

M A G A Z I N E O F T H E B R I T I S H A R M Y

SOLDIER

APRIL 2008 £2.50

GOING GREEN

Tabbing into the
'hoofing' world of
the Royal Marines

HEROES HAILED

Op honours list
unveils tales of
front-line valour



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April 08 Vol 64/04



Cover picture (left): British Army soldiers tab into the "hoofing" world of the Royal Marine commandos. See Pages 31-45 Picture: Graeme Main

Background image: Sappers from 24 Cdo Engr Regt prepare themselves for the rigours of the nine-week All Arms commando course. See Pages 41-43 Picture: Graeme Main

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"We may be a bit weak at this cliff scaling lark, Mick, but at least we can 'yomp' at 140 to the minute!"

● *Soldier* goes commando – Pages 31-45

Three steps to JPA pay heaven

FIRST SIGHT

JOINT Personnel Administration (JPA) gets a regular kicking in our Talkback pages and this issue is no exception (see Pages 56 and 63).

And those are just the ones we print. Soldiers – and officers – write to us virtually every day to complain about incorrect pay and allowances often stretching back months.

Their situations are unacceptable and difficult to swallow in light of the demands asked continuously of our soldiers on operations in Iraq and southern Afghanistan. The roll-call of supreme courage revealed by the latest round of operational honours and awards (see Pages 15-27) boldly underlines how important it is that they are correctly paid.

A glance at the official responses to their letters suggests that all too often individuals are caught helplessly in a limbo of process as unit human resources admin staff, the Army Personnel Centre at Glasgow, and the JPA enquiry desk bat the problems back and forth between them.

We are firmly assured that the platform used by JPA is a very good one, tried and tested in civvy street, and that those experiencing difficulties are almost always victims of incorrect information being fed into the system.

Now, a year after JPA roll-out to the Army, a new complaints procedure has been

introduced, which we have been told will make a real difference. So, if you are being paid too little or too much, if your new promotion or location is unrecognised, or your hard-won allowances or leave "lost", take these steps.

ONE: Ask your unit HR staff and the JPAC enquiry desk to resolve the issue.

TWO: If they cannot do so within ten working days, submit your complaint in writing to: (by letter) SPVA, JPA Service Delivery Complaints, MP 600, Kentigern House, 65 Brown Street, Glasgow G2 8EX; (by email) jpa-complaints@spva.mod.uk; (MoD internal email) SPVA-JPA-Complaints; (fax, mil) 94561 2605; or (fax civ) 0141 224 2605.

THREE: If you don't get a satisfactory resolution within ten working days after that, write to us. We will be very happy to take up your case and to print your letter.

Finally, a message for those whose hackles have been raised by *Soldier's* decision to go commando (see Pages 31-45) ... Marines may be a pain in the "bootneck", but their generosity to Army recruits goes far above and beyond the call of duty (see Page 47). ■

"All too often individuals are caught helplessly in a limbo of process"

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Harry of Helmand

Prince's 'secret' deployment to war against Taliban raised profile of Army

NEWs that Prince Harry had been soldiering unannounced for several weeks on the front line of Afghanistan's war-torn Helmand province sparked an instant worldwide media frenzy.

The story that the junior officer in The Blues and Royals had been working as a forward air controller since before Christmas dominated newspapers, websites and radio and television channels for days as images and interviews recorded in theatre under a scrupulously observed arrangement with British editors were widely released.

Soldier learned of the prince's presence in Afghanistan weeks before the story broke, but in common with other British media, had been sworn to secrecy.

Images of Cornet Wales directing air strikes against Taliban positions, firing heavy machine guns, playing football, riding a clapped-out motorbike, and making the best of spartan living conditions flashed around the globe, turning the prince, in his own words, into a "bullet magnet" and forcing the MoD to pull him reluctantly out of Afghanistan, as much for his own safety as for the soldiers serving with him.

The prince was praised by Gen Sir Richard Dannatt, the Chief of the General Staff, in an interview with

Press Association chief reporter John Bingham. "I'm delighted that we had the opportunity for Prince Harry to go and deploy on operations. It would have been ideal if he had been able to complete the whole tour, but ten weeks is a significant achievement. He has done really well during that period."

The head of the British Army described the prince's time in theatre as "a significant contribution".

"Obviously he was disappointed that he couldn't deploy to Iraq last year with his squadron, but his commanding officer had the need to fill a place within the battle-group as a primary forward air controller and trained Prince Harry for it during the course of the autumn."

His premature withdrawal had caused the battle-group a problem because it had had to reshuffle qualified personnel to fill the gap.

The prince's deployment to Garmsir and Forward Operating Base Dwyer had involved risk, admitted Gen Dannatt. "But the nature of operations and the locations he would be in is exactly the sort of risk that we would expect a young officer to be exposed to, and there's no reason why he shouldn't do that."

Prince Harry, he said, had been very understanding of the situation [when the news broke on an American internet

news channel] and "all the way through he has not wanted his presence to expose other soldiers to extra danger".

In CGS's judgement the risks of the prince remaining in theatre at that point outweighed the benefits of him staying, both from his point of view and of the soldiers serving with him and their families. The deployment had been good for the Royal Family and good for the Army. It had showed the nation that senior people were willing to share the same risks as the other 7,000 soldiers in Afghanistan and 3,500 in Iraq.

"I think also it has been an interesting and very profitable experience with regard to the relationship between the MoD and the media at large."

He said discussions with the media had led to an understanding based on transparency and trust "and that's really how we've taken it forward".

Gen Dannatt did not rule out the possibility of the prince returning to an operational theatre, but said this would be looked at on a case-by-case basis.

He also acknowledged that the saturation coverage had raised the Army's profile and served to better inform the public of what was going on in Afghanistan. It had also reflected the appreciation that the nation increasingly had of its Armed Forces.

OPERATIONAL HONOURS

AFGHANISTAN

CBE: Brig G P R Norton, late Gren Gds.

OBE: Col P J A Baker, late RLC; Maj J H Haggerty, RA (V); Lt Col P F Mahoney TD, RAMC; Col R J Westley MC, late Mercian.

MBE: Maj N P F Champion, Para; Lt H J Abdy-Collins, Para; Capt R L Earl, REME; Sgt M D Gibbons, RRF; SSgt E T Palmer, RE; Maj R J Watts, R Signals.

DSO: Lt Col S W Carver, R Anglian; Brig J G Lorimer, late Para.

CGC: LCpl D P Campbell, RE; Capt S T Cupples, Mercian; Pte P D Willmott, Mercian.

MC: LCpl L D Ashby, R Anglian; Maj M P Aston, R Anglian; Maj D S J Biddick, R Anglian; Cpl C A Brelsford (killed in action), Mercian; Pte L Cole, Mercian (V); Maj M P David, Gren Gds; LBdr M R Frew, RA; Bdr P M Greenwood, RA; Capt D C Hicks (killed in action), R Anglian; Fus D M Hields, R Welsh; Pte A S Holmes, Mercian; WO1 G C Kimberlin, Mercian; Cpl M Lockett, Mercian; Cpl R W Moore, R Anglian; LCpl O S Ruecker, R Anglian.

QGM: Pte L C Nadriva, R Anglian.

MID: Sgt S E Armon, R Anglian; SSgt A E Berry, RA; Lt N W D Binnington, LD; 2nd Lt R W M Bowers, Mercian; Lt A L C Browne, Mercian (V); Capt J A Carrick, RA; Spr O J Crook, RE; Maj A P L Dawes, RA; Sgt D P Fitzgerald, Mercian; Maj J Godfrey, LD; Sgt D Greenland, RA; LCpl D S Gwilliams, RE; Gdsm A E B Harrison, Gren Gds; Sgt M I Jackson, Mercian; LCpl M A Joseph, RLC; WO2 K Main, R Anglian; Gdsm D Malcangi, Gren Gds; Gdsm D L McBride, Gren Gds; Maj P J Messenger, R Anglian; LCpl S J Mills, RE; Cpl J J Mizon, Gren Gds; WO2 T R Newton, R Anglian; Cpl D R Norris, Gren Gds; Maj J P Nowell, Mercian; Sgt S I Panter, R Anglian; SSgt A O Peat, RLC; Capt J A Seddon, Gren Gds; Capt R D Smith, RRF.

QCB: WO2 P Meadows, PWRR; LCpl G Stoddart, RE.

QCVS: Lt Col D P Amison, RLC; Capt P N Blanchfield, R Anglian; Lt Col W J F Bramble, RA; Capt S J Gates, TA; Maj P G Gilby, Mercian; Capt A C R Hare, AAC; Lt Col A G C Hatherley, Gren Gds; Lt Col I B L Jones, RE; SSgt S J McKenzie, Int Corps; Spr G B Montgomery, RE; Lt G D Pritchard, QARANC; Maj J C Roddis, Scots; SSgt N J Ulley, R Signals; Lt Col H A Watson MBE, LD.

NATIONAL OPERATIONS

OBE: Lt Col P J Phillips, Para.

MBE: CSgt M L Jamieson, Para.

QCVS: Cpl D Whitfield, R Signals.

NON-COMBATANT AWARDS

QGM: Sgt D J Leak, RE.

● **Iraq and Northern Ireland awards –**
See Page 26

Trouble brews in Balkans' hot spot

British remain ready for action as Kosovo flares

MILITARY chiefs have made "prudent plans" to sustain the Army's involvement in other operations should British troops be called on to help quell violence in Kosovo.

As this issue went to press, UK soldiers remained on standby to intervene in the country, which has been volatile since declaring independence from Serbia earlier in the year.

Most recently there was serious rioting in the ethnically-mixed town of Mitrovica, during which United Nations police and multi-national troops came under attack.

Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, Welsh Guards, are the current Operational Reserve Force for Kfor – a role that was due to pass to the 2nd Battalion, The Rifles, as this issue went to press. Personnel from another Nato nation will take on the job in July.

A spokesman for the MoD told *Soldier*: "We recognise the possibility of being called upon to intervene in Kosovo and we have obviously put prudent planning in place."

He added: "We are taking an interest in the situation on the ground, although

it is a judgement for Kfor commanders as to whether the reserve force should be called."

There are currently around 100 British personnel in Kosovo, mainly from the Royal Signals, serving in headquarters and communications roles.

Despite the rioting in Mitrovica, Kfor commanders were adamant there was no immediate need for extra troops on the ground, but said the situation might change. A spokesman for the Nato force told *Soldier*: "We have some 16,000 troops in Kosovo and that is enough at the moment."

"The situation in Mitrovica is tense but calm. However, we are very aware that the situation can change out here at any moment."

The spokesman revealed that UN police had called for help from Kfor troops after they were attacked with grenades and automatic weapons during the rioting in March.

"There were no British soldiers involved in that action, and at the moment we do not need any further addition to our forces in Kosovo," the spokesman confirmed.

Information upgrade

BRITISH troops serving with the 7th Armoured Brigade are to get an enhanced version of their morale-boosting Home Rat website as they key up for future ops.

Under a review of the welfare initiative, which was originally launched in 2006, soldiers and their families will now be able to upload YouTube-style video clips.

Brigade spokesman Capt Liam Wilson, RRF, was confident that the refreshed website would provide a boost to both those on ops and those left at home.

He said: "While Home Rat has been pretty stagnant since Op Telic 7, it is now being refreshed in preparation for potential future deployments."

"We are aiming to provide photos and video clips, a bit like YouTube – there will also be special family groups similar to the Facebook social networking site."

As previously reported, Home Rat was the brainchild of former 7 Brigade Commander Brig Patrick Marriott, who wanted to beef up links between Iraq and the home front. Run under the secure ArmyNet por-

tal, the site provided troops and their families with the opportunity to upload pictures for each other during the Telic 7 tour.

● THE new Army Intranet is being launched this month. As of April 1, soldiers will be able to visit one port of call to get all their information rather than relying on seven separate intranet services.

The move means searching will be less time consuming and communicating messages will be easier. The seven existing sites, which include AG Web, Army Portal and Tanet, will be phased out over the next two years.

● TV beauty Kelly Brook has shown her appreciation for the troops by posting a personal message on a new website created for British soldiers.

The model and actress, along with other celebrities and members of the British public, have uploaded notes of encouragement on www.tothebest.army.mod.uk, a website created for people to express their backing of Service personnel.



Picture: Cpl Jon Bevan RLC

Decorated: LCpl Oliver Ruecker, 1 R Anglian, who braved a hail of enemy bullets to rescue an injured comrade, was among the 28 Military Cross winners

Roll call of courage

Record haul of Military Crosses reflects intensity of front-line operations

MORE Military Crosses have been awarded to Armed Forces personnel in the latest round of operational honours than at any time since the Second World War.

The MoD confirmed that 28 of the decorations would be presented for acts of bravery, with most won by soldiers fighting on the front lines of southern Afghanistan and Iraq.

Among them are posthumous decorations for Sgt Craig Brelsford, Mercian, and Capt David Hicks, R Anglian, who died protecting comrades during separate contacts with Taliban fighters in Helmand province.

Servicemen also won five Conspicuous Gallantry Crosses – the military's second highest award for bravery – during a series of fierce contacts on ops last year.

Defence ministers and senior officers welcomed news of the latest awards. Defence Secretary Des Browne paid tribute to the soldiers deployed on operations who, he said, were risking their lives to help bring peace and stability. He added: "It gives me great pleasure to congratulate those honoured and thank them for their tireless service. These men and women are a credit to the Armed Forces."

"Many of them have displayed courage

beyond the call of duty and all have shown unstinting dedication.

"We owe thanks to them all and to their families."

Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, Chief of the Defence Staff, said: "The Service personnel we honour have all distinguished themselves.

"They have all earned the nation's thanks and respect and I pay tribute to their outstanding achievements in the face of most difficult and dangerous circumstances."

● Helmand heroics and Basra braves –
Pages 15-27

Dungeon destroyed

SOLDIERS have located and destroyed a chamber used by the Taliban to torture Afghans in Helmand province.

The Coldstream Guards were on patrol north of Forward Operating Base (FOB) Keenan, in the Upper Gereshk Valley, when members of the Afghan National Army alerted them to a small underground room. On closer inspection, the guardsmen discovered chains used to hang prisoners from the walls, a pair of shackles and two Afghan police uniforms.

It is believed two Afghans who defied the Taliban by joining the police force were badly beaten in the chamber, which was destroyed by the UK patrol using three phosphorus grenades.

LCpl Steve Walker, 3 Company, 1 Coldm

Gds, said: "Chains were hanging from the ceiling, broken glass was on the floor and there were bamboo sticks, which we presume were for beatings."

