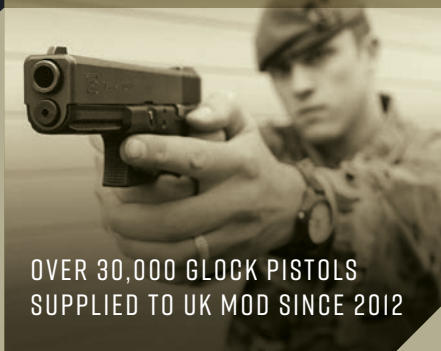
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Pictures: Parkdean Resorts



Dreaming of summer leave?

Free Parkdean trips being offered to Army families in need

ARMY welfare teams have been urged to consider putting soldiers and their families forward for a free holiday.

The call was made after Parkdean Resorts offered £150,000 of breaks to military families at its sites – and top brass have suggested those going through financial problems, relationship issues or bereavement could benefit.

The Newcastle-based firm is also giving the holidaymakers a third off food and drink during their stays across 19 destinations in England, Wales and Scotland. And personnel will be given a free entertainment pass throughout, which can last between three days and a week.

Welfare teams wanting to put someone forward must fill out a form and submit it to Army personnel chiefs by April 30.

Those chosen will be called and bookings for their holiday made.



Adapted accommodation for guests with disabilities is available if required.

Maj Steve Hill (RLC), who deals with personnel issues at Regional Command, said there were 65 holidays available in total.

He told *Soldier*: “We’re hoping this will benefit our people and their families in need.

“While those going will have to pay for their own travel, their accommodation is all covered – they can even take their pets along too.”

The offer is part of Parkdean’s ongoing support to the military.

The company has donated breaks totalling £450,000 to personnel over the past four years.

Chief exec Steve Richards said they are committed to helping Forces families spend time together.

“We have so much respect for the resilience they show,” he added.

See **ABN 049/2024** for information on how to apply. ■

“We have so much respect for the resilience they show”



Ground view

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

I WAS once asked who the most senior soldier was before my post was created a decade ago.

The academy sergeant major is the one that springs to mind – but for me it always made sense to have a single point of contact linking troops to the senior echelons.

I’ve been the third person to hold the title, and it has been the greatest privilege of my 27-year career.

It has taken time and effort to develop the role, but the cold truth is that it only works if all of you – soldiers and NCOs, who form our military backbone – are fully supportive and stay on comms with us.

The fourth Army sergeant major will take over when I stand down from the Service next month.

That has now been confirmed as WO1 John Miller (R Signals, more on him in a future *Soldier*).

Don’t be afraid to speak your mind with him as you have done with me. It is important you tell him your views about how we need to improve.

He is plugged directly into the chief of the general staff – but he will only be as good as the picture you provide.

We are living in volatile times and the world has arguably become more dangerous since I arrived in 2021.

It is therefore important we pull together, support each other and ensure we’re ready for anything.

There is new kit arriving in the shape of armoured vehicles, improved comms, and the latest unmanned aerial systems. And, more than ever, there are greater opportunities to develop leadership skills.

We need to be in the best shape if we are to treble our fighting power by the end of the decade as CGS plans.

Let’s do our leader proud.

Contact Paul on Defence Connect



Escape to the Cotswolds – for free

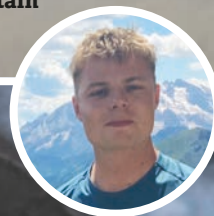
All Army personnel are also eligible to use the Corsham-based Services Cotswold Centre, which offers short-term accommodation to troops and family members in times of need (read more in *Soldier*, October 2024). For details and to book email rc-aws-scc-bookings@mod.gov.uk

Fog of war

How to navigate when visibility drops

▶ **GETTING** your team from A to B amid the complexity of military manoeuvres can be tricky enough. But when the mist rolls in, things can quickly grind to a halt.

In such situations, a good grasp of navigational basics will get you out of trouble, says Cpl Tom Somerville (RE, shown), a technician at the Defence Geographic Centre and a trainee mountain guide. These are his tips for staying on track.



“

You might be able to read a map on a sunny day – but are you equally comfortable in challenging conditions?

Grasp nav to be more lethal – page 24

”





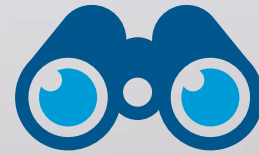
1. Stay calm and maintain situational awareness

Retaining a relatively confident fix on your position is key. You can then apply the following methods to ensure the accuracy of your next movement.



2. Orientate

Use your compass to keep track of north, east, south and west at all times. Ensure the top of the map faces north by aligning the needle with the eastings – the vertical gridlines. The red end of the needle should point towards the top.



3. Use dead reckoning

This technique, perfected by the Long Range Desert Group to help them navigate the featureless terrain of North Africa in the Second World War, focuses on a series of set bearings and distances from a known start point. It's useful when visibility is reduced, too, but robust measurement of pacing and timing plus accuracy of bearing is essential.



4. Spot natural features

If cloud cover suddenly clears, this is your chance to take bearings off anything you can confidently identify on the map or ground. Plot the back bearings from as many visible features as possible and work out where they intersect to improve your position fix.



5. Use a partner as a marker

Where vis is poor or the terrain lacks features, send a member of your team out on your intended bearing to the limit of visibility. Get them to stop there until the rest of the group moves to that location, then repeat the procedure. It's essential your marker sticks as close to the bearing as possible – if they veer off course, correct them. As long as you stay on track, maintain a fix on your position and ensure your bearings and distances are accurate, this will keep things moving in the right direction.

'I'm here for you'

...and other phrases to say to someone going through a tough time

▶ **FORMER** gunner Joe Jungeblodt never thought he would suffer from mental illness – until a heart attack turned his life upside down.

The trauma brought on severe depression, anxiety and PTSD, which eventually saw him admitted to a psychiatric hospital.

Now on the road to recovery, he has written a book – *Invisible War Wounds* – that he hopes will encourage others to seek help sooner than he did.

Having experienced a breakdown first hand, this is his advice on what to say to a friend or loved one who finds themselves struggling.



Name Joe Jungeblodt, ex RA
Years served 1984-2006
Rank on leaving WO2
Operations Include Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Iraq

'I'm here for you'

Let them know that you're available to listen and support them through this tough time.

'You're brave for reaching out'

Acknowledge their courage in seeking help or opening up about their struggles.

'It's okay to take things one step at a time'

Remind them that healing is a process and it's okay to focus on small victories.

'It's okay to not be okay'

Assure them that it's normal to struggle with mental health and they're not alone in their experience.

'How can I support you right now?'

Show genuine interest in understanding their needs and offer practical help, whether it's accompanying them to appointments, helping with daily tasks, or simply being a supportive presence.

'You're not alone'

Reassure them that you're committed to supporting them through their journey and that there are resources and professionals available to help.

'I believe in you'

Offer words of encouragement and express confidence in their ability to overcome this challenging period.



Troops chat in a Middle Wallop food area. Mealtimes can be a good chance to talk things over

Blisters banished

Former infanteer develops aid for footsore troops

▶ AS ANY soldier knows, blisters can make life pretty miserable – but for ex-Grenadier guardsman Hadrian Garner, these pesky wounds became the inspiration for a post-Army business venture.

Here, he explains how he came up with Action Plaster, a skin barrier spray that is now on sale in major outdoor stores...



Where did the idea come from?

I was a medic in the Pathfinders in the 1980s and realised how easily cuts and abrasions became infected in dirty environments. A friend even contracted sepsis via an open blister while on ops. From Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War to modern-day conflicts, many medical advances have stemmed from lessons learnt on the battlefield. Infection control needs to be taken seriously because it's the biggest enemy to soldiers on the ground.



Why this type of product?

My mother was a nurse and gave me various lotions and potions to try on operations, so I knew a barrier solution was much more effective than a normal plaster, which comes off in water or through sweat. The spray is waterproof and helps to stop the ingress of foreign bodies that cause infection, while also acting as an antiseptic.

How did you turn it into reality?

In 2015 I found a leading UK manufacturer of cosmetic and medical products to produce a water-resistant barrier product that could be delivered from an aerosol. The development process took about four years in total.

What was the take-up like?

Once launched it quickly became popular in the extreme sports world and among professional sportspeople. Cyclists, runners and open water swimmers use it to prevent rubs, while female athletes find it works well under sports bras to stop chafing. The Pathfinders have also been testing it and have given positive feedback on how it stands up in harsh environments. They've found it soothes mosquito bites too. My son is actually going through training at Harrogate

at the moment and is using it there. I'm trying to get it stocked in shops on Army bases.

Any final thoughts for budding entrepreneurs in the ranks?

Soldiers learn so much that is transferable to civilian life. Discipline, determination and the will never to give up puts you head and shoulders above many people. If you direct these hard-won skills towards business, you will have a winning formula for success.



THE BIG PICTURE

London, UK

Cover story

RECOGNISE anyone you know?

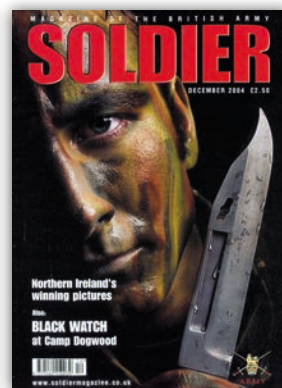
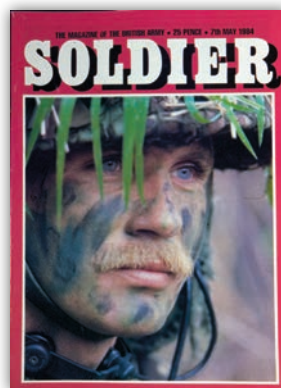
This is just a small selection of the 1,000-plus front pages to have been printed by *Soldier* since it was first created by Field Marshal Bernard "Monty" Montgomery 80 years ago.

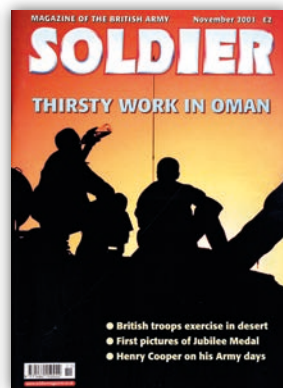
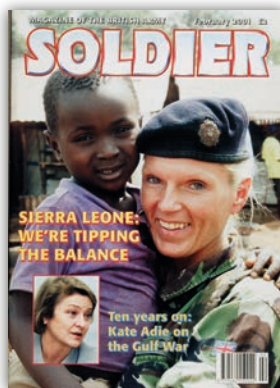
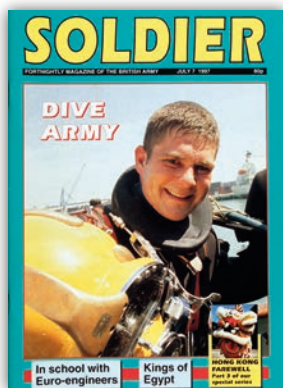
To mark our special anniversary next month, a short film about the amazing backstory of this magazine is running in a special exhibition at the National Army Museum.

Do you or your unit feature? Why not drop in to find out.

Catch us from February 4 to July 6 at the free-to-visit attraction in Chelsea, London every day between 1000 and 1730 (closed Mondays).

See nam.ac.uk





“It’s about having a winning mindset, taking pride in everything you do”

MORE LETHAL

5 things every soldier must do now to be ready for war

YOU could be part of the most high-tech defence force on the planet, but unless you get the basics right when toe-to-toe with the enemy all your Gucci kit will amount to zilch.

That’s the reality keeping commanders like Maj Euan Philbin (Para) awake at night as they throw their weight behind the Chief of the General Staff’s order to double the Army’s lethality in the next two years, and treble it by 2030.

Alongside the race to develop more battle-winning weapons, drones, autonomous vehicles and cyber capabilities, another vital mission is under way – to ensure that when new kit does roll off the production lines it is matched by capable, and highly robust, soldiers who are excellent at the basics.

And according to the Infantry Battle School’s chief instructor, that effort must start today with individuals ensuring they take responsibility for meeting the “Brecon standard” no matter what their cap badge.

“Ultimately, it’s about survival,” Maj Philbin tells *Soldier*.

“You need to be able to survive before you can be lethal in your role, and lessons from Ukraine tell us that if you are over-exposed, over-communicating or failing to disperse, you won’t last 20 minutes on the battlefield.

“Yes, we need more drones to be even more lethal as an Army.

“But at the very core of it all, the fact remains we must all be comfortable with the basics of soldiering first and foremost.

“We won’t keep up with the technological advancement if we are unfit, can’t shoot straight or survive in arduous conditions.

“It’s also about having a certain mentality, an ability to keep going – that winning mindset where you take pride and have a professional approach in every single thing you do.”

Here are five things the Infantry Battle School says every Service person must do now to be ready for war...

1



Be a better marksman

A large-scale conflict against a near-peer enemy would test British Army supply chains like never before. So troops must know how to make every round count.

"So often in combat it comes down to that final moment when you're face-to-face with the enemy," world-class marksman Sjt Daniel Stanton (Rifles), captain of the British Army Combat Shooting Team, says.

"If you're terrible at everything else, but your marksmanship is extraordinary – you'll probably still have the upper hand.

"Similarly, you could be an excellent soldier – but if you can't take that vital shot, that could be it for you."

Having worked with many different cap badges, the common gripe Sjt Stanton hears is that personnel don't get enough time on the range.

"My reply is always the same – that I am happy to deliver training packages to any cap badge if they ask their chain of command to get in touch," he adds.

Contact daniel.stanton342@mod.gov.uk for details.

The more weapon time any soldier

gets, the better they will become. But Sjt Stanton insists that personnel can also do more to ensure that time they do get is put to best use.

"That's where individuals can make a difference," he continues.

"A lot of people go to the range with no intention of doing better because they know what it'll be like.

"Try to utilise every opportunity – do as much as you are physically able to while there. Make every round count.

"Even on a poorly run range there are still things to learn."

He adds that improved fitness – especially cardio and upper body strength – will make a better marksman. And flexibility helps too.

"Improve your ballistic understanding, know what a round does," the senior soldier adds.

Dry firing is another easy way for individuals to upskill.

"It's as easy as putting a piece of paper on the wall with a target and using a toy pistol," Sjt Stanton explains.

"I have an Airsoft pistol that I use, and a VR system as well."



Once you're in action, Sjt Stanton recommends these basics for better shooting...

SIGHT PICTURE

Make sure you have front-sight blade and rear-sight blade lined up – "equal height, equal light"

TRIGGER SQUEEZE

Take the shot and follow through while maintaining correct sight picture

MINDSET

Your head should be focused on nothing else – if the round makes you jump, you're properly focused

2



Be confident in bad conditions (without GPS)

“Much of this is about knowing all those fundamentals of soldiering from your first few weeks of training – for example, your wet and dry drills,” says Capt James Hails (R Yorks), a platoon commander at IBS. “Make sure they are up to scratch.”

“Troops need to bring each other on with these skills – collectively as well as individually.”

Chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) drills must also not be dismissed in a hurry.

“One of the main misconceptions is that CBRN will be an isolated incident and so it is often seen as a box-ticking exercise in training,” said Lt Col Robert Warrington (RE), Defence CBRN Centre commandant.

“The reality is that it is an environment – like hot and cold – that can appear on the battlefield in any place and at any time.

“As such, we must be able to operate in this environment and that is why being proficient in our individual skills and drills is so important.”

Anyone with questions about this training, or the courses available, should speak to their chain of command.

According to SSgt Dave Rustemier (RE) from the Royal School of Military Survey (RSMS), good old-fashioned map and compass skills are another definite way to increase your fighting power – especially given the likelihood of GPS jamming on future ops.

“Nowadays it doesn’t have to be military forces that jam GPS,” he adds. “Your average Joe on the street can do it.”

Nav skills can easily be brushed up on individually with a bit of time and effort.

“These are the basics you’re taught in your early days in the Army,” continues Capt Hails.

“Make sure you don’t dismiss them as something to get through on your ITRs –

these skills need to be constantly tested, again and again, in different environments.

“Yes, you might be able to read a map on a sunny day – but are you equally comfortable in challenging conditions or unknown terrain?”

SSgt Rustemier says there is work to do.

“From what I’ve seen over 17 years across a variety of units, there are about a handful of really, really good navigators,” he adds.

“People will say ‘ah yes, Smith’s good at that so we’ll put him on it for the exercise’ but these skills could save your life – I don’t think it’s taken seriously enough. And it needs to be understood by all.

“Another issue is that people are often on autopilot with these drills in the UK. But the Ordnance Survey 1:50,000-style mapping we are used to doesn’t have global coverage. Outside these shores it’s likely that unfamiliar mapping will be used so it is critical users become familiar with new conventional signs, grid magnetic angle and coordinate system information.”



Things every soldier can do to brush up their nav skills:

- 🎯 Use DDCRAPs (Direction, Distance, Conventional Signs, Relief, Alignment, Proximity, Shape) when relating map to ground
- 🎯 Ensure you can accurately estimate distance. Record your pace counts over 100m, across varied terrain and carrying different loads
- 🎯 Practise orienting yourself to the ground and taking accurate magnetic and grid bearings. Understand grid magnetic angle (GMA) and how to apply it to accurately convert bearings for use, remembering that GMA varies globally
- 🎯 Interpret relief info on a map. Being able to visualise land requires practice, but there are many historical examples that show a link between doing this well and success on ops
- 🎯 Practise, practise, practise! It is a physical and cognitive skill that must be revised regularly, outside, and in a variety of different conditions

3



Be willing to step up, isolated and dispersed

You only need look as far as the newly established NCO Academy to know how seriously the Army takes lower-level leadership these days.

Last month its Command Sergeant Major WO1 Matty Howarth (RE) explained how the modern battlespace is becoming far more complex, with big decisions being taken at lower levels.

Junior ranks will need to step into leadership roles and adapt fast. But what can individuals do to feel more comfortable with the idea of being thrown in at the deep end?

According to Capt Hails, there are plenty of opportunities to be found in any sort of tasking.

"If there's something you can step up

and do in a training situation, do it," the officer says.

"Practise now in an environment that will allow for it – for example a section commander may get the chance to step into the role of platoon sergeant."

Even the most junior soldier with no ambition to promote may surprise themselves, he adds.

"I think many would be quite shocked at how much they are actually capable of doing once they expose themselves to tasks that are outside their comfort zone," the officer continues.

"A lot of learning comes from simple exposure, and from seeing your peers step up – as well as from being under the command of others."



4



Plan faster and be more adaptable

“We don’t want people to cut corners with their planning because that’s when we make mistakes,” Capt Hails explains. “But it’s about having that ability to act faster on a problem.

“And you can only do that when you understand the planning process well through practice.

“The more times you have planned, at whatever level, the better you can understand the pinch-points when factoring in new problems.

“Think of it like sets and reps – if you repeat something to the point where you feel really confident, muscle memory kicks in and you can do it with a degree of mental freedom.

“Planning is very specific to role, so speak to your chain of command and tell them you want to improve so they can help identify opportunities.”

Adaptability is a familiar trait to most British personnel, with training and global operations already demanding

high levels of it.

But there is more troops can do at an individual level.

“You might get told how to sort a problem in certain conditions,” Capt Hails says. “But adaptability is about understanding there are different ways to solve anything.

“If you learnt some new skills and drills in the jungle recently, for example, there is no harm in transferring those to a more conventional European forest setting, adapting what works to that environment as well.

“Trial stuff out and experiment.

“Of course, there will be times you want things to go to the finishing line and succeed with flying colours, for example your Wessex Storm and other such validation exercises.

“But if you’re in the early phase of an exercise or course, talk to your platoon commander or company commander and say ‘I’m thinking of doing this – what do you think?’.

“Getting comfortable with failure

in order to learn is important.

“And for commanders, it’s about creating an environment where there is a real willingness to try.

“While at war, skills like this will allow us to integrate new assets as fast as they are fielded.”

Ready for war – a checklist for the field

- ☐ Marksmanship
- ☐ Nav
- ☐ The basics (wet and dry drills...)
- ☐ Step up
- ☐ Practise planning
- ☐ Experiment
- ☐ Be fitter (carry loads)

5



Be fitter

The pace of future conventional conflicts will be faster than ever before, with dispersed soldiers having to carry heavy loads on their backs across the battlespace over much longer distances.

So if the Army is to succeed – and personnel are to survive – their bodies must be able to sustain the rigours of these kinds of operations.

SSgt Ryan Clelland (RAPTC) from

the training development team at HQ Royal Army Physical Training Corps says a good start is for everyone to fully commit to unit fitness sessions and tests, whoever they are.

“Getting involved with sports at any level can also enhance physical health,” he adds.

“Take advantage of any AT available and make use of experts such as PTIs to assist with your own training.”

SSgt Clelland has the following tips for taking your phys to the next level:

Set goals

What does better fitness mean to you – do you want to improve your run time or load carriage, perhaps? Picture yourself achieving that goal.

Create routine

Consistency is key. Develop a workout schedule that fits your diary and stick to it.

Track progress

Keep a fitness journal or use an app to track your workouts.

Read up

Learn about different exercises as well as training methods, understanding the benefits of each.

Find a buddy

Even though self-motivation is the goal, having a workout partner can provide an extra incentive and accountability.

Mix it up

Avoid monotony by varying what's in your phys. Try new exercises.

Think food

A balanced diet and good nutrition is crucial for better fitness.

Rest and recover

Don't forget this. Your body needs time to recover and build strength.

Stay positive

Celebrate your achievements, no matter how small, and don't be too hard on yourself if you have setbacks.







BE A HOT SHOT

What you need to know if the
potential NCO course is on
the cards for you this year





IT'S said that lance corporal is the hardest rank to reach and the easiest to lose.

Competition is fierce and some struggle to get their heads around the added responsibility.

Luckily, there's a raft of training in place to set personnel up for promotion success – including the potential non-commissioned officer's course.

The five-week infantry package covers leadership theory, range sessions and a field phase where troops demonstrate what they've learnt in section attacks, casualty evacuations and more.

Here, the Union Division's latest batch of graduates – whose training took place on the harsh terrain of Otterburn – give the inside track on the biggest challenges they faced during the cadre.

“Being in the middle of nowhere for five weeks, away from your mates back in your unit is quite hard. You go from living on your own in the block, with time and space to yourself, to sharing with upwards of 12 people while working long hours in one of the most austere training areas in the UK. It's not something you really do unless you're deployed, so it's good to have that exposure early on in your career because it helps prepare you for going on ops.”

LCpl Carwyn O'Keefe

1st Battalion, The Royal Welsh





“The duration of the course was tough in itself because it’s just nonstop work, lesson after lesson. You’re constantly multi-tasking and learning new things, while also doing phys and keeping up with admin. It teaches you a lot about time management.”

LCpl Aden Jacques

1st Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment



“It was sometimes hard to stay awake in lessons because we were so busy. The days were long – even in the evenings you’d be prepping for presentations the next day or packing your kit. It’s a big step up – you go from being told what to do all the time to telling people what to do.”

LCpl Will Robson,

1st Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment





“I found the competition a challenge – and that’s something I face daily. Being a female in the Infantry, the fear of falling back is always there. The course helped me realise my fitness could be a lot better. It got me through, but if I was in a stronger position it would have made life easier. It’s mentally exhausting too. That’s what I’m trained for, though, to engage my mental resilience when needed. I’ve been in the Army almost three years and want to promote and be in a leadership role to help change the narrative so more female leaders in the Infantry become the norm. It will be new to me, but I know all the boys back in camp and we’re all there for each other.”

Fus Taylor Emslie

2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland





“ Staying mentally sound was difficult – not giving up and sticking through the hard times. In some ways it’s similar to your training in Catterick – you’re doing long hours and you need to be super rigid in terms of your professionalism. I felt I’d prepared myself well – I gradually built up with progressive overload training including running and tabbing as well as nav practice. ”

LCpl Liam Jones

1st Battalion, The Royal Welsh



Come prepared

Capt Ruairidh Tuach (Scots), OC of the Union Division training team, says these are the areas to brush up on if you want to arrive on the potential NCO course in a good place...

- **Navigation** – get out onto the back area and learn to do it well
- **Fitness** – it helps you lead from the front. Physical robustness is important too
- **Training out on the road, not just the gym**, to build your cardio fitness. Working as a section 2iC you need to be able to cut about between your team
- **Maths**, especially multiples of three – rifle magazines contain 30 rounds
- **The basics of the 2iC role**
- **Confidence** – you need to speak in front of people on the course
- **Basic military knowledge**



And remember...

- **Mentally prepare** to be out of your comfort zone
- **Speak to others** in your unit who have completed the course recently
- **Have a positive attitude** from day one





Know thine enemy

Upscaled training is providing a new dose of realism for aspiring recce commanders

CHINESE thinker Sun Tsu once said that a commander who understood their foe as well as themselves “need not fear a hundred battles”.

This wisdom may date back to 500 BC, but it has resonated across the millennia.

Knowing the type, size and position of your opposing force remains as relevant in the age of the UAV as it did in the days of sword and crossbow.

And those overseeing the updated light close reconnaissance commanders’ course understand this all too well.

Knowledge is power, but amid the digital data flows that can rapidly bring weapons to bear, reflexes are critical too.

In an age of conventional conflict against peer adversaries, enemy formations will be sensitive to any compromise of position. Speed to the trigger is vital.

“The nature of reconnaissance has not changed over the years – just the tools,” Capt Dominic Parker (R Anglian), part of the team overseeing the eight-week training

package run by the Ground Manoeuvre School, Warminster, tells *Soldier*.

“The syllabus is demanding and those involved can expect to be extensively tested out on the exercise area.

“We only run two courses each year and typically between six and ten of the 20-or-so students do not make the grade – it is tough for those involved.”

With the core skills demanded of those on recce actions, it is unsurprising the main elements of the course have remained unchanged over the years.

Designed to cater for those leading patrols – junior NCOs with the section commanders’ battle course under their belt plus senior counterparts and officers overseeing platoons – those taking part are already proven in the field.

And they certainly need that experience because the past few months have seen moves to up the ante in training realism.

Students no longer have their abilities tested on isolated serials, with their final assessment now conducted in a full-on »



IN NUMBERS

Light close recce
commanders' course

8

WEEKS OF TRAINING

24

PLACES PER COURSE

2

RUN PER YEAR





» mock battle scenario.

“As of last year, the final element of the course has been hosted within Exercise Combined Warrior – which is run by the Infantry Battle School and takes place out on the Sennybridge Training Area,” says Capt Parker.

“This means the students now fit in with more than 1,000 soldiers of different cap badges and skills – they have the opportunity to work at a much larger scale.”

In this environment, troops deal with company-level taskings as well as gaining a feel for their role within the bigger picture.

As they head out of the ultimate phase, the soldiers – the bulk of whom are infantrymen, although some course spaces are reserved for specialist gunners and sappers – will already have spent upwards of a month in the field.

There they will have honed surveillance and recognition skills in both urban and rural environments.

Those involved soon find that drawing on age-old traditional skills, as well as deploying the latest technology, is essential.

“Navigation is one of the areas personnel tend to struggle with when tested – they must have a good understanding of ground manoeuvre,” Capt Parker says.

Others are surprised by the limits of new kit, such as small uncrewed aerial systems.

“These drones are a case in point – during the last Combined Warrior in December there were many days the troops could not use them,” the officer continues.

“There are a number of considerations to make when deploying this equipment – not least the limited battery life and the weather – clearly cold and windy conditions are going to have an adverse impact.

“Drones are also only suitable for certain tactical situations, so you have to be aware of where and how you could use them – they are not a simple solution.”

Leading on the recce front has always been a demanding task – requiring a set of diverse skills, razor-sharp initiative and a cool head to operate well forward.

But in a battlespace that is so fast moving and where troops are constantly vulnerable, the ability to gather and act on information remains critical to decision makers. A strike at reach can ultimately reduce the need for close-quarters combat.

The nature of the battlespace may have changed, but a commander that knows the enemy, and their own strength, will still have the winning edge. ■

Cadet life can forge careers, including for writer Cliff Caswell, circled in the cutting below



YOUNG GUNS

Defence funds are tight – but military chiefs warn that cutting the Army Cadets will have effects far beyond recruitment...





IT WAS a fork in the road moment – a realisation that military life was not for me and that career aspirations forged from a parade of Sly Stallone movies needed another look.

The epiphany happened during a summer camp at a blustery military base in the depths of Cambridgeshire. As a teenage cadet, I was in the front rank of an inspection as a warrant officer paced the line of youngsters on their final parade.

He stopped and glanced at me as I stood to attention. “Do you like orange juice?” he asked, perplexing an already nervous teenager with his bizarre question.

“Yes sir.” Such were my nerves, I sounded like wee Scooby Doo on helium.

“I thought so,” he replied. “You’ve got it all down you.” And with his pace stick tucked under the arm of an immaculately pressed shirt, he moved on down the line.

The parade collectively sniggered, but I didn’t care. Military standards might have

been a challenge for this clumsy teenager but I’d been on night exercise, hammered the ranges with the cadet version of the SA80 and had a week-long stack of fun.

Later, two colleagues from the camp who didn’t have orange juice all over their uniform did serve their country – a young woman enlisted in the Royal Navy and went on ops, while a good friend joined the Royal Air Force and saved lives as a doctor on Afghan medevac flights. My own tenure influenced a career in defence journalism.

The cadet forces, by all accounts, hold a unique position, straddling both the Armed Forces and civvy street. While military based, they are not an official recruitment arm, promoting the likes of life skills and citizenship that are applicable anywhere.

Yet ask those on any parade night if they want a career in uniform and a fair slice will say yes.

With this in mind, it is not difficult to understand why a significant drop in

central government funding to the Army Cadet Force is causing some concern – particularly with the reality that the Regular ranks are already understaffed.

The situation has been deemed so serious that 26 honorary colonels of the organisation have signed a letter to ministers warning that the cuts will have serious consequences.

They maintain that the reductions – overseen by both the Conservative and Labour administrations – amount to a real-term hit of 50 per cent when compared with 2020.

The leaders point out that cuts are affecting allowances for adult volunteers, testing goodwill and impacting on the quality of experience for youngsters.

There are currently some 70,300 Army cadets – accounting for more than half the membership of all Armed Forces-affiliated organisations. And the ACF has seen a ten per cent rise in joiners since the

»





IN NUMBERS **CADETS**

Army Cadet membership

70,300

Total number of cadets

139,950

Total ACF funding

£26m

Real-term cuts since 2020

50%

SOURCE: ACF OPEN LETTER

» coronavirus pandemic.

Victoria Carr – a Reservist lieutenant with the Intelligence Corps, civvy street primary school headteacher and senior research fellow at the Centre for Army Leadership – has recently produced a paper on cadet forces and their impact. She is concerned the reductions could hit both recruitment and – critically – the military's relationship with wider society.

“Bringing in new blood is important but there is a bigger picture here,” she says.

“Even if a young person doesn't end up joining the Armed Forces, they gain life skills as well as an understanding of the military and the place it holds.

“This means, for example, a former cadet is more likely to be sympathetic to Reservists in the workforce should they eventually become a company boss or even supportive of their own children if they choose to join.

“My son, Tom, is a case in point – he was in the ACF, attended the Army Foundation College Harrogate and is now serving in the Royal Engineers.”

Overall, she concludes that there is a solid bang-for-buck return on the MoD's annual cadet forces investment. In her paper, she accepts the reality of competing defence priorities with tightening budgets but flags a University of Northampton study, which suggests a threefold return on every pound spent in terms of a young person's skills and future employability.

A hit on recruitment is highly likely, the academic maintains.

“You need a suite of ways to bring people into the fold – both online and in



Academic Victoria Carr, a lieutenant with the Intelligence Corps, pictured with her Sapper son, Tom

the physical world and the cadets form an important part of that mix," she adds.

Figures certainly bear out Lt Carr's assertion. According to recently retired brigadier Stuart Williams, whose last role was Deputy Commander Cadets, those attending youth groups could account for a quarter of 2,000-strong intakes at Harrogate.

"I'd be very surprised if that number was not a lot more in some years," he tells *Soldier*. "But while many young people who are involved want to pursue an Armed Forces career, civilian employers, colleges and universities will all look favourably at membership as it brings a great deal."

While declining to publicly comment on the funding cuts, Brig Williams – who is now CEO of the East Midlands Reserve Forces and Cadets Association – urged units to bolster their links with cadets as much as possible.

"This can be, for example, as simple as getting troops to speak to cadets," he adds. "They love nothing more than meeting real-life soldiers – the more the engagement, the more people will think about joining."

Personnel whose career in uniform started in Service-affiliated youth groups are numerous. The most high-profile of them includes outgoing Army Sergeant Major WO1 Paul Carney, who believes he benefited from exposure to military life during a brief tenure with the Sea Cadets growing up in Portsmouth.

He maintains that a healthy programme for young people is crucial.

"This is obviously a personal view, but I never understood how some have been advocating the creation of a new form

of national service on one hand, and then endorsing cuts to cadet funding," he says.

"The ACF and other organisations are great for teenagers interested in a career as you are exposed to weapons handling, drill and the rank structure.

"But I'd also agree that the cadets are a way of promoting awareness of the military in society – and this is important at a time when the Armed Forces are smaller. You only have to look at the Regular Army, which has shrunk by a third in the 27 years since I joined."

The gap between the military and civvy worlds has certainly widened with a smaller Armed Forces template and fewer people with connections to the Services.

With budgets eye-wateringly tight, however, the debate about priorities on cash distribution is only likely to intensify. Defence was never going to be an exception to the fiscal challenges, whatever shade of government was elected.

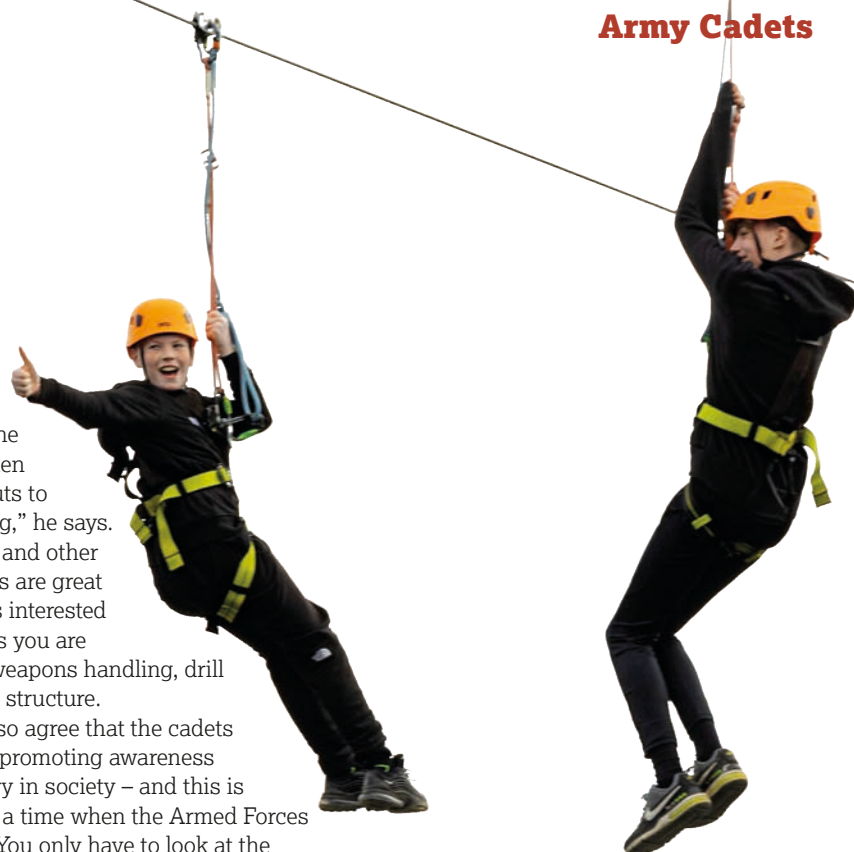
In her paper, Lt Carr points to different models of cadet schemes in other countries, from an officer-inspired scheme in the USA

to a tougher, compulsory initiative, run alongside school studies in Singapore.

She suggests that studying these templates could help inform discussions about the future. But as a teacher and soldier, seeing the impact of tough economic times through both prisms, she suggests a solution is quickly needed.

"With organisations for young people generally now depleted, we are potentially facing a situation that is going to impact the country more widely," she concludes.

"You are reducing the ability for early intervention for those in need – and that is something that should concern us." ■



LIKE FATHER, LIKE DAUGHTER

RESERVIST Cpl Mark Bailey (AGC (RMP)) and his daughter Lois have both seen the value of ACF service – choosing to sign up at the same time.

The NCO, who wanted to join the Royal Marines as a youngster, took the plunge to volunteer for the Army in his late thirties and decided that becoming a cadet instructor was "the next logical step in giving something back to wider society".

Meanwhile, 12-year-old Lois has recently enlisted in her school Combined Cadet Force – and has not ruled out service in the Armed Forces as a career.

Northamptonshire-based Cpl Bailey – the unit PTI at 116 Provost Company and a civvy massage therapist – said: "I've done all the relevant joining bits for the ACF and I'm going to become an instructor soon."

The 45-year-old added: "Young people gain so much from these organisations in skills and confidence, even if they don't go on to join the military."

Lois said that the ACF is so far living up to all her expectations. "We're doing our weapons handling test at the moment so that we can shoot on the ranges," the youngster explained. "I'm excited to be trying this and I want to make sure I can do it safely."



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This image from Ex Iron Wolf in Lithuania was taken by 2019 Professional Army Photographer of the Year, Cpl Becky Brown (RLC)

“

Be **creative**, take your inspiration from **everywhere** and put your **own spin** on your work

”

FINAL CALL

THE ARMY PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

Deadline February 10

Is your entry in?

Get it squared overleaf >

AS THIS magazine hit the shelves there was just one week to go until the deadline of the Army Photographic Competition 2024.

So if you haven't done so already, you have until **February 10** to send your best images to **pics@soldiermagazine.co.uk**

Get scrolling through your work from the last year, and send us some shots in any of the four categories below.

Many Servicemen and women have already done so – and as this spread shows, the standard of entries is pretty high so far.

Whether your favourite picture is from a once-in-a-lifetime overseas tasking, a ceremonial event or a plain old phys session, it doesn't matter. We want to see it.

If it inspires our judges and showcases any aspect of Army life in 2024, it will be in with a great chance of making the competition shortlist.

"Myself and Command Master Photographer WO1 Barry Lloyd (RLC) are looking forward to seeing the best images that our Service personnel have to offer," said *Soldier* photographer Graeme Main.

"The Army Communications Branch will assist us with the tricky job of judging, and we hope to uncover some real gems.

"If you're unsure whether to enter – my advice would be to do it.

"You don't have anything to lose, and you could bring your cap badge some great exposure as a result."

Competition winners will be announced in an upcoming issue of the mag.

Follow us on Facebook, Insta and X to be kept updated of the results and to take part in a public vote for Smartphone Shot of the Year.



A flavour of the competition so far...

Will any of these shots scoop a prize?

Got something to top them?

Email **pics@soldiermagazine.co.uk**





ENTRY DETAILS

You don't have to be a RLC photographer to enter the **Army Photographic Competition** – just a serving soldier

Email your images to us at **pics@soldiermagazine.co.uk** before the closing date of **February 10, 2025**

Include the name of the category you are entering, your rank, full name, unit, daytime contact number, email address and a few sentences to explain what the image(s) show and why they interest you

The winners will be announced in a future issue.

THE CATEGORIES

» **Army Photographer of the Year**

A portfolio of eight images – professional RLC photographers only

» **Amateur Photographer of the Year**

A selection of six images – open to all other soldiers and officers

» **Image of the Year**

Selected from individual entries and the portfolios – no need to re-enter if you have entered any of the above categories

» **Smartphone Shot of the Year**

Any image from any soldier – a public vote will decide the final winner

THE RULES

» You must be a serving British soldier or officer – Reservist or Regular – on the day you enter » Up to ten entries each are permitted for **Image of the Year** and **Smartphone Shot of the Year**, and up to three portfolios » By submitting an image, you give *Soldier* permission to print it in the magazine and to distribute to outside organisations under the terms of Crown Copyright » **Army Photographer of the Year** is only open to trade photographers in the Royal Logistic Corps » The pictures must have been taken between February 1, 2024 and February 1, 2025

THE BIG PICTURE

Salisbury Plain, UK

Fridge freezer

CHILLY conditions haven't stopped Maj Joss Mowforth (RE) from getting stuck into his training for the London Marathon this spring.

The bonkers Sapper will be attempting to break the world record for running a marathon while carrying a 25kg fridge – a title currently held by a Finnish athlete with a time of 3hr 53min 14sec, who topped the 2023 effort of super-fit Royal Marine Cpl Sam Hammond.

Maj Mowforth has named his hefty kitchen appliance "London Fridge" – a marginally better naming attempt than Cpl Hammond's "Fridget Jones"!

"It's not just about setting a record, it's an effort to raise awareness and funds for SSAFA," the officer said.

Follow his journey on Instagram via [**@the_london_fridge**](#) and help him meet his £2,500 target.

Picture: Graeme Main







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ben.woolf222@mod.gov.uk



Firing back with kind words

I AM a veteran who, unfortunately, has made some very bad choices and decisions since leaving the Army and has spent the past 21 years in prison.

I'm writing to commend the sergeant major of the unit in which I served in the 1980s – WO2 Martin Porter of 5 (Gibraltar 1779-83) Battery, Royal Artillery.

I have been trying to find a photograph dating from 1989 of the whole battery as was for years. It was taken on the parade square of Roberts Barracks, Larkhill.

Most of my letters were not replied to, until recently, after my eldest daughter encouraged me to write again.

To my surprise I received an

immediate response from WO2 Porter.

This man's words truly touched me. He told me that despite my bad choices I will always be part of the 5 Bty brotherhood and that he'd personally try to help me in my quest.

Thanks to him, the photograph in question has now been located and a copy should be with me soon. Martin also sent me some old prints that included my image from the regiment's collection, which was greatly appreciated.

More than that, though, his kind words have given me so much hope for the future and will stay with me after my eventual release. – **Name and address supplied**

“This man's words truly touched me”

Talkback

UNSUITABLE MATCH?

● CONSULTANCY firm McKinsey has agreed to pay more than \$600 million to the US government over its role in boosting sales of an addictive opioid painkiller.

Type “McKinsey” into a news search engine and numerous judicial investigations and allegations of impropriety the company has faced will be revealed.

This same consultancy firm has been paid to provide high level advice to Army Headquarters, including on the implementation of Agile, a system of working and improving productivity within the organisation.

I'm not sure what a company like this has to offer an organisation like the Army, which holds integrity as one of its core values. – **Name and address supplied**

REPLIES GET ROASTED

● I AM becoming increasingly frustrated by the responses to letters in this section of an otherwise excellent magazine.

Every time someone raises an issue, the response from the subject matter expert nearly always quotes back the policy, which I suspect the author is aware of, hence their letter.

Inconsistent terms and conditions, and failure of policy to stay abreast of modern life, are frequent issues so a tin-ear response quoting a JSP is not the answer.

The personnel who have taken time to write in have raised an issue that is outside their chain of command but the impression we get from these replies is the Army is not listening and not willing to understand the problem. The impact of this failure will be disgruntled personnel who stop raising issues and, ultimately, use their feet. – **Lt Col Guy Cooper, REME**

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.

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BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know



COMPETITIONS

DECEMBER 2024

HOAY winner (Edgar Brothers goody bag): Barry Rogers, Shrewsbury **Karaoke speaker winner:** Barry McIntosh, Edinburgh

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



WELFARE

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

Army HIVE

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

army.mod.uk/hives

Forcesline

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

0800 731 4880

ssafa.org.uk/get-help/forcesline

Army Welfare Service

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

ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

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

Drinkline

A free, confidential helpline 0300 123 1110

NHS support

nhs.uk/livewell

BULLYING/HARASSMENT/ DISCRIMINATION

Army Mediation Service

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

Army Speak Out Helpline

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

Defence BHD Helpline

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

CHILDCARE/CARING/FAMILIES

Army Families Federation

The independent voice of Army families, offering confidential advice

and support
01264 554004
aff.org.uk

Flexible working has been introduced by the Army to help personnel tailor their work-life balance. This includes arrangements such as remote working, variable finish times and restricted separation. Read more in the *Flexible Working and You* guide on Modnet.

Regulars can find out how this impacts pay and benefits at **discovermybenefits.mod.gov.uk**

DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

Forces Pension Society

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

Joining Forces Credit Union

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

Money Helper

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

National Debtline

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

StepChange Debt Charity

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

GAMBLING

National Gambling Helpline

Free information, support and counselling for problem gamblers in the UK
0808 8020 133

GRIEF

Cruise Bereavement Support

0808 808 1677

SSAFA support groups

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

HOUSING

Joint Service Housing Advice Office

The MoD's tri-Service focal point to provide Armed Forces personnel and dependants with civilian housing info
07814 612120
rc-pers-jshao-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services

01748 833797
spaces.org.uk

Veterans Gateway

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

INJURY/SICKNESS

Personnel Recovery Centres

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

LONELINESS

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

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



Samaritans

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

The Royal British Legion

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

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

There's always someone you can talk to. Speak to your friends or family, boss or padre, unit welfare staff (details above), medical officer or GP. There are a number of charities and

other organisations that can also provide support and they include...

Combat Stress 24/7 Helpline
0800 138 1619

Headspace

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

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

NHS

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

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Picture: Cpl Rebecca Brown, RLC

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REVIEWS

PICK OF THE MONTH

Sunray: Fallen Soldier

Veteran-led indie film hits the mark

▶ AS lockdown projects go, making a movie is among the more ambitious. But with typical military determination, that's exactly what former Royal Marines Daniel Shepherd and James Clarke did – from scratch.

Despite having no industry experience, the duo wrote, financed and filmed a feature-length actioner, all for under £1 million.

Almost five years on, *Sunray: Fallen Soldier* is out on digital platforms and select cinemas across both the UK and America.

It's the tale of veteran Andrew Coleman, who embarks on a mission to hunt down the drug dealers responsible for his daughter's death – ably assisted by a loyal band of ex-military colleagues.

With the cast and crew made up of Service leavers, military audiences can expect the skills and drills to be on point, while the underlying theme of PTSD will chime with many.

Soldier caught up with the rookie filmmakers to find out more about their cinematic adventure...



MOVIES



How did this all start?

Shepherd: During the Covid pandemic in 2020, we got together and decided we were going to write a film. We came up with this idea of working with veterans as actors so we found some people who had left the Services and gone into acting. This was even before we had a full story in place so we developed some ideas with them and then wrote the script. Principal photography took place in 2021 and 2022.

How did you pay for it?

Shepherd: Initially through a Kickstarter campaign – we made a trailer that we self-funded and raised quite a bit of money through that, which showed there was an audience that wanted it. We also needed other investors to get us over the line because the vision we had grew while we were making the film.

What prior experience did you have in the industry?

Shepherd: We'd always been into film and photography. We would make the troop videos when we were in the Marines. So we had experience with short films but this was our first time doing anything narrative. It was very much outside our comfort zone.

Clarke: One of the best things was getting to see and control the process from the beginning to end. The learning experience has been incredible.

What kind of feedback have you had?

Clarke: We've had quite a lot of praise on the scale and quality of the project. People have said that for the budget, it really holds its own. As a first-time filmmaker I'm personally very proud with how it's turned out.

Did you draw on any military films for inspiration?

Shepherd: *Act of Valor*, which gets a bad rap for its plot but in terms of the military skills and drills



it's a great film. It was made with the support of the US forces and they used real Navy SEALs in the cast.

Clarke: We're also both big fans of *Sicario*, which is obviously a very different film but what we took from that is the idea of short sharp action as well as building and releasing tension.

Are you working on anything else?

Clarke: We're both writing another project in a similar vein, but we can't say too much about that as it's currently in the very early stages. We'll definitely use veterans again. One thing we learnt through *Sunray* is how many talented and creative people there are in the Armed Forces. From the outside it seems very regimented, with everyone just being told what to do, but when you come into an environment like this you realise that's not true at all.

What do you want audiences to take from the film?

Shepherd: I want people to have fun and enjoy it – it's an action film that's designed to be entertaining. However, I also hope they pick up on



the idea that you think you can see what's going on, but there's things happening underneath the surface that you might not be aware of.

Clarke: We wanted to shine a light on mental health and also that it's good to talk – people should reach out for help if they need it.

Any final thoughts?

Shepherd: A nice unintended benefit was that, from early in the process, the veterans involved would come to us and thank us because they'd been looking for that sense of belonging they lost when they left the military and felt like they'd found it again on set. The whole thing was worth it because of that. I'm a big believer in therapy through creativity and finding purpose in something bigger than yourself. To have all of those people, some of whom may have had their own personal struggles, working towards one goal was just amazing.

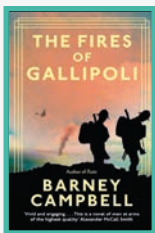
Clarke: I'd recommend anyone in the military give acting or writing a try – it's really good for your mental health. Get out of your comfort zone and try something new. There is a power in the arts. ■

Interview: Becky Clark, *Soldier*



MORE TOP PICKS

BOOKS



The Fires of Gallipoli

by Barney Campbell

HAVING covered ex-Serviceman Barney

Campbell's debut novel, *Rain*, in 2015, *Soldier* was excited to receive this follow-up offering set in the First World War. While the first book was a fictional take on the former Blues and Royals officer's time in Afghanistan, the latest title centres on two friends, Edward and Theo, as they endure the horrors of Gallipoli and France. Despite both tales taking place 100 years apart, some common themes emerge – most strikingly the corrosive effect of combat on the human spirit. The author has a knack for capturing inner dialogue as well as authentically portraying the bonds forged in battle. The latter is no doubt born of experience, but rendering it onto the page so movingly – while weaving a solid plot throughout – takes real skill. A strong second effort and hopefully not the last.



Review: Becky Clark, *Soldier*

PODCAST



Stakeknife

by the BBC

DELVING into one of the darkest chapters in UK and Irish history, this fascinating investigative podcast unpicks the double life of Freddie Scappaticci, who before his death in 2023 was widely named as both an IRA enforcer and the British Army mole known by the codename Stakeknife. Across ten episodes journalist Mark Horgan speaks to former IRA members and agent handlers as well as relatives of some of the more than 40 people murdered as alleged informants. It makes for compelling, if truly grim, listening – best binged in one go to help keep track of who's who.



Review: Capt Mike Owens, RE

GAMES



Six Days in Fallujah

Out now on PC

IT IS intriguing when games stray beyond entertainment alone and this squad-based outing is one such case in point – with a documentary-like dynamic throughout.

Set at the height of operations in Iraq, *Six Days in Fallujah* – currently in early access on Steam – recreates an urban action in a major Iraqi city two decades ago.

And it is an impressive piece of work, immersing players in combat situations faced by troops of the era. I was struck – in particular – by how realistically

room clearance is simulated. I'm an urban ops instructor and, when applying the real skills and drills, my AI teammates did what I expected.

Elsewhere, the voice acting and environment design are engrossing, pulling you into the role and the situation.

My one gripe is sometimes the enemy feels like it is engaging just to give players something to shoot at when the action starts to drag. This feels a bit forced, breaking from the realism. Overall, however, this is a gem of a game and highly recommended.



Review: Maj Griff James, Coldm Gds

Read last month's reviews section for an exclusive interview with *Six Days* publisher Peter Tamte

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SOLDIER SPORT

MAT MOMENTUM >>

THE Army Judo skills course and championships proved as popular as ever. A number of novices sampled the sport for the first time, while more experienced fighters such as LSgt James Pickersgill-Jones (WG, pictured) continued their progression. Read more on pages 64-65...



GET INVOLVED: VISIT THE BRITISH ARMY JUDO ASSOCIATION FACEBOOK PAGE OR FOLLOW @BRITISH_ARMY_JUDO ON INSTAGRAM FOR MORE INFORMATION



NOVICES LEAD THE WAY

NEWCOMERS FLOURISH AS JUDO CONTINUES MISSION FOR GRASSROOTS GROWTH

ENTHUSIASM on the mat proved as high as ever as the Army Judo set-up started the 2025 campaign with its annual skills course and championships.

More than 40 personnel signed up for the week-long test, which featured an intensive examination of their credentials ahead of a final-day competition spread across a host of individual and team categories.

Crucially, the organisation saw a number of novice athletes embracing the challenge of the sport for the first time.

Further opportunities to develop will follow at a second skills camp in April, with the highlight of the year coming at the UK Armed Forces Championships in the summer. Plans for an overseas tour to Canada are also in the pipeline.

Coach, and Army Judo committee member, Lt Col Oliver Martin (AGC (SPS)) told *SoldierSport* he was pleased to see so much talent on show and that the course was proving as popular as ever, despite the increasing demands on troops in their day jobs.

"We've had 18 novices here," he said. "We normally hit double figures, but this is one of the biggest turnouts in ten years, which is a real positive."

"The programme is ever evolving. We are obviously guided by the British Judo syllabus, but we have to make sure it is fun, and that people progress at the right pace."

"It is about giving them enough excitement without destroying them."

"Around three quarters have double graded this week, with the rest single grading, and that is the best news; the amount of

fresh blood we have seen.

"We always want to do well at the Inter-Services and this course will help us select fighters for that."

"We have a good track record in the competition recently and want that to continue – the talent is there."

While the elite performers who have graced stages such as the Commonwealth Games in recent seasons have now moved on, Army Judo has still had plenty to celebrate over the past 12 months.

SSgt Lewis Hannington (REME) and Lt Col Jim Crompton (AGC (ETS)) won gold and silver medals at the British Championships for kata and went on to compete at European and world level. And Cfn Vladimir Olenic (REME) took bronze in the under-90kg division at the British Senior Championships.

LSgt James Pickersgill-Jones (WG, pictured far left bottom) is among the new generation of Service athletes coming through and attended his first skills course in 2024.

Fighting in the intermediate under-90kg ranks this time round, he said the programme allows personnel to quickly get to grips with the sport.

"From 0900 to 1700 you are on the mat doing judo; it is intense," he explained.

"But it is the best coaching and some of the people here have competed at the highest level. There is always something to learn and adapt, or changes you can make to your technique."

"While I did the skills course last year, this is my first Army Championships. For me it is about participating and having



**"THE
COACHES
HAVE
DONE A
GREAT
JOB"**

a good time, if I win great.

"There are some decent novices out there and hopefully they can continue their love for judo – they are the future."

1st Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment helped bolster the number of newcomers, with five soldiers travelling to Aldershot to sample the discipline for the first time.

Capt Nathan McKinley (pictured left) was among those and said the drive to come and compete was part of a wider effort to grow combat sports within his unit.

"We are very busy sports wise, and this is another notch on the pole," he explained. "Boxing is the big one for us, but the squad is only open to a select few."

"Here, we can bring absolute novices along and get involved."

"The body definitely hurts, and if you'd told me I would get to a yellow belt after only three days' training, I wouldn't have believed you."

"On the first day we were throwing people and 24 hours later we were sparring, so it has been incredible."

"There is also a real community feel. The brown and black belts have been phenomenal, giving little pointers along the way, and the coaches have done a great job."

"We have brought five soldiers here and next year we will aim for ten. The appeal of combat sports is pretty big; the boxing team is always full so having another discipline can hopefully bring more people in." ■





LEAGUE FORMAT KEY TO GROWTH SPURT



**"YOU
HAVE
TO PUSH
TO THE
END"**

ANOTHER successful cyclocross season drew to a close at a highly competitive Army Championships in Chilwell. Following on from the popular cyclocross league – which this season attracted more than 95 different riders across four stages – the event proved to be a happy hunting ground for Capt Simon Hale (R Anglian), who was crowned overall men's champion.

Fresh from winning bronze at the British Championships in the 55-59 age category, the officer was also victorious in the men's masters race.

Despite trailing Cpl Sarah Toms of the Royal Air Force in the female event, Maj Ibbey Neville (R Signals) was women's champion, while Cfn Jimmy Smith (REME) won in the open senior field.

"It was a really good day," Hale told *SoldierSport*. "We've raced at Chilwell before and it is also used in a local league, so it is a great setting."

"We had 31 people on the start line – four of whom had never ridden a cyclocross bike before. There were also quite a few Army team members, who have competed nationally and internationally, so it was a huge spectrum."

Hale (pictured left) said the league has been the perfect platform for newcomers as each leg features coaching sessions followed by a race in the afternoon.

"They can come along with a mountain bike or cyclocross bike and have a go," he continued. "We have qualified coaches who can run through the basics and show them the skills they need."

"This is about everything we are as soldiers. You must have good fitness and bike skills, and there is a lot of running involved. You have to be mentally and physically robust, and push to the end."

The Army team was in Inter-Services action as this issue went to press. ■

SPORT SHORTS



Flourishing in Florida

FOOTBALL referees were handed a stateside test as they travelled to Florida to officiate at two prestigious international youth tournaments.

An 11-strong cohort from the Army Football Association made the trip to Sarasota, where they took charge of competitions involving male and female teams from Europe, North America and South America.

Over the course of two weekends they refereed almost 100 matches, including semi-finals and finals.

"Their ability to manage the emotions of young players, coaches and supporters was a testament to their training and professionalism," said organiser Sgt Ryan Hetherington (RLC).



Giants make their move

PROP Capt Skye Jackson (RLC) has become the latest player from the Army women's rugby league set-up to progress to the highest level of the domestic game.

In what has become a well-trodden path to the Women's Super League, the officer has signed with the Huddersfield Giants for the 2025 campaign.

"I'm really looking forward to embracing the challenge that comes with playing in the Super League," she said on joining the club. "They're a great set of girls, and I can't wait to see what the season holds for us."



EMMERSON EMBRACES SERVICES TEST

A STALWART of Army football for more than 20 years, WO1 Keith Emmerson (RAPTC) faces one of the biggest tests in his coaching career as he leads the under-23s into Inter-Services action for the first time this month.

Having amassed more than 150 appearances for the Reds as a player and captain, as well as being a regular for the UK Armed Forces, the soldier was appointed as the set-up's head coach in the summer with a view to using his experience to help develop the next generation of on-pitch talent.

Since then, more than 60 players have been assessed by his management staff over the course of two training camps and a series of friendlies before the team claimed the scalp of Camberley Town in the Aldershot Senior Cup.

Final preparations for the Forces showdown were getting under way

as this issue went to press, with the Army facing the Royal Navy on February 4 ahead of a home clash with the Royal Air Force in the contest's concluding fixture on February 19.

"The lads are hungry," Emmerson told *SoldierSport*. "We have got some good players who have had academy experience at professional clubs.

"We've had four represent the senior squad in earlier camps and a lot of them are playing regular corps football, which has probably been lacking in previous years.

"It is always hard to gauge where you are in friendlies and Camberley has been our biggest test so far, but we believe the ethos we have created in the group has set the foundations for us to be successful.

"We will be going in blind for the game with the Navy, so for us it will be about getting the best from the squad. If we take care of what we

need to do I am sure we will get a positive result.

"The RAF then play the Senior Service in the tournament's second match so we will know more about them ahead of our game, which could work to our advantage."

Predicting some personnel would be unavailable for the competition, Emmerson made an initial call for 45 players but as has become the case across Army sport, the pace of Service life has taken its toll.

"We have lost 20 due to deployments and exercises, but that is just the nature of military football," he continued.

"We were expecting to lose around ten people, which is why we sent letters out to 45, so we could then get down to a final group of 24.

"We will leave no stone unturned in terms of our preparation and fingers crossed, we will be successful." ■



FINAL GOES TO THE WIRE BUT SIGNALS FALL SHORT

THE British Army Basketball League staged a thrilling division one finale as the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers edged out the Royal Signals to get their hands on the coveted trophy.

Having lost to the Royal Logistic Corps in last year's showpiece, the REME took to the court in Aldershot in determined mood and made an electrifying start to open a 19-8 lead at the end of the first quarter.

However, their rivals returned to the fray galvanised and went on to plunder 23 points in the second quarter, compared to the REME's 14, to trail by just two at half-time.

The onslaught continued after the interval as they led 55-50 going into the final quarter.

But the champions-elect came roaring back, and a 24-point haul helped them overcome the deficit and eventually seal a hard-fought 76-71 victory.

"This means a lot," LCpl Anish Tamang (pictured far right), who lifted the silverware on his birthday, told *SoldierSport*.

"In the past we have fallen short, and it is my first time playing in the final four; I'm glad I could come in and make a difference for the team.

"We lost in the final last year and people said we were good players, but not winners, so this is a great feeling.

"We were strong in the first quarter, but I thought they were in control in the second half.

"Our energy was low, the calls were not going our way, and the shots weren't falling – because of that we got a bit frustrated.

"We changed a few things and stuck to the game plan, which got the job done.

"Credit to the Royal Signals. They were shooting and rebounding well, and if it was not for a bad start they could have won the game.



"In the past I've been part of the regular season but have missed the big games and finals, so it has been great to play in these tough fixtures and know I can compete at this level."

Tamang's focus is now fixed on this season's Inter-Services campaign and he will be among those heading to an Army training camp later this month.

"I've been playing for the under-23s for the past few years and my goal is to go to the Inter-Services and win and then get selected for the UK Armed Forces," he added.

"This is my last year of being eligible for the team. We have won that title once before and we have the grit to do it again."

Elsewhere, the Royal Logistic Corps claimed the division three silverware, with the Royal Armoured Corps taking the division two honours.

The fixtures marked the completion of the second season

of the competition's new format, which sees pool games played monthly ahead of two days of semi-finals and finals.

The old format saw the entire tournament crammed into a one-week window with teams coming together for training weeks in the build up.

The move has seen the standard of play improve as individuals are less fatigued but has led to selection issues due to the availability of personnel from one month to the next.

"I thought all four finals were very good," said SSgt Alex Ress, who was part of the defeated Royal Signals squad but is also a British Army Basketball League committee member and the officials manager.

"We managed to bring it back but lost by five points in the end.

"The REME were better on the day. We have not been in a final since 2021 and we will come back and go again.

"As a league, we brought in a third division this year and that has been a real success – players can now step up when needed.

"But there has been a lot of forfeited fixtures due to work commitments so that is something we have to look at. There could be a shake-up ahead of the next season."

Attention now turns to the inter-unit competition, which starts this month, with the Inter-Services following in April. ■



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TWO DAYS
AS PART
OF THE
LEAGUE'S
FINAL
FOURS**

11

**MEN'S
DIVISIONS IN
THIS YEAR'S
FORMAT,
ALONG WITH
A
SEPARATE
WOMEN'S
DRAW**

3

**POINTS
SCORED BY
THE REME IN
THE FOURTH
QUARTER
AS THEY
WON THE
DIVISION
ONE MEN'S
FINAL**

26

**QUALIFYING
ROUNDS
IN THE
INTER-UNITS
CONTEST,
WITH THE
FINALS SET
FOR MARCH**

4



MEDICS MAINTAIN TOP SPOT

DEFENDING champions the Royal Army Medical Service added another women's Inter-Corps Basketball Championships title to their haul with a comprehensive victory in the 2025 showpiece.

In a repeat of last year's final, the medics squared off against the Royal Logistic Corps and after a tight opening quarter went on to claim a 55-35 win.

The key swing came in the second quarter, when the loggies reduced the arrears with five unanswered points only for their rivals to hit back with a run of six points.

They managed a healthy lead for the remainder of the contest, with a 17-point haul in the final quarter underlying their dominance.

"It is never a walkover when we play the RLC, and it was another tough contest," skipper Cpl Jessica Moon told *SoldierSport* afterwards.

"We started a bit slower than

we wanted but crept away in the third and fourth quarters. We were strong in defence and offensively we were driving hard at the basket.

"We lost to them in the pool stages when we were missing some players but won our remaining fixtures.

"We came here as the defending champions, but didn't take winning the trophy for granted."

Pte Shannon Purves (pictured) was among the standout performers in offence, while Capt Jess Parkes has been a key figure throughout the campaign.

Moon said their form, together with consistency in selection, has helped fuel this season's success.

She added: "We have pretty much had the same team in every game and when we are fully manned there is no doubting our ability. The aim is to come back and make it three in a row next year." ■

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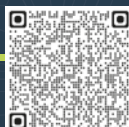
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Pictures: SBS Photography

REDS RISE TO THE CHALLENGE IN ALL-MILITARY CLASH

A NEW-look Army team crossed for three tries in a stirring second-half comeback to down Inter-Services champions the Royal Air Force in the opening round of rugby league's Challenge Cup.

The Reds, who had eight players making their debuts in the Aldershot showdown, found themselves trailing 16-6 in the early stages of the second period before a brace from Pte Meli Tuicina (RLC) helped inspire them to a 22-16 victory and set up a clash with Wests Warriors in the next round.

The visitors made the perfect start to the all-military tie as AS1 Ewan Makinson crashed over for a converted try before AR Luke Broadbent stretched the lead to 10-0 as he ghosted home on the right flank.

However, the soldiers established a foothold in the game courtesy of Fus Petero Canakaivata (Scots), who used his searing pace out wide to round off a cross-field move.

With skipper LCpl Mikey McDonald (RE) – whose brother Spr Cameron McDonald (RE) was among the debutants – adding the extras the Army reduced the deficit to 10-6 at the break.

Their rivals went on to add a third try of the afternoon courtesy of Cpl Sam Roberts before the momentum shifted.

Pte Joeli Varo (R Yorks) had the simple job of touching down following a swift break from Kgn Jeremaia Deveta (Lancs) on the left wing and Tuicina then took centre stage.

Firstly, the forward powered over following an electrifying break by Canakaivata before he sprinted in under the posts to complete a solo run from inside his own half.

"In typical Army style, we didn't start well," head coach Cpl Leigh Paul-Rientoul (R Yorks) told *SoldierSport*.

"We had a chat at half-time to put a few things right as we were making dumb errors in the wrong areas of the field.

**RUGBY LEAGUE
CHALLENGE CUP**

ARMY

22

RAF

16



"We spoke about spreading the ball wide, which we did in the second half, and it paid off. Mikey McDonald was the difference; he can control a game and that is why we decided to make him captain.

"We needed to put a few things right after we lost in the Inter-Services, and I think this performance shows we are in the mix for this year's competition."

Paul-Rientoul was also pleased to see so many newcomers stepping up to the plate following the departure of key personnel in recent times.

"We are in a transition period and have lost a lot of players, as well as changing the coaching team," he continued.

"We've had to grizz it out and get through but have now got a good group together."

The Army were in action against Wests Warriors as this issue went to press, with the winners facing Super League powerhouses Leeds Rhinos in the third round. ■



WHITE LEADS THE WAY

FIL D'Ariane overcame the challenge of favourite Farceur Du Large to claim the honours at this year's Military Gold Cup at Sandown Park.

The 11/1 shot – owned, trained and ridden by Capt Doug White (R WxY, pictured in blue) – held firm in the home straight to finish a length clear of the defending champion, ridden by Maj Will Kellard (RL).

"It was a complete shock," White, who fell in the closing stages of last year's race, said afterwards. "I was not expecting it, but

I loved every minute out there.

"The plan was to drop him at the back as I'm guilty of going too fast and he blows up. But I could not hold one side, so I let him go in the end; I wasn't worried about the others as I was enjoying myself too much.

"I was expecting Will Kellard to come zooming past, but he didn't, so there you go."

Kellard won both the Military Gold Cup and Royal Artillery Gold Cup last season and White will be hoping to match that feat when the latter is staged on February 13.



● **SCRUM** half LCpl Mikey McDonald (RE, pictured) was among the scorers as the Army rugby union men's team started 2025 on a high with an emphatic win over the British Police.

Staged at Worcester's Sixways Stadium, the match proved to be a one-sided contest as the Reds romped to a 66-7 victory.

McDonald lined up alongside brother Spr Cameron McDonald (RE) just days after the duo helped the Army rugby league team down the Royal Air Force in the first round of the Challenge Cup (see page 71).

The union squad return to action on February 12 with an away fixture against Cambridge University.

Meanwhile, kick-off times have been confirmed for this year's Army-Navy matches at Twickenham on May 3, with the men at 1400 and women at 1645. To book tickets visit eticketing.co.uk/rfu/Events?preFilter=12

**"I LOVED
EVERY
MINUTE
OUT
THERE"**

SPORT SHORTS



Court campaign kicks off

THE Army Indoor Tennis Championships were reaching a conclusion as this issue went to press.

The event marked the start of a busy 2025, with players from all six Service teams due to fly out to Spain for a week-long training camp from March 1.

Attention then turns to the Inter-Service Development Championships in April, with the women's festival of tennis planned for May ahead of the Inter-Unit Cup and Army Championships. Email ihais@britisharmysport.com for details on how to get involved.

MONTH IN SPORT

February's key dates...



WHAT: Inter-Services Snowsports Championships
WHEN: February 1 to 8
WHERE: Meribel, France
NEED TO KNOW: Team

and individual prizes will be up for grabs in Alpine skiing, Telemark and snowboarding with the Army looking to improve on a mixed showing in 2024



WHAT: Army Table Tennis Championships
WHEN: February 10 to 13
WHERE: Aldershot
NEED TO KNOW: This event attracted more than 100 personnel last year and features a training camp before the main competition. Players will be hoping to catch the eye ahead of the Inter-Services



WHAT: Army women v Havant, rugby union
WHEN: February 12 (1930 kick-off)
WHERE: HMS Temeraire
NEED TO KNOW: Having seen two fixtures cancelled either

side of Christmas, the Reds will be looking to make up for lost time as they build towards the Inter-Services. They also face Richmond on February 1



Pictures: 2Lt Brian Leung, RLC

PROGRESS CONTINUES ON ALL FRONTS



**"I'M
OVER
THE
MOON"**

THE Army Equitation Association (AEA) is targeting further success across all disciplines in 2025 as the organisation continues to go from strength to strength.

The 2024 campaign ended with a winning performance by Gnr Charlotte Pudge (RA, pictured left) at the London International Horse Show's Services showjumping competition, where she narrowly triumphed over rival Flt Lt Michelle Randall (RAF) after both riders produced two clear rounds.

"I'm over the moon," she said afterwards. "We had a little mishap in the first round when we rolled a fence and it stayed on, then we just went for it."

Pudge claimed an individual title at the Royal Windsor Horse Show earlier in the year, when the Army lifted the military team trophy, and secured two wins and five podium finishes while competing at international level in Spain. The Reservist

was also one of three AEA members to be shortlisted at the last Army Sports Awards.

She will be hoping for further honours at the British Showjumping Winter Championships in April, alongside teammate Maj Zoe Andrew (R Signals).

Elsewhere, Capt Holly Day (RAMS, pictured above) and 2Lt Brian Leung (RLC) became the first personnel to qualify for the National Grassroots Eventing Championships at the Badminton International Horse Trials in May.

And the latest staging of the Army Grassroots League – aimed at newcomers to the sport – is under way, while an Army League has been launched to bridge the gap between novice level and the corps competitions that last year saw 65 riders from 11 formations tested in six military fixtures.

Follow [@ArmyEquiUK](https://www.instagram.com/ArmyEquiUK) on Instagram or the Army Equestrian Facebook page for more updates. ■



A year into the Army I went on exercise to Kenya – a couple of the lads pulled a wind-up on me and said it would be really cold at night and that I should pack a nice, thick sleeping bag. I ended up sweating it out.

LCpl Harry Fairbrother, Mercian



A couple of colleagues decided it would be funny to put a blow-up doll in my kit when I was heading out to the Falklands. I only discovered the item when I arrived for my six-month tour, 8,000 miles from home.

LCpl James Brocklesby, RLC



I was attached to a unit on a deployment to Belize and left for Brize without trying on the jungle issue boots. When getting changed at the airport it became clear they didn't fit, but I didn't want to embarrass myself by telling anyone. Needless to say, it was an emotional first few weeks in country.

Cpl Louice Rowley-Limb, RAMS



I had a double blast on a promotion course at Longmoor. We'd all prepared our kit for the cold weather, and then March turned out to be unseasonably warm – well over 20 degrees. Then to compound things further, only vegetarian ration packs were available.

Cpl William Morris, RLC



Mine was definitely a hammock – I had one that had a broken string when I was on exercise in the Belize jungle last year. It made sleeping uncomfortable, and I had a pretty miserable time throughout.

Gdsm Dipesh Rai, IG

I've taken an entrenching tool – as per the packing list – to a no-digging training area before. I've also packed a Bergan with a summer-only sleeping bag expecting to do a para jump before returning to camp, only to find myself on exercise for a week in the midwinter.

Maj Joss Mowforth, RE



Chocolate teapot

We asked troops about the most useless item they have ever taken on exercise...

Our team bought a drone to use in our training for the World's Toughest Row. We thought we'd get some unusual photos for social media – but soon discovered none of us were any good with it. When we had chance to fly it, we couldn't because of regulations and other dramas.

Maj Dec Lynn, AGC (ETS)





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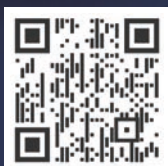
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