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MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY



MARCH 2022

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ARMY

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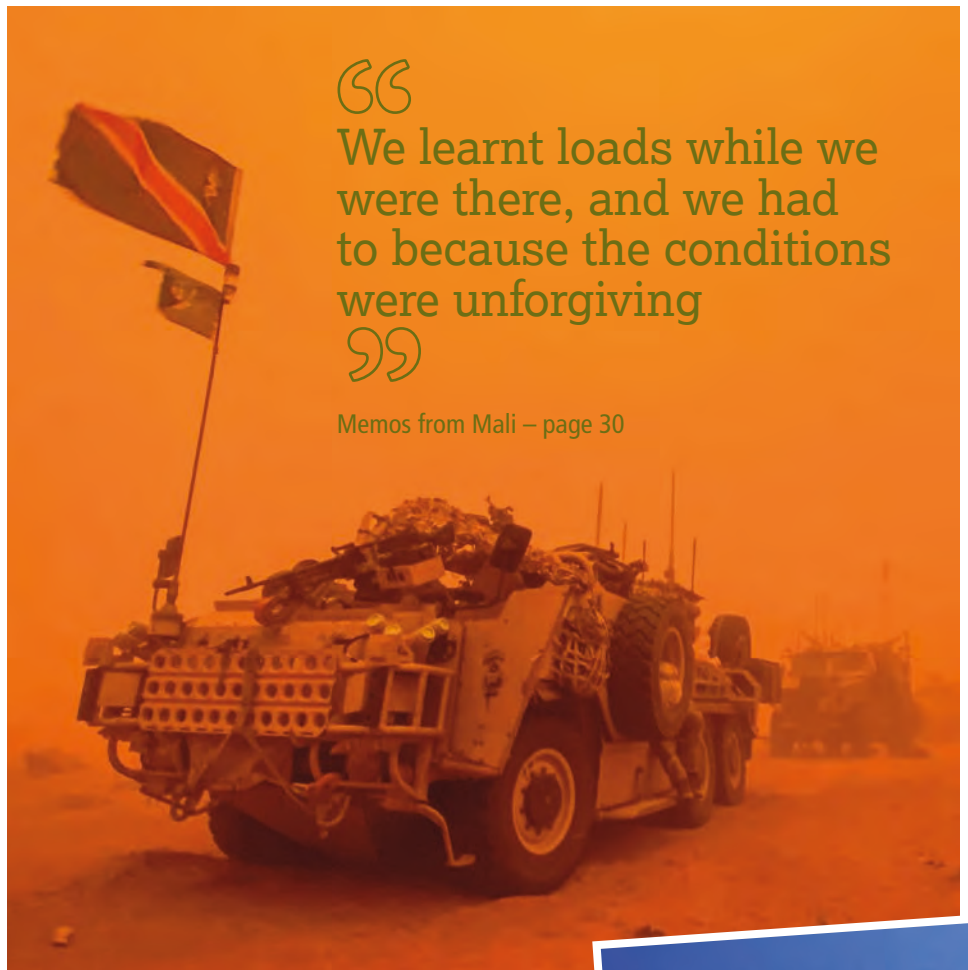
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Back out into the world



FOR quite some time now our team has been assembling this magazine virtually from our respective

rooms and man-caves.

Like everyone else, we have made things work in less-than-ideal conditions. But as our readers know all too well, there can be no substitute for getting out into the real world.

Following you on operations and exercises has been *Soldier's* bread-and-butter for 77 years now. So it was a welcome return to business-as-usual when we were finally able to deploy overseas this month – in this case to see the Coldstream Guards on Exercise Red Stripe in Jamaica.

Read more about this package on pages 36 and 74, where officers wasted no time in taking junior troops about as far from the Caribbean travel stereotype as it is possible to be.

How reassuring to see our brilliant soldiers getting back out into all the places that help to make them that way in the first place.

Sarah Goldthorpe • Editor

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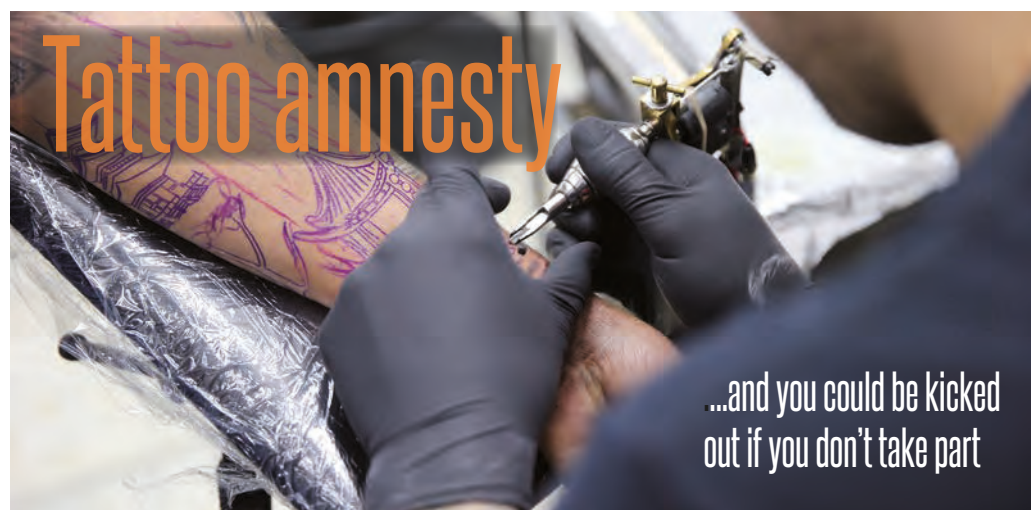
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Pictures: Graeme Main

ARM Y rules on tattoos are being tightened after it came to light they are not being followed correctly by all units.

As a result, some soldiers are serving with inkings that breach Service policy.

But the Personnel Directorate says it would be unfair to penalise individuals in these circumstances, so troops with a visible tattoo that breaches the rules (below) must flag it to their chain of command by the end of May.

After that date, anyone with body art that breaks the guidelines could be dismissed from service other than in exceptional circumstances.

The amnesty affects both Regulars and Reservists.

It does not apply to offensive, obscene or facial tattoos, which are still banned in any scenario.

Lt Col Claire James (RE) from Army HQ's workforce policy desk said inappropriate inkings looked unprofessional and could bring the Service into disrepute.

"We're trying to preserve the Army's ability to communicate openly, fairly and honestly with individuals of all race, colour and creed – regardless of where we are conducting operations," she told *Soldier*.

"Something as simple as a male soldier with a heart on his neck

engaging with a female in a Muslim country might well cause offence.

"It's about being sensitive to the environments in which we are working and understanding what we represent when we do that."

However, the officer went on to say that troops should not feel worried about disclosing tattoos that contravene the rules.

"It's really important that people don't feel judged," she explained. "The amnesty is all about protecting them from a policy that was unclear and that we've now made clearer."

"When someone comes forward it will be logged on their personal file and if they then move to a new unit they will be covered."

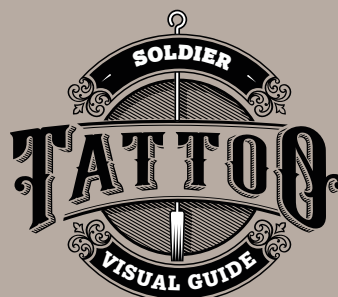
"However, if they were to later get another tattoo in a place where they're not allowed, the chain of command would have to apply for their discharge."

After the amnesty Lt Col James said formations could still ask to retain a soldier, but the decision on whether to dismiss them would be made by the Personnel Directorate instead of units.

She also stressed that new recruits would be subject to the same criteria.

Cosmetic tattoos such as eyebrow pigmentation also fall under the policy and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. ■

“We’re preserving the Army’s ability to communicate”



Inkings **concealed under clothing** or – if on the back of the neck – that can't be seen from the front.

Anything on the **face** or **throat** that's **visible front-on** with open-necked shirt, button undone.

Tattoos that could be considered **obscene** or **offensive** – or **anything on the face** – are banned.

SOLDIER

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GLOBAL SITREP

1. JAMAICA

GUARDS PAUSE
TO REMEMBER
FALLEN
COMRADE



Picture: Graeme Main

PERSONNEL from the Coldstream Guards took time out of preparations for Exercise Red Stripe (page 36) to track down and restore the memorial of a fellow guardsman who died in the Jamaican jungle.

Gdsm Craig Lashley (Gren Gds) drowned as he attempted a crossing of the Rio Grande River, near Port Antonio, during the same exercise in 1998.

A plaque to commemorate the 21-year-old was installed at the side of the river but given the lack of Army activity in the region in recent years the location

was unknown and it had fallen into disrepair.

After hearing the story and receiving some local intelligence as to its whereabouts, a seven-strong team made it their mission to find the memorial.

"Nobody had seen it for 14 years," Number 2 Company's 2iC, Lt Matthew Paynter, said.

"We are all part of the Household Division family and we decided we would do what we could to locate and clean it up."



2. FALKLAND ISLANDS

MEANWHILE DOWN SOUTH...

SOLDIERS from the Coldstreamers' Number 3 Company ended their tenure in the Falkland Islands with an exercise on the wilderness of Onion Range.

The troops, who made up the outgoing Roulement Infantry Company, faced a 20km tab plus serials including a casualty triage and minefield encounter. A patrols competition and marksmanship serials rounded off the manoeuvres.

Speaking shortly before being replaced on the territory by colleagues from 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, Officer Commanding Maj Henry Greeves (Coldm Gds) added that the Falklands represented an opportunity for training that was "second to none".



3. KENYA

ROAD SAFETY

CONVOY escort drills were the focus of British-led training for Kenyan troops prepping to deploy on the African Union Mission in Somalia.

A short-term training team from 1st Battalion, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment – who had been on a battlegroup exercise in Batuk – ran a two-week course at the School of Armour in Isiolo.

Following revision of basic dismounted close combat, counter-IED skills and vehicle movement, the students faced written and practical tests of their convoy escort knowledge and a mini final exercise.

CSgt Chris Morley said passing on operational lessons from around the world would set the Kenyan troops up for success.

"Rather than having to fail to

learn, they can learn from the failures that we have made in the past," he added.

The package was arranged by the British Peace Support Team (Africa), with members of the Batuk-based US Security Force Assistance Brigade also providing guest instructors.



To support the team in raising money for the War Widows Association visit justgiving.com/fundraising/10k10khot



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6. NORWAY TELEMARK TEST

A TEAM of Army wives is set to trace the route taken by the Heroes of Telemark – the famous resistance fighters who thwarted the Nazis' nuclear programme.

Led by Reservist and military spouse Maj Heather Sharp (RE), the 12-strong group will ski 100km across Norway's Hardangervidda plateau, sleeping in the original huts used by the saboteurs.

The exped is the latest exploit of the Forces Wives Challenge, which the officer set up to provide partners with similar adventurous training experiences to those enjoyed by serving troops.

She explained: "I'm ex-Regular and, when I also married someone in the military, my eyes were opened to the sacrifices made by the families and I wanted to give them some of the same opportunities I had."

Doko basket on their backs as they battle to complete the demanding course.

The latest event was conducted in smaller groups to reduce the risk of virus transmission but maintained the traditional route around the city of Pokhara.

Selection remained competitive, with only 218 recruits chosen from scores of hopefuls. They were due to arrive in the UK as this issue went to press, beginning a new challenge of 39 weeks at the Infantry Training Centre Catterick.

6. NORWAY

4. CYPRUS

5. NEPAL

3. KENYA

4. CYPRUS FIGHTING FUTURE



ANOTHER round of experimentation is in store for 2nd Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment, this time testing a new nano drone at section level.

The troops will be investigating if the device can be used to improve the distance at which soldiers can locate and target the enemy.

The steep, unforgiving terrain in Cyprus provides a challenging test of robustness for personnel and kit alike as they execute a series of offensive and defensive actions, explained Capt Rich Pooley (Yorks).

"Success will be about driving operational advantage grounded in evidence and tangible data," he added. "As the Army's next generation combat team, 2 Yorks aim to influence how soldiers should fight in future."

This summer the battalion will return to the UK and formally join the Land Warfare Centre's new Experimentation and Trials Group.



5. NEPAL BRAVING THE BASKET

THE Gurkha selection process has returned to familiar form – with would-be soldiers taking part in the first Doko Race for two years.

The iconic challenge – which had been paused during the Covid pandemic – is a stern test of candidates' character and determination. Each carries a traditional Nepalese

VC HERO'S STORY REMEMBERED

■ TWO slate plaques honouring Victoria Cross winner Lt Philip Salkeld have been unveiled at the bridge sharing the late soldier's name in Dorset.

The ceremony was held 164 years to the day since the officer, along with his British and Indian colleagues, blew in the Kashmir Gate and began the recapture of Delhi during the First War of Indian Independence.

The Royal Engineer was among the 14 sappers charged with carrying out the plan but was shot in the arm and leg, with his left arm later amputated.

He was awarded the VC days later but died on October 11 – two days before his 27th birthday.

A fundraising campaign was launched for a memorial in his home village of Fontmell Magna, but a surplus of cash allowed for the building of a bridge over the River Divilish, which was named Salkeld Bridge.

More than a century later, Peter Metcalfe was driving over the structure when his wife spotted the original but long-forgotten plaques. He then set about sourcing replacements.



REME VETS CLEAN UP

■ SENIOR professionals united to celebrate the achievements of veterans in industry.

The British Ex-Forces in Business Awards and its Scottish equivalent saw ex-Army personnel saluted including REME stalwarts Steve Lagadu, who took the military values in business category, and Jimmy Quinn, who was advocate of the year. Some £70,000 was raised for SSAFA.



Braced for success: The Serviceman is burning 8,000 calories a day on his seaborne mission



Corporal smashes the seas

Engineer Jack Jarvis eyes Atlantic rowing record

A RESOLUTE soldier who has set out to complete an epic solo rowing expedition across the Atlantic Ocean is well on track to complete his endeavour.

As this issue went to press, Cpl Jack Jarvis (RE) had finished more than two-thirds of his record breaking 4,500-mile pull across the waves – in which he is raising tens of thousands of pounds for brain tumour charity Brainstrust.

Having started at Lagos, Portugal in December the 28-year-old is aiming to become the first person to cross the Atlantic from mainland Europe unsupported.

He hopes to complete the journey to Miami, Florida in three months, rowing 15 hours a day on a route taking him past the Canaries and Dominican Republic.

While Cpl Jarvis is supremely fit – having won the Service's indoor rowing league three years ago – the challenge is a punishing endeavour.

Living on a diet of freeze-dried meals and cereal bars, he is burning 8,000 calories a day and is expecting to be a stone lighter at the finish line.

The sapper is snatching four hours of sleep a day, with a gruelling schedule in which he must also maintain his boat and ensure he packs in the required nutrition.

Undertaking the attempt to push himself "to the next level", the soldier is raising money in memory of his grandfather, who in 2007 died from a brain tumour.

Cpl Jarvis said before setting off: "I was understandably heartbroken as he was my hero and the person I looked up to."

"I want to do my bit to try to find a cure for this awful disease – if I can stop even one family losing someone to cancer, it'll be my greatest achievement."

Support the sapper at unitedweconquer.co.uk

Turn to page 45 for more Atlantic rowing inspiration. ■



“I want to do my bit to try to find a cure”

PATHFINDERS PACKAGE



■ RECCE troops from the Pathfinders blazed a trail across the Norfolk countryside as they unleashed their weapons suite on the Stanford Training Area.

The soldiers – who form part of the 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team – showed their teeth in a four-day package of fire and manoeuvre serials.

Equipped with RWMIK patrol vehicles, they demonstrated their full firepower range – including grenade machine guns and the fearsome NLAW anti-tank missile.

Members of the Colchester-based platoon are drilled to head behind enemy lines and operate self-sufficiently as they relay back information that assists mission planning.





GOING

STAYING



Pictures: Graeme Main and Steve Dock

Husky put down but Panther lives on

THE Husky armoured vehicle is now in the final phase of decommissioning – and is due to be fully removed from service this year.

Defence chiefs confirmed that the platform, which has been a mainstay of the fleet since the days of Op Herrick, had now reached the end of its operational life.

The move follows a reorganisation of the Army portfolio, under which Husky's seven-tonne Panther stablemate had originally been scheduled for retirement.

But the plans were shelved after it was decided that Panther's design made it the best option for command and control in the field.

The vehicle, which first arrived in 2007 and will now remain in service for the next 15 years, is similar in appearance to the US Army Humvee and offers sound protection against small arms fire and explosive devices.

It has proved versatile out on the ground – it can be underslung beneath a Chinook helicopter for movement around the battlespace and is armed with a 7.62mm weapon.

This can be upgraded to a higher calibre firearm if needed along with day and night sighting systems.

Officials said Panther, which is also in service with the Royal Air Force, remained a good candidate for worldwide operations. It could be configured as a platform for commanders or to deliver a punch to the enemy, they added.

But the outgoing Husky has also served the Army well – designed for a range of deployments it has seen service on operations from Afghanistan to Estonia.

Along with its sister vehicles Wolfhound and Coyote, it has shown itself to be highly adaptable, delivering plenty of firepower and protection.

Above: Panther is set to be in service as a command and control vehicle for another 15 years

“As a country we can, and must, do better”



Picture: Shutterstock

VISA FEES REMOVAL 'NOT ENOUGH'

■ COMMONWEALTH veterans who have served for six or more years, or been medically discharged, will no longer have to pay visa fees to remain in the UK, the government has announced.

But campaigners say the measures do not go far enough.

A statement from The Royal British Legion (RBL), which has been at the forefront of the campaign to ditch the fees, said family members and troops serving for shorter periods would still be left seriously out of pocket.

A family of four wishing to remain on British soil, for example, could still have to pay out more than £7,000.

RBL Director General Charles Byrne said: “While we welcome the news that these fees will be waived for some Commonwealth Service personnel, this proposal still leaves many Armed Forces families facing severe hardship.”

“We strongly urge the government to go further and scrap these unfair charges for everyone who has served for at least four years and their immediate family members.”

Soldiers hanging up their uniform are eligible to apply for indefinite leave to remain in the UK if they have served for four years.

The Home office receives around 400 such applications annually, which cost £2,389 per person – a figure that was just £155 in 2003.

“In recent years, at least half of those who have accessed the RBL's support for visa and immigration costs have been the spouses and children, often living in desperate situations,” Byrne added.

He said the announcement contradicted pledges made in the government's Armed Forces Covenant.

“As a country we can, and must, do better,” he continued.

“The sacrifices and commitment of those who come from the Commonwealth to serve our nation, and their families, should not be forgotten.”

FALKLANDS VETERANS' EIGHT-DAY QUEST

■ A GROUP of veterans who were involved in Op Corporate are taking to the saddle to commemorate four decades since their campaign in the South Atlantic.

The Falklands Forty bike ride will see nearly 30 ex-personnel embark on a route around the UK. They will be visiting several memorials en route – among them the Brecon Peace Gardens and National Memorial Arboretum.

Organiser Gus Hales – who served with 9 Parachute Squadron, Royal Engineers during the 1982 conflict with Argentina – said the ride would be a fitting way to mark the anniversary.

Starting in Cardiff and finishing in Aldershot, bikers will be equipped with buckets to collect for various charities during the eight-day event in early June.

Search **Falklands 40th Anniversary Bike Ride** to find out more.



Familiar ground (right): Royal Welsh personnel conduct training in Estonia back in 2018

TABLETS FOR LONELINESS

■ GURKHA veterans and their families are now better connected to loved ones and support networks, thanks to a digital initiative by a military charity.

Under the SSAFA scheme, tablet PCs have been given out pre-loaded with apps that help with issues such as pensions and connect them with family and friends.

Around 70 have already been distributed in Nepalese communities from Aldershot to Edinburgh (pictured), with 100 more on order. The kit was procured with funds provided by the government amid concerns of isolation during the pandemic.

Gary Williams (ex-Coldm Gds), SSAFA welfare and specialist services boss, said feedback on the project had been "overwhelmingly positive".

He added: "We have had some wonderful comments from those who have been using the tablets.

"This initiative has also helped us to identify several previously unknown areas where veterans and their families have settled across the country.

"The qualification criteria is simple – you have to be either a veteran, with a day of paid service, or a dependant."

Find out more at ssafa.org



“I am appalled by these horrific events”



Pictures: Graeme Main

Troops doubled in Estonia

HUNDREDS of extra personnel have been sent from Germany and the UK to Estonia as Russia mounted a military invasion of the Ukraine.

A battlegroup led by The Royal Welsh was already en route from Sennelager and British bases to bolster Nato's presence in the Baltic state amid tensions in the region. But as this issue went to press on February 24 Moscow's troops had crossed its neighbour's borders with reports of fighting.

Earlier, the UK and other governments had imposed sanctions on Russian individuals and organisations as the situation deteriorated.

President Vladimir Putin – who had deployed more than 120,000 troops in the region – officially recognised Ukraine's breakaway areas of Donetsk and Luhansk. Both have long been influenced by rebel groups sympathetic to his government.

Russia, which annexed the Crimean Peninsula from its neighbour eight years ago, had also issued a long list of demands to Nato – including that Ukraine be excluded from membership. But alliance leaders had defended the right of a sovereign nation to determine its own future.

In condemning Moscow for the attack, British PM Boris Johnson said there would be a further response with more severe economic sanctions.

"President Putin has chosen a path of bloodshed and destruction by launching this unprovoked attack on Ukraine," he added. "I am appalled by these horrific events – the UK and allies will respond decisively."

Some 800 extra British troops – plus kit including Apaches, Challenger 2s and Warrior armoured fighting vehicles – are joining the Royal Tank Regiment Battlegroup in Estonia.

Royal Navy warships and Royal Air Force Typhoons are also backing the op.



FEARLESS FUNDRAISING



BALL'S BEARING

A SOLDIER chained herself to a charity cause – quite literally – as part of a punishing physical challenge to raise awareness of mental health matters. Sgt Naomi Benson (RAMC), 34, undertook 300 laps of Tidworth Oval while handcuffed to a three-kilo medicine ball. She finished her circuits of the 400m track – 75 miles in all – in 24 hours and remained strapped to

Target funds:
£1,000
For: ABF, Combat Stress

the globe for several more days in aid of the effort. The event formed part of the

wider ABF and Combat Stress Medicine Ball Challenge. The Servicewoman told *Soldier* she had been supported by well-wishers. "I had company for most of the laps, including in the rain and through the night," she said.



Pictures: Cpl Alexander Morris, RLC

Army halt triggers tough talks

...and CGS did not exclude himself from the soul-searching

THE Chief of the General Staff led by example as the Army halted all non-essential business for a day to reflect on its culture and approach to inclusion in the ranks.

Gen Sir Mark Carleton-Smith described last month's Op Teamwork event as "an electric shock to create the time and space to let the organisation know what is important".

And while he did not believe there was necessarily a wholesale problem with military culture, he said: "I think that no institution today is beyond reform – given the pace of social change it is important the Army is as up-to-date as it can be."

The event – in which troops were shown some hard-hitting videos about inappropriate behaviour before discussing how Service culture could be improved – followed a number of incidents in which the conduct of some personnel was called into question.

Items on the agenda included

military banter – and when it could overstep the mark – as well as the effects of coercive, threatening and discriminatory behaviour.

Gen Carleton-Smith – the driving force behind the initiative – took part in discussions along with troops he visited at Aldershot-based 27 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps.

Attendee LCpl Connor Tordoff-Drew (RLC) said the event had certainly made him think.

"You never hear about the percentage of people who are affected by specific things," he said. "Instead of having a bit of banter I'd look around the room to see who it might affect."

Army Sergeant Major WO1 Paul Carney, who addressed the RSM designate course on the day, said he was pleased with how leaders had embraced it.

Read more about his thoughts on Op Teamwork in his regular *Soldier* column on page 19.



Driver admin goes DIGITAL



■ TROOPS have welcomed news that military driving admin is going digital from this month.

A system called *MyDrive* will replace the long-running FMT 600 pink card, while a linked programme known as *Campbell* will store users' driver training records (the FMT 601) and driver hours.

Hosted on the Defence Gateway, both can be accessed via computer or mobile phone and have been trialled across all three Services.

CSgt Jim Lawrie (Scots), from the team overseeing the rollout for Field Army, said the response from units he had briefed about the change had been "overwhelming".

"They think it's brilliant," he continued. "This is long overdue – it will save time and duplication of effort, as well as using less paper and being more accurate."

"Previously, you would hand over a hard copy of your driver training record when you moved units, which didn't always happen very quickly."

"This solves that because it is now a single system across defence, so even if I got posted to an RAF station, it stands."

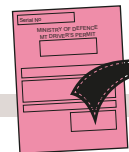
Users are encouraged to start accessing the portal from March 7, with the aim that all personnel make the transition within a year.

They must click on the *MyDrive* icon, select "Army" as their community, then search by location or unit code to find their local hub.

Troops should then upload a copy of their driving licence – obtained from the DVLA website – as well as a photo of their current FMT 600.

Meanwhile, additional competences such as heavy goods licences must be added on *Campbell*, which is also where those driving green fleet vehicles or mini buses will record their journey times.

Individuals will receive a notification when any permits are about to expire.



SOLDIERS from the Long Range Recce Group in Mali took on the West African desert with a sponsored four-mile run every four hours for 48 hours. The 4x4x48 challenge saw 90 members of 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment run in 35 degree Celsius heat.

MINDFUL MARCHING

A FORMER career gunner has been busy picking up the pace as he prepares to hit the road this month to raise money for mental health services. Lee Cutter, 50, who served 24 years in the Royal Artillery before leaving in 2012, is pounding out 20 miles of the Suffolk coastline as part of a charity's March in March campaign. Participants must aim to walk at least ten miles on any day during the month.



WIN
a £150 Cumbrian
Challenge place!



LAST month's spine line clues may have been recognised by the Service's airborne history experts.

Inspired by our feature on the Apache, (Arthur) Clowes, (Billy) Fiske, (Brian) Lane and (Adolph) Malan were all pilots who flew in the Battle of Britain.

This month, we have teamed up with military charity Walking With the Wounded (walkingwiththewounded.org.uk) to offer one reader a team place for three to four people at this year's Cumbrian Challenge.

Held on May 14 at Grasmere Sports Ground, the event is the organisation's annual hiking test, which has raised more than £1.2m to date.

To be in with a chance of winning this prize tell us what links the words on the spine of this issue. Answers, including phone number, to the usual address or comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by March 31.



SPINE LINE COMPETITION

Right: The Challenger 2 main battle tank from The King's Royal Hussars Battlegroup surveys the prairie back in 2014

“It will focus on sub-units and battlecraft”

**BATUS
SITREP**

Established:
1972



Location: Prairie of
Alberta, western
Canada

Size:
1,677
square miles

Distance from UK:
4,279
miles

Time difference:
-7 GMT



Troops set to train
there this summer:

700



Picture: Graeme Main

Batus is sticking around

Canada training area will host smaller serials in future

BRITISH troops will continue to exercise in Canada as the country remains a training venue “for the foreseeable future”, a senior officer has told *Soldier*.

Top brass say manoeuvres are still scheduled to be held on the prairie of Alberta, which has been hosting UK personnel for half a century.

But while activity is penned-in up to 2024, the focus will be different, with serials of a far smaller scale to the armoured exercises of the past.

And although adventurous training will still feature on the agenda, activities will now be run by contractors rather than resident troops.

The AT base – hosted at Trails End Camp – has now been closed.

As reported in this magazine, the Future Soldier initiative will see the creation of new global hubs for the Army. These facilities – initially set up in Germany, Kenya and Oman – will be a springboard for training and operations.

Under the restructuring, armoured activity will be focused on Europe in a move to keep troops and kit where they are required by Nato commitments.

But senior officers have stressed that there is no intention to swap training in Canada for the Middle East as reported in some quarters of the media.

Col Mark Ellwood, Commander British Army Training Unit Suffield (Batus), said it remained open for business despite the changes.

He told *Soldier*: “There is no intention for us to leave the country and we are

examining how we can use its unique training opportunities in future.

“While the changes mark the end of an era, they herald the beginning of another as we continue to transform the Army from the old Cold War model.”

While Col Ellwood pointed out that future locations for armoured training were still being scoped, Batus has already been significantly drawn down with the moving of the Tactical Training Team to Warminster.

Gazelle helicopters and crews tasked with providing medical evacuations have been returned to their base in Northern Ireland, while the number of personnel involved in running prairie exercises has been reduced.

“In effect, we are now providing support for the 3rd (UK) Division to train itself rather than delivering large-scale exercises,” the officer continued.

“This means the training in Canada will be focused on sub-units and battlecraft syllabus serials rather than the large exercises of times past.

“The summer will see 5th Battalion, The Rifles training – five rotations will take place, each with some 350 troops on the ground at a time.

“There is still an intent to maintain a footprint in the country, and it will remain a place that troops will see for the foreseeable future.” ■



Commander Batus,
Col Mark Ellwood



END OF AN ERA

Read our next issue for your memories of Trails End Camp...





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There have been few periods in the Forces Pension Society's 75-year history when so many in the Armed Forces Community (including many who are recently retired) have been challenged by such pension complexity and change.

The implementation of the McCloud Remedy affecting all those serving on or before 31st March 2012 and on or after 1st April 2015 (including service leavers), will give you the choice between your legacy scheme entitlement and AFPS 15 for the Remedy period.

Additionally, from this April, everyone still serving on AFPS 75 and 05 will be transferred to AFPS 15, involving further calculation complexity. Good to know then, that our Forces Pensions Consultants are standing by to provide guidance based on each of our Members' individual circumstances.

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VETERANS'
GATEWAY



From guns to guard



Picture: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC

■ SOLDIERS from 5 Regiment, Royal Artillery parked up their light guns for a stint as the Queen's Guard at Buckingham Palace. Ceremonial experts from the Household Division trained the gunners to learn complex drill manoeuvres, with a fit-for-role parade inspection at Wellington Barracks.



Old pension schemes shut

ALL serving soldiers will become members of Armed Forces pension scheme (AFPS) 15 from next month, with older Service schemes closing down for good.

It follows the transfer of some back into their legacy arrangements for several years after a Court of Appeal ruling found that public sector pensions had discriminated against some younger members when they were altered back in 2014/15.

As a result, Regulars and Reserves who were in service on or before March 31, 2012 and on or after April 1, 2015 benefitted from being back on their older schemes such as AFPS 75 and 05 (and some Reservists on FTRS 97, RFPS 05 and NRPS) for a "remedy period" of April 1, 2015 through to March 31, 2022.

It means that when they leave the Army, these troops (including those with a gap in service of no longer than

five years) will get to choose between the benefits of their legacy scheme or AFPS 15 for that remedy period.

Individual soldiers do not need to act on the changes, but those affected are due to receive a letter from Defence Business Services explaining the situation.

An updated pensions calculator is also due to be issued later this year.

Troops who have always been members of AFPS 15 are unaffected.



“It is key to being ready for operations”

Wales bans smacking

PARENTS serving in Wales are being urged to note a new ban on the physical punishment of children, which comes into effect this month.

The country joins Scotland, Jersey and more than 60 others globally to outlaw smacking, hitting, slapping and shaking.

Anyone breaking the law risks being arrested or charged with assault, and the change applies to everyone in the country – including visitors.

The Army Welfare service is working with the Welsh government to raise awareness of the change, which is detailed at gov.wales/endphysicalpunishment



FANCY A CURRY?

■ ABF The Soldiers' Charity will host The Lord Mayor's Platinum Jubilee Big Curry on April 7 at London's Guildhall.

As well as offering three lunch sittings, the event will include a silent auction and has raised more than £2.5 million for the charity since 2008.

For tickets visit the events section of soldiercharity.org

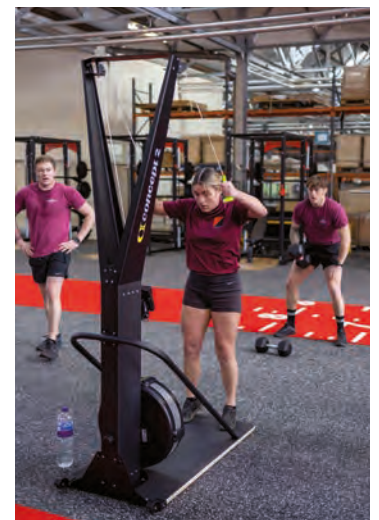
FITNESS TAKES FLIGHT

■ ARMY PTIs were some of the first to test a new gym at Merville Barracks, Colchester.

Built inside a repurposed warehouse with space for 150 troops to train together, the facility is the third gym to be created for members of the 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team.

Commander Brig Nick Cowley said: "Fitness is key to being ready for operations and, as the Army's very high readiness formation, our soldiers need to be very fit."

It joins the site's other extensive fitness facilities, including sports hall, boxing ring, pool, running track and all-weather pitches.





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Ground view

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

IN AN interview with this magazine in the not-too-distant past, I made the point that soldiers join the Army because they want to go on operations.

Nobody enlists for a dull time – the Service is attractive to young people because they have opportunities that are simply off-limits in civvy street. This – for me – is a basic fact of life, although my comments seemed to excite journalists and found their way into a couple of newspapers.

It was uplifting for me, then, to once again visit our soldiers excelling on deployment – this time alongside our Nato allies in Estonia and Poland.

Events in Europe made the reasons for troops working as part of the alliance's enhanced forward presence very tangible indeed. And it was great to see them rising to the challenge on Op Cabrit.

In some areas they were without comms to loved ones at home and conditions were well below freezing.

In Estonia the Royal Tank Regiment Battlegroup had been busy, with personnel going through a cold weather operators' package and preparing for their winter camp exercise. The course is

demanding physically as well as mentally, as soldiers learn to operate in killer conditions.

Working in Poland was tough too – there The Royal Dragoon Guards have been embedded with our US allies, along with others including members of 26 Squadron, 32 Engineer Regiment.

A personal high point for me in both nations was seeing young section commanders growing in their leadership role.

The ethos of a soldier does not change throughout the generations.

Most of us want to make a difference and help people. I remember feeling this sense of duty back in 1999 as I waited to go into Kosovo – a place where so many local civilians had suffered – as a young sapper and peacekeeper.

More recently on Op Pitting, the Kabul evacuation, we saw some of our newest soldiers showing a professionalism that saved thousands.

We join to serve our country. But it is only by being on ops that we develop ourselves and use the skills we learn in training.

Deployment has its challenges, but it is part of the life we have chosen.

Nobody joins to sit at home.

“
Nobody joins to sit at home
”

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Q What do you like best (and least) about ops?

A Having a single focus each and every day. But being away from family and friends can be hard

A very valuable pause for



Picture: Steve Dock

UPHOLDING our values, standards and professional ethos is vital if we are to function as a Service. And having a day in which we stopped our non-essential business to think about these critical issues was very useful.

Last month's Op Teamwork event saw the Army pause to reflect and look inwards while considering how it might change for the better in the future.

It was great to see commanders largely given the opportunity to deliver the event in their own way, making the most of the day and tailoring it accordingly.

I was at Pirbright,

helping to deliver the regimental sergeant majors' designate course, and there were some good discussions on issues such as inclusion and equality.

The insight of the senior warrant officers was particularly inspiring as they will be the next generation of leaders providing the link between troops and officers.

Society has changed a great deal, certainly since I joined the Army, and the Service must adapt too if it is to recruit and retain the very best people.

But crucially, we must also make sure that we look after one another – whatever our background.

Fighting fit for future taskings

■ IT WAS great to see troops at Larkhill taking part in mental fitness training – which will become an important part of how we keep tabs on each other's well-being in future.

With OpSmart now coming to an end, the aim is to have instructors within units who can deliver mental

fitness and resilience training – in a similar way to the successful Trauma Risk Management (Trim) initiative.

This will allow us to square away help early on, delivering assistance where it is needed.

It's important to keep tabs on our health – both mental and physical.

THE BIG PICTURE

Tower of London, UK

Accession Day

MEMBERS of the Honourable Artillery Company fire a 62-round gun salute at the Tower of London to mark 70 years of the Queen's reign.

The spectacle was one of several across London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Northern Ireland to mark the start of the Platinum Jubilee year for Her Majesty, who has reigned longer than any other British monarch in history.

Members of The King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery and the Royal Artillery's 104 Regiment, 105 Regiment and 206 Battery undertook the other gun salutes, which usually comprise 21 rounds.

A further 20 are fired in royal parks and palaces, and another 21 at the Tower of London to show the city's respect.

The Armed Forces will be at the heart of celebrations for the Platinum Jubilee this summer, leading Trooping the Colour and taking part in a special pageant on June 5. Search **#platinumjubilee** online.

Picture: Cpl Victoria Goodall, RAF

Got an impressive shot of your own?
Email it to news@soldiermagazine.co.uk





What's in a NAME?

Why the replacement for Matts isn't just a meaningless rebrand

► “ESSENTIALLY, the individual training requirement (ITR) represents a culture shift from tests to training,” Capt Huw Barry (RRF) tells *Soldier*.

“As much of it as practicable takes place in the field and not in the classroom – it’s about trying to make training as representative and useful to the troops’ roles as possible.”

The officer is one of a number of Royal Regiment of Fusiliers personnel who’ve been trialling the Army’s latest annual training regime, one that is set to replace military annual training tests (Matts) and the “soldier first” syllabus from April 1.

Service chiefs had determined that the old schemes “lacked clarity of purpose, were too confusing and took too long to deliver, resulting in

inefficient use of time and a lack of attention paid to the development of individual soldiering skills”.

Crucially, unlike Matts, the ITR’s policy leaves exactly how the modules are taught open to interpretation, so an instructor’s planning can be adapted to the unit’s role and exercise schedule.

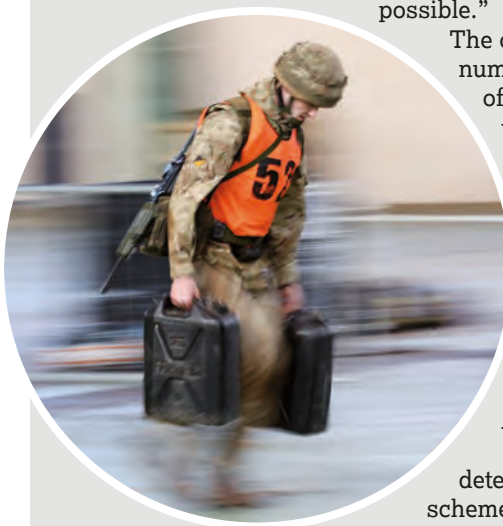
“The Army command standing order describes each component and what objectives you need to hit, but it doesn’t specify what should be done,” adds Capt Barry.

“We are free to make the training as complex or as varied as we like.

“The ITR pretty much covers the same topics as Matts but you can train beyond the basic requirements if you want to.

“The new guidelines mean we will be able to integrate elements into our regular training more often and that will make it a lot more engaging for personnel.

“If you get the same packages every year in the same environment and the soldiers are doing it only because they have to, they tend to switch off.”



Quality control

We asked one of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers' most experienced instructors for his take on the effectiveness of the ITR...

Name: Cpl Reece Perkins

Joined Army: 2012

Career highlight: Completing the platoon sergeant's battle course at Brecon

Previous posting: Instructor at AFC Harrogate

Experience: Served in Estonia, Canada and Ukraine, teaching recce and navigation skills to troops based in Lviv and Rivne

Cpl Reece Perkins, RRF

the morning and used some of the soldiers with stronger knowledge to help out the others with practical demonstrations, before going more in-depth later in the day.

What other advantages does the ITR have over Matts?

Matts were more paperwork-based and if a soldier failed one element it was a bit of a downer because it all had to be redone. With ITR, if a soldier doesn't do one particular element correctly I can re-teach it there and then, so it's more efficient time-wise and the lessons then stick better in the soldier's mind in my opinion.

with the task it would be more daunting for the soldiers I suppose, but the ITR doesn't need to be set at a very advanced standard. It's about giving them a good base level of knowledge and competence.

Is there a danger the quality of training loses consistency if more onus is on the instructors?

The commanders should know their people well enough to decide which NCO teaches which subject. If they have a qualified CBRN instructor in their ranks obviously they should pick them for that area. But I'd also like to think that if an NCO was picked to teach certain skills and didn't feel confident about it they'd have the moral compass to say I'm not the best person to do this. There are also benchmarks to achieve to safeguard the quality of the training, so consistency is there to a degree. Some instructors will always be better or more qualified than others, but you are going to get that anyway, even with Matts. »



Will the ITR improve the quality of training?

Overall, yes, but it's not so much about the quality, it's the structure that is better because the instructors have more freedom to tailor the package to their personnel's needs. I put my spin on the CBRN module, for example, by adapting the tuition to the level I thought the group were at. Because of the skill fade I detected, I decided to teach some basics in



So is this less about box-ticking?

I think so. It's certainly more relaxed and enjoyable, which must be better for absorbing knowledge. The day before the nav exercise I gave my group some info to prep for the task – maps and grids etc. This gave them time to plan their route or come to me that evening for advice if they identified any problems or knowledge gaps. It makes it a bit more interactive and the troops get more out of the training as a result. It's certainly better than just turning up saying, 'right, here's your map, here's your grids, now get on with it', and setting people up to fail.

Wouldn't critics say this doesn't mimic real life too well... that you wouldn't have all that time to plan in a combat scenario?

I wouldn't agree with that. Even in combat situations you get planning cycles and combat estimates. If I just surprised them



ITR's three elements

1 Fitness

This includes the existing soldier conditioning review and role fitness test as well as mandated training in subjects such as heat and cold injuries



2 Education

This covers content related to operational law, behaviours, security and substance misuse



3 Combat skills

This delivers practical training in professional soldiering skills, such as fieldcraft, navigation, marksmanship and counter-IED. It focuses on ensuring that personnel in Field Army sub-units receive fresh annual training in these vital areas. In addition, it keeps personnel heading on operations current in the drills that are fundamental to delivering effect on deployment

● For more information read **ABN 109/21 – Changes to annual individual training**

And breathe...

Why you could be breathing incorrectly and what to do about it...

► BREATHING may be automatic, but according to sleep expert Charlie Morley, up to 90 per cent of adults are doing it “sub-optimally”.

In his book *Wake Up to Sleep* he explains how common habits such as mouth breathing or breathing too fast and too shallow can negatively impact health, sleep and mental wellbeing.

Here, he outlines three ways you could be getting it wrong – and why it matters.

1 Shut your mouth

Hairs and mucus in the nose stop dirt and bacteria from entering the respiratory system, while the nasal cavity also heats, cools and humidifies air. The mouth has no such filtration system, though, meaning that germs, allergens and other pollutants can get into the lungs. Mouth breathing is also bad for our teeth, contributing to gum disease, bad breath and cavities

...even when you're working out

When you do phys you may instinctively mouth breathe because it feels like you're taking in more air, but in fact the reverse is true because nasal breathing increases the vacuum in the lungs, allowing 20 per cent more oxygen to be drawn in. It also boosts nitric oxide release, which in turn ups blood circulation and oxygen absorption

...and preferably in bed, too

If you often wake up with a dry mouth, feel thirsty in the night or snore regularly, you are probably a night-time mouth breather. While breath exercises and consciously inhaling and exhaling through your nose will promote good habits, those serious about tackling night-time mouth breathing may want to consider taping, where a thin strip of tape is placed vertically over the lips to encourage nasal breathing

2 Expand your lungs

Increasing your lung capacity through slow, deep breathing not only makes them more effective but is also linked to longer life. Healthy lungs mean we are more likely to recover from respiratory illnesses – Covid-19 included

3 Slow down

Breathing too fast activates the sympathetic nervous system, putting your body into fight or flight mode. Raised levels of cortisol and adrenalin not only make us feel anxious and affect our sleep, but contribute to a host of nasties such as heart disease, cancer and chronic inflammation

The remedy

So-called coherent breathing is a great way to slow down and deepen your breathing. The easiest way to practise is to follow guided audio tracks that encourage you to breathe in a certain rhythm. Just 20 minutes per day can have a profound effect on health and sleep

Did you know?

Research into breathing rates in the US has shown that the average adult took 4.9 breaths per minute in 1929. By 2020, this had increased to around 15. It's not known exactly why, but the rise of sedentary lifestyles, stress and convenience foods could play a part

'I'M A SAPPER I WON'T GIVE UP'

Soldier praises Army family for unstinting support in his final weeks of life

► **WHEN Cpl Bobby McCaigue (RE) was given 12 weeks to live last September, he could never have imagined the love and encouragement that would be incoming from his unit, corps and the wider military family. Here, the 32-year-old father of two describes how Army colleagues have helped him to endure – and even smile in the face of – a terminal brain cancer diagnosis.**

I am facing the biggest challenge of my life. My enemy is deadly, clever and doesn't give up easily.

It doesn't care about my family, in fact it seems to hate them, but it doesn't know I'm a sapper and will not give up.

From Colne in Lancashire, I joined the Royal Engineers as a geographic technician in 2010. I've enjoyed a varied career

serving in Germany, with the Royal Navy, in defence intelligence and most recently with 16 Air Assault Brigade in Colchester.

I'm very proud of being a sapper and providing engineering expertise to UK defence. But it has also given me the physical and mental strength to deal with my serious medical condition.

When my surgeon told me about my brain tumour, I had heard it once before so it wasn't exactly a shock, nor a surprise unfortunately.

Cancer is a clever old thing. I thought I had beaten it the last time but it was not to be. I had to fight it again. Keeps life interesting, though, I suppose.

Bad news can be dealt with by the 'never give up' attitude, discipline and pride that also make a good engineer.

After being in a hospice, I am now back at home in bed. As well as brain cancer I am suffering with diabetes, blood clots, muscle wastage and probably Covid. But you know what? I'm still positive.

The Army, Engineers, NHS, hospice staff, my family and faith have got me through. Many others have rallied round during the toughest of times.

The sapper family in particular has done me proud. After my diagnosis both 42 and 23 Engineer Regiments quickly mobilised to fundraise for my family through sports events and other ventures.

I didn't know too much about the Royal Engineers Association before my reoccurrence, only that I was a member and paid a days' wage every year to buy old guys microwaves.

But how wrong I was!

Within days of contacting them, financial and emotional support was offered. And through the Lord Kitchener National Memorial Fund I have been given funding for my children's education up to the age of 25.

This unbelievably generous gift from the corps moved me to tears. I couldn't believe



such schemes were available to a geo full screw with a little headache!

Thank you to everyone who supports the Army's regimental associations.

I'm so proud to be part of an organisation that looks after its own.

Donations have been used to help adapt my house and make beautiful memories with my family in what could well be my last few months.

All the fundraising conducted on my behalf inspired me to do my bit, too.

I'm not happy to be on the sidelines, so I decided to mobilise my brain (which fortunately happens to be growing) and under the influence of prescription drugs wrote poems and created digital artwork.

At first this was just for my family, but I decided to produce a small book of pictures and poems and it was suggested that I could maybe sell them for charity.

This has provided me with a very important sense of purpose and raised more than £1,000 for my hospice, Farleigh Hospice, in Chelmsford.

In short, being a soldier gives me the drive to get through each day. It has given me the pride to keep working and not waste my time laid in bed, and the peace of mind to know my family will always be looked after.

A word from the PRO

Personnel recovery officer
Capt Kev Robison (Para) talks tough times...

“It's a privilege to be supporting Bobby – he is the same age as my son.

A really high-grade young corporal who had been selected for promotion, he is driven by achieving short-term goals and one is to share this story.

In the time I have known him, his wife and children, I have come to admire their spirit, willpower and resilience to fight this illness together.

He has engaged in fundraising, radio interviews and articles – he is simply an incredible person who is showing immense humour and spirit.

A great moment also came recently when we were able to arrange for his Platinum Jubilee Medal – his first ever decoration – to be fast-tracked to him.”



Why you should read the labels on your energy drink

► FOR many, caffeine and sugar-laden energy drinks are a go-to for staving off fatigue.

But along with an instant jolt, they come with a few potential side effects and some extras that it pays to be clued up on...

Caffeine

In small quantities, caffeine may boost energy, alertness and athletic performance, but too much could lead to increased blood pressure, sleep disturbances, heart problems and headaches. A large can of energy drink contains up to 160mg – the same as four shots of espresso.

Sugar

Some brands can pack up to 62g of sugar in a 500ml serving – equivalent to more than 15 teaspoons and around



NUTRITION

250 calories. This increases the risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes, not to mention tooth decay. Even sugarless variants are not problem-free as some studies indicated artificial sweeteners could throw appetite and insulin levels out of whack.

Extras

This is where it gets more confusing, with a cocktail of herbs and extracts promising to boost everything from mental alertness to physical performance and even weight loss. While rarely dangerous in small quantities, these can cause side effects and interact negatively with prescription medications such as blood-thinners, diabetic medications, immunosuppressants, and antidepressants. Some common ingredients are...

● **Ginseng:** Often claimed to improve stamina, immune function and concentration. This is mostly well tolerated but can also cause hypertension, sleep disruption and diarrhoea



● **Ginkgo biloba:** Said to fight mental fatigue and boost memory, however the research is conflicting, with studies linking it to thyroid and liver cancers in mice, for example

● **Guarana and green coffee seeds:** Common stimulants, but contain caffeine, so increase the overall caffeine content of the drink

● **Taurine:** An amino acid found naturally in food but when combined with caffeine may raise heart rate and blood pressure

● **Niacin:** This vitamin has been shown to lower bad cholesterol, but some energy drinks contain over the recommended daily amount. Signs of an overdose include flushing, dizziness, low blood pressure, fatigue, headache, nausea, blurred vision, and inflammation of the liver

The bottom line

As with most things in life, quaffing energy drinks in moderation is unlikely to do serious harm – especially if you are in good health. However, regular consumption is linked to a host of unpleasant side effects. Finally, while the cost varies significantly between brands, it is considerably more expensive than tap water – a healthier alternative that comes absolutely free

'My typewriter served as my pillow'

As *Soldier* celebrates its 77th anniversary, one of our early contributors looks back at his life as an Army journalist in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War

► **WHEN Stanley Maxton joined the Service in September 1944, he had ambitions of fighting the enemy on the front line.**

But as the Second World War drew to a close, his previous job as a newspaper reporter resulted in him being posted to the Middle East with the military title *Parade*.

A number of the articles he wrote for the weekly newspaper appeared in *Soldier*, many of which saw him venturing to countries and places his peers could only dream of visiting...

and told the troops what was happening back home in Britain, as well as in the region they were serving.

It was my job to go off and visit these countries and write stories.

One of my first trips was to Iraq. I went with a photographer; I was on a mule, and he was on a horse and we went north of Baghdad all the way to Mosul – I remember thinking to myself at the time 'how the hell did I get here?'.

I wrote a piece called *The Devil Worshippers*. It was a story about a tribe who spent their days wandering the hills of Iraq. Their attitude was 'there is a god, and he is good, and then there is the devil'. God was not going to do them any harm, so they believed they had to stick with the devil.

Going to these places was so interesting and it was the most wonderful experience a young man of 19 could have.

I would go away for weeks at a time with my notebook and typewriter, which also served as a pillow, and then I would come back and write articles based on my travels.

I would contact local units to see if I could find stories. I remember being sent to Greece during the civil war and when I reported to the headquarters the intelligence people knew who I was and said they couldn't do anything for me – but I had my orders.

The doors then opened and I stormed the head man of the British Forces in Greece. He knew of me and didn't want me scurrying round the country – he said I should get the first plane back.

But Greece was in the midst of a typhoid epidemic so there were no flights. I had a lovely couple of weeks in Athens, but it didn't reflect well on the paper.

When I was in Egypt and the Persian Gulf the British troops there were keen to make use of my services.

I remember going on a trip with the Trucial Oman Scouts and they set me up as a correspondent to report on their activities.

They were based in Sharjah and I had a free rein – it was very much for me.

In those days the only people who used aeroplanes were the Royal Air Force but if we went anywhere, we were generally flown – that was amazing.

Before I left for the Army, I was a young journalist with the *Daily Mail* and when I came back, I rejoined. It was known then as the *Scottish Daily Mail* and I was posted to Aberdeen, but it was not as exciting as working for *Parade*.

It was one of the highlights of my career – purely because of the travel and the fact I got to visit so many new places. I would not get that working on a local paper.

Military titles were very important for morale, and they told soldiers about what was going on.

But people started leaving the Army after the war and *Parade* folded not long after I left in the late 1940s.

I was not obliged to stay on in the Service and I wanted to go off and do other things. I didn't see why I should change jobs, though – I considered myself a journalist in uniform.

F I wanted to join the Royal Armoured Corps and spent a year training at Bovington before being posted to Egypt.

I then went through to Palestine, but it was not long before I was taken out and sent back to Cairo.

At the time, these were not the places I was trying to get to. The war was nearly over, and I was keen to go to India and Burma to be involved in the fighting.

However, my services were required elsewhere. The Army needed journalists and I went to work for the *Forces Radio Times* as a proofreader. From there I moved on to *Parade* – where I would spend four years.

Part of the Inter-Services (Army Welfare Service) Publications Unit, it was distributed across the Mediterranean and Middle East

Looking back now, it was a great experience and set me up for my career.

I recall being on our last day of armoured training and we parked our tank up in a small village in Dorset when word came through that the war in Europe was over.

I still have a picture from that time of myself and two friends in Bovington. I'm sure they looked back at the Army as a complete waste of time, but I would not have missed it.

After finishing his service as a staff sergeant in The King's Own Hussars, Maxton embarked on a long career in journalism, working for the *Scottish Daily Mail* and oil companies based in the Middle East, among others.

But he maintained his military links and wrote and presented a weekly segment called *Letter from Scotland* for Forces broadcaster BFBS throughout the 1970s. Now aged 95, he lives at a care home in Elgin with wife Isobel.



MEMOS FROM MALI

Infantry troops reveal critical lessons from UN deployment

SANDSTORMS

“ We learnt to batten down the hatches and get inside our vehicles at the first hint of a sandstorm. If you felt the wind picking up a little bit, especially in the evening, you knew you were about to be hit. This one was in the Ansongo region in south-eastern Mali. We experienced storms like this regularly –

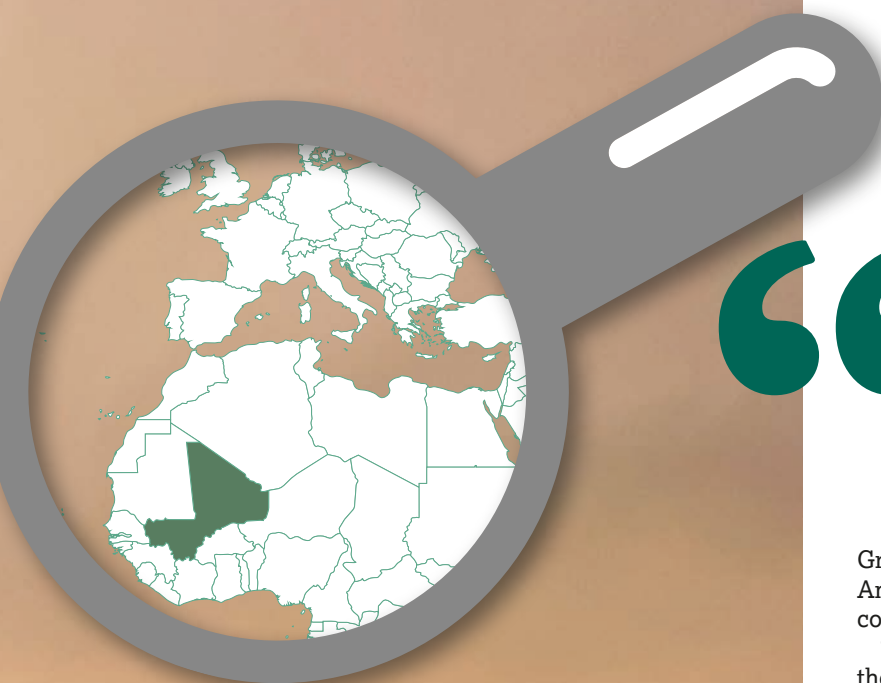


someone would shout a warning and everyone would run to pin stuff down and shut the vehicles up. All you could do was sit inside and wait it out. This was essential because the sand could get everywhere and being wet season these storms

always had rain in them, so it turned the ground into a quagmire. We also realised that sometimes, after it had blown through, the wind could switch around and you'd get hit by the storm coming through a second time – a real nightmare. The weapons weren't affected badly by the dust as the lads cleaned them meticulously but if sand and water got on your clothing it would dry out really quickly in the heat, leaving everything in a crusty mess. Trying to administer yourself in these conditions was very challenging for everyone. ”

Sgt Eddie Charrington





“E

VERY op is full of lessons and you keep the blade sharp by using it,” Lt Col Will Meddings, commanding officer of 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment, tells *Soldier*.

He should know. He recently completed a six-month stint leading the UK Long Range Reconnaissance

Group (LRRG), part of the United Nations mission in Mali. And the situations his team were exposed to meant they had to constantly adapt.

“We learnt loads while we were there, and we had to because the conditions were unforgiving,” he says.

“Driving off-road for extended periods, the temperatures hit 56 degrees Celsius at one point and rarely dropped below 35 degrees at night, so you couldn’t sleep well.

“That could break people and machines very easily.”

Both needed preserving. The LRRG consisted of troops from his own unit mounted in Foxhounds, soldiers of 1st The Queen’s Dragoon Guards in Jackals and a support echelon of mechanics, vehicle recovery specialists, medics, intelligence analysts and military police.

“In such an environment vehicles are our lifeline, so we had to find optimum solutions to keep them going,” the officer adds.

“For example, on our first patrol just 40 per cent of our mechanical failures were fixed with spares we were carrying. But by the end we’d optimised the parts situation by working out what tended to break on the vehicles in the environment. As a result, by the end of our deployment that 40 per cent had risen to 90.

“We also realised that being proactive helped a lot with reliability – replacing vulnerable parts with new units and clearing some vehicles’ air intake and water systems before each patrol. That’s a time-consuming job normally carried out once a year.”

But it wasn’t just the machines’ performance that was improved through experience. People also benefited from being tested in Mali’s demanding conditions.

“When you are operating at range with so little support even the most junior troops quickly realise they have to take personal responsibility,” notes Lt Col Meddings.

“The soldiers who don’t look after their gear don’t get told off, they go without – we couldn’t turn a patrol around simply to look for a lost item of kit.

“In addition, some of our less experienced personnel witnessed life at its rawest for the first time – the aftermath of murders or brutal beatings, for example.

“But on the flip side, they also saw the joy they brought to people who could feel safe and secure, maybe for the first time in a while, and realised just how important being able to provide that is.”

Thankfully, some of the troops’ more vivid experiences were captured on camera. Here, a group of personnel from The Poachers talk us through their memorable moments while patrolling one of the most austere regions of the planet. »



Report: Steve Muncey Pictures: Long Range Reconnaissance Group and (this page) Sgt Simon Coakley, REME

»

ESSENTIAL AIR SUPPORT

“This tour brought home to us how important helicopters are to long-range patrols in remote environments. The more cover from air assets you have the more you can do because the medical recovery ring can be extended – and so your limit of exploitation increases. Ultimately, this means we have more chance of executing a successful, productive patrol. The air assets we had supporting us were really good – they were supplied by the UN – but we also had a Royal Air Force Chinook working for the French that was on standby to come to our aid if it was required.”

Cpl Scott Wall



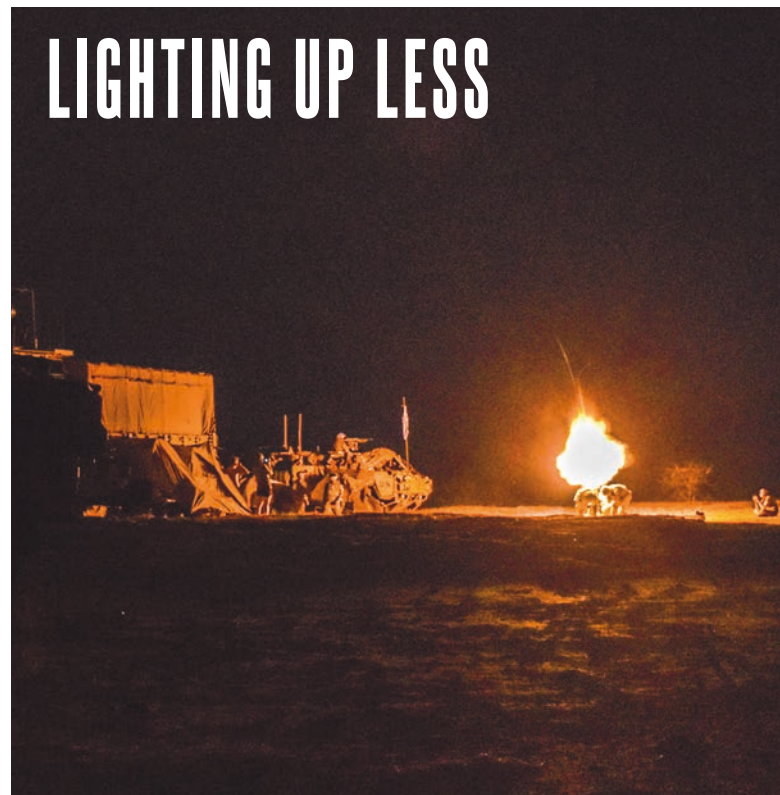
“This is us putting up an illumination round near the settlement of Tin-Hama. At the start of our deployment we’d fire these regularly when we were on patrol as they were an effective deterrent, especially near remote villages. Any Islamic insurgents in the area would know UN forces were present and leave. We could light up roads they might use or wooded areas where they might be hiding. However, we decided pretty quickly to scale these back. We’d been telling the interpreters to inform the locals what we were doing.



But because of the lack of ambient light from infrastructure in Mali, and its big open skies, people for many miles around would hear a loud bang and see the red sky and panic that some kind of firefight was going on. In certain areas like Ansongo, where they knew we were in the region on a consistent basis, we could use this capability. But in other places we stopped firing them and kept the kit in reserve for when something was kicking off. The whole tour was a great experience overall, though, and it was fascinating to do a peacekeeping role rather than adopting the aggressive posture of normal infantry duties. We escorted NGOs, often taking people out from six or seven different organisations at one time. They were really pleased to have us around because our presence allowed them to get the information they needed from local community leaders and get aid to the people in need really quickly.”

Sgt Adam Matthews

LIGHTING UP LESS





BOG-INS

“ This is a couple of kilometres outside Tin-Hama, on our first long-range patrol. We lost almost a day in travelling time after one of the Ridgebacks got stranded in an area of farmland where they had recently turned the soil. It had also rained hard a few days before so the ground was pretty soft. Initial self-recovery failed because the asset had dug itself in up to its V-shaped blast armour. One of our two recovery vehicles equipped with a crane eventually retrieved it, but if this had happened towards the end of our tour we’d have got it out ourselves. We must have had 20 bog-ins during that first patrol but that reduced significantly as drivers became more adept at reading the ground. Also, we quickly learnt that at the first sign of a vehicle getting bogged down the commanders should grip the driver and immediately halt the platform because if you got frustrated and planted your foot down it would simply dig itself into the sand. This tactic really paid off. ”

Cpl Scott Wall



FEELING THE HEAT

“ The importance of pacing yourself and taking decent breaks in the extreme heat of Mali was felt by us all when out on patrol in all our kit. We’d see temperatures bust 50 degrees on most days. This is one of our platoon-level rings of steel of five Foxhounds during our second patrol. We are down near a place called Lelehoy, some 120 klicks from Gao. We’ve stopped on a bit of higher ground, as you can see for miles and miles most of the time in Mali. We’d normally stop for a couple of hours and draw up a rota so everyone got to relax inside the ring, rehydrate, eat, sleep if they could, play some music and then take turns to act as sentry. ”

Pte Obi Morgan



»

»



KIDS' CONFIDENCE

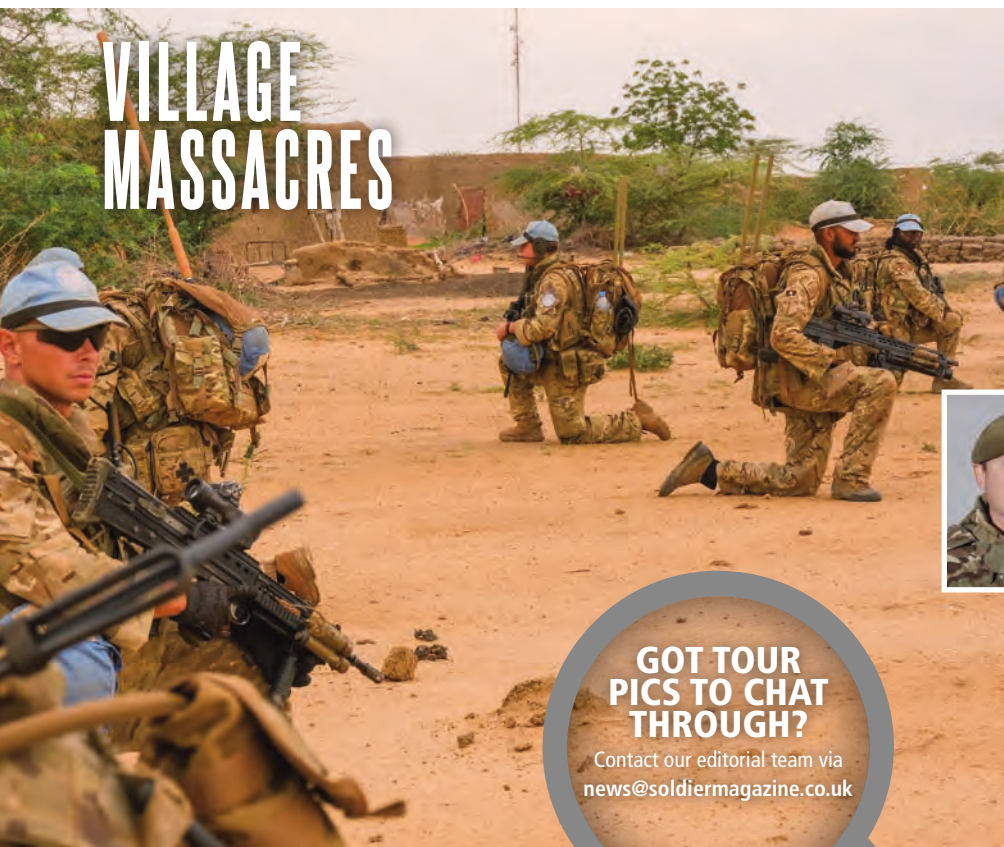


“ This was taken during a short rest in the heat of the day outside a small village in the Gao region. It's the second patrol of the four we conducted during our time in Mali and I'm sat under the shade outside A Company's tactical headquarters, plotting our patrol route for the following day. Whenever we stopped near a settlement lots of kids would appear – around 60 per cent of Mali's population is

under 16 so there are lots of them. We welcomed them as they were positive, friendly and generally inquisitive. We'd play football with them, have a chat or show them photos from back home. It was a nice way to liven up the day and a great way to break the ice with the local community and gain the confidence of its people. ”

Lt Col Will Meddings

VILLAGE MASSACRES



GOT TOUR PICS TO CHAT THROUGH?

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“ The value of our mission-specific training was felt when we were told to go to the village of Ouatagouna, around 200km south of our base in Gao. We had received reports that some young men and boys had been killed just 24 hours earlier during a raid by Islamic terrorists – and our pre-deployment training had covered just such an eventuality. The personnel in this picture are keeping watch as another group from the team are engaging with locals further up the road. We found out that two other villages – Karou and Daoutegeft – had been attacked as well and around 60 individuals in total had been executed.



We faced a complex human terrain because numerous local groups carry arms. Some are signed up to support Mali's government while others are not but may be friendly anyway. It's very hard to distinguish between these groups and you also had Malian army units cutting around. The routine way of engaging with locals is to immediately ask for information or make contact with a local chieftain, but we knew we needed to give these people time and space after such a horrific incident. We gained their trust and ended up staying for a couple of weeks to provide reassurance and security before forces from another nation on the UN mission took over. ”

Maj Harry Willis ■



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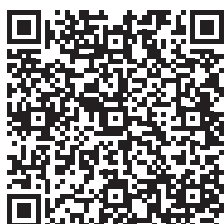
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RED STRIPE RESURRECTED

Coldstream Guards hit the jungle as training returns to Jamaica for the first time in 14 years »

BROTHERHOOD Gang foot soldiers patrol along the jungle path on a mission to forge greater control of a key transport route for the group's expanding narcotics enterprise. But, unbeknown to them, they have just walked into an ambush as personnel from the Coldstream Guards stealthily lie in wait, immersed in the dense backdrop.

Their progress is swiftly halted as the British troops open fire with clinical accuracy. The fact they have been in position for more than 15 hours – in which they have faced torrential downpours, coupled with the heat and humidity of the jungle – does not deter their aim.

With key intelligence recovered from the fallen, the platoon withdraws from the contact zone and makes for a RV point deeper under the canopy.

However, this is not the time to switch off and their focus is maintained throughout a tab that is made more difficult by the sludgy conditions underfoot and the thick vegetation in their way.

After reaching their destination, they go on to secure the helicopter landing site that comes into view as the jungle opens to provide an extraction point.

The heavy rain then returns as they wait for the host nation's Bell airframes to start shuttle runs back to camp.

Lift off on the last flight marks the end of a four-day dry exercise for the troops, in which they have been tracking and skirmishing with the mock enemy, and they go on to enjoy a welcome shower before beginning the admin needed for their final test.

This begins two days later, and its completion will mark a successful conclusion of the resurrected Exercise Red Stripe – the first jungle training package to be staged in Jamaica since 2008.

A year in the making, the honour of conducting the drills was handed to Number 2 Company, Coldstream Guards and its commander, Maj James Howlin.

"During the Telic and Herrick era the focus was elsewhere, and the jungle environment was no longer a primary area for training, so this exercise fell by the wayside," he tells *Soldier* during a break in preparations for the final test.

"But over the past two or three years there has been a drive to get back to the jungle warfare of old, and really hone those basic skills.

"We set three objectives before coming here. Firstly, it is an opportunity to validate our ability to operate as a company and conduct some pretty demanding training for our soldiers.

"It is also about supporting the relationship between the United Kingdom and Jamaica and building ties with the Jamaican Defence Force (JDF).

"And finally, we wanted to create a career highlight for the guys. More than half of our people have not been on an overseas exercise before, and many are only one or two years out of Catterick.

"This will hopefully give them an experience they can look back on in 20 years' time with fond memories." »

“This is about the basics of infantry training done well”



Force multiplier

Home troops join British counterparts in the Jamaican jungle

AS WELL as offering an exciting opportunity for members of the Coldstream Guards, Exercise Red Stripe welcomed personnel from the partnering Jamaican Defence Force (JDF) to the fold.

Embedded in the platoons of their British counterparts, the host nation's soldiers underwent the same training as their newfound allies in an environment that proved equally alien.

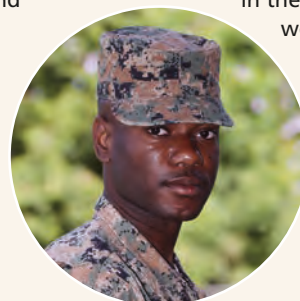
"When

operating with other armies there is give and take on both sides," Maj Howlin explains.

"The JDF has an urban focus, and those skills are very good.

"They are perhaps not as at home in the jungle, but that is the same for a lot of our guys. We operate in different ways, but it has been a great learning experience for our young soldiers.

"We have those who served in the Herrick era and were used to working with the Afghan National Security Forces, but for many it is their





first taste of interoperability.

"The JDF have thrown a lot of resources and effort at this – they want to make sure it is a success so that it is an exercise that endures."

Boats and helicopters were the key assets offered in the field, while home drivers and vehicles provided the crucial link between the base at Titchfield Camp and the surrounding training areas.

Pte Travonne Frankson (pictured left) was among the Jamaican personnel to benefit from the training.

"I was happy to come and sample some new experiences and tactics," he says.

"In terms of contact drills, the concept is basically the same, but our movement and the way we pack our kit is a bit different.

"We pack as light as possible for the bush, but I would say the British carry too much for

this environment – moving around with that much weight could be a problem.

"It has been interesting. They have come here to get experience of training in the jungle, and, for us, it would be good to make the return trip and train in the cold."

Fellow recce platoon soldier LCpl Javier Grant (pictured right) echoed the positive nature of the experience.

"It has been good to exchange knowledge and it is a privilege to be here," he explains. "We do not get the opportunity to train and fight in the jungle with the JDF.

"Tactically, the British are slightly different to us but what they do makes sense – once I get back to my unit, I will be passing some of that knowledge on."

Lt Charlie Upton welcomed JDF personnel into his platoon and believes their presence has

benefitted the troops under his command.

"It is a good education for them," he adds. "The Army is looking at more short-term training teams, where we will be working with local forces.

"So it has been great to interact with the JDF and they

have gelled very well with the platoon – they are all very motivated soldiers.

"Tactically there is quite a big difference as their primary focus is on urban operations, but their low-level skills and drills have transferred over quite well."



» With the junior elements of the company in mind, the Jamaican deployment seems perfectly timed as Maj Howlin describes the skills needed to succeed in the jungle.

“This is all about the basics of infantry training – navigation, fitness, robustness – done very well,” he continues. “If they can soldier here, they can operate anywhere.

“The majority of guys have not deployed to the jungle before, so we didn’t know how they would respond. It can be quite daunting, but they have really performed.

“I’m hoping the final test exercise will be pretty tough. This is the first time we have functioned as a company in the field and it is going to be difficult, covering lots of terrain and more complex scenarios. But we are ready.”

Jungle insertions via helicopter and boat – assets provided by the partnering JDF – lay in wait as the scenario of battling local drug lords resumed.

The five-day mission served to reinforce the skills learnt in the preceding weeks and formed a fitting last hurrah for Maj Howlin, who is due to move on from his role as company commander in the coming months.

“I could not have asked for a better way to go,” he concludes. “This has been a great opportunity and I have had total autonomy on this from start to finish.”

Rewind a few weeks and the exercise started with an acclimatisation phase, before the soldiers embarked on a 12-day jungle training stage in which they perfected skills in areas such as navigation, survival, and tracking.

A platoon rotation featuring live-firing packages, a dry jungle exercise and community projects in and around their base in Port Antonio then followed, before the final training exercise.

To help the company achieve its goals an expert team of jungle warfare instructors was assembled. Among them was CSgt David Price (Coldm Gds, pictured below).

He taught on a similar exercise with the Scots Guards in Belize before Christmas and was delighted to be helping personnel from his own unit this time round.

The deployment also saw the NCO’s career come full circle as he deployed on Red Stripe as a 17-year-old guardsman in 2004 in his first overseas exercise.

“As soon as this came up, I definitely wanted to get on-board,” he explains. “I love passing on knowledge and coming back to teach people from my battalion is so rewarding – that is where my heart is.

“They have done really well. They came in at a good level after doing a lot of preparation back in the UK.

“This is the hardest environment to soldier in. The terrain, weather conditions, the climate – everything is against you.

“If things like your wet and dry drills, weapon cleaning and field admin are all correct you can operate in the jungle, and what they learn here can transfer to anywhere else in the world.

“We saw them going in with worry on their faces, but they got used to it. Once you accept the fact you will be wet, life becomes easier.”

CSgt Price describes the Jamaican backdrop as “like the jungle of Belize, with the terrain of Brunei” but the one crucial difference comes from the fact there are no snakes, scorpions, or other deadly beasts to contend with. »



RED STRIPE IN NUMBERS



112
UK TROOPS
INVOLVED



50
PERSONNEL FROM THE
JAMAICAN DEFENCE FORCE



25
SIZE OF THE TRAINING
AREA, IN KILOMETRES



28
AVERAGE TEMPERATURE
DURING THE EXERCISE,
IN DEGREES CELSIUS



30
AVERAGE RAINFALL,
IN MILLIMETRES PER
MONTH, WITH AN AVERAGE
OF EIGHT WET DAYS





Finding their range

Jungle backdrop tests live-fire skills

THE Coldstream Guards deployed their own permanent range team (PRT) to put Number 2 Company's platoons through their paces in a four-day package.

Instinctive shooting, close-quarter battle drills, individual fire and movement lanes, fire team tests and a live platoon ambush were all delivered for exercising troops – many of which were taking aim in the jungle for the first time.

"The principles of the range are the same as they would be in the UK, but the difference here is the fact we have been given a complete free rein to utilise the area as much as possible," says Capt Tom Fortescue, the PRT's OC (pictured below).

"In Brecon you can see where every platoon attack has previously been done, but that is not the case here. It has been a great opportunity for us to come in and build something new in a complex environment.

"They have seen nothing like this before and the feedback has been very positive – they have really grasped the opportunity.

"We've had people in the Falklands, but apart from that this is the first full company-level deployment since Ex Askari Storm in 2019.

"This exercise is giving all soldiers a once-in-a-career experience."



» The absence of potentially fatal distractions allowed the company to fully focus on the task at hand and Lt Charlie Upton, commander of 6 Platoon, believes those under his charge have adapted well.

“Even though this is their first time in the jungle, they have picked things up quickly,” he says. “It is a privilege to be here, and we are almost the pioneers for this.

“I have recently come in from Number 7 Company and it has been a good opportunity to get to know the platoon. Seeing people in the field offers a different perspective to camp and they really come out of their shells.

“This is an alien environment and there have been challenges. Communication is more difficult as you must be so quiet, and water is another issue – you get through five litres a day and are constantly refilling from rivers.

“Out here there are 12 hours of daylight, and you cannot encroach into the night-time hours as there are cliff drops and dense vegetation to get lost in.

“Things really ramped up with the dry exercise. At the start we were slightly behind the curve, but we have improved. The guys are now confident about going in the field here.”

With that confidence oozing through the rest of the company, the Coldstream Guards can look back at a job well done in their mission to revive a former exercise favourite.

And with future deployments to this challenging environment set to follow, the Army’s presence in Jamaica will go from strength to strength. ■



● Tropical tests – page 74

Talk of the jungle

Personnel
reflect on their
experiences in
Jamaica

Ed Green

Rank: LCpl

Age: 20

Length of service: Three years

How have you found life in the jungle?

It is my first overseas exercise and I’ve really enjoyed it; this is a different environment to Brecon with new challenges. The heat can be blistering, but at other times it is not so bad, and the rain comes out of nowhere – it can last for ten minutes or 14 hours.

What were your thoughts when news of the exercise came through?

I was excited, and it is not your typical deployment to Kenya or Belize. It is something completely different and almost an expeditionary exercise. I would never have come to Jamaica if it

was not for this – it’s a great country to visit.

How have you found operating with the Jamaican Defence Force?

It’s a new experience. A lot of our doctrine is the same and that has really helped. It has been interesting to work with people who come from a different upbringing, and we have integrated well.

Matthew Boughton

Rank: Gdsm

Age: 21

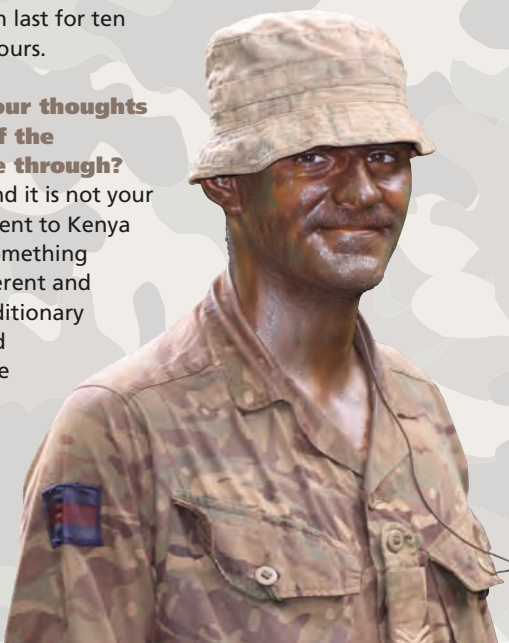
Length of service: Five years

How have you found life in the jungle?

Because our company is relatively new, with a lot of fresh guardsmen, the jungle training was important. It focused on personal admin, survival and tracking and I really enjoyed it. I picked up the tracking quite easily and the dry exercise was great – it gave us a good understanding of how realistic it is for a platoon to move in an environment like this.

What do you see as the benefits of Ex Red Stripe?

It is good to uphold our links to Jamaica and the Commonwealth. Although we do training like this in Belize and Brunei, it is important to



“
This is giving
soldiers a
once-in-a-career
experience
”



get a feel for a different type of jungle. Overseas exercises are key for young guardsmen, it allows them to build confidence and they can take parts of what they have learnt back to the UK.

How have you found operating with the Jamaican Defence Force?

There are differences in terms of the kit they carry, and it has been great to learn from them as people. They predominantly operate in an urban environment, they are not really in the jungle, so we have come together at the same level.



Jack Roberts

Rank: Gdsm

Age: 24

Length of service: Five months at unit

What were your thoughts when news of the exercise came through?

Nobody really did anything in terms of overseas exercises during Covid, so when I heard about this I was quite excited – Jamaica will always be something to look forward to.

What have been the highlights?

The live firing was great and, as soldiers, getting live rounds down is what you want to be doing. The main difference to ranges in the UK

is the density of the jungle; at home you can see for 100 metres in front of you but here it is about 15 metres, which means you do not know which targets will pop up. The community project was also good and offered a nice break after 12 days in the jungle. The locals can see that we are here, and it is great to get our faces out in the community and give something back.

You are relatively new to the unit, how has this experience helped your integration?

The boys in 6 Platoon are a good bunch of lads and by working together, day in day out, you soon get along with people. In terms of career progression, this would help anyone. Having recently left Catterick it has been a lot better than it would have been two years ago, when

not much was happening due to Covid.

How have you found operating with the Jamaican Defence Force?

At the start it was two cultures meeting, so it was always going to be difficult. But once we got to know one another we worked together well.





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Whether it is the prospect of weeks under armour or roughing it in a forward operating base, humour provides an antidote to the bleakest situations.

And as personnel rowing across the Atlantic found, it can help smash world records in a cramped boat hundreds of miles out at sea too.

“If you’ve ever watched the TV programme *Big Brother*, you’ll have some idea of the test we faced,” WO1 Victoria Blackburn said with a smile as she recalled the demands of the Talisker Whisky Challenge ocean race.

“Contestants in the reality show had a house – in contrast we had four of us living on an eight-and-a-half metre boat with a single cabin,” she added.

“We’re all soldiers and disciplined but obviously you are not going to get along all the time – military banter definitely helped us along the way.”

Maintaining morale certainly contributed to the winning ethos of the four-strong Force Atlantic team from the Royal

Army Physical Training Corps during the race – a 3,000-mile crossing from the Canaries to Antigua.

Along with Capt Scott Pollock, SSgt Phillip Welch and Sgt Laura Barrigan, WO1 Blackburn smashed the record for a mixed team in the test, which saw 35 groups vying for success amid the extreme environment.

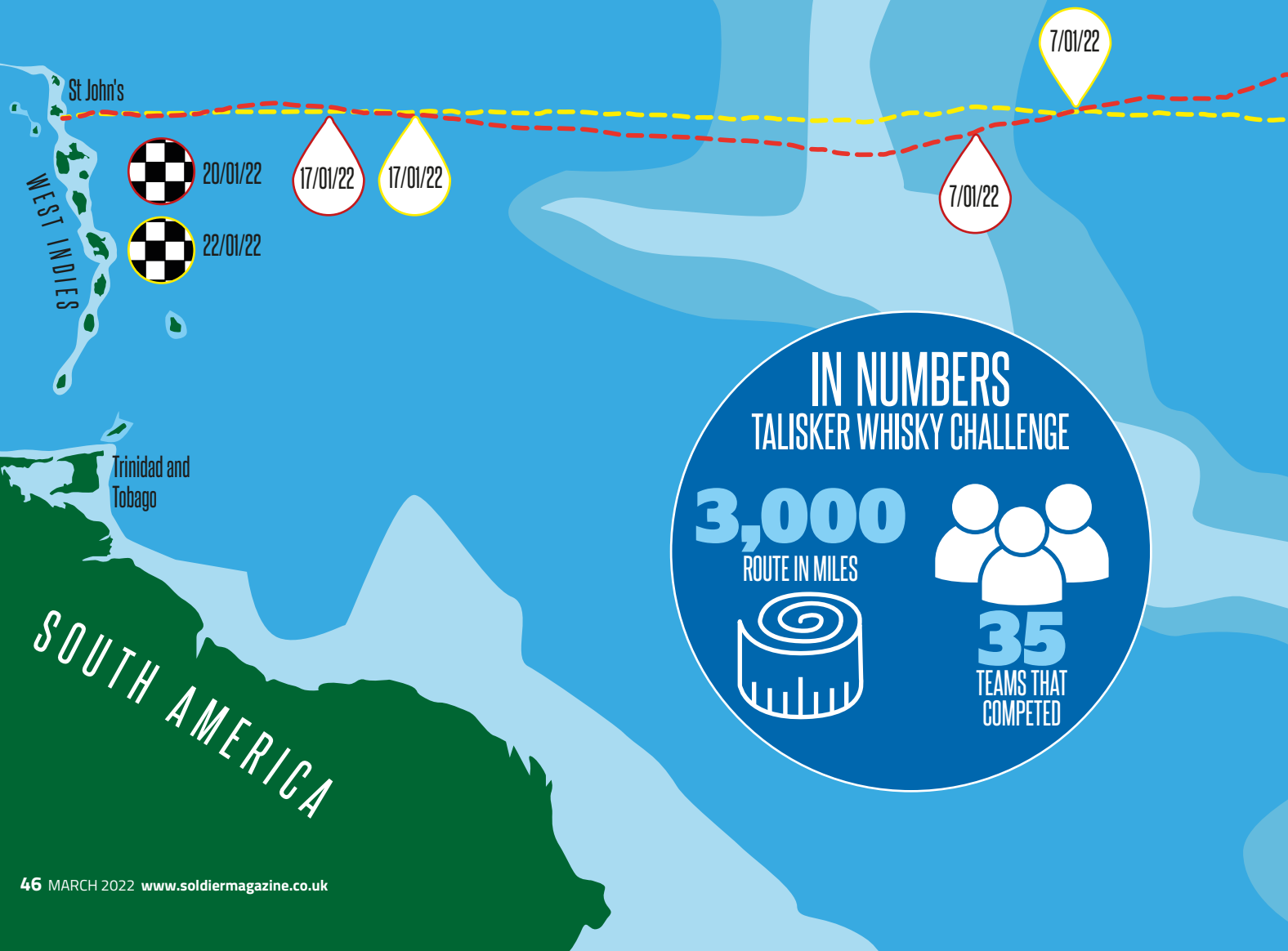
Setting out at La Gomera, they arrived at Nelson’s Dockyard 40 days, 23 hours and 57 minutes later, shaving 36 hours off the previous best time in an impressive showing for the Army.

An all-male Royal Engineer quartet – the Salty Sappers – had also crossed the finish line just ahead of them.

Entering the history books was the culmination of months of intensive preparation by the PTIs – all well-known faces on the indoor rowing scene.

“I actually started out competing on machines around seven or eight years ago,” Capt Pollock, who skippered the team, told *Soldier*. “But it is completely different to being on water – much less going across an ocean.

“However, the Talisker Whisky Challenge had long been on my bucket list. I was in the unusual position of knowing people who had been across the Atlantic so I had an idea about the difficulties and how we might overcome them.” ”



IN NUMBERS TALISKER WHISKY CHALLENGE

3,000
ROUTE IN MILES



35
TEAMS THAT
COMPETED

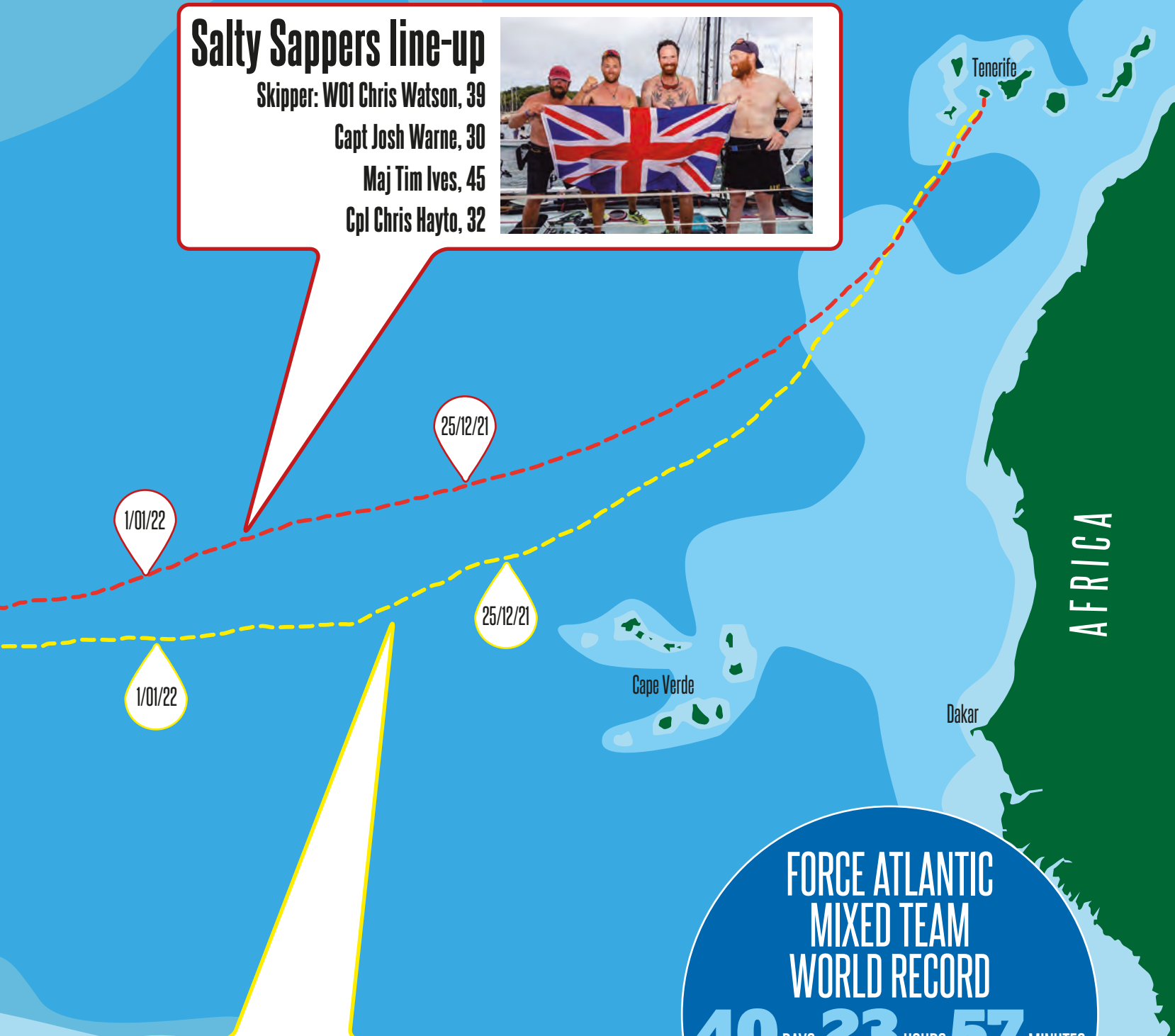
Salty Sappers line-up

Skipper: WO1 Chris Watson, 39

Capt Josh Warne, 30

Maj Tim Ives, 45

Cpl Chris Hayto, 32



Force Atlantic line-up

Skipper: Capt Scott Pollock, 40

WO1 Victoria Blackburn, 39

SSgt Phillip Welch, 37

Sgt Laura Barrigan, 29



FORCE ATLANTIC
MIXED TEAM
WORLD RECORD

40 DAYS 23 HOURS 57 MINUTES



OCEAN DRIVE

» Finally setting his heart on taking part after an Army squad achieved the feat in 2019, he began assembling the mixed team with a record in his sights. Along with all race competitors, they had to complete several safety courses while learning how to fix kit on the boat in an emergency.

Training throughout the Covid pandemic, the quartet racked up hours of gym time and embarked on two five-day sessions on their boat, called Rosie, in Skye, Scotland.

But the experience could never fully recreate six weeks at sea, and the heat, waves and punishing lack of sleep would all take their toll on the troops.

“You can rehearse all of your skills and drills but you cannot really replicate much of the ocean experience,” said Sgt Barrigan. “Adapting was vital – in training we rowed for two hours on and two off, but in the Atlantic it was so hot in the middle of the day that 90 minutes was the limit.

“There were also times when there was no wind, so we had to use three people to make progress – you have to adapt your planning to succeed.”

“
The boat was
caught on a
wave like
a surfer
”

Just ahead of the RAPTC team in the race, the four-strong Royal Engineers crew were experiencing the same pressures on their boat – dubbed Victory – and had to dig deep to overcome the water wilderness.

Despite a similarly gruelling UK training schedule, the magnitude of the real-life test on their vessel soon sank in for skipper WO1 Chris Watson and pals Capt Josh Warne, Maj Tim Ives and Cpl Chris Hayto – all serial adventure-seekers.

“The conditions would change – one of the weeks saw us into still water without much in the way of wind and it was very hard going,” the boss recalled.

“But there were also four or five days of really big waves – at one point we were hit by one that was huge and the boat was caught on it like a surfer,” he continued. “Fortunately, we rode it out and emerged pretty much unscathed.”

While echoing that it was impossible to fully prepare for an ocean rowing voyage, WO1 Watson believed that having the right foundations of solid fitness levels and a healthy mental resilience made the difference at sea.

“Making sure that you’re eating properly is also crucial to success,” he added. “We were taking on up to 6,000 calories a day depending on bodyweight – with three main freeze-dried meals plus snacks such as peanuts.” Staying hydrated was also critical – water was regularly drawn from the sea and processed with an on-board



desalination unit that made it drinkable.

Despite the hardships of the crossing – with no privacy for personal admin and nothing but a cramped cabin for snatched periods of rest – members of both teams singled out the finish experience as a lifetime high.

“It was an amazing feeling – we started seeing cargo ships on the horizon and then Antigua from around 30 miles at sea,” WO1 Watson said.

“But Nelson’s Dockyard, where the race ends, is flanked by cliffs and the inlet leading to it is quite secluded. It’s amazing when it comes into view, and we finally entered with a pleasing time of 39 days and seven hours.”

Sgt Barrigan shared the sentiment. “The finish line was so amazing,” she admitted. “We spoke about it beforehand – how it was going to be – but it surpassed all expectations and was better than any of us could have imagined.

“When we were about three days out we started counting down the time but in our sleep-deprived states our maths would be all over the place – it would take us ages to come up with a figure for the time we had left at sea.”

While arithmetic may have been skewed by exertion – and legs left wobbly after weeks rowing the waves – both teams made global headlines as the Army started the new year with an impressive expedition double.

And with their chains of command having fully supported both teams, a new organisation will now assist troops with future transatlantic aspirations in the shape of the Ocean Rowing Club Army. “This outfit will provide guidance for competitors and the Service generally,” Capt Pollock concluded. “We already have two teams preparing to compete in the 2023 challenge – and this can only help achieve success in the years to come.” ■





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As a serving soldier you often come across the Chelsea Pensioners. They get invited to the mess. Although they were in the Army 20 or 30 years before you, they've done the same things. It doesn't change. You're singing off the same hymn sheet. When you've been soldiers, you have this bond.

When my wife died, I thought, "What am I doing knocking around in a three-bedroomed house? I don't like this. I'll apply to be a Chelsea Pensioner". I came down on a small recce first, because I knew someone who was living there. That first night I went with him to the Pensioners' club for a beer and as soon as I walked in the door I thought, "This is the place for me". It took me back 30 years to the sergeants' mess. In my berth at night, I sometimes think of how many generations of Chelsea Pensioners have been here in these buildings before me.

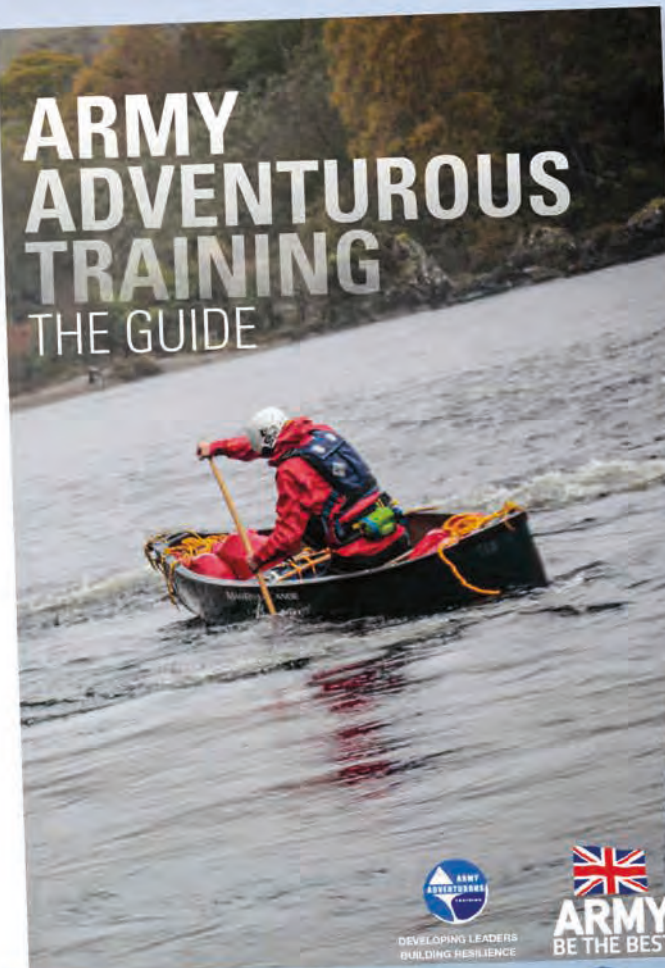
My four-day trial stay was brilliant. Everyone stops and talks to you. During my interview they said, "Aren't you a bit young to come in here?". I said, "I can live independently, I'm not married and I'm in receipt of a state pension, so I meet your criteria. And you need people like me to cheer up those old ones!"

For me, the best part is going out and representing the Royal Hospital. There's nothing else to worry about. The hardest thing is choosing what to have for lunch!

For anyone even thinking of joining, don't hesitate – it's one of the best decisions I've made.



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'Are we expendable to the One Army?'

THERE has been a lot of chatter recently about full-time Reserve service (FTRS) posts being reviewed, changes to contracts and redundancies.

To date, I have not received a single piece of first-hand information from anyone in the Service regarding this.

However, as a Civil Service line manager, I have been sent a letter addressed to "all Field Army Civil Service staff". It was very informative, clear and concise and highlighted potential cost saving measures and additional, compensating posts being created.

I was completely flabbergasted to see some FTRS jobs were to be replaced by civil servants.

Does the chain of command or our Personnel Centre think so little of the FTRS component they don't feel the need, or professional obligation, to pass any of this information directly to us?

Are we expendable to the "One Army" we pledged our allegiance to?

Professionally, I have lost all respect for that concept and now feel like a mere add-on. This is before even mentioning the long-standing issues with the lack of allowances, medical and dental cover, zero per cent X-factor (or five per cent for limited commitment) and large pension abatements. – **Name and address supplied**

Maj Gen Paul Griffiths, Director of Personnel, Army Headquarters, replies: I am really sorry that you and your FTRS colleagues feel threatened and insecure.

I fully understand that any review like this will cause disquiet. Let me provide the reasons why we are doing this.

We are determined to deliver a whole force workforce structure (Regular, Reserve, civil servant and contractor) that is fit for the 21st century and able to deliver the vision of Future Soldier.

We need a modern British Army that is fit for future challenges.

The task is, therefore, to identify the best way to do this in a more strategic, integrated and affordable way. To do this we need a full review of all our FTRS home and limited commitment positions.

The review is seeking to first conclude whether a post is required in the future, and if it is required, to then determine what is the most appropriate workforce type for it.

This is not about getting rid of our FTRS but about getting to a place where we have the right workforce in the right positions.

Please be assured the review will be conducted in accordance with Reserve Land Force Regulations.

As part of this, if a post is identified for removal, the required seven-month notice period will be provided as a minimum.

Each post will be reviewed against the same question set which seeks to determine whether the output could be delivered by a civil servant or whether the role requires a military incumbent; the questions consider both the scope and nature of the role and the balance of workforce type across the team.

The best person to talk to now is your commanding officer as they should have received direction and guidance for the review.

“ I have lost all respect for that concept ”

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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X-FACTOR BOOST

● I HAVE seen a defence communication sent out to a neighbouring unit telling them that if they do not have their booster jabs they may lose their X-factor pay.

I know that Service personnel are required to have inoculations for deployments and not doing so may render them non-deployable, but are the Armed Forces allowed to use this method to force individuals who are double jabbed to have a booster?

Are there rules within our contract that stipulate we must comply?

This has caused concern with certain individuals and families who are worried about their finances. – **Name and address supplied**

Maj Fraser Stark, Army Remuneration Policy, Army Headquarters, replies: The answer to your question is no.

Please be assured that there is no mechanism for removing X-factor from military pay unless a soldier volunteers for flexible service and becomes non-deployable at their own request.

It may also be because of a change to Service type from, say, Regular to Reserve or vice versa.

Lt Col Richard Eaton, Army Internal Communications, adds: Army Briefing Note 07/2022 has just been published and includes the following advice: “If you have reservations about accepting the vaccination you can make an appointment with your medical officer to discuss your concerns.

“If declined, this will be detailed on your military medical record as per normal vaccination refusal.”

GOT A GRIPE?

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GET IT
OFF YOUR CHEST?

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No high fives over clasps

I HAVE been a Reservist for a number of years and hope, when I leave, to have the fifth clasp to the Volunteer Reserve Service Medal (VRSM).

I already have the fourth but never had it mounted. This is because one of my colleagues did and it looked terrible.

I have sent photographs (above) of medals with third and fourth clasps and you can see there is a big difference.

I have always been proud to wear my decorations but three clasps is just the right amount to display in my opinion.

I’ve thought about taking them off and purchasing a number instead but I don’t know if that’s allowed. Can I have some direction or information about this?

– **Name and address supplied**

Lt Col (Retd) Kestrel Simson, Ceremonial Policy and Plans, responds: Army Dress Regulations part 13 provides direction and guidance on the wearing of orders, decorations and medals.

With swing or court-mounted decorations, the length of the ribbon on which the medal is suspended should be at least 32mm long but may, in the case of the VRSM, be

extended to allow the wearing of up to four clasps (up to five clasps for campaign medals).

If the ribbon of one particular medal is required to be lengthened to accommodate more clasps, then so should the length of all other associated medal ribbons so that all hang to the same length. The same applies to swing or court-mounted miniature medals.

Any additional clasps awarded after 35 years or more of Reserve service cannot be worn on the medal ribbon and clasps cannot be replaced by numbers.

However, Reserve service up to 45 years can be shown on the ribbon of undress uniforms. Silver rose emblems denoting the award of each clasp are attached to the ribbon to recognise up to 25 years’ Reserve service as only a maximum of three silver roses may be worn.

Reserve service of 30 years or more is recognised as follows: 30 years – one gold rose; 35 years – one gold rose and one silver rose; 40 years – one gold rose and two silver roses; 45 years – two gold roses.

“I’ve thought about taking them off”

‘HOW CAN JUBILEE MEDALS BE FOR SALE ONLINE?’

● I HAVE seen Platinum Jubilee Medals for sale online, they seem to be genuine and are going for between £300 and £450.

How can this be? Why are people allowed to sell them? I understand some recipients may not want or agree with the medal, so if that is the case just refuse it – but don’t sell it. – **Name and address supplied**

Lt Col (Retd) Kestrel Simson, Ceremonial Policy and Plans, replies: Army personnel are unlikely to be involved as they didn’t start receiving their medals until this month.

Individuals from the emergency services could be selling them as they have already received theirs. Retailing these decorations is not only discourteous to Her Majesty, it contravenes our Queen’s Regulations.

It would be a disciplinary offence if anyone was unable to wear them because they had sold, lost or misplaced them.

They remain Service property until an individual retires or is discharged, whereupon they are free to do with them as they choose.

BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know



CAREERS

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service is recruiting veterans to join its ranks through its Advance into Justice fast-track scheme. The initiative is open to those who have left in the last five years and are not in full-time employment. Full training is provided, with travel and relocation contributions available. Visit advance-into-justice.service.justice.gov.uk for more.

The Officers' Association and **RFEA – The Forces Employment Charity** are planning to combine to create a single charity providing career support to all Service leavers and their families throughout the UK. The new organisation will be called Forces Employment Charity, and is expected to be formally established by April.

Forces Families Jobs is a platform designed to help partners into meaningful employment. Visit forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk



COMPETITIONS

January 2022 HOAY winners: Jason Turner, Brecon; Neil Hulme, Larkhill

Spinelines winner: Alfie White, Oxfordshire



DIARY

March 10-12: Operation Black Door. Experience life during the Second World War through this immersive experience. Choose one of five different journeys and take on challenges to uncover the stories hidden in the labyrinthine corridors of the Churchill War Rooms – solving missions inspired by real people who worked in this secret government headquarters. Participants are asked to dress the part to add authenticity. Tickets £35. For more information go to the events section at iwm.org.uk

March 13: Duxford Dash. Run a 5k, 10k or family mile at IWM Duxford, Cambridgeshire, 0930-1230. Book your place for £13/£26 at theraceorganiser.com

March 23: IWM Institute Annual Lecture 2022. War: How Conflict

Shaped Us will see Prof Margaret MacMillan, one of the world's most eminent war historians, examine the complex relationship between war and society since the Second World War. A fascinating evening of discussion, with a Q&A session moderated by the BBC's Reeta Chakrabarti. Event at IWM London from 1830, tickets priced £15. Visit iwm.org.uk for more details and to book.

Until May 6: Brothers in Arms. A National Army Museum exhibition charting the story of the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry – an elite British tank regiment whose men fought their way across north-west Europe during the Second World War. For more details visit nam.ac.uk

Until further notice: World War 2: War Stories. An exhibition at The Tank Museum, Bovington telling the story of the Royal Armoured Corps. Visit tankmuseum.org for more information and opening times.



DIRECTORY

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

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

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

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

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

Army Families Federation: 01264 382324; mil 94391 2324; aff.org.uk

Army LGBT Forum: armylgbt.org.uk

Army Libraries: 01252 340094

Army Ornithological Society: armybirding.org.uk

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

Big White Wall, now Togetherall: togetherall.com

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

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

Care After Combat: careaftercombat.org

Career Transition Partnership: 020 7469 6661

Centre for Veterans Health, King Edward VII Hospital: 020 7467 4370; cdunne@kingedwardvii.co.uk

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

Combat Stress: 0800 323 4444; combatstress.org.uk

Defence Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination 24/7 Helpline: 0800 783 0334

Erskine: 0141 814 4569; erskine.org.uk

Family Escort Service: 020 7463 9249

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

Forcesline: UK – 0800 731 4880; Germany – 0800 1827 395; Cyprus – 080 91065; Falklands – #6111; from operational theatres – Paradigm Services *201; from anywhere in the world (CSL operator will call back) – 0044 1980 630854

Forces Pension Society: 020 7820 9988; forcespensiosociety.org

Help for Heroes: 0845 673 1760 or 01980 846 459; helpforheroes.org.uk

Heroes Welcome: heroeswelcome.co.uk

HighGround: highground-uk.org.uk 07951 495 272

Humanist, Atheist and Non-religious in Defence Network: defencehumanists.org.uk

Joint Service Housing Advice Office: 01252 787574

Medal Office: 94561 3600 or 0141 224 3600

Mutual Support (multiple sclerosis group): mutual-support.org.uk

National Gulf Veterans' and Families' Association Office: 24-hour helpline 0845 257 4853; ngvfa.org.uk

PoppyScotland: 0131 557 2782; poppyscotland.org.uk

Regular Forces' Employment Association: 0121 236 0058; rfea.org.uk

Remount: 01451 850 341; remount.net

Royal British Legion: 0808 802 8080; britishlegion.org.uk

Royal British Legion Scotland: 0131 550 1583; legionscotland.org.uk

RBL Industries Vocational Assessment Centre: 01622 795900; rbli.co.uk

Scottish Veterans' Residences: 0131 556 0091; svronline.org

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services: 01748 833797; spaces.org.uk

Speak Out – the Army's confidential bullying, harassment and discrimination helpline: 0306 7704656

SSAFA: 0845 1300 975; ssafa.org.uk

Stoll: 020 7385 2110; stoll.org.uk

The Not Forgotten Association:
020 7730 2400;
nfassociation.org

The Poppy Factory:
020 8940 3305;
poppyfactory.org

The Royal Star and Garter Homes:
020 8481 7676;
starandgarter.org

The Veterans Charity:
01753 653772;
info@veteranscharity.org.uk

Troop Aid:
0121 711 7215 or 07734 384260;
troopaid@icloud.com; troopaid.info

uk4u Thanks!:
01798 812081;
uk4u.org

Veterans Welfare Service:
0808 1914 218 (from the UK);
gov.uk/government/groups/veterans-welfare-service

WVRS: 02920 232 668



REUNIONS

The Cheshire Yeomanry Association is planning a dinner in Chester on April 23 to mark the outfit's formation 225 years ago. Email kingsbr@gmail.com for info.



ROADSHOWS

The Forces Pension Society – an independent, not-for-profit

membership-funded organisation that acts as a pension watchdog – is staging a number of roadshows. Log on to forcespensionsociety.org/news-events/events for more information about the events.

The Army Engagement Team has resumed face-to-face events. For further information email rc-aeg-mailbox@mod.gov.uk
The next roadshows are:

March 2 – Wolverhampton
March 16 – Lambeth
March 23 – Bristol

JUST HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU? No. 959



A two-night stay for two people at a historic country retreat

WIN

karmaresortdestinations.com

TEN details have been changed in this picture of troops from 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment parading through the streets of Lincoln last month.

Known as The Poachers, the soldiers were marking their return from operations around the world – including two stints in Mali as part of the UN peacekeeping mission there (page 30).

Circle all the differences on the left image and send the panel to HOAY 959, *Soldier*, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU with your full contact details, including email address, by no later than March 31.

A photocopy is acceptable but only one entry per person may be

submitted. Alternatively, email a photograph of the image highlighting the differences to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk

The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win two nights' accommodation at Karma Salford Hall, a historic country retreat dating back 700 years, situated in the Vale of Evesham near the Cotswolds.

The prize is based on two people sharing a Superior Room and includes daily breakfast and a three-course dinner, including soft drinks, on one evening. The prize must be booked by June 30, for a stay completed by March 2023. Some other date restrictions also apply.

The winner's name will appear in the May 2022 issue. All the usual competition rules apply.



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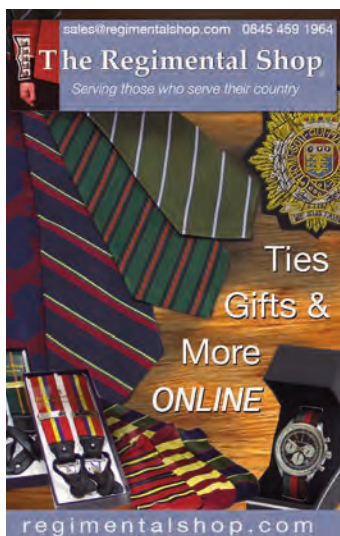
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REVIEWS

PICK OF THE MONTH:

The Pilot: A Battle for Survival

Russian film records eastern front's aerial clash

► WHEN Adolf Hitler ordered his forces to invade the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, he was about to unleash a very different type of conflict.

Operation Barbarossa was, by all accounts, to be fought with an unmatched savagery as the fascists moved to subdue their communist rivals.

Skewed Nazi racial doctrine saw the Slavs as an inferior species to be treated accordingly and, with the Geneva Conventions torn up, a battle of annihilation quickly ensued.

While both sides ultimately committed atrocities against each other, it is reckoned that 20 million Russians died during the Second World War in a country that suffered more than any other.

It is against the backdrop of the unfolding Barbarossa operation that *The Pilot: A Battle*



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BOOKS

P62

GAMES



The Pilot: A Battle for Survival is out now as a digital download

for *Survival* begins.

Inspired by several true stories of Soviet aviators who continued to fly despite suffering life-changing injuries, the film provides a Russian perspective on the brutal war in the East.

The plot follows the fortunes of fictional airman Nikolai Komlev, who cheats death early on when his Ilyushin IL-2 is brought down during an attack on an armoured column.

Alone, behind enemy lines and armed only with a pistol, the odds of returning home alive are stacked against him.

Told partly in flashback to his unfolding romance with girlfriend Olga, the first half of the film is effectively turned over to an escape and evasion story in a Russian winter every bit as deadly as the German adversaries.

While Komlev ultimately manages to survive the ordeal, albeit with others paying a heavy price for their actions in helping him, he is left with severe injuries and faces the eventual amputation of his legs below the knee.

And it is his recovery and attempts to return to flight status that form the latter part of the film.

Despite news filtering into Russia of Royal Air Force contemporary Douglas Bader, who is still flying fighters with prosthetic limbs, he faces a near-impossible battle to convince doctors he can do the same.

Although the aerial fighting of the Second World War has been told on celluloid many times, from **David Niven** in *The First of the Few* to **Ed**

Skrein in *Midway*, the story of the Russian clash with the Luftwaffe has rarely featured.

This offering certainly manages to redress this balance with a credible plot that remains cohesive despite having several strands to the story.

Komlev's fight through the wilderness is a compelling tale in its own right – the sparse dialogue allowing the beautifully shot landscapes and natural soundtrack to speak for themselves.

The tension is ramped up as the downed pilot is ruthlessly hunted by enemy soldiers and attacked by wild animals.

Flashbacks are sparingly used to shed light on his personal life, allowing the action to flow seamlessly into the film's second half and later war years.

The aerial combat scenes – while only accounting for a small part of the movie – are superb, with computer generated and real flying blended well. There is a grim sense of cockpit

claustrophobia and the chaos of battle as crews are involved in explosive ground attack sorties and barrelling dogfights.

Outstanding direction by Renat Davletyarov – who also co-wrote the script – is underpinned by credible performances, notably by **Pyotr Fyodorov** who leads as Komlev and **Anna Peshkova** playing his lover Olga.

All in all, *The Pilot: A Battle for Survival* is well worth a watch, providing a perspective on a side of the Second World War that has hardly been told in Western cinema.

It acts as a salute to a generation of aircrew, now fast disappearing, who fought in history's greatest aerial battle. ■

VERDICT:

A gripping tale of courage and resilience

★★★★★

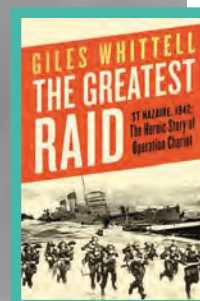
REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, *SOLDIER*

Liked *The Pilot: A Battle for Survival*? Try...

The Spacewalker

THE history of Soviet aviation moves on a stage in this take on the hair-raising career of cosmonaut Alexei Leonov – the first man to walk in space. Locked in a struggle with the Americans for prestige in the heavens, the film follows the aviator's early work with fast jets to one of the riskiest spaceflight missions ever undertaken on Voskhod 2. Leonov, who died in 2019, was himself closely involved in the movie, making this offering well worth a watch.





● *The Greatest Raid* by Giles Whittell is published by Viking on March 17 and priced £20

Pictures clockwise from top: IWM, Battlefield Historian and Canon Lisle Ryder

PICK OF THE MONTH:

The Greatest Raid

Author brings audacious amphibious op to life

➤ EIGHTY years after Operation Chariot – the British commando mission on the port of St Nazaire in March 1942 – author Giles Whittell offers up a fascinating new account of what became known as “the greatest raid”.

The plan required an old destroyer, packed with explosives, to ram the gates of a key dry dock. Meanwhile, a force of Royal Marines would alight from the escorting flotilla of motor launches and wreak havoc on the port infrastructure – all of which was to be achieved despite the most formidable array of shore defences anywhere along the Atlantic wall.

Thought by many at the time to be unachievable and suicidal, Churchill approved the raid, hoping it would prevent the Germans from supporting their battleship *Tirpitz* and disrupt the U-boat operations which were hitting vital supply convoys.

Also, and perhaps more importantly, it



would show the world – particularly Stalin and Roosevelt – that Britain was far from finished and had the imagination and fighting spirit to take the battle right back to the enemy.

Whittell describes the genesis and preparation for the raid and then, interweaving the personal stories of many of the key players, reveals exactly how events unfolded.

He shows that the mission was almost doomed to failure through using wooden

motorboats which had no chance of surviving the guns at the mouth of the Loire, and a general inability (at that time) to coordinate priorities with the Royal Air Force and rest of the Royal Navy.

But against the odds the raid did succeed. The participants destroyed the dry dock and much of the port, giving Churchill exactly what he needed to convince the Russians and Americans that the British were still in the fight.



BOOKS



In crystal clear detail, the book reveals the drive, energy and bravery of the fighting sailors and commandos in the face of a plan that evaporated on enemy contact with horrendous casualties.

The author brings the story alive by capturing the personalities, motivations and fears of many of the participants – mostly through use of their own diaries and papers and from witness statements from all sides.

He splices facts, figures and timings with memories and impressions to bring clarity to what must have been a night of absolute chaos.

The story gallops along, inspiring alternate waves of insight into the thinking of those driving the raid, awe at the bravery of those fighting it, despair that leaders could contemplate throwing such a small force into such overwhelming hazard, and sheer elation that it performed so magnificently.

Five Victoria Crosses were awarded to the most prominent heroes of the night. A quarter of the 600 commandos who took part were killed, half were wounded or captured – the stories of sacrifice, survival and bravery are humbling.

Whittell recounts them with great respect and empathy, placing them in the context of the much broader strategic issues at stake – a clever combination.

Eight decades on, this is a worthy tribute to the men whose sheer warrior courage carried the night. ■

VERDICT:

Top marks for this absorbing retelling of a chapter too few people know about

★★★★★

REVIEW: LT COL SIMON SOSKIN,
GREN GDS

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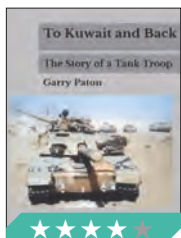
BOOKS RELEASES



Two Storm Wood by Philip Gray

SET in the grim aftermath of the First World War, this whodunnit is as much about the devastating psychological impact of conflict as it is a finely woven murder mystery. As special battalions toil in the former battlefields to exhume, identify and reinter the dead, evidence of a shocking war crime is uncovered. Meanwhile, a young woman travels to France in search of her fiancé, missing – presumed killed – in action. Well researched fiction often informs, and a strength of this novel is that it sheds light on a mostly overlooked chapter – the gruesome, seemingly insurmountable task of the then Imperial War Graves Commission in honouring the fallen. The plot twists keep coming, but the picture it paints of physical and emotional desolation will stick with the reader long afterwards.

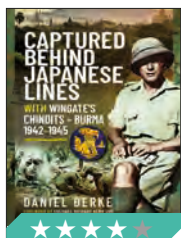
Becky Clark, *Soldier*



To Kuwait and Back by Garry Paton

THIS “story of a tank troop” gives an excellent account of the First Gulf War. The author tells us all about his vehicle and how such a unit operates, before revealing the organisation required to get from Germany to Saudi Arabia, the build-up to war and going through the berms to take on the Iraqi army. Complete with many photographs of the crews and their platforms, with additional maps and diagrams, the book is a compelling tale of a young man going into battle. The main thing that comes from it is the strong comradeship that close confinement in a 50-plus tonne war machine brings. A great read and well worth having on the shelf for any military history enthusiast.

Andy Kay, ex-RS



Captured behind Japanese Lines by Daniel Berke

COMBINING a deeply personal family history with an overview of parts of the Second World War in the Far East, this offering about the Chindits is a gem.

Tracking the author's late grandfather's military service with the formation and subsequent experiences in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps, it provides a valuable insight into a lesser studied campaign. As the number of veterans dwindles, histories such as this are particularly important and tell a tale that far too few know or appreciate.

LCpl Daniel Levy, AGC (RMP)



PICK OF THE MONTH:

Twelve Minutes

How to square up to a time-loop nightmare

► THERE are occasional times in life when a profound sense of déjà vu descends – a certain situation or set of circumstances which seem uncannily familiar.

For serial travellers with the Army, these tend to pop up on ops – when routine takes over and days begin to barrel into each other. Eating, sleeping, training and patrolling become the norm until an unexpected drama arises.

The dreadful prospect of becoming forever trapped in a repeating time period has, however, long been considered in fiction – as **Bill Murray** finds when his character winds up reliving the same 24 hours in comedy *Groundhog Day*.

But it is an altogether more sinister set of circumstances confronting gamers in *Twelve Minutes*, which has just been released on Nintendo Switch following its debut on PC, PlayStation and Xbox systems.

Arriving home to find their wife being detained for a murder she denies, they are strangled to death by the arresting cop before beginning the brief, brutal loop all over again.

Players assume control of this grim reality – which unfolds in a humdrum one-bedroomed apartment – from a top-down and occasional first-person perspective.

With the story starting as the participant walks through the door, the aim is to break the seemingly endless cycle by attempting to manipulate events.

This means finding out about their spouse's

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Nintendo
Switch



past, convincing her that the reoccurring situation is real and altering patterns of behaviour by tinkering with objects in the flat – all against the clock.

The seconds tick away to the appointment with fate with the ping of the lift outside and a knock on the door.

It might sound a simple premise, but the concept of *Twelve Minutes* belies a depth of gameplay that is underpinned by an unsettling edge. And while drawing heavily on the point-and-click adventure genre of the 1990s, there are several features that firmly set the title apart from its contemporaries.

Firstly, the superbly paced and reasonably plausible story penned by the game's brainchild – ex-Ubisoft and Rockstar Games developer Luis Antonio – make the ticking seconds seem like hours in the escalating tension.

Voice performances by three seasoned Hollywood A-listers are also excellent. **James McAvoy** (*X-Men* series) is sound as the lead, supported by **Daisy Ridley** (*Star Wars Skywalker Saga*) as his secretive spouse while screen legend **Willem Defoe** (*Platoon*) is terrifying as the police officer.

Action is well-presented too. While graphics are functional for the top-down perspective, the soundtrack is excellent and the ambient creaks and groans of the flat plus a thunderstorm outside add to the atmosphere.

Criticisms are tough to find but the lack of

touchscreen control on the Switch – a capability serially underused on titles of this type – is regrettable as the finesse needed for some actions is clunky on the thumbsticks.

The game can also prove frustrating at times – particularly when there are obvious lines of enquiry or conversation topics that seem to be off-limits. Repeated plays can be required to reach the desired effect – making the game best attempted in bursts and then shelved for thinking time.

These couple of points aside, however, *Twelve Minutes* is a polished offering that will fill a few hours and the format means it can be easily played in scoff or coffee breaks.

The £20 price tag is also reasonable with plenty on offer for the cash.

Clearly the title will not be to everyone's taste – particularly if you prefer kinetic rather than psychological warfare – but it is worth checking out if flexing grey matter over first-person marksmanship is the order of the day. ■

VERDICT:

A highly original psychological thriller

★★★★★

REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, SOLDIER

Like *Twelve Minutes*? You might also enjoy...

1979 Revolution: Black Friday

VIDEO games have covered an array of eras – from the Crusades in *Assassin's Creed* to *Call of Duty*'s fictional modern-day conventional battles in Western Europe. But they rarely provide such a deep insight into a relatively recent historical event as this little-known gem. *Black Friday* casts players as a photojournalist recording the events leading to religious hardliners seizing power from the ruling Shah in Iran. Those in the boots of the lead character of this all-format release face stark choices amid a chaotic time, making this title a must for those with a wider interest in Middle East history.



Grim Fandango Remastered

IF SOMETHING a little more light-hearted is your bag, this remixed Lucasarts adventure is well worth a look.

First released in the late 1990s, this version – which includes a new orchestral recording of the acclaimed jazz soundtrack – retains all of its original playability and charm. Players are cast as Manuel 'Manny' Calvera – who acts as a guide for departing souls as they arrive in the afterlife – and charged with helping a virtuous spirit on her journey. Available on all formats, this outing is rated by many critics as an all-time video game classic.



ARMY CYCLING

MOUNTAIN BIKE 2022 SERIES

Great news! Army Cycling are planning to hold 6 events in 2022, open to all serving personnel, Regular and Reservist.

These races are for all levels of experience, from beginners to seasonal racers, which are held on terrain that all riders can manage, but will be challenging at speed.

All riders will experience the exhilaration of a 1 hr MTBXC race and will compete to win prizes or beat personal bests. A minimal fee will be charged on the day, details of which will be contained in the race series Admin Instruction.

So save the dates, keep monitoring Defence Connect for up to date information in case of cancellation and join the ACMTBXC team on race day.

XC Dates and Venues

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ARMY

CYCLING

SOLDIER SPORT



MAGIC OF MERIBEL >>

AFTER seeing the event scrapped in 2021, the Army's winter sports stars made an eagerly anticipated return to the slopes at the Inter-Services Snowsport Championships. Read about their efforts in snowboarding, Alpine skiing and Telemark on pages 70-71...

Picture: Cpl Jack Wilson, RAF



GOLDEN REGRET AS REDS SUNK BY NAVAL RIVALS

THE Army rugby league team were left to reflect on what might have been after a golden point defeat to the Royal Navy saw them crash out of the Challenge Cup.

The Reds made the ideal start to the second round clash as debutant Rfn Kaji Saguvana (Rifles) intercepted a pass deep in his own territory before sprinting the length of the field to touch down for an unconverted try.

And a further score followed as Sgt Dec Baines (R Signals) ghosted through the Navy's lines to create the space for veteran LCpl Kev Brown (RE) to crash over in the corner.

A penalty early in the second half helped the soldiers to a 10-0 lead and, with their defensive shape holding firm, they looked well placed to progress.

But the visitors had other ideas and two late tries saw them pull level as the final whistle sounded.

With the match heading into golden point extra time, the Senior Service capitalised on their momentum to cross for a decisive third try that settled the first Challenge Cup meeting between the military rivals.

Reflecting on the defeat, head coach WO2 Mike Thompson (RE) told *SoldierSport* individual mistakes proved costly.

"Our preparation going into the game had been good and we were 8-0 up at half-time, playing into the wind," he said.

"The conditions were in our favour in the second period, but we could not capitalise. The game plan went out of the window and too much individual rugby was played.

"To be fair, neither team looked like scoring and it was a good, old-fashioned Army-Navy match. But when they crossed for their first try our heads seemed to go and we could not regroup.

**CHALLENGE CUP
SECOND ROUND**

ARMY

10

NAVY

14



"They had four or five drop goal attempts in extra time and were desperate to win the game. It was our own mistakes and poor discipline that cost us in the end – we were seeing errors we would not expect to see from Army players.

"I think we had a brain explosion in those last few minutes. In our minds maybe we had the game won before we even set foot on the pitch – but the Navy kept coming at us.

"It is disappointing, especially when you consider the magnitude of the game. It is a difficult pill to swallow."

Despite the result, Thompson believes positives can be taken from the campaign and said the team will hopefully return to action next month in a bid to move on from the result.

"For 60 minutes our defence was solid, and they didn't look like scoring," he added. "We also

had two or three players making their debuts.

"We are keen to have another game before Easter and then we will look ahead to the President's Cup and community season.

"That is very important for us as it allows us to build our development and senior squads – we will be looking to find some rough diamonds."

The Inter-Services will then follow later in the year, and it is hoped the Navy will return to the fold after withdrawing from the competition in 2021 due to operational commitments.

"It makes things more exciting," Thompson explained. "We played the Royal Air Force home and away last season, and the second match was an explosive affair.

"Playing both teams takes some of that pressure away, although it creates different pressure at the same time."

In other news, the Army women's senior and development teams stepped up preparations for their 2022 campaign with a week-long pre-season training camp in Catterick.

The players tested themselves alongside Super League runners-up Leeds Rhinos and underwent sessions led by St Helens and England duo SSgt Carrie Roberts (REME) and Amy Hardcastle. ■



LEAGUE IN NUMBERS

POINTS
SCORED BY
THE ROYAL
NAVY AS
THEY WENT
ON TO
BEAT YORK
ACORN AND
PROGRESS
TO THE
FOURTH
ROUND

22

SOLDIERS
NAMED IN THE
STARTING
LINE-UP
AS THE UK
ARMED
FORCES
WOMEN
LOST 18-14
TO BARROW
LAST MONTH

4

DATE, IN
OCTOBER,
OF THIS
YEAR'S
ARMY V
RAF INTER-
SERVICES
MATCHES

9

PLAYERS
SELECTED IN
THE ARMY
WOMEN'S
SQUAD
FOR THIS
SEASON

25



FORCES FOOTBALL RESUMES

HAVING lifted the trophy the last time the Inter-Services were completed, the Army men's football team will start their long-awaited title defence later this month.

A 1-1 draw with the Royal Navy in Yeovil (pictured) saw the soldiers seal a fourth successive crown in 2019 but on-field action has been in short supply since as the Covid-19 outbreak intervened.

The 2020 campaign was abandoned after the opening round of fixtures and the 2021 tournament was cancelled, meaning the Reds' home clash with the Royal Air Force on March 23 comes with heightened excitement.

A lot has changed in the meantime with Capt Jimmy Blair (Coldm Gds) coming in as head coach, while a raft of players have embarked on life outside the Service.

Preparations for their latest title bid began with a trials period before Christmas and the players had a further

chance to impress at a three-day camp last month.

"They are all fighting for a place and the competition is very tight," Blair, who has since deployed to Iraq and will therefore miss the tournament, told *SoldierSport*.

"We've unearthed some new talent that has been identified by us getting out and about to corps matches.

"There has been a churn of about eight to ten players – five of which would have been starters in 2020 – so it is a new era on and off the pitch.

"The draw works in our favour this year as the Navy and Royal Air Force play each other in the opening game. It means we can analyse their style and get a better idea of what we will face.

"But they look like strong outfits so I think it will be a close competition."

The women's match will be played at the Army Military Stadium at 1500, with the men lining up at the home of Aldershot Town at 1900. ■

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SPORT SHORTS



Gibbs' golden delight

THE Service's Brazilian jiu-jitsu set-up celebrated a successful outing at the European Championships in Italy.

Bdr Josh Gibbs (RA, pictured above at the Army Championships) claimed gold in the ultra heavyweight purple belt division and is now ranked second in the world.

Reservist SSgt John Woodman (REME) also secured a bronze medal at the competition.

The event marked the start of a busy spell for the Army, who were in action at the Armed Forces, Veterans and Emergency Services Championships as this issue went to press.



Picture: Paul Sanwell

Flying the flag in Beijing

FORMER soldiers Owen Pick (pictured), Scott Meenagh and Steve Arnold have been named in a 20-strong Great Britain snowboard and ski team for this month's Winter Paralympics.

Pick, who was Paralympic GB's flagbearer at the Games' opening ceremony four years ago, will be competing in the snowboard events, while Arnold will join Meenagh on the start line for the Nordic skiing.

The latter became the first British athlete to compete in the discipline for 20 years last time out.

"To be here again is an amazing feeling," he said.



Pictures: Team GB/Sam Mellish

GLEESON CALLS FOR FUNDING RETHINK



**"YOU
HOLD
ON AND
TRY NOT
TO GET
KICKED
OUT"**

B OBSLEIGH ace LCpl Nick Gleeson (Para) said the sixth-place finish achieved by Team GB's four-man crew at the Winter Olympics felt "like a medal" given the lack of funding afforded to the squad.

UK Sport cut financial support for the discipline after some disappointing results at the PyeongChang Games four years ago, but Gleeson and his teammates are urging a rethink after an encouraging season that also saw them win six medals at World Cup level.

The crew, led by pilot Brad Hall, sat sixth after their opening two runs at the Chinese showpiece but were unable to close the gap after runs three and four.

They finished with an aggregate time of 3min 55.72sec – which was 1.42sec behind the winning effort clocked by the Germans.

"Brad can be super-annoying sometimes and we've had our altercations over the last four years, but to get here and for him to drive us into the top six knowing the mountain that

we are up against with the other nations is unbelievable," Gleeson added.

"He should hold his head very high. Organising every season, planning it all out, getting all the equipment that we need testing.

"Knowing what he's talking about and then getting us to trust it has been unbelievable.

"He wouldn't be here without us, and we wouldn't be here without him."

The strong showing in the four-man event followed an 11th place finish in the two-man discipline, in which Gleeson and Hall crashed on their third run. They escaped unscathed and returned to complete the fourth run, finishing with an overall time of 3min 59.92sec.

"It happens to everyone and when it does, it is a survival instinct," the 25-year-old said. "You hold on and try not to get kicked out of the back.

"Thankfully it was quite an easy crash. The fourth one was really nice; we picked up a few spaces and ended the event with a positive." ■

Pictures: Cpl Jack Wilson, RAF





MARVELLOUS IN MERIBEL

WINTER SPORTS STARS ATTACK THE PISTE AS BATTLE FOR MILITARY HONOURS RESUMES

IT MAY have assumed a slightly different feel this year, but the Army's winter sports stars made a welcome return to the slopes at the Inter-Services Snowsports Championships in Meribel.

With Covid-related travel restrictions limiting training time in the build-up, organisers adjusted the format to reflect the relative inactivity in the Alpine, snowboard and Telemark disciplines – but the new-look programme did not disappoint.

It proved to be a trophy-laden week for the soldiers – who secured a raft of individual and collective honours across the board – and one of the biggest success stories came from the men's Alpine ski team.

They won the downhill and super-giant slalom competitions on their way to claiming the overall title, with Spr Duncan Kuwall (RE), LCpl Hayden Grand (R Signals) and LCpl Findlay Farquharson (REME) dominating the podium places.

The women were bolstered by the inclusion of Maj Jen Kehoe (RE), who won Paralympic gold in 2018 as the guide to Menna Fitzpatrick in the visually impaired skiing, but they were unable to break the stranglehold of their Royal Air Force rivals.

The light blues were victorious in all three competitions, while also capturing the team trophy. However, Kehoe finished third in the individual standings and Capt Emily Wilson (AAC) was named best newcomer. Capt Tom Windsor-Clive (Coldm Gds) was awarded the men's equivalent prize.

"After missing out last year it was exciting to get out there," team manager John McClelland

told *SoldierSport*. "The team had a positive attitude and that paid off with the results.

"There was a risk factor that came from the lack of training, but the events were not overly different. There were mitigating factors around speed, and everything was slowed down, but our skiers loved it.

"There was a fear that we didn't have enough training and Duncan and Jen only came out on the eve of the championships. They had to prove they could run at speed, which is what they did."

The snowboarding had a similar feel as the Army men claimed more silverware, only for the RAF to triumph in the women's field.

The most eye-catching result came in the final of the men's parallel giant slalom, where teammates CSjt Sven Benavides (Rifles) and Sgt David Grant (REME) clocked identical times to be awarded joint gold medals.

Their efforts helped the men to the team crown, and the soldiers enjoyed further success in the snowboard cross and slopestyle on their way to the overall title. Benavides also added bronze medals in both events to his personal haul.

Sgt Fiona Ross (AMS) took bronze in the women's giant slalom and Maj Jess Drew (RE) finished third in the overall individual standings, but it was the RAF who dominated.

"Selection was focused on the more senior athletes who I knew could perform," team manager and senior rider WO2 Tom Etherington (RE) said.

"But availability issues meant we ended up with a mix of experienced and development riders in both teams and it



**"AFTER
MISSING
OUT LAST
YEAR
IT WAS
EXCITING
TO GET
OUT
THERE"**

worked pretty well.

"I'm really happy with the performance. This is my first year as manager and it's nice to have some success.

"You cannot expect people coming in to perform at the top level at the first time of asking. Hopefully they can now stay with us and really develop.

"The Army Championships are coming up this month. Younger personnel have seen the Winter Olympics, looked at the big air and snowboard cross and are now thinking 'I can have a go at that'.

"We have a good team, but need more depth, so I will be out there scouting for talent."

And the Royal Navy's dominance of the Telemark competition came to an end as the Army triumphed in the classic and sprint events, before lifting the main team trophy.

Capt Stefan Hurst (RLC) and SSgt Danny Johnson (RE, main picture) were instrumental to the success as they claimed the overall gold and silver medals, but Maj Simon Dunk (RA) – Army Telemark treasurer – stressed it was very much a team effort.

He said: "All members deserve praise for their hard work and endeavour.

"I'm really pleased for them, and it was great that all their training over the past few years paid off. The key to our success has been the focus on improving the technical aspects of racing, which has been helped by coaching from former World Cup winner, Phil Lau." ■



BACK IN THE CROSS COUNTRY GROOVE

FAMILIAR names were at the fore as the Army Cross Country Championships returned to Minley after a Covid-enforced absence in 2021.

Maj Ed Knudsen (REME) defended the men's title he won two years ago by completing the ten-kilometre course in a time of 31min 38sec – an effort that saw him finish more than a minute ahead of nearest rival Capt Chris Pickering (RAMC).

And in the women's draw, Army team member Cpl Jesse Lutwyche (QARANC, pictured right) clocked a time of 30min 21sec over the eight-kilometre route to top the standings ahead of Cpl Roanna Vickers (RAMC) and Capt Rosie Wild (RA).

Vickers was crowned women's masters' champion, with Maj Paul Molyneux (RAMC) taking the men's equivalent prize.

Runners from 5th Regiment, Royal Artillery captured the major units' prize, with 216 Parachute Signal Squadron sealing the minor units' title.

The day represented a welcome return to action and Army men's team manager WO1 Dave Branfoot (AGC (SPS)) was

pleased with the talent on show.

"It was really interesting," he said. "In the top 15 there was an even mix between known athletes and new people who have emerged since Covid."

"Chris Pickering was right up there, and he is someone we have not seen much of before. The start line was packed with quality, which was great to see."

The top performers went on to represent the Army at the Inter-Services Championships.

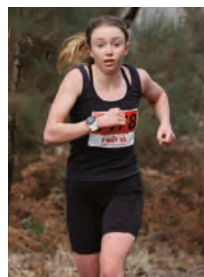
"This is one of the strongest squads we've had for some time," Branfoot added.

Women's manager Capt Kelley Haniver (RAPTC) said that while a number of key performers were missing, the race proved extremely competitive.

"It was fantastic to see everyone again, as well as the work they have done, and we saw a few surprises," she added.

"Looking at the results from the other Services, it will be a strong competition this year."

Despite the positive mood, the Army were second best to the Royal Air Force in the military match-up as the light blues took three of the four team titles. ■



**"THE
START
LINE WAS
PACKED
WITH
QUALITY"**



Pictures: Mick Brown

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

IT WAS a day to celebrate for the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers as corps riders secured two of the major prizes on offer at the Army Cyclocross Championships.

Staged in unusually dry and fast conditions at Chetwynd Barracks in Nottinghamshire, the event saw 2Lt Amy Drysdale (pictured above) pull clear of the field to claim the women's title.

And Sgt James Bevan, who was victorious at the Army and Inter-Services Road Race Championships in 2021, added further silverware to his haul by claiming the men's senior crown.

However, he failed to overcome the challenge of Capt Simon Hale (R Anglian, pictured below) who powered to the line to become overall Army champion, while also winning the masters' category.

Bevan's cause was not helped by a fall that allowed his rival to open a 25-second lead and, despite closing the gap to ten seconds going into the final lap, he was unable to overhaul the deficit. A strong start allowed Drysdale to establish herself at the head of the field and with her lead stretching to 20 seconds the result was never in doubt.



MONTH IN SPORT

March's key fixtures...



WHAT: Inter-Services Netball Championships
WHEN: March 2 to 4
WHERE: RAF Cosford
NEED TO KNOW: The

Army lifted the trophy in 2020 in what was one of the last Forces contests to be staged before Covid. They'll be looking to defend their crown in Shropshire



WHAT: Combined Services Boxing Championships
WHEN: March 16
WHERE: RAF Halton
NEED TO KNOW: Boxers return to the ring for the first Forces battle in three years. A new-look Army team will be hoping to retain their title from 2019, with the top performers progressing to the national championships



WHAT: Inter-Services Hockey Championships
WHEN: March 22 and 23
WHERE: Army Hockey Centre, Aldershot
NEED TO KNOW: The

Reds will be on the hunt for silverware after returning empty handed from the indoor format last year. Men's, women's, masters' and U25s' titles are up for grabs

UNION IN NUMBERS

POINTS SCORED BY OXFORD UNIVERSITY IN THEIR FIRST HALF ONSLAUGHT AGAINST THE REDS

15

TRIES POSTED BY THE ARMY AS THEY RETURNED TO WINNING WAYS IN THEIR CLASH WITH CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

4

FANS IN ATTENDANCE AT THE LAST FORCES CLASH IN GLOUCESTER

6k

DATE, IN APRIL, OF THE MOBBS MEMORIAL MATCH - THE FIRST TO BE STAGED IN THREE YEARS DUE TO COVID

13



REDS RALLY IN STUDENT TEST

PREPARATIONS for this season's Inter-Services Rugby Union Championships stepped up a gear as the Army men faced the challenge of Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

The Reds' fixture with the former didn't go to plan as injuries and errors proved costly in the first half as they trailed at the break.

An improved defensive showing in the second period stemmed the flow, but Oxford added a further score to complete a 20-0 triumph.

"Sometimes you learn more from a defeat than you would from an easy victory," head coach Capt Mal Roberts (RLC) said afterwards. "This is a massive learning curve and the lessons we take from this will be crucial as we move forward."

"In the first half we lost both second-row forwards and our skipper, so when you take away the backbone of our set piece it was always going to be a struggle."

"In the second half we rolled our sleeves up and got on with it. Questions were asked of us

but defensively we stood up."

Roberts had greater cause to cheer two weeks later as the Army downed their Cambridge rivals 37-10.

The Reds' Premiership and Championship stars are due to return to the fold for this month's Inter-Services opener, although the coach's focus has been on working with the talent currently available.

"When you have boys playing at that level, they add value to this squad when they come in, but I'm concentrating on those that are here now and they are doing just as good a job," he said.

The Army continue their preparations with a trip to Coventry on March 5 and will take on a Cardiff side during a week-long training camp in Wales, starting on March 13.

They then face the Royal Air Force at Gloucester's Kingsholm Stadium on March 26 (1515 kick-off). The women's match will be played at the same venue from 1100.

For more details and to purchase tickets visit tickets.gloucesterrugby.co.uk ■



The theory side of things is relatively easy to get to grips with, but tabbing round the area with a good amount of kit on your back is a real test of your mental and physical robustness. You have to keep going.

Gdsm Matthew Boughton



Adapting to the terrain. It is very different to Brecon and much harder underfoot. We've also done a lot of climbs.

Gdsm Josh Barrass



Staying on top of your admin. Your body can deteriorate rapidly out here so things like wet and dry drills and hydration are important.

LCpl Macauley Chapman



We have been operating in an area that was totally untouched, so we've been in thick jungle which can be tough going. There has also been a lot of rain – we had it three days straight at one point.

Sgt Kevin Edge



You must do your low-level skills and drills properly. If you cut corners you will fall short.

Sgt Toby Joyce



It is the heat and humidity of the jungle. When you're on exercise in the UK you cool down quickly, but it is harder to do that here and the heat sticks around into the evening.

Gdsm Jack Roberts

I found it quite hard to acclimatise and get used to the weather – I've not been in an environment like this for years.

LCpl Ed Green

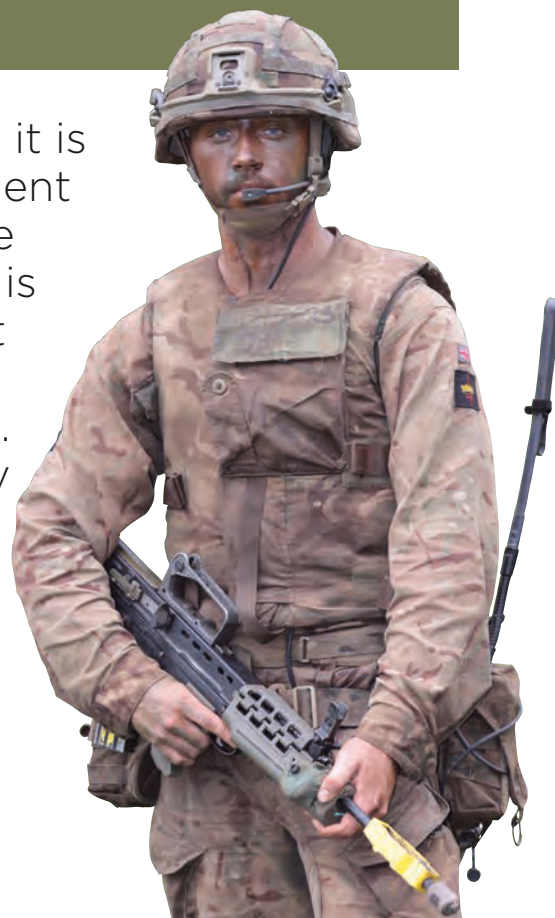


Tropical tests

We asked personnel from the Coldstream Guards about the biggest challenges they faced while operating in the Jamaican jungle on Ex Red Stripe...

I would say it is the movement through the jungle as it is so different to what we are used to. The density means that, tactically, everything is slower.

LCpl Cameron Thomson



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