The mortar fire controller added: "There was definitely dried blood on the floor. I knew that sort of stuff probably goes on but you don't expect to come across it."

Based at FOB Keenan, the guards have been working to stop Taliban insurgents returning to the area after they were driven from the Upper Gereshk Valley in a massive operation last year.

The increased security has meant that locals have been returning to their homes. However, the soldiers are bracing themselves for more attacks from the Taliban as the weather improves.

IN BRIEF

● **SCOTTISH** soldiers have been praised for their quick thinking when an improvised explosive device (IED) blasted them in Iraq.

Four members of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland were supporting an operation in Basra city when they came under attack.

Although all four were injured, one seriously, their anti-IED training is thought to have saved them.

A statement posted on the battalion website read: "If it had not been for their anti-IED drills and training the outcome may have been far worse."

● **CATTERICK**-based soldiers are getting the message loud and clear now that the Army's radio station has changed frequency.

Garrison Radio listeners can now tune in to their favourite programmes on FM, following the station's move from its medium wave slot.

Col Nick Millen, commander of Catterick Garrison, said: "Garrison Radio entertains and informs and does so, not just to the military and its families, but to the wider community in which we live. The station has a real empathy with its audience and now that it is able to broadcast FM it will reach more people with more clarity."

Based at the largest Army garrison in Europe, the station will be known as 106.9 Garrison FM and will broadcast from Gaza Barracks.

● **THE future of Colchester** has been placed in the hands of the Army following the appointment of a senior officer as the chairman of its long-term vision and strategy project. Col Tony Phillips, deputy commander of Colchester Garrison, was officially appointed to the post at the Colchester 2020 biannual assembly. He said: "I am delighted and greatly honoured to have been invited to fill this prestigious position and commit to do my absolute best."

● **RESERVISTS** killed in the line of duty are to be honoured with a memorial later this year to ensure they are never forgotten. The monument, a four-foot pillar, will be created at the Reserves Training and Mobilisation Centre (RTMC) in Chilwell, the central hub for reservists' deployments.

Sixteen Territorial Army soldiers and reservists have been killed while deployed on operations since the opening of the RTMC in 1999.

A spokesman said: "It is only right that we commemorate all soldiers who mobilised through the RTMC but sadly did not return. It will be a place for the families of those killed on operations to visit and see that their loved ones haven't been forgotten."

Biting back

New dog unit prepares for operational walkies

FRONT-line soldiers will soon be able to fight with added bite following the arrival of more canine comrades in trouble hotspots such as Iraq and southern Afghanistan.

The creation of the new 103 Military Working Dogs Support Unit in Germany means personnel will have more animals alongside them carrying out vital tasks such as protecting patrols and sniffing out deadly explosives.

Commanders were confident that the new dog unit would be up and running as this issue went to press and emphasised that demand for front-line animals was on the rise.

Unit spokesman Sgt Kev Gavin, RAVC, said the canine companions had proved to be a war winning weapon in the battle against terrorists on world-wide operations.

He added: "The appearance of a dog in a place such as Afghanistan is a massive deterrent. They are now being used in forward locations in theatre. We have found that they can be used to identify the Taliban as people will often disperse when a dog is around. They have proved valuable in search ops too."

Sgt Gavin said nearly 80 new RAVC posts would be filled with the creation of the unit, based near Paderborn, which

will be reviewed after being active for two years.

The infrastructure of the German camp has been being beefed up, with the refurbishment of offices and a 40-strong kennel block.

Capt Steve Leavis, RAVC, 2iC of the sister 102 Military Working Dogs Support Unit, believed the creation of the new outfit also reflected the animals' success. He said: "Dogs are out in Iraq and Afghanistan saving lives. They are finding improvised explosive devices and weapons before they can be used against us."

"Many people have a misguided view that all we do is patrol the fences of bases in the UK, but our dog teams are now very much going forward with the teeth arms."

● Military working dogs will benefit from new standards of comfort while they are off duty with the delivery of the latest air conditioned kennels to Iraq and Afghanistan. The new canine accommodation is being delivered to theatre following the announcement of a £1.3 million deal with Dorset-based company G3 Systems.

Under the contract, nearly 20 of the kennels are being deployed to Iraq and southern Afghanistan as an Urgent Operational Requirement.

Territorial Tosca

COMMITTED Territorial Army soldiers are set to become increasingly busy over the coming months as they take over responsibility for a key Army operation.

Scores of TA soldiers have been preparing to become part of the British contingent on Op Tosca – the ongoing United Nations-backed peacekeeping force in Cyprus – as their organisation celebrates its 100th anniversary this year.

In an exclusive interview, Brig Greg Smith, Deputy Inspector General Reserve Forces, said the new responsibility showed the esteem in which the TA was held.

He told *Soldier*: "Contrary to popular belief, Cyprus is an operation. We are also contributing to capability by allowing Regular forces to be deployed elsewhere."

"My soldiers are now working hard in preparation for this and other deployments and all are looking to a mobilisation period of around ten months within the year."

Brig Smith reckoned that up to 80 TA troops would already have arrived in Cy-

prus as this issue went to press, with numbers ramped up to 250 by October.

At the same time, soldiers would continue to be mobilised for operations in Afghanistan and Iraq where they had been providing vital support.

Brig Smith added: "As I speak, we have had 15,061 reservists mobilised since 2003 and now have, at any one time, around 600 or so people in theatre."

"The last five years have been a defining moment for the TA – we have become the reserve of first choice and played an important role in current operations."

Brig Smith pointed out that the last few years had seen the largest call up of reservists in half a century. They were marking their centenary in fitting style by serving in key campaigns. He said: "This year is a celebration for all the TA, including those troops on ops. Our centenary is clearly a big event – we can look back with pride at what we have done but also look ahead to a very strong and positive future."



IN BRIEF

● A NEW target locator system will be issued to front-line troops to make finding enemy forces more effective, Defence Secretary Des Browne has announced.

The Surveillance System and Range Finder (SSARF) can establish quickly the exact location and distance of the enemy and determine the most appropriate firepower to use.

Soldiers will be able to use the handheld kit, which has thermal imaging, built-in GPS and a lazer range finder, in any weathers, day and night. It is made in Scotland.

Mr Browne said: "The ability to see and target accurately at night gives our troops on operations a boost to their capabilities. This will help deliver more effective use of firepower and save lives."

Thales UK's £30-million system is expected to enter service in 2009. An earlier version, on which SSARF is based, is currently being used on operations in Afghanistan.

● BUSINESS use insurance is no longer required for Service personnel using a private vehicle to move home on posting from one unit to another.

The business use proviso frequently prevented soldiers from claiming motor mileage allowance (MMA) when they travelled in their own cars on permanent assignment.

Widely regarded as unfair and regularly criticised by correspondents to *Soldier's* Talkback pages, the stipulation was removed after work by staff at the Upavon-based Directorate of Personnel Services (Army), who negotiated the change with the MoD.

In future it will be the responsibility of Service personnel to check with their own insurers that they are covered for social and domestic pleasure use when moving home in connection with a permanent assignment. Claims for MMA in this respect will no longer require proof of business cover insurance.

● See Page 56

● THE Army's latest batch of officer cadets have quickly taken on the military values of self-sacrifice and generosity by raising thousands of pounds for charity in the past year.

Cadets at the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst collected more than £100,000 for the Army Benevolent Fund, Hope and Homes for Children and Portesbury School, which is located near the academy and assists youngsters with physical and mental disabilities.

Maj Tracy Price-Jones, AGC, who helped administer the charity drive, said senior officers were delighted with the efforts of the cadets.

Deep impact

Volunteer medics save life of Afghan knife victim

ATERRITORIAL Army medical unit was pressed into life-or-death surgery when an Afghan boy was brought to their hospital with a knife embedded in his brain.

Soldiers based at Camp Bastion in Helmand province were instrumental in saving the life of the boy, who had been stabbed after his shopkeeper father was involved in an argument with a customer. The troops, from 208 (Liverpool) Territorial Army Field Hospital, recalled the "horrendous sight" that greeted them when they first saw the injured ten-year-old.

Senior Accident and Emergency Nurse Maj Stephen Gallacher said he had been carrying out his handover duties when the boy was flown in from Kandahar.

"When the child reached us he walked in, still conscious and talking. The knife had come in at an angle, had gone down

behind the eye and had penetrated the front of his brain – to have pulled it out would have been a disaster because you would not have known what damage was done behind it."

Surgeons from 212 Field Hospital operated before handing the patient on to the 208 Fd Hosp medics, who took charge of his care and recovery.

Maj Gallacher recalled: "I just did not think he would survive, but he was soon off life support and was up and about within days.

The TA medics were recently praised for their work in Helmand province after being presented with their campaign medals by Brig Tom O'Brien, Deputy Commander Theatre Troops.

Maj Gallacher said: "The tempo of operations increased dramatically while we were there and as a result the workload for us increased dramatically."

IN BRIEF

● **TROOPS** extending their military service are set to pocket more cash after changes to the Commitment Bonus system were announced.

The maximum windfall, which is paid as an incentive to stay in the Army, will treble to £15,000 in a bid to encourage troops to remain in uniform for longer. Soldiers, but not officers, can claim the bonus after four or eight years of service. The increases are expected to cost the Government around £80 million.

● **THE** Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Richard Dannatt, is lending his support to honour a black nurse who overcame discrimination to treat British soldiers more than 100 years ago.

Mary Seacole was a heroine of the Crimean War and was much admired by soldiers for her skill in military nursing. When the war broke out in 1854 she tried to enlist as a nurse, but despite her considerable experience she was turned away because of her colour. With a strong desire to help, she travelled independently to the Crimea and established a nursing station for British troops.

To make a donation to the Mary Seacole Memorial Statue Appeal visit www.maryseacoleappeal.org.uk

● **A** FAR-reaching review into the role of Reserve Forces across all three Services gets under way this month. The initiative will look at issues including how to capitalise on TA soldiers' civilian skills and how often they should be used in stabilisation tasks.

● **SOLDIERS** are being urged to follow in the footsteps of Wilfred Owen and publish their verse for charity. Poet in the City is hoping to put together an anthology of poetry written by Army personnel and is appealing for troops to contribute their own work to the project.

To enter, send an email enclosing full contact details and a sample of poetry to either DGMC-DEF PR ArmyGroup or DGMC-DEFPRArmyGroup@mod.uk with the heading Poet in the City.

● **SERVING** soldiers, their families and veterans are being given the opportunity to tell the Government how it can better improve levels of support on key issues such as accommodation and medical care. The move follows the announcement of a Service Personnel Command Paper by Defence Secretary Des Browne, which is set to be published later this year. Anyone can respond online via the MoD website or in writing to MoD Main Building, 7th Floor, Zone M, Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB. Mark your envelope Service Personnel Command Paper. Closing date is the end of May.

Force for good

Signallers hit long and winding road for charity

AN adventurous trio of bikers from the Royal Signals is embarking on a mission across Europe in a bid to raise cash for two high-profile Armed Forces charities.

Maj Craig Sutherland, WO2 Dinger Bell and Sgt Yogi Welch are leaving on their 4,000-mile ride later this month and are aiming to visit every major and minor unit in their corps on the way.

They are hoping to collect more than £20,000 from the marathon Corps Tour, which is due to finish in Blandford, with the cash going to the Army Benevolent Fund and Help for Heroes.

The three riders, all from York-based 2 Signal Regiment, have already attracted high-profile backing for their European road trip.

Actor Charley Boorman, famous for his TV adventures with *Star Wars* star Ewan McGregor, is one of the patrons of the ride, along with Brig Ted Flint, the Army's Signal Officer-in-Chief.

Speaking to *Soldier* as the team made their final preparations for the ride, Maj Sutherland, 2iC of 2 Signal Regiment, said that £10,000 had already been raised from activities and donations.

He added: "Some of the soldiers from my unit, who are serving in 214 Signal

Squadron, recently raised £3,000 from a 24-hour static triathlon in York.

"In addition, we have been absolutely staggered by the generosity shown in terms of help and equipment.

"We have even received donations from groups overseas, including one from the Australian Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club."

Sgt Yogi Welch added that he and the others were looking forward to the forthcoming adventure, which promised to be the trip of a lifetime for the keen motor-cycle enthusiasts.

He said the Corps Tour team, which includes crewmen Cpl Dan Carter and Sig Ben Scaife, who will provide 24-hour support to the riders, was delighted with the steadfast backing by *Long Way Down* star Charley Boorman.

Sgt Welch added: "He has been so on side throughout and was very excited about what we have been planning to do from an early stage. It's great to have that support.

"I've done a lot of charity work each year, but having recently come back from Kabul I felt it was important to be able to raise money for soldiers."

● **Hell's angel** – Pages 52-53

Colchester chicks

MILITARY detainees in Colchester are providing a new lease of life to battered birds sat on death row.

The Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC) has provided refuge for 150 chickens rescued by the Battery Hen Welfare Trust. The glasshouse's farm was already home to a number of animals rescued by the RSPCA, including rabbits, guinea pigs and birds.

Maj Tony Booth, the MCTC senior education officer, explained that the farm gives the centre's Service personnel responsibility and provides experience for those soon to join the civilian workforce.

Maj Booth added: "The aim is to prepare the detainees for employment as many of those at the MCTC will be discharged once they leave.

"The single biggest factor for re-offending is a lack of employment and we're trying to reduce that as much as possible. All the guys working in the farm are trusted and have worked their way up the system."

The MCTC farm was chosen as it already breeds pigs for Jimmy's Farm – which found fame thanks to the BBC 2 reality television



programme of the same name – in Suffolk.

Soldier under sentence Nathan Watts, pictured above left, wanted to work with the animals as he has a gamekeeping background. He said: "I love working outdoors. This is one of the reasons I joined the Army in the first place, so it's definitely a bonus having the farm here."



Picture: Steve Dock

Idzi's back on song

Reality star warms up for his second assault on hit television talent show

X-FACTOR hopeful Tpr Ryan Idzi has vowed to return to the ITV talent show ranks after making an appearance with his fledgling regimental choir.

In an exclusive interview, the 23-year-old member of 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards (pictured above, centre) told *Soldier* he would be back on prime time telly when his military life was less hectic.

But he admitted that he was pleased to be singing with the regimental choir, which recently delighted crowds with a special performance at their base in Germany. The soldiers were in fine voice as they delivered powerful renditions of classic Welsh songs including *Men of Harlech* and the national anthem, *Land of My Fathers*.

Tpr Idzi said: "I'm definitely planning to be back on *X-Factor* next year. Being on the show in 2007 was certainly an experience and I learned a lot from it.

"I made some awesome mates too and I am still getting used to people recognising me from the show. When I go down town I'm always being asked to do karaoke."

The soldier, who is based at Dempsey Barracks in Sennelager as part of 20th Armoured Brigade, added that the choir had given him the opportunity to try new musical styles.

He said: "I find it quite demanding to be honest as it's a difficult type of singing to do, especially as I refused to learn Welsh at school.

"But signing up for the choir has helped me as well. It is definitely very enjoyable and keeps my vocal chords all warmed up. Along with a friend of mine I have also been over in Essex recording some songs, which has been fun."

As previously reported in *Soldier*, Tpr

Idzi, who is originally from Cardiff, proved one of the favourites with bookies to win the *X-Factor*. But having initially wowed the judges with his vocal performance, he failed to make it through the show's second stage.

He was the second soldier to go for glory in the ITV show. In 2006 LCpl Kevin Wilkins, from the 5th Battalion, The Rifles, tried but was unsuccessful at his audition.

Band calls for team spirit

CHART-topping Army musicians have been nominated for a top music prize – and they need your help.

Following the success of their album *Spirit of the Glen*, the Pipes and Drums of The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards have been shortlisted for the Classical Album of the Year Award at the Classical Brits.

Although competition is fierce, with the likes of The Choirboys and Hayley Westenra in the running, the number of online votes an album receives from the public will determine the winner.

Spirit of the Glen, a collection of popular songs reworked by the bagpipes of the Scots DG, reached the number one spot in

the classical charts where it stayed for eight weeks and also achieved the 13th slot in the mainstream charts.

It is thought to be the first time a military band has been nominated for such a prestigious national award.

Hosted by TV presenter Myleene Klass, the Classical Brit Awards will take place at the Royal Albert Hall on May 8 and will be televised on ITV on May 11.

To give the band – who signed a record deal with Universal Music, home to artists from Eminem to U2, last year and have got a 68-date tour of the US booked – your backing log onto www.classicalbrits.co.uk/voting. Voting closes at midnight on April 11.

Three simple steps to save up to £1,195* on your childcare



Childcare vouchers - it's as easy as 1,2,3

Dear Parent,

We know that juggling work and home life can be difficult - there simply doesn't seem to be enough time to get everything done! Everyone needs a little help now and then and we, at Sodexho Pass, can do a small part in helping you ease the financial burden of childcare. The benefits of childcare vouchers are very real - up to **£1,195** in tax savings or **£2,390** if your partner also takes vouchers - so sit back and let us explain a little about our childcare voucher scheme.

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Helmand heroics

**Op Herrick's roll-call of courage
revealed in operational honours »**

**Reporting: Cliff Caswell
Pictures: Cpl Jon Bevan RLC
and Steve Dock**



Mercian might

A FEROCIOUS engagement with heavily-armed Taliban fighters prompted a heroic reaction from soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, The Mercian Regiment.

During the firefight last year, platoon commander Capt Simon Cupples – then a lieutenant – led a team to recover British casualties and managed to save the lives of four soldiers. His actions have been rewarded with a Conspicuous Gallantry Cross – one of the military's highest awards for bravery.

As the officer moved to rescue the injured, one of his soldiers, 25-year-old acting Sgt Craig Brelsford, placed himself between the Taliban fighters and the rescue party, fighting on despite being mortally wounded. He was awarded a posthumous Military Cross. Pte Johan Botha was also killed during the contact.

Pte Luke Cole – a Territorial Army volunteer who refused morphine and kept fighting after his leg was smashed by enemy fire – and Cpl Michael Lockett, who braved a hail of bullets to rescue the



● Sgt Craig Brelsford



● Capt Simon Cupples

injured, also received Military Crosses for their conduct. The action, which took place on September 7-8 last year, was part of an operation, codenamed Palk Pechtaw, to disrupt enemy activity around the town of Garmsir, Helmand province.

Capt Cupples's section had been caught in open ground by intense and accurate Taliban fire, and several injured soldiers found themselves at the mercy of the incoming rounds.

Undeterred, the officer rallied his soldiers to rescue the men, with Sgt Brelsford

among those providing covering fire so that the extraction could take place.

Sgt Brelsford's citation read: "While providing inspiration and encouragement to frightened young soldiers, he was critically injured but continued to command his men."

"Only once he was in the safety of a Viking armoured vehicle did he stop and sadly succumbed to his injuries a short time later. Brelsford displayed leadership, professional skill and courage of the very highest order."

Capt Cupples was praised for his persistence in leading his team back into the area where the injured troops were stranded and for extracting all four personnel under withering fire. The officer paid tribute to Sgt Brelsford as a highly professional and respected soldier.

"Throughout the whole tour he time and time again demonstrated calm and considered leadership under pressure and incredible bravery in the face of the enemy," Capt Cupples recalled. "The night he died was no exception to this."

● A MILITARY Cross winner has recalled the terrifying moment he was caught in a "textbook ambush" by Taliban fighters.

Cpl Michael Lockett, 2 Mercian, said several members of his section had been left exposed under a hail of bullets and grenades as enemy fighters closed in for the kill. In an interview with *Soldier*, Cpl Lockett said he had been on Op Palk Pechtaw in Afghanistan's Helmand province when the troops came under a sustained attack.

He recalled: "It all happened so quickly. We found ourselves the target of a textbook ambush by the Taliban and were right in the middle of the killing zone."

"We suffered several casualties and went to locate the injured and extract them. Pte Luke Cole [see facing page] had been shot

twice, through the leg and through the stomach."

Cpl Lockett's citation read: "Lockett is awarded for his leadership, command, control and supreme courage when his forward section sustained serious casualties."

"He dashed into the killing area and assessed the situation, then, as a member of a five-man extraction party, selflessly moved forward three times under heavy and sustained fire to extract seriously wounded soldiers."



● Cpl Lockett

● A DECORATED former commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment has been awarded the OBE for outstanding leadership in southern Afghanistan.

Col Richard Westley, late of The Mercian Regiment, was responsible for security in the commercial and economic heartland of Helmand province and the Upper Gereshk Valley.

Col Westley, who already holds the Military Cross, was described as "a tough and fearless combat soldier".

His citation added: "His courage, vision and tactical acumen left an indelible legacy of security in Gereshk and trust among the local Afghans."

● IN his civvy street job he is a forklift truck driver, but on ops in Afghanistan Military Cross winner Pte Luke Cole was every bit the professional infantryman.



● Pte Luke Cole

During a lengthy contact with the Taliban last September, the 22-year-old member of the 4th Battalion, The Mercian Regiment showed his courage and commitment when he defended his Regular comrades from a lethal barrage of enemy fire.

Despite being shot in the leg and stomach during an ambush, he helped to treat injured colleagues and kept talking to his commanders, refusing pain-killing drugs.

"Having been hit by a burst of enemy fire that broke his leg, Cole selflessly crawled over open ground to administer first aid to his wounded comrades and suppressed the enemy with his personal weapon to protect them for over two hours," his citation read.

"He was shot again but refused morphine and continued to manoeuvre out of the killing zone and communicate with his commander – Cole is rewarded for his remarkable gallantry."

Lt Col Ivan Yardley, CO of 4 Mercian, said Pte Cole had shown "the ability of the Territorial soldier" alongside Regular 2nd Battalion comrades. He added: "I have known Luke for a number of years and he has always struck me as a calm, intelligent, professional soldier who enjoyed the excitement of being in the TA."

"To hear what he did that night in Helmand makes all members of 4 Mercian very proud to know him and we would like to congratulate him and all members of 2 Mercian on what was a difficult and challenging operational tour."

"As the TA celebrates its 100th anniversary, it is poignant to think of all the members who have served in previous wars and conflicts around the world."

Pte Cole is only the third TA recipient of the MC in more than a decade.

● ONE of the latest recipients of the Conspicuous Gallantry Cross has spoken of his surprise at receiving the military's second highest award for bravery.

Pte Paul Willmott of 2 Mercian was left speechless after being selected for the coveted medal – awarded for his supreme courage under heavy fire in southern Afghanistan.

Pte Willmott caught the attention of his superiors after he was forced to take command when his section leader was killed in the Upper Gereshk Valley during a firefight with 40 Taliban gunmen on June 6 last year.

Forced to attempt first aid under Taliban fire, he managed to pull the dead soldier back to cover.

Pte Willmott's time on the Op Herrick

● SOLDIERS from 2 Mercian have been awarded Military Crosses for their part in operations to smash Taliban strongholds in southern Afghanistan.

Pte Aaron Holmes and WO1 Gavin Kimberlin served with distinction as their battalion forged a reputation for professionalism and courage.

Pte Holmes was praised for his actions during two contacts with the enemy on July 8 and 12 in the Green Zone and Upper Gereshk Valley area.

During the first, he had been on sentry duty protecting his company's defensive position when he opened fire on Taliban advancing under cover of the hedgerows, killing three gunmen and alerting his battalion comrades.

In the second, he moved to draw fire away from a seriously injured comrade, who was successfully evacuated, and braved 15 minutes of heavy rifle and RPG fire. His citation said: "Holmes's performance was significantly above that of a private soldier."

"He personally killed a large number of the enemy and his courage and selfless actions maintained the initiative and supported his comrades."

WO1 Kimberlin's citation recalled his "unswerving and sustained courage"

front line was cut short two months later when he was hit by shrapnel from an RPG and withdrawn to Camp Bastion. His citation paid tribute to his "extreme devotion to duty and his comrades".

Of his award, Pte Willmott told *Soldier*: "I'm speechless but also overwhelmed and happy to have been chosen from my regiment. I believe we achieved a lot in Helmand – we gained a lot of ground, took out a lot of the enemy, helped the Afghan Army and improved things for local people."



● Pte Paul Willmott



● WO1 Kimberlin



● Pte Aaron Holmes

while he was attached to the Czech Special Operations Group in Helmand.

As a liaison officer, he was commended for his role in Op Leg Tufaan, which took place from July 6-24 and struck at the heart of enemy territory.

He was frequently involved in the thick of the action, raiding compounds and striking at "Taliban-infested positions".

WO1 Kimberlin was also commended for his part in a raid on an enemy-held village in the Upper Gereshk Valley, during which he helped evacuate a casualty under fierce fire.

His citation read: "Kimberlin's unswerving and sustained courage throughout his attachment to the Special Operations Group was an inspiration, not only to the SOG but to the entire battle-group; stories of his bravery are legion."



● Brig John Lorimer



● Lt Col Stuart Carver

● **COURAGEOUS** senior officers who kept cool heads and clear minds during fierce fighting in Afghanistan have been recognised with the Distinguished Service Order.

Brig John Lorimer, Commander of 12 Mechanized Brigade, and Lt Col Stuart Carver, CO of 1 R Anglian, were singled out for their leadership in the battle against a cunning and determined enemy. Both officers were responsible for directing their soldiers during a period of daily contacts with Taliban forces on the Op Herrick 6 tour last summer.

Brig Lorimer told reporters he was "absolutely delighted" to receive the recognition for his contribution, but was quick to praise his soldiers. He said: "Irrespective of rank or cap badge or experience, their humility, compassion and courage were extraordinary and they were a real honour to command."

Brig Lorimer was praised for his "inspiring leadership" in tough conditions. His citation added: "Despite suffering significant casualties, the force measurably improved the security situation."

Lt Col Carver was among the commanders involved in tackling the enemy and was also praised for his "exemplary leadership". The CO's citation read: "Despite the loss of several soldiers in combat, they never relented from their desire to fight the Taliban. He initiated reconstruction and development projects to show local Afghans that the battle-group was a force for good and the feeling of hope and optimism was overwhelming."

In an interview with *Soldier* last summer, Lt Col Carver said: "It's a tough environment because of the heat, casualties, limited contact with home and the pressure of never knowing where the next attack will be. But you can take things into your own hands and it's all still to play for."

THEY were welcomed home with applause and parades after winning the hearts and minds of their home communities during a tough tour of southern Afghanistan.

And now the bravery of the soldiers of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment, and their contribution to stabilising Helmand province, has been rewarded with a cluster of gallantry awards.

Among them, LCpl Levi Ashby and Maj Michael Aston received the Military Cross for separate contacts with Taliban fighters in the searing heat of last summer.

Section leader LCpl Ashby had been helping to clear a village in the Upper Sangin Valley – the scene of fierce fighting – on June 30 when he and his men were ambushed by the enemy.

During a harrowing close-quarter battle, he helped save several lives by protecting seriously injured soldiers and manning an exposed machine-gun position to cover an evacuation. LCpl Ashby's citation said: "The actions of this relatively junior NCO, who took on huge responsibility without hesitation and who displayed remarkable bravery over a six-month period, is deserving of official recognition of the highest order."

Maj Aston was awarded his MC for a series of encounters with the Taliban, which



● Maj Michael Aston



● LCpl Levi Ashby

included an intense firefight with enemy fighters north of Gareshk on Op Silicon in April. Engaged by rifle, RPG and mortar fire, the officer led his 200-strong force of soldiers in what was described as "the most intense close-combat fighting the British Army has seen for some years".

Despite the presence of air support, troops were often forced to clear enemy compounds with fixed bayonets.

In a separate incident in early June, Maj Aston was commended for braving enemy fire to rescue a wounded top-cover sentry from the turret of his Viking vehicle.

His citation added: "These are just two of the many examples of his impressive leadership during his command of B Company on operations."

"A talented officer, he led his men from the front with drive and determination."

● **A PROFESSIONAL** and dedicated infantry officer who directed his soldiers despite being mortally wounded has been recognised for his "inspirational example".

Capt David Hicks, 1 R Anglian, was shot during a attack on his patrol base near Sangin in Afghanistan's Helmand province but refused morphine and continued to play his part in repelling the Taliban fighters. He was evacuated to Camp Bastion after the battle but died from his injuries.

The 26-year-old, who was the 2iC of C Company, has been awarded a posthumous Military Cross for his actions in the fight and a series of other contacts with the Taliban.

His citation revealed: "As a relatively junior officer Capt Hicks demonstrated leadership, courage and tactical skill of the highest level and way beyond that expected. He repeatedly led the fight against a determined enemy, putting himself in the centre of the action – he is honoured for his dedication to duty and inspirational example."

Friends and colleagues of Capt Hicks were quick to pay tribute to the way the young officer had led from the front during the contact on August 11 last year.

Lt Col Stuart Carver, CO of 1 R Anglian, said: "It

is typical of Capt Hicks that he led from the forward position during the attack on his company in order to best direct the battle and provide an inspiring example to his men. Highly professional and with a genuine concern for his soldiers, he commanded genuine respect from all those he served with."

And Pte Benjamin Emmett, who served under Capt Hicks, recalled: "He was a very hard-working and understanding second-in-command – a caring man."

"Capt Hicks was always willing to give advice and would never put you down."



● Capt David Hicks

HELMAND HEROICS

● **TALIBAN** fighters quickly learned to respect soldiers from The Royal Anglian Regiment after being dealt a series of hammer blows by them in southern Afghanistan's Helmand province.

Troops from the 1st Battalion hit back hard during every engagement with the ruthless enemy and their courage proved decisive in the progression of the Op Herrick mission.

Cpl Robert Moore and LCpl Oliver Ruecker played key roles in separate contacts during their tour in theatre and their bravery has been recognised with the Military Cross.

LCpl Ruecker had been on a Viking armoured vehicle patrol on May 17 when it was ambushed on the outskirts of Sangin.

The NCO's Viking was hit by an RPG round – which set the vehicle on fire and seriously injured the top-cover sentry – before the Taliban fighters closed in for the kill.



● Cpl Robert Moore



● LCpl Oliver Ruecker

LCpl Ruecker killed an enemy fighter about to engage fellow troops before fighting his way through the blaze and a barrage of enemy bullets to rescue an injured comrade.

Seconds after he emerged from the stricken Viking it exploded. His citation said: "Already veterans of over 30 engagements, members of the patrol described the rate of enemy fire as the most intense they had ever experienced."

Cpl Moore had been on an operation to clear the Taliban from the town of Nowzad on April 13 when he was wounded in the right arm during a ferocious gun battle with the enemy.

Having seized a light machine gun from a fallen comrade, he laid down fire on the Taliban, taking down three enemy fighters.

He refused morphine and, despite bleeding heavily from his injury, organised the extraction of a seriously wounded colleague.

Cpl Moore's citation read: "Ultimately his aggressive leadership defeated the primary Taliban offensive move during the engagement, ensuring that the initial position of disadvantage was turned rapidly into a major British tactical success."

"Moore's selfless demonstration of courage, not to mention humour in adversity, had a tangible positive effect on the soldiers under his command."

● A MUCH-respected officer who was featured on the front cover of *Soldier* last September has admitted feeling "humbled" after being decorated with a Military Cross.

Maj Dom Biddick of 1 R Anglian received the award for "repeatedly demonstrating his tactical ability and exceptional leadership skills" during the battalion's high-intensity tour of Afghanistan.

His citation stated: "Fearless in combat, his contribution to the increasing security in his area of operations, and the winning of consent from its population, were equally as impressive as his performance under fire."

In an interview, Maj Biddick said he was humbled and honoured to have been put forward. "As a professional soldier and commander you want to be tested and on a few long days in Helmand province we found our limits."

"As a company commander, you had a massive amount of responsibility and yet freedom of action."

"We were working in such dispersed roles with a lot of trust bestowed on us by our commanding officers."

"The hardest decisions were how far to push the operation, how much risk to take, balancing the risk that was necessary to take the operation forward and defeat the Taliban against the protective instinct with regard to one's men."



● Maj Dom Biddick

Maj Biddick said he respected the enemy fighters, who had been motivated, cunning and often tactically competent in battle.

Maj Biddick recalled: "The Taliban that we fought against represented a number of different groups, with different levels of professionalism and capability. But generally speaking they were tenacious, and they were competent in the ground of their choosing at a time of their choosing – a very wily adversary."

Maj Biddick said the tour had been tough and the loss of Pte Chris Gray and Cpl Darren Bonner from his company had been a particularly bitter pill. But he added: "I think the success that the Anglians have had, particularly in the town of Sangin, means the sacrifices have not been in vain. We've left a tangible legacy and we hope that the battle-groups following us will continue to take that forward."

● A COMMITTED officer with the Grenadier Guards has been awarded the Military Cross for leading Afghan National Army troops by example.

Maj Martin David personally kicked down the doors of several Taliban

strongholds and directed fire against the enemy during a major multinational action in the Upper Gereshk Valley, Helmand province, on July 7.

An operational mentor and liaison team commander with the 1st Kandak, Afghan National Army, he braved intense fire to inspire those under his command to take the initiative. Even when attacks against enemy compounds seemed destined to fail, Maj David kept up the pressure, accounting for several Taliban fighters.

Maj David's citation read: "His courage was infectious and his leadership inspiring; he encouraged, cajoled and inspired the Kandak to ever greater feats of military prowess."

"Time and time again he led the Afghan soldiers against well prepared positions and an enemy so committed that he refused to surrender," the citation added.



● Maj Martin David

Viking valour



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● A GRENADE machine gunner who ignored his pain and went on firing his weapon despite bleeding from a chest wound has been praised for his “inspirational example”.



● Fus Damion Hields

Fus Damion

Hields of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Welsh, was praised for his attack on the Taliban during an ambush in southern Afghanistan on June 3 last year.

His unflinching dedication to duty in the face of intense enemy rifle and RPG fire, earned him the Military Cross. Despite the bullet wound, he volunteered to return to duty as soon as he could.

The citation revealed how Fus Hields had been manning his GMG on a Land Rover during a 17-vehicle road move from Urzgan province to Kandahar airfield.

When the convoy came under attack he returned fire on Taliban positions, clambering to his feet after being shot in the chest and continuing to fight back until he collapsed from loss of blood.

His citation said: “His inspirational example of fighting spirit, determination, selflessness and courage undoubtedly played a part in allowing the patrol to snatch the initiative from the enemy and extract from the killing area.

“Without his inspirational example, it is highly likely that lives would have been lost and the outcome of the engagement would probably have been very different.”

● THE accurate use of mortar fire in the hands of a brave and gifted gunner proved a battle-winning combination during two intense contacts in Afghanistan.

LBdr Michael Frew, Royal Artillery, used his experience as a signaller in a fire support team to deadly effect against the Taliban, risking his life to lay down accurate salvos. His courage and skill in combat, which accounted for the elimination of several enemy fighters, was rewarded with the Military Cross.

In the first contact, on April 13 last year, LBdr Frew was supporting an Estonian armoured infantry company when they came under attack from the Taliban during a five-hour patrol. Despite being exposed

Daring deeds

A SAPPER who braved enemy fire so that an armoured attack in enemy territory could advance has been awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Cross.

Cpl Donald Campbell, RE, did not hesitate under “very intense and accurate fire”, driving an unprotected plant vehicle to lay fascines across an irrigation ditch.

In “an incredible act of premeditated bravery”, he completed his task, enabling an armoured advance to continue.

Cpl Campbell told reporters: “I was attached to the Infantry Assault Unit and was called forward to bridge a ditch, all the time under fire. I had to get out, undo the straps on my bucket, then get the pipes to lay across the ditch to allow the infantry through.” His citation read: “He intentionally drove a piece of large plant machinery into a Taliban killing zone.”



● Cpl Donald Campbell

on open ground, he took out three enemy combatants with his light machine gun before calling in mortars to smash the rest. LBdr Frew regularly put himself in the line of fire to make sure the strikes were accurate and his actions freed up colleagues to call in air support.

He was back in the thick of it with the Estonians during Op Chakush on July 26, when his company was ordered to seize a bridge across a canal near the settlement of



● LBdr Michael Frew

● A GUNNER charged over open ground to collect vital ammunition and prevent his comrades being overrun.

Bdr Paul Greenwood, RA, was pinned down in an irrigation ditch with his fire support team by Taliban fighters after they were abandoned by Afghan National Army counterparts. Disregarding his own safety, he ran a gauntlet of Taliban RPG and rifle fire to get more vital ammo up to his forward position.

Bdr Greenwood’s death-defying resupply runs – as well as his earlier exemplary conduct on Op Leg Tufaan and Op Chakush in Helmand province – earned him the Military Cross.

The extra rounds he provided bought enough time for air support from F-16s, Harriers and Apache helicopters to pound the advancing Taliban. The attack against Bdr Greenwood, his commander and the Afghan Army soldiers was so ferocious that the jets and choppers were forced to expend all their ordnance to suppress it.

His citation read: “Although exposed under intense fire, Greenwood distinguished himself by conducting innumerable fire missions at close distances to protect friendly forces and destroy the enemy.

His courage was infectious and leadership inspiring throughout the operation.”



● Bdr Paul Greenwood

Hyderabad. Faced with a heavily defended trench and bunker system, he closed in to engage the Taliban at ranges of just a few metres before calling in air support.

He sprinted to help Estonian troops engaged in a separate contact, attacking the enemy with his light machine gun and calling in mortar fire, which enabled friendly forces to secure the bridge.

LBdr Frew’s citation said: “He has consistently demonstrated enormous courage and a level of leadership and influence far in excess of his rank and experience. His extraordinary bravery, application of firepower and tenacity to succeed in the face of perilous danger has been a remarkable example.”



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Basra braves

Heroes of Op Telic honoured »

Reporting: Cliff Caswell
Pictures: Steve Dock



● A BOMB disposal expert who removed his protective suit to approach a suspect device demonstrated “the highest tradition of valour in the British Army”.

WO2 James Wadsworth, RLC, managed to remove the detonator of the shaped charge, which had been planted outside a hospital in Basra. He succeeded just as the terrorist attempted to blow up the bomb.

WO2 Wadsworth’s bravery on the evening of July 25 not only saved scores on lives, it also preserved a complex bomb, which was removed for forensic investigation. His bravery was rewarded with the Conspicuous Gallantry Cross.

The citation revealed how he had taken off his suit to reach more easily the device, which had been disguised to look like a builder’s stone block.

Throwing smoke grenades to cover his advance, he diffused the bomb by hand. As he completed his work, a light flashed on the device, indicating that the terrorist observer was trying to detonate it.

Forensic analysis revealed that it was one of the largest improvised explosive devices (IEDs) recovered in southern Iraq.

The senior NCO was also praised for a separate incident the previous night, when terrorists opened fire on him as he attempted to clear a bomb from a main supply route. Responding with “immaculate calmness” despite the incoming RPG and rifle rounds, he cleared the IED using explosives, opening up the road in less than 40 minutes.

WO2 Wadsworth’s citation said: “His action on consecutive nights in Basra was nothing short of remarkable. Not only did he deny the terrorists an opportunity, but he provided the intelligence community with a device of a design capable of defeating the range of Multi-National Force armoured vehicles. There is no doubt, such selflessness and extraordinary courage, which is in the highest traditions of the British Army, must be formally recognised.”



● WO2 Wadsworth

A JUNIOR officer whose soldiers fought a lengthy battle against 200 insurgents while still in their sports kit has recalled how the fight was “like being in a movie”.

Throwing on body armour over their gym clothes, troops under Lt Rupert Lane – then a second lieutenant – fought a life-or-death defence of Basra’s vulnerable Joint Provincial Coordination Centre (JPCC).

Heavily outnumbered, his 24 soldiers repelled a large attacking force from the Jaysh-al-Mehdi militia, which was desperate to avenge the death of their commander in an action that had taken place a few hours earlier.

But the officer from the 4th Battalion, The Rifles kept a clear head and led the fight against the enemy gunmen from the building’s rooftop sangars.

His leadership helped save the outpost and earned him the Military Cross.

Lt Lane described the night battle on May 25 last year, during which his troops fired nearly 10,000 rounds of ammunition in four hours, as “pretty wild”.

He said: “It seems almost like a cinematic experience now – like we were in some kind of movie.

“There had never been an attack like it in that location before and it was the most coordinated attack the militia had managed. For the guys it was awesome.

“At a very basic level, fighting is what they joined the Army for and to have that experience is absolutely unrivalled.”

Miraculously, no British troops were seriously injured during the ferocious exchange, during which the militia gunmen advanced within 150 metres of the building.

“My biggest concern was taking a serious casualty,” said Lt Lane. “We took a couple of minor ones and quite frankly it was amazing we didn’t take more.

“One of the guys was shot in the back and the bullet lodged in his body armour. In addition we only had so much ammunition and there were a lot more of them than there were of us.

“The guys did superbly to hold their own and defeat the enemy.”

Lt Lane’s final action in the battle was to call in air strikes from Tornado fast jets and Predator unmanned drones, which broke the enemy’s will in the nick of time. The



● Lt Rupert Lane



● Rfn Mark Lunn

gunmen were preparing for a mass attack when the aircraft arrived.

The officer’s citation paid tribute to his role in the defence of the isolated outpost, which was vital to the Op Telic mission at that time. The tribute added: “Lt Lane showed raw courage, inspiring leadership and exceptional determination.

“His actions deserve public recognition of the very highest order.”

● A JUNIOR rifleman with just five months’ experience won his battalion’s second Military Cross of the night during the frenetic defence of Basra’s Joint Provincial Coordination Centre.

Rfn Mark Lunn, 4 Rifles, was credited with destroying seven enemy positions with his light machine gun and providing comrades with valuable information about the oncoming enemy.

Despite being wounded later in the battle, he returned to the fight and delivered supplies to soldiers in the sangars as they battled with the insurgents.

The contact was so fierce that supplies of gun oil quickly ran out and the defenders used cooking oil from their kitchen stores to keep their weapons lubricated.

Rfn Lunn went on to attack the enemy with the same ferocity as before, contributing to the militia’s defeat and the saving of the small city outpost.

His citation said: “Throughout the battle, but particularly in view of his injury, he showed remarkable fighting spirit, courage and devotion to duty.

“This determination and conspicuous bravery in such threatening conditions is all the more remarkable given that Rfn Lunn had only served with his platoon for five months and that this was their first contact.”

● A COMMANDER at one of Basra's most dangerous locations has been rewarded for his exemplary conduct during a three-month battle with terrorists.

Lt Col Robert Fram, of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, led a 70-strong team at the JPCC, which had become a focus of attack.

An Iraqi police base, the compound was assaulted more than 100 times, with incoming mortars and RPG fire frequently scoring direct hits on the building.

But Lt Col Fram's inspiring command, during which he led with bravery and determination, earned him the Military Cross. His citation revealed: "In order to survive, Lt Col Fram had to live on his wits. It was a lonely and demanding command and, in the event of a large-scale attack, he knew that immediate relief from other UK forces would be impossible.

"His second-in-command, Maj Paul Harding, was killed by mortar fire, but despite the loss of a trusted friend and adviser, he did not flinch in his task. Lt Col Fram was under constant and enormous stress and danger but not once did he buckle or sway – his exemplary conduct in leading the defence of the JPCC is worthy of the highest public recognition," the citation concluded.

● A NEWLY decorated officer who commanded high-risk strike ops in Basra last year has praised his soldiers for showing the British Army at its best.

Maj Ian Crowley, of the 1st Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment, said he would wear his Military Cross with pride and as a symbol of his troops' bravery and commitment.

Maj Crowley was rewarded for his seven-month contribution to operations in southern Iraq, during which he commanded the brigade strike company in nearly 50 actions.

He admitted that he was "surprised and absolutely delighted" to be awarded the MC, adding that it had been a pleasure to work with such professional comrades.

Maj Crowley said: "It's very difficult for the private soldiers, particularly going into a house and not knowing what is behind

the door and being able to deal with whatever is there.

"We did a total of 47 strike operations in Basra and were engaged frequently, but we were highly successful and I managed to bring out all my soldiers."

Maj Crowley's citation paid tribute to his exceptional contribution to the progress made during Op Telic 9.

The document added: "He consistently displayed outstanding leadership and gallantry of the highest order under the most challenging conditions.

"His determination, courage and personal example have inspired a strike company that has surpassed all records for the number of strikes in a six-month operational tour."



● Maj Ian Crowley



IRAQ

MBE: Maj J B W Hollister, Lancs; Maj J A Stevens, Rifles; Maj T J Wood, RE.

DSO: Brig T P Evans, late LI; Lt Col J C W Maciejewski, Rifles.

CGC: Sgt A W Miller, REME; SSgt J A Wadsworth, RLC;

MC: Maj I G Crowley, Yorks; Lt Col R C Fram, REME; CSgt S Kincaid, Para; 2nd Lt R G S Lane, Rifles; CSgt M A Langridge, Para; Rfn M D Lunn, Rifles; Sgt M C O'Brien, Para; Cpl R T Pask, R Welsh; WO2 R A Poulter, Rifles; Maj S N Webb, R Welsh.

BAR TO QGM: Capt E C Heakin QGM, RLC; Capt V M Strafford QGM, RLC.

QGM: WO2 B J Campbell, IG; LSgt K W Tomlinson, IG.

MID: Cpl S C Arthur, Yorks; Cpl R S C Ball, REME; Rfn B Campbell, Rifles; Pte B J Chamberlain, R Welsh; Maj P R Driver, Lancs; Capt D G E Evans, R Welsh; Rfn A C Gormley, Rifles; LCpl D S Gregory, R Welsh; Maj P H G Harding (killed in action), Rifles; Lt Q J M Hicks, KRH; Cpl S W McLeod, Scots; Pte L M Main, RAMC; Capt R E D Moger, R Welsh; Maj Q W M Naylor, Rifles; Tpr E N Payne, KRH; Cpl K L Peters, R Welsh; CSgt S T Pullin, Para; WO2 L R Roberts, Rifles; Lt C A San Jose, Rifles; Sgt P Skelton, Lancs; Capt E A Smith, Rifles; Cpl R L Wilson (killed in action), Rifles.

QCB: Bdr D N Ball, RA; Cpl N A Close, RE; Sgt P J Edge, RA; A/WO1 A W Little, RLC; Sjt R T W Taylor, Rifles.

QCVS: Lt Col B W Bennett, RA; Capt D C Blackmore, Int Corps; Lt Col N S Chapman, Mercian; Rev T A R Cole, RACHD; Rfn H Geali, Rifles; Maj C J T Job, Lancs; Capt B Joyce, Int Corps.

NORTHERN IRELAND

OBE: Col P I Brown, late REME.

MBE: Maj J M Cowan, R Irish.

QCB: WO1 S A W Wilkinson, RLC.

QCVS: SSgt C K Baxter, RLC; WO2 P R J Dargavel, Scots; WO1 C B Davis, RE; Capt I S Parrott, Mercian; Brig M L Riddell-Webster DSO, late BW; Capt D Turner, R Irish.

SUPREME courage under intense contacts earned the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Welsh a double helping of Military Crosses.

Maj Stephen Webb and Cpl Richard Pask both won the gallantry medal for their actions last summer during a period of fierce action around Basra.

Maj Webb was singled out for his "outstanding leadership" and providing an example to his men by leading from the front during operations.

Commanding B Company and exposed almost daily to hostile fire, he kept his men's morale high and earned a reputation for inflicting significant damage to the enemy in combat.

Maj Webb was specifically commended for his actions while clearing an extraction route in Basra on May 23, during which his Warrior vehicle was severely damaged and his driver wounded by an improvised explosive device.

Although exposed to enemy fire, he crouched by the driver's hatch and guided the injured soldier by voice and touch for 300 metres to relative safety.

Maj Webb's citation read: "Throughout this action, he showed the qualities that have characterised his leadership and conduct throughout the tour. He risked his life for his men and his actions displayed premeditated and selfless courage, conspicuous gallantry and inspiring



● Maj Stephen Webb



● Cpl Richard Pask

leadership of the very highest order."

Cpl Pask received his MC for pressing on with his mission after his Warrior had been severely damaged by a roadside bomb while escorting a convoy to Basra Palace. He was knocked unconscious by the blast, which damaged the turret and knocked out the sights and radios. Despite being dazed, his ears ringing and with his head streaming with blood, he chose to continue the mission.

Commanding the vehicle standing up in the turret, he secured the convoy route and braved rifle and RPG fire to take the battle to the insurgents.

Cpl Pask's citation said: "His defiance in the face of danger, even when shocked and wounded, was inspirational.

"His professionalism and determination under enemy fire were unquestionable and helped the convoy reach its destination unscathed."



● THE courage and determination of two British soldiers in the face of a devastating attack against a Basra supply convoy has been recognised with top medals.

Cpl Adam Miller of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers has been awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Cross for attempting to salvage a lorry carrying British vehicle reinforcements in an “almost suicidal” display of bravery.

And WO2 Rodney Poulter, a company sergeant major with the 4th Battalion, The Rifles, received the Military Cross for his part in engaging the enemy and helping to cover the evacuation of casualties from a killing zone. He was also commended for his actions during a later incident, in which he risked his life to save an injured colleague from a burning vehicle.

During the two-hour ambush, which erupted on May 21 and took place in temperatures of 70C, a fuel tanker was hit and set on fire and two men were killed.

Father-of-two WO2 Poulter had been commanding a Bulldog personnel carrier with the convoy en route to Basra Palace when the contact happened. He organised the evacuation of injured colleagues as well as helping to cover Cpl Miller – who was attempting to recover the low-loader supply vehicle – which had been disabled and was blocking a bridge over a canal.

During the battle the senior NCO's Bulldog was destroyed by a massive



● Cpl Adam Miller



● WO2 Rodney Poulter

roadside bomb, throwing the driver 25 metres along the road. WO2 Poulter moved into the open, with rounds whipping past him, to cover the soldier's evacuation.

“Under heavy fire and in an act of extraordinary and selfless courage, WO2 Poulter ran forward to beyond the driver and suppressed the enemy firing points with his rifle, with rounds striking the road around him,” his citation said.

“He displayed selfless courage, presence of mind and steadiness under fire to the very highest order – he repeatedly placed himself in extreme peril to save his men.”

As the battle raged, Cpl Miller, a recovery mechanic based at Basra Palace, moved in to recover the low-loader that had been hit by enemy fire.

Arriving at the bridge in a soft-skinned Foden vehicle, he found himself in the middle of an intense firefight with 80 insurgents firing rifles and RPGs.

As colleagues fought for their lives from behind armour, Cpl Miller dismounted and attempted to carry out the recovery of the vehicle under a stream of bullets. RPGs poured in as the insurgents tried to destroy the lorry, which eventually was found to be too badly damaged to be recovered.

Cpl Miller's citation read: “He displayed icy nerve, professional dedication of the very highest order and an almost suicidal courage in an impossible situation.

“In a tour characterised by numerous acts of courage in heavy urban fighting, his actions stand out as the defining example of bravery under fire.”



● Brig Timothy Evans



● Col Maciejewski

● TWO senior officers involved in the most intense fighting in Iraq since the invasion of 2003 have been rewarded with Distinguished Service Orders.

Brig Timothy Evans, who commanded 19 Light Brigade during Op Telic 9 last year, and Col Justin Maciejewski, commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion, The Rifles, were awarded the DSO for their inspiring leadership.

Brig Evans oversaw the second half of Op Sinbad to promote reconstruction and security in Basra City, and a major re-posturing of British troops in the Multi-National Division (South East) area.

As well as meeting these significant challenges, soldiers from 19 Light Brigade faced an increasingly determined campaign of attacks against them and mounting casualties. In providing an “exceptional response”, Brig Evans oversaw 200 strike operations in six months and made sure the brigade's objectives were completed on schedule.

His citation read: “Brig Evans is directly responsible for the outstanding performance of his brigade. His outstanding leadership has been operationally of the utmost significance and is deserving of the highest formal recognition.”

Col Maciejewski also received high praise for his command of the Basra Palace-based 2 Rifles Battle-group, which was at the sharp end of operations.

Troops found themselves on the receiving end of rocket, mortar and small arms attacks on a regular basis while IEDs were a constant danger on patrol. Thirteen soldiers from the battle-group died and more than 70 were injured. Despite the ever-present dangers, the battle-group took the fight to the insurgents and was responsible for removing a significant number of rogue militants from the streets.

Col Maciejewski's citation said: “He was inspirational. No other battle-group within the brigade was put through its paces to such a degree and retained such high morale. The soldiers trusted him and knew that there was nothing that was asked of them that he would not do himself. In short, he was pivotal to the brigade's success.”

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Royal Rifles

Battalion gets to grips with a new set of combat skills as it joins the Marines »

On the move: Members of Charlie Company, 1 Rifles, in Belize for Exercise Tropical Storm, during which they stepped up their training in readiness for their new role within 3 Commando Brigade



Hide and seek: Above, Cpl Danny Ashton, 1 Rifles, a sniper section commander, fires the new L115A3 sniper rifle (with a suppressor fitted) at targets out to 1,500 metres. Below, A soldier from 1 Rifles wearing the new Deployable Tactical Engagement System (DTES) on Exercise Tropical Storm in Belize as he and his colleagues ready themselves for their new role within 3 Commando Brigade.



Report: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Steve Dock

DEEP in the heart of the Belizean jungle, an Infantry battalion given a completely new role to bolster Britain's defence network is getting into shape with single-minded purpose.

Little more than a year after taking on their new regimental identity, troops from the 1st Battalion, The Rifles are undergoing a second major change as they prepare to link up with the Royal Navy's elite Royal Marines as part of 3 Commando Brigade.

The proud riflemen travelled to South America to take part in Exercise Tropical Storm where, alongside the usual jungle survival and warfare packages, they were put through their paces in amphibious skills usually thought of as the exclusive preserve of their bootneck counterparts.

The tough exercise signalled the start of a hectic 12 months for the men of 1 Rifles, who are now preparing to start pre-deployment training ahead of a tour of Afghanistan later this year.

As well as providing the British Army's Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) capability for the Afghan National Army, 1 Rifles will also have a Mastiff company reinforcing 42 Commando, a mortar platoon with 42 and 45 Commando, and a total of 28 snipers spread across the brigade.

Speaking from Forward Operating Base (FOB) Augustine, in Belize, battalion commanding officer Lt Col Joe Cavanagh expressed his satisfaction at 3 Commando Brigade's early taste of operational action.

"It's good to get the shared operational experience in early because it will solidify our links and give us a chance to get to know each other better," he told *Soldier*. "If there is any rivalry or an us-and-them attitude at present, I'm confident that most of it will be gone by the time we get back."

The link-up with 3 Cdo Bde is a permanent move for 1 Rifles and the riflemen are being given the chance to prove their commitment to the cause by volunteering to complete the famed – and feared – commando training course at Lympstone in Devon.

Although the battalion hopes to start a major push to get its troops to earn the title of Army commando from May 2009, anyone with the time and the mental and physical fortitude can pit themselves against the gruelling 11-week course now.

Rfn John Cain and LCpl Rory O'Neill did exactly that when they travelled south in 2006. From an initial intake of 103, just 32 men – including both riflemen and five other colleagues – were left standing to receive the prized commando title at the end.

"It's a benchmark course and a lot of people look up to you when they know that you have been through it," said



Rfn Cain. "I wouldn't say that the basic soldiering and fieldcraft side of it is any tougher than you would find in the Army, but the physical side is so much harder. A lot of people might be able to pass it on their day, but you have to stay free from injury and learn to cope with the fatigue."

"Coping mentally is just as tough."

Cain and O'Neill were not alone in proving their worth. Twenty infanters have made it through Lymptone, with three doing well enough to earn the commando badge for excellence.

But regardless of whether they have dominated the Devon course, each and every member of 1 Rifles who is deploying to Helmand will have the necessary skills to take the battle with the Taliban onto the water if need be thanks to their training in Belize.

Using a reservoir several kilometres in length, Rifles personnel practised basics such as capsizing drills before moving on to embarkation and disembarkation manoeuvres. Complex techniques such as recovering troops to the sides of moving vessels rounded off an intense water-based training package.

Battalion 2iC Maj Ben Tomkins said

"It's good to get the shared operational experience in early because it will solidify our links and give us a chance to get to know each other better"

that getting to grips with an entirely new form of warfare was just part of the reason the battalion had thrown itself into amphibious training.

"The intention behind this move was to make defence more capable and it has created a positive gain," he said.

"Our guys can see the benefits straight away. They get to learn new skills and they also have the opportunity of going to new places that are usually only used by the Navy."

With the Army and Marines sharing respect and rivalry in equal measures, it was good to note that the enthusiasm for a closer working relationship was evident on both sides of the defence divide.

On his first posting since passing out of Lymptone in December, 2nd Lt Pete Williams, RM, travelled to Belize to take charge of a platoon that he will command when the brigade deploys to Afghanistan.

Although he acknowledges that the proud nature of soldiers and Marines could lead to a bristly relationship, his first impressions were that there were no signs of any problems.

"It's great to get out here, get my platoon together and work with some fairly junior riflemen," he said. "This is

a really big step, but by taking the guys out of their comfort zone it is a good learning experience."

"There is a good bit of banter between the Army and Marines, but it has been a great atmosphere since I arrived and I have been made to feel right at home. If there is a difference, it's that riflemen can come from a broader spectrum than Marines."

"I think that both jobs are broadly the same and where there are differences, it will only help to improve us, regardless of whether we are from the Army or the Royal Marines."

A Herrick tour is likely to provide the perfect benchmark for the fledgling link-up and 1 Rifles will be deploying on amphibious exercises in the Mediterranean and Norway in 2009 ahead of reaching full operational capability in March 2010.

The relationship between the Army's Infantry and the Royal Navy's aquatic warfare specialists is still in its relative infancy, but the determination from both camps to learn as much as possible from one another should ensure that the Taliban will be facing a frighteningly powerful foe when the Royals and the Rifles team up in southern Helmand later this year. ■

Above, Making a splash: Members of 1 Rifles prepare to get their feet wet during amphibious training in Belize



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Gunners go back to their
Army commando roots on
Norway's icy fjords »

Report: Karen Thomas
Pictures: PO Dave Husband
and Graeme Main

IN 1941 a gunner led a small amphibious assault force against the German military occupying Norway's coast and left an elite footprint that snowballed into a supreme fighting armed Service.

Brig John Durnford-Slater, who joined the Royal Artillery in 1929, was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for leading the successful Second World War attack on the Lofoten Islands. Styled after Boer commandos, these first select soldiers were tasked with reconnoitring, disrupting and demoralising the enemy until a large-scale assault – D-Day – could be launched against mainland Europe.

More than 65 years later and the men of 29 Commando Regiment RA returned to practise their battle-honoured trade on the same frozen mountain ranges that end abruptly

at a icy fjord coastline. Arctic warfare and amphibious raider training now underpin their fighting skills, preparing them to work alongside their Royal Marines commando comrades in the winter badlands of Helmand province on Op Herrick.

Two months of working in the planet's most northern deep freezer hones these Army commandos' survival and trade abilities but this time they were revisiting more than just their historical roots. During 3 Commando Brigade's final exercise, soldiers from 7 (Sphinx) Battery polished up their advanced infantry commando expertise and stormed the snow-bound beaches rifle-ready with the bootnecks.

LBdr Stephen Anderson, a gun detachment commander, welcomed the chance to do some foot soldiering with

the Royal Marines' Whiskey Company despite the rigours of traversing snow and ice in sub-zero temperatures.

"It's challenging because manoeuvring on the ground on foot and skis takes a lot longer and more effort, especially if you're formed into more than a company of men. You're exposed to the environment for longer and you have to look after yourself more," he told *Soldier*, describing the benefits of getting to know your mates, bootneck or otherwise, better.

"You're mixing in when you're doing this whereas on

Op Herrick you do your separate things because the Royal Marines are on patrol and we provide the fire cover. So this exercise is good for team bonding and team building."

Waving the 105mm light gun on its battle Colours, 29 Cdo Regt's skill and firepower has provided cover for 3 Cdo

"You have to pay more attention to the infantry drills in Norway, otherwise there are pretty severe consequences"



Bde for almost half a century. The fire support teams (FST) can parachute into combat and practise their art of calling in guns, mortars, fast air and attack helicopters, with 148 (Meiktila) Battery primed as naval gun specialists. Having land, sea and air firepower at its fingertips is unique to this RA regiment.

"I love being in the FST and it's a good crack. It's great to get out with the company and work with the Royals. Norway has been good for keeping our role sharp and the technical training has been excellent," enthused Gnr Mathew Corney.

The commando gunners have supported 3 Cdo Bde on operations in Northern Ireland, Kuwait, Iraq and, most recently, southern Afghanistan. With Op Herrick 5 already under their ammo belts, the gunners are lining up their sights again on the Taliban's rugged desert heartland of Helmand, where their infantry prowess proves as life-saving as their gunnery acumen.

Capt Kieran Phillips, ops officer, maintained the wintry wilderness of Norway was ideal to test a soldier's infantry commando role and prepare the gunners for Afghanistan.

"You have to pay more attention to the infantry drills in Norway, otherwise there are pretty severe consequences because of the particularly harsh conditions, which can lead to cold injury and ultimately death.

"There is no better environment for preparing individuals and small teams to work in Afghanistan because on operations the attention to the smallest detail is crucial at every stage.

"The teamwork transfers really well onto ops too."

Mimicking the amphibians of the animal kingdom, 29 Cdo Regt's ability to work confidently on both land and water is a trademark shared with other Army commandos and makes it a rare battle asset. Launching their assault from Royal Navy ships anchored in the fjords, the gunners got to grips with

deploying on a variety of seafaring vessels. The latest addition to their fleet is the offshore raiding craft (ORC), a powerboat that can be armed with an array of weaponry.

Despite the pressures of being on short notice to deploy while cramming the Arctic warfare training between tours, Lt Col Neil Wilson, CO of 29 Cdo Regt, stressed the importance of keeping the gunners' amphibious character core to their diverse skills set.

"This exercise really keeps the amphibiousity flame alive on this scale. We've done little bits but not at brigade task force level. It's unique in military doctrine and needs to be practised," he said, before highlighting the cohesive relationship between his gunners and the Marines of 3 Cdo Bde.

"We all work together and are well integrated. We've been in the brigade for 45 years and not left our home in Plymouth in the castle on the hill. It's a great place and we're in the heart of the brigade." ■



United effort: British Army and Royal Marines commandos return to their roots and hone their amphibious skills during a simulated beach assault on the freezing fjords of northern Norway

Ice-breakers

Commando encounters of the Arctic kind for new sapper regiment

Report: Karen Thomas
Main picture: Graeme Main

CRACKING open an ice-covered lake and chucking yourself into its glacial depths might be alright for polar bears but it seems a bit extreme for commandos experiencing the sub-zero climate for the first time.

Yet the men of 59 Independent Commando Squadron RE had to wrestle with more than just ice-breaking drills in frozen northern Norway. During four weeks of cold weather warfare training the sappers learned how to keep themselves and each other alive in temperatures that can plunge to minus 50C. But as the polar bears (sensibly) hibernated, these commandos eagerly raided their Arctic larder.

Skiing, abseiling, building brushwood bivis and learning tactical moves using pulks (mini sledges) went down a storm with those new to the forbidding mountains and fjords. Followed by a fortnight of infantry training and combat engineering, the sappers were ready to assist the Royal Marines of 3 Commando Brigade with some trademark bridge demolition during the final amphibious exercise.

First-timer Spr Deepak Rai, who earned his green beret last September, discovered hidden talents as well as the importance of getting along with his oppos in the blizzards. "I enjoyed the

course. I was mentally prepared but the weather was severe – the temperature dropped below minus 20C but I had to get used to it. I'd never skied before but I could keep up and pull the pulks so it was good fun," he told *Soldier*.

"When it gets really bad the person next to you helps, as we're all feeling the same. It makes the bond stronger and builds up team spirit, which is important for upcoming operations."

Having already deployed to Helmand with 3 Cdo Bde on Op Herrick 5, LCpl Jonathan Hancock thought the "brilliant package" set the sappers up nicely for future tours of Afghanistan.

"The austere environment makes you focus on what you're doing and you are really switched on to your personal administration. It's excellent preparation for theatre because although there is no enemy here, you are still working against an enemy in the weather. The more stress the better. It prepares you for the stresses of theatre."

In southern Afghanistan these Army commandos routinely put themselves in the Taliban's gunsights, as they join their Royal Marine comrades in some tricky locations. When they're not building forward observation bases, they're

blowing up compound walls – mouse-holing – often with bullets cracking over their heads. They have also been key to the hugely important reconstruction effort for Afghan civilians.

Maj Neil Whitcombe, OC of 59 Sqn, praised the work of his close combat support sappers, although in the current operational climate the squadron cannot provide the level of support required by 3 Cdo Bde. So, on April 1 it merged with 54 Commando HQ and Support Squadron RE to form the new 24 Commando Engineer Regiment, which is looking to expand while retaining its amphibious and infantry commando roles within the brigade.

"Everyone realised we needed to become a regiment because of the demand for sappers in theatre," said Maj Whitcombe. "As a regiment, there will be more time and resources to look after the men in terms of their careers and more

"It makes the bond between you stronger and builds up the team spirit, which is important for upcoming operations"

opportunity for commando-trained sappers to mix up the fun stuff of sport and adventure training with our core business of supporting RM commandos on operations."

Arctic warfare training in potentially lethal weather conditions would set any engineer apart as a soldier. The bootnecks are equally keen to keep the Army specialists on board their amphibious landing crafts and Lt Col Alan Litster RM, the brigade's Chief of Staff, viewed the winter exercise as fundamental to strengthening the integration of 59 Squadron's sappers and the gunners of 29 Commando Regiment RA.

"We feel Norway is part of the commando culture and it really tests the commando ethos. It is the best preparation for any operations anywhere in the world and if you can soldier here you can soldier anywhere," he said, agreeing that the new regiment would pay dividends for the brigade.

"The addition of 24 Cdo Engr Regt gives us a much needed increase in capability and shows a great deal of investment in our amphibious capability. The Army's commitment to 3 Cdo Bde is healthy and being invested in by 59 being made into a regiment." ■



Main picture, Demolition man: Spr Shane Auld, 24 Cdo Engr Regt, attaches a Hayrick CD 14 explosive charge during a bridge demolition exercise in Norway

Below left, Bridge blowers: Commando sappers set about their explosive activities

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Insider training

Conditioning course gives Army commando candidates a head start »

Report: Karen Thomas
Pictures: Graeme Main

ONLY as *Soldier* huddled against the wind-lashed rain pouring over north Devon and tried to keep notepad and camera lens dry did we grasp the true meaning of “barking”.

Day two of the conditioning package, offered by 24 Commando Engineer Regiment as preparation for the nine-week All Arms commando course, had volunteers swinging from 30ft high ropes and getting a further soaking in the chilly water tank. So, barking as in mad.

But, apparently, this sort of preconditioning is necessary and, so we were assured, enjoyed by the soldiers wanting to be the commando best. After six weeks at the Chivenor Royal Marines Barracks, candidates for the green beret should have acquired the strength and endurance to be in with a decent shout of passing the course at the Commando Training Centre at Lympstone.

Army contenders build up their stamina under the guidance of

former Lympstone instructor WO2 Eddie Williams, who revamped the conditioning course so it does not select soldiers out but instead prepares their minds and bodies for the rigorous two months awaiting them in the West Country

“We are firm, fun and friendly and I’ll get into the water tank as much as they do. We don’t expect them to do anything we won’t do,” he explained, clutching a steaming brew as he dripped onto the floor.

“The All Arms commando course is difficult but achievable. We invest in each individual as the future of the regiment and the lads know we want them to pass the course.”

The new 24 Cdo Engr Regt, formed this month, needs more commando-trained sappers. Improving the first-time pass rate is high on the agenda and 70 per cent of conditioning course candidates are expected to pass and go on to complete the All Arms training. Those who want to stay clean, warm and dry need not apply. ■



It's all in your head

Oldest journo-turned-bootneck defines essence of being a commando

ON the day Chris Terrill proudly shaped his green beret on his 55-year-old head he knew he would selflessly do anything for his fellow troopers on and off the battlefield.

The acclaimed documentary-maker captured the pain and ecstasy of 50 bootneck rookies from 924 Troop undergoing the gruelling Royal Marines training for *Commando: On the front line* screened last year. The twist? Terrill punished himself on the same rigorous six-month regime that made increasingly hefty physical and mental demands.

Despite a ruptured bicep and fighting his nemesis of the regain rope, the lifelong sportsman joined his 42 Commando Brigade comrades as a green-lidded non-combatant in southern Afghanistan. But it was the dark days of despair when that green lid seemed

forever out of reach that concentrated the essence of being a commando – look after your oppo because he is looking after you.

“There were many occasions when things got very tough and I thought, ‘I can’t go on’. But there was always somebody there, whether from the training team or one of the lads from the troop, who would just buck me up and encourage me,” he told *Soldier*, describing the despondency that stalks all aspiring commandos. “Of course, I would return the compliment and it is that ethos, that relationship with your mates, that you take with you to the battlefield and it sees you through.”

Watching the series you can’t help but cringe at just how tough the course is but

Terrill was impressed with the progressive build-up to conquering the most daunting obstacles such as the 30-mile run. He witnessed a matching build-up in the lads’ self-belief that perhaps the impossible was possible, and that “much of it’s in your head and what you believe you can do.”

At 55 Terrill knew he would lose the suppleness and agility edge to his more youthful comrades but he carried an ace in his combats. As a triathlete, he was only too familiar with excruciating pain. However, age and experience were irrelevant when dealing with the loss of mates who dropped out of the course.

“The fact that they were 18 and I was 55 didn’t matter. You were bonded by what you were doing. But when some of the

“The fact that they were 18 and I was 55 didn’t matter”



Inside tips from WO2 Eddie Williams:

- Work as a team – be that guy who's the morale-booster
- Keep injury-free – the conditioning course will help
- Be unselfish – look after each other from day one
- Keep cheerful – when you're all wet and muddy, you bond
- Be determined – it's an uphill struggle so take a week at a time

Clockwise from above, Dunking, yomping, crunching and hanging: Sapper recruits and 55-year-old journalist Chris Terrill, right, experience the rigours of commando training

lads, for whatever reason, failed in their training and were either back-trooped or left altogether, that was hard."

Terrill experienced even deeper loss when Mne Tom Curry was killed in action on Helmand's front line. Op Herrick's battleground was where the honorary commando saw the purpose of experiencing the anguish with mates during the hard times at Lympstone.

"I saw that band of brotherhood, that bonding, that closeness, put into extreme practice. What you realise when you're in a battle situation is that young marines, and I'm sure it goes for any soldier, are there fighting for the cause, for the Queen, for the flag, but actually mostly for themselves and each other. It's not until you see it that you realise how important it is and they would, and do, die for each other.

"I had the immense privilege to follow these boys, soon to become men, into battle. I hope that impacted in some small way on the viewing public so they realise what extraordinary work our Armed Forces are doing." ■



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White out: Arctic weather training in Norway is all in a day's work for both Royal Marine and Army commandos

Yomping on

Army supply masters keep commandos topped up in the thick of battle

Report: Cliff Caswell
Picture: PO Dave Husbands

FIRED-up soldiers from the Royal Logistic Corps have been limbering up for future ops alongside battle-hardened counterparts from the Royal Marines.

The troops, from the Logistic Support Squadron, part of 3 Commando Brigade RM, are already accustomed to working alongside their green beret cousins – and keeping them topped up with essential supplies during their frequent forays to the front line and on exercises.

Now they are busy squaring up to the demands of future tours, and were recently put through their paces during a tough arctic weather exercise in Norway.

“Being in this squadron is quite a different experience to logistics in the rest of the Army,” said 2iC Capt John Moy. “For example, we have passed the same commando tests as the Royal Marines and it is great for guys to have that experience.

“We were out on Exercise Octans II in Norway for six weeks, and you had to take care with the conditions – you had to make sure that you did not touch metal objects with your bare hands and that you had kit such as extra gloves and goggles with you.”

Being able to survive in extreme conditions is a pre-requisite for a career with an RLC squadron that is

responsible for backing up the Royal Navy's elite troops.

Anyone signing up for the outfit can expect a demanding regime requiring physical and mental agility plus an ability to operate in the most extreme of weather conditions.

All of the RLC soldiers are urged to take part in the demanding All Arms commando course, during which they will be expected to hone survival and infantry skills. If successful, they are awarded the coveted green beret and famous dagger insignia.

The 11-week package is a shortened version of the Marines' basic training course and troops can expect to have their fitness and resolve severely examined.

“The tests you have to pass are standard, whether you are an Army or a Marine commando,” said Capt Moy. “But we tend to get people in the squadron who are extremely keen and they are very much soldiers who join for action.

“We have a troop of Marines within the squadron and we are integrated with them. As we have all been through the same type of training, there is a level playing field.”

Soldiers serving with the Logistic Support Squadron admitted the regime was often tough, but relished the chance to push themselves to the limits in extreme conditions.

“The All Arms commando course is quite hard and an intense experience, although I enjoyed it,” LCpl Anania Rabosea, who works as a supplier, told *Soldier*.

“I have found it good to work with the Royal Marines because you can learn new stuff from them, especially infantry skills, and we all get on extremely well. We're doing what they are doing and have to pass the same commando tests.”

Petroleum operator LCpl Ashley Turner also admitted that training to be a commando had been tough, but added that the job was both rewarding and satisfying.

“The All Arms commando course has similarities with P Company,” he recalled. “I did it back in 2004 and it was very hard, but it is always great to work alongside the Royal Marines.”

Versatility is a key weapon in the arsenal of the British Army. With the nature of current operations in far-flung theatres such as Afghanistan, and southern Iraq, inter-Service co-operation is vital.

So, too, is the work of the RLC. Far from being in the rear of operations, troops serving with this vital corps are now very much in the front line, keeping the fighting force equipped and ready for action. They have been proving that they are, above all, soldiers first. ■

‘The tests you have to pass are standard, whether you are an Army or Royal Marine commando’



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Genetic warfare

British Army deploys DNA of real-life Rambos

Report: Cliff Caswell

RECRUITS likely to fail basic training are literally being given a shot in the arm thanks to an amazing new initiative poised to transform them into super-troopers.

The Army will, in effect, be turning to the Marines for a drop of the "right stuff".

Under a controversial scheme codenamed Project Rico, personnel struggling to make the grade can volunteer to be injected with the genes of individuals with proven military prowess, including heroes from the Royal Marines and RAF Regiment.

According to Defence sources, the initiative, being rolled out this month, has been undergoing closed door trials at the Centre of Aviation Medicine for the past five years.

It has delivered promising results, with two-thirds of test subjects showing enhanced performance and physique.

"We are not talking about turning failing soldiers into Sylvester Stallone or Vin Diesel, and any suggestion that this will provide us with a legion of Hollywood action heroes is complete rubbish," said an Army clinician involved in the trials.

"However, by harvesting the genes of some of the Services' top guns, and introducing them into recruits who have a track record of poor performance, the long-term results suggest an increase in motivation and fitness."

The process of extracting DNA from the military elite is painless and involves collecting cells by rolling the tip of a sample collection swab on the inside of both cheeks.

This genetic pick-me-up is stored under lock and key at the Centre of Aviation Medicine from where it can be requested by clinicians in the Soldier Upgrade Personnel Resource (SUPER) programme.

The identities of the Servicemen donating the DNA is never disclosed and only recruits who volunteer will receive the genes, which are introduced into the bloodstream via a series of injections.

Medical chiefs pointed out that the shots could either be done as a stand-alone procedure or as part of routine health checks

carried out during phase one training. Further injections are given at weekly intervals for a month.

The details of those taking part in Rico have been withheld because of the MoD's strict code of confidentiality to protect troops involved in medical trials.

But one 18-year-old male participant, backsquadded in the early stages of his training at ATR Pirbright, said the treatment had awoken a "killer instinct" in him.

He added: "Full credit to my instructors, they had really tried to get me sorted but my

morale was at rock bottom and I was about to throw in the towel.

"After three shots I am more motivated, focused and it's not a drama to get out there and mix it up.

"I'm holding my own now

and thanks to Rico I'm going to do it."

A Royal Marine veteran of Afghanistan and Iraq, who has participated in the project since its conception in 2003 and is continuing to donate, firmly believed the introduction of Green Beret DNA could improve performance.

The 27-year-old added: "It is an established fact that our tough training regime only attracts the most dedicated and we owe it to future generations of soldiers to pass a little bit of our success back through the ranks. I don't have a problem with this scheme as long as our genes are only used for the stated purposes." ■

Enduring hero: 20 years after his last tour of duty, Vietnam War veteran and Green Beret John Rambo is back in action. Sylvester Stallone directs and stars in the fourth instalment of the *Rambo* series, which is in cinemas now

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Into the green zone

Pathfinders go to emerald extreme
as they head back to Helmand »

Shadowy world: The
Pathfinder Platoon
gives a brief glimpse
into their covert
soldiering community



**Report: Karen Thomas
Pictures: Graeme Main**

IT might be the greenest of the green but Pathfinder Platoon won't be looking to win any environmental awards as it once again takes on southern Afghanistan's badlands.

The enigmatic eyes and ears of 16 Air Assault Brigade more than lived up to its hard-as-nails reputation during its Op Herrick debut in 2006.

Unexpectedly embroiled in a prolonged battle with the Taliban in Musa Qala, the elite reconnaissance force used the ultimate in green soldiering skills to tough it out on short rations and low munitions and hold back the tactically-savvy enemy fighters.

But being tough and wily is what these secretive soldiers are especially good at. The platoon's primary role is covertly inserting patrols by air or overland and reconnoitring drop zones and targets for 16 Bde's conventional fighting units. Members are trained

**'If you sell
your soul to
the platoon
you'll go far'**



in all types of parachuting, including high altitude low and high altitude high openings (HALO and HAHO), in readiness for a tactical drop.

Anyone wanting to join the platoon can expect plenty of pain and deprivation during the six-week hard-core selection course in the Welsh wilderness. Fellow Pathfinders need to know everyone will cut it when they snoop behind enemy lines, especially if the chips are down.

And although each patrol member will have a specialist skill, they must be able to step in and multitask.

Just a third of candidates succeed and even then they are put on probation for a year. However, the prizes for total commitment include training on specialist courses, solid career progression, appointments according to ability (not rank) and extra pay.

So if you're aged between 19 and 33 and want to know if the close-knit Pathfinders – “the best platoon to be in for green soldiering” – is for you, read on . . .

Main picture, Paths of glory: Pathfinder troops practise their green soldiering skills in the Welsh wilderness ahead of deploying to Helmand

Get selected

● **Directing staff:** “The platoon is the most professional green unit in the Army but a lot of people let themselves down because they underestimate the course. We’re looking for someone who works hard and can be relied on to do the job when your back’s turned. We ask ourselves, ‘Would we have these people in Pathfinder patrols?’”

● **Candidate, RAMC:** “I was in Afghanistan as a medic in 2006 and the tour opened my eyes to what’s out there in the wider Army. On the course it’s pretty tough physically and it’s hard to keep your body going at times. My advice is to have the bottle to have a go and try your hardest to get it right the first time – don’t do it twice.”



● **Candidate, AGC:** “I’d already served with the platoon so I did the course once from the ranks but have to do it again as an officer. Repeating it is every bit as demanding as my age offsets any advantages I may have had with my experience. I really enjoyed my time in the platoon and it is some of the most rewarding soldiering you can do.”

Apply yourself

- Aged between 19 and 33
- Minimum 18 months’ service
- Open to all Services
- Open to all cap badges
- Contact – Platoon sergeant on 94660 5972 for further information

Stay elite

● **Platoon sergeant:** “There is a quality of life that comes with working with very mature individuals in a very relaxed atmosphere. We don’t have problems with discipline and that helps us to retain soldiers. We are all on first name terms and there’s no need to shout and bark to get lads to do their jobs because they do it anyway with no qualms. We don’t do duties and are a close family unit. There’s no divide in the Pathfinder world and we all get along together.”



● **Pathfinder, RE:** “I was halfway through my Afghanistan tour when I was attached to the Pathfinders in Musa Qala and it gave me an insight into what the platoon was like. It’s much more adult and you’re not micro-managed. The soldiering skills needed for selection can be quite a steep learning curve for non-Para candidates but you get taught everything you need to know and you practise navigation and skills on the hills.”



● **Pathfinder, 2 Para:** “It’s the best platoon to be in for green soldiering. You get more opportunities for promotion and to get on the career ladder. If you sell your soul to the platoon you’ll go far. The qualities you need are enthusiasm and controlled aggression and you must be physically robust and mature. My advice is to do the course if green soldiering is what you want to do.” ■



Hell's angel

Afghanistan-bound star backs trip to raise funds for military charity

Interview: Cliff Caswell
Pictures: Graeme Main

PAWING over a huge map of a route that will take him from Ireland to Australia, maverick motor-cyclist Charley Boorman is keen to enlist the British Army's help.

Having previously saddled up with *Star Wars* actor Ewan McGregor on two journeys spanning the length and breadth of the world, the thespian-turned-adventurer has been preparing for his latest road trip, which begins in County Wicklow and culminates on the other side of the world in Sydney.

But with the route crossing the dangerous badlands of northern Afghanistan, Charley was keen to learn as much as possible about the region from a group of military friends when they dropped in on his HQ in Kensington, London.

"I've always been a fan of the Army, and would love to see our soldiers on the journey," the 41-year-old told *Soldier*. "They have had a rough deal over the past few years.

"I get the feeling that people have tended to blame them for being involved in operations when, in reality, the troops are told where to go.

"The Armed Forces look after us and I think they are sometimes taken for granted. I'd like to see how they live their lives while they are out in Afghanistan."

Charley certainly shares many qualities with British troops. As well as being driven by the same lust for adventure, he recently became the patron of a charity motor-cycle expedition organised by three members of York-based 2 Signal Regiment.

Led by Sgt Yogi Welch, the Corps Tour will take the riders on a 4,000-mile journey as they visit every major Royal Signals unit in Europe. The aim is to raise more than £20,000 for the Army Benevolent Fund and Help for Heroes charities.

For Charley, assisting the British soldiers is a worthy endeavour. "What Yogi is doing is absolutely fantastic, although I'm not entirely sure he knows what he has let himself in for," the

veteran biker joked. "I'm really glad to be involved."

By all accounts, Charley is well aware of the tribulations the soldiers are likely to face. Since his first outing with McGregor in *Long Way Round* – in which the pair travelled from London to New York via Asia – he has competed in the Dakar Rally and, with his old friend again at his side, rode from Scotland to South Africa.

Their journey, from John o'Groats to Cape Town, was serialised in last year's BBC series *Long Way Down* and is also recorded in a best-selling book of the same name.

Charley is going solo for his latest escapade, *By Any Means*, and was due to hit the road as this

issue went to press after several months of planning. But adventuring is a far cry from his former career of choice as an actor, during which his screen appearances included films directed by his father John.

Now firmly established as a seasoned traveller, the biker has dedicated his professional career to riding across the world and supporting charities.

As well as being a supporter of Help for Heroes, he has also raised cash for Unicef, and is passionate about ending the death and injury caused to children by landmines.

"I have always found that people are just people wherever you go and that 90 per cent of them in areas of conflict just want the fighting to stop," he said. "Mine clearance is something troops get involved in but the laying of these weapons is something that is still going on. There are a million around the Eritrean border alone.

"As for Help for Heroes, Robert Lawrence, an old friend of mine who was injured at Tumbledown during the Falklands War of 1982, introduced me to the charity. He told me about it when he was describing his experience of being a wounded soldier."

Despite never signing up for military service himself, Charley has certainly embraced an expeditionary spirit – getting

out on his bike around the world has become a huge enthusiasm.

While admitting that he missed his wife and two children, as well as his creature comforts during his excursions, he said that he felt at home out on the road.

"There are some horrible bits where you just want to stop but you just have to keep driving forward," he said. "There are things that you miss too. When I'm starving hungry I miss junk food like pizza and I could kill for an Indian takeaway.

"But it is so much fun to do these trips. I really enjoy them and the adventure is always special because, for me, it is all about how people used to get around." ■

Easy riders: Actor Charley Boorman, left, and Sgt Yogi Welch, below, have been comparing motor-cycle diaries





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TALKBACK

How can I take my leave?

Brief is best

YOUR letters provide a real insight into the issues at the top of soldiers' agendas . . . but please keep them brief. Emails (mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk) MUST include your name and location (although we won't publish them if you ask us not to). Anonymous letters go in the bin. The Editor reserves 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. Our postal address is on Page 5.

ON the issue of pay in lieu of leave not taken, I am on Op Telic but managed to glimpse on JPA that I have 17 days shown as "not yet taken" from leave year 06/07.

For leave year 07/08 I have 24 days showing and am fortunate that my OC agreed to a one-year extension of the time I can use my REN (re-enlistment) leave as I have yet to take a single day of the 20 allocated.

Is this bad time management on my part or by my immediate chain of command? Not really. The reason is our workload, and especially those of us in specialist trades.

I was on Op Herrick from Oct 06 to

Apr 07, had a few months off and am back on Telic until this month.

As it will be leave year 08/09 when I return to my unit, I can write off 26 days owed to me, and that is taking into account the carry-over of 15. Add those to my annual leave allowance of 30, plus my 20 REN days and I know my unit will not be able to release me for that time. And don't forget my 20 days of post-operations tour leave (POTL).

In my six years of married life I have spent three Christmases and New Years on tour, which doesn't make for a happy home front. Being denied the chance to take my leave entitlements makes that worse. My family can't wait for the day I leave the Army and live something akin to a normal life.

Surely the Army should look again at pay in lieu for leave not taken? It might go some way to compensating my family for the time they have lost me to operations. – **Senior NCO, Op Telic.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), responds:

Unfortunately the situation you find yourself in is not uncommon and I have every sympathy. My answer will be the same. The fact that all leave cannot be taken is a reflection of Service life, particularly given the current tempo of operations.

However, it is a factor in the X-factor calculation. We made this point in last year's review and no doubt it was a factor in the one per cent uplift. That said, the Terms and Conditions of Service (TACOS) Project Team within the MoD is conducting a wide-ranging review, which will consider leave.

PRIZE LETTER

PS...

I WRITE with reference to your article on the tracking course in Brunei (Nov 07 issue).

I recently returned from Brunei and believe it would be beneficial for conventional and Surveillance and Target Acquisition (STA) troops to do the five-week course.

It would teach them to navigate in all environments, follow sign left by an enemy, and enable an intelligence picture to be gained on numbers, direction and possible intentions, so allowing defensive and offensive operations to be mounted.

You can get in touch with Training Team Brunei via ArmyNet. – Sgt Hammond, 29 Commando Regiment RA.

Out-of-date travel scheme

I AM writing to inform you of the leave and travel situation we encountered before and over Christmas.

I am serving in Brunei with the Army Air Corps, and have a son who is in his first three years of service with the Royal Engineers and who recently returned from his first operational tour.

With the idea of flying him to Brunei at Christmas to visit us, I tried to find out what travel allowances were available.

I was told there were no travel allowances available to him under the Fig Leaf Scheme, Get You Home (Early Years)(GYH(EY)) and Get You Home (Overseas)(GYH(O)) schemes and so paid for a return flight for his visit.

JSP 752 Chap 4 (Travel Allowances)

para 04.1153 lists the countries a serving member of a serving family can travel to at public expense. Brunei, Belize, Kenya, Canada and others are not listed and so do not allow travel at public expense.

Travel schemes need updating to make them fair across the Service. – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), responds: *This is the first time I have come across this issue. For whatever reason, JSP 752 Chap 4 only lists European countries. As the principle of the allowance has been agreed, it would be fairer if all countries where Service personnel and Service families reside is included. We will take this forward.*

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

Stop overpaying me

LIKE many in the Armed Forces, I've been a victim of mismanaged pay over the years, but my current situation has taken a new twist. The Army is giving me too much money.

It is almost as bad as not receiving enough pay, which has also happened to me. On returning from back-to-back exercises in Canada last November, I discovered I was still receiving Local Overseas Allowance (LOA) to the tune of several hundred pounds.

I immediately reported it to my pay staff to avoid reduced pay the following month, but the next time round I was again overpaid, and the next and so on until the switch-over to JPA when things really got messed up.

Since JPA I have had LOA started, stopped and started again, had nearly £600 deducted from my pay then immediately replaced and, since deploying on Op Telic in May, received LOA, LSA, LOA Temp, LOA Arrears, Transitional LOA and LOA Temp Arrears in various amounts.

I may also be the first soldier in history to have one month's pay statement spread over three envelopes. My unit pay staff have been aware of the problem since it started and I commend them on their efforts to fix it.



"Please tell Glasgow, or whoever, to stop overpaying me. My wife doesn't believe me so she's gone on a spending spree."

They narrowed the error down to me being logged on the pay system as a British Army Training Unit Suffield permanent staff member on attachment to a REME battalion in Iraq. But they have been unable to change my details on JPA and I have now gone almost a year during which no two pay statements have been the same.

I reckon I'm owed between £2,000 and £3,000 so no doubt the problem will be resolved in time to wipe out my operational tour bonus.

I welcome the opportunity provided by JPA for me to mismanage my own pay, although I doubt I could manage anything as spectacularly incompetent

as that currently being provided for me.

After 17 years of service I cannot recall a year when my pay has not been messed up. I believe I speak for the majority of the Army when I say that after family, a soldier's pay is the most important thing to him or her and yet there are always problems with it. – **Sgt R Lawlor, 3 ES Coy, Op Telic 10.**

Col Jeremy Taylor, SPVA Assist Dir Mil Svcs, replies: Under JPA, allowances are allocated to personnel via the Arrivals Script when they first arrive at their unit of posting. LOA and LSA claims are processed by unit HR administration staff via the script.

Sgt Lawlor's unit has now taken the correct action by tracking his record and repeating the arrivals process to accurately reflect his current status.

I can confirm that the corrections were fed through with all adjustments reflected on his January statement of earnings.

If other units have problems with similar circumstances the standard procedure is to call the enquiry centre and raise an IT call.

It is unfortunate that Sgt Lawlor has been experiencing problems with his allowances. The Arrivals Script is an exclusive unit HR function that can only be accessed and amended at unit level.

Separated from my LSA days

MORE than 150 Longer Separated Allowance (LSA) days of mine were not recorded by my last unit, 1 CSMR. I was told that as these date from before JPA (75 days go back to 2006), unit policy is that they will be lost.

The adjutant asked the detachment commander to explore it last year but it appears to be lost (as is my confidential report from the same period). – **Maj C Richards, RAMC, attached 5 Scots.**

Col Danny McCulloch, Col Current Ops, DSPS(A), replies: Longer Separated Service Allowance (LSSA) was converted to Longer Separated Allowance (LSA) on April 1 last year, which coincided with the implementation of JPA.

The LSSA balance held on legacy systems was used to create the new LSA

balance on JPA, so if the LSSA balance was incorrect, the LSA balance would also be incorrect.

It is not clear whether Maj Richards received his LSSA for the periods he refers to. If not he should provide evidence of his qualifying dates so that his unit can deliver the allowance via JPA using the Transitional Entry system.

In addition, his unit may then approach the DSPS(A) Tiger Team so it can correct his Longer Separated Allowance balance on JPA to ensure he receives the correct level of payment in future.

PS...

I WAS saddened to read of the plight of LCpl Turrell, 39 Engineer Regiment ("I've been ripped off over cost of journey", Feb).

While not earth-shattering as plights go, here is a young man who tried to use his own resources to do something that ultimately benefits the Army and is left out of pocket. The bottom line is that he should not be out of pocket and it's about time the system ensured that was the case. – **Maj S A Roworth, 14 Regiment RA.**

● Good news – it has. See Page 11 for details of new rules – **Editor**

New boot for women rolled out

I READ with interest in the January issue the letter regarding clothing for the female form. I am told that we female soldiers are to be issued with new boots designed to better fit the female foot than the current combat high. Can you confirm whether or not this is the case and if so when might we begin to see them issued? – **Maj C A Ross, 2iC Scottish Transport Regiment RLC (V).**

DCIPT has told Soldier that the first batch of 200 pairs of boots was sent to RTMC Chikwell in February for issue to the Territorial Army and Reserve Forces.

The boots are being sent to regional kitting centres so that they can be tried on, rather than just issuing them directly to troops deploying, to ensure that they fit before use and there will, therefore, be no wastage. Further stocks are due in stores next month.

They even diverted a flight for us

I AM writing to express my appreciation of the Army compassionate system. I have served nearly 25 years in the British Army, at first in the RAPC and now as a human resource administrator in the AGC.

I have long been aware that in a category A or B compassionate situation the three Services will move heaven and earth to reunite a serving person with their family.

I am the regimental admin officer of 3 Battalion REME in Paderborn and in January I was granted a Cat A after being told my father had only days to live. Within minutes of it being granted, I was asked if I could get to Hannover or Düsseldorf to catch a scheduled flight.

I couldn't, but the duty officer came back ten minutes later and told me an RAF VC10 from Bosnia to RAF Brize Norton had been diverted to pick my wife and me up at Paderborn 90 minutes later.

At Manchester International we were met and escorted through passport control to a taxi which took us to my parents' house. The fare was taken care of by the MoD. The Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), supported by the compassionate cell in UKSC(G), got me from Paderborn to Manchester in under four hours to be with my mother.

I would like to express my gratitude to the staff who work tirelessly 365 days of the year in the JCCC, the RAF pilots and crews, UKSC(G) compassionate departments and 3 Bn REME.

My case was helped by the response and professionalism of all those involved from all three Services.

It was a difficult and emotional time for my family and me, but I am very proud to be part of this successful team. Once again, many thanks. – **Capt J Sykes, RAO, 3 Bn REME.**

Disappearing posts

FORMER Service personnel working as civilians for the Armed Forces in Germany are being treated badly.

With bases in Germany being closed there are bound to be redundancies, but some vacancies are being changed from local civilian posts to dependants' posts, which are not available to them.

It is being done by British managers to save money. If this is supporting past members of the Forces, heaven help us. – **Name and address supplied.**



"They reckon back home the Brits ain't got no kit . . . now that ain't true, is it?"



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We buy gas bottles to heat our quarter

I HAVE been in the Army for 28 years and am now at Chicksands where we are living in a house which is spacious but very old.

The kitchens are nearly 45 years old, and over the past two years half the houses on base have had new heating systems installed. But our half will not be getting new heating systems. The same houses are also being fitted with new bathrooms and kitchens.

Our bathroom is in a very poor state of repair. We have old storage wall heaters and during the winter I pay £30 extra a month for gas bottles because the house is so cold. The call-out system is good and the maintenance personnel do their best to help, but I feel the money could be spent more fairly. – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: I am sorry to say you are not alone. The standard of

Service families accommodation (SFA) is not as high as we would like and there is not enough money available to make the necessary improvements across the whole Service estate in the time we would like.

The Army Infrastructure Organisation and Defence Estates do have priorities as to how houses and estates are refurbished.

It is sometimes more cost effective to use what money is available to completely refurbish specific properties rather than spreading bits of upgrade (heating systems, new bathrooms or kitchens) across a wider number of properties.

With regards to your heating costs, there is a mechanism within the four-tier grading system to reduce rental charges if the house is poorly insulated or inefficiently heated. You should speak to your unit welfare officer to have your SFA regraded, which will hopefully result in a reduced grade for charge and reduced monthly costs if they have not already been lowered.

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Headlight regs are 'farce'

I BELIEVE the new headlight laws that apply to motorists in British Forces Germany (BFG) are a complete farce.

Under the new regulations, car headlights must have a slight kick-up to the right. This only applies to BFG cars and not to German vehicles.

I would like to buy a car which has

flat beam headlights but I can't because they only make left kick headlights for the UK and flat beam as standard.

I spoke to a TUV [German equivalent of an MOT] test centre and they told me that flat beam headlights are fine and would not fail a TUV test. – **Cpl Buckley, 6 Supply Regiment RLC.**



"Here comes another BFG job with funny lights, Hans. Let's bang him for wrong beams."

No quarter

I AM based in Arnhem, Netherlands as an exchange officer and am due to marry this year.

My wife-to-be is a professional and works in London and, not unreasonably, does not wish to give up her career to follow me around the world. We requested a surplus married quarter in or close to London but Defence Estates were unhelpful and rejected my application without offering any real alternatives.

I have been told that the allocation of married quarters does not have to consider the wishes of the spouse of the Service person, which is incredibly old-fashioned.

In this period of instability and frequent deployments, it is more vital than ever for the Army to take the welfare of its families seriously. Are there any plans to revise current regulations? – **Capt R Sanchez, 2 Mercian, 11 (NL) AAslt Bde.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: *The Army encourages accompanied service, but does recognise that wives have careers. Increased opportunities for spousal employment, along with family stability, are two factors behind the move to super garrisons.*

Family welfare is also taken seriously and much effort is devoted to its provision. However, the needs of the Service must and do come first.

Service families accommodation (SFA) is provided for married personnel to live with their families at their duty station, not wherever they wish.

This is your entitlement; if you do not wish to exercise it that is entirely your choice. That said, there is flexibility within current policy that takes account of surplus married quarters.

Even so, if there were surpluses – which is unlikely in the London area – there is always the chance that your wife might have to move if there was a more needy entitled case.

Badge unites veterans

I READ with interest Tony Morland's comments (Feb) on the institution of a UK defence medal and HM Armed Forces Veterans Badge (HMAFVB).

The purpose of the badge, introduced in 2004, is to recognise all military service, not just operational or campaign service. Unlike a medal, the badge is intended to generate a sense of identity and unity for all Armed Forces veterans in our communities.

They are encouraged to wear it as this serves to publicly raise awareness of the diversity of veterans in the community. More than 560,000 have been issued and the feedback from the majority of recipients has been positive.

High demand meant that it had to be issued in batches, starting with the eldest first, and there have been a number of extensions to the eligibility

for it. On January 29, Veterans' Minister Derek Twigg announced that eligibility was extended to January 31, 2005, when issue of the HMAFVB to those leaving the Services was introduced.

This means that all ex-Service personnel, regardless of their conditions of service, are now eligible to apply for the HMAFVB.



While medals are intended to be worn on formal occasions, owners of the badge are encouraged to wear it daily. It is automatically issued to each Service leaver, so ensuring that future generations of veterans are included under the umbrella of the badge

as the recognised mark of all who have served in the Armed Forces. – **WO1 Spence Parry, Project 2, Veterans Policy Unit, MoD.**

Problem with Pax premium

MY PAX insurance premiums are increasing by 30 per cent because the scheme is taking a hit from the increasing number of claims.

I have been a member since the scheme began and that loyalty is rewarded with a hike in cost. Any chance of a no-claims discount or the opportunity to reclaim these loaded premiums via a new allowance?

Will premiums reduce once current hostilities cease? What a shame these changes are accepted by the chain of command when our compensation schemes are the subject of rebuke. – **Name and address supplied.**

Kerryn Dinsdale, AIG UK Ltd, replies: *We have been involved with Pax for years and have been able to provide support to thousands of Servicemen and women. In the last 11 years the cost of a unit of cover has risen only twice, in 2003 and now in 2008.*

As has been widely reported, the costs of claims have exceeded the premiums for a number of years. To ensure continuance of Pax, it is necessary to raise the price per unit for an individual from £2.10 to £2.75 and for a family from £3 to £3.90. This has been done in consultation with the MoD and the administrator.

We cannot comment on compensation policy or the issue of allowances as these are matters for the MoD.

PS...

IN the February issue you had an interesting article on Desert Hawk [the compact unmanned aerial vehicle] in Iraq. The system is slightly heavier than the 3kg you mentioned and the latest version – DH3 – is not launched using a bungee, but is hand-launched. The first variant we bought – DH1+ – used a bungee. – Maj Martin Smith, SO2 GS RAGTT.

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What's with the monkey business?

I WAS shocked by the picture ("Cold comfort", Feb) which showed Lt Storm Green speaking to a Zumbelay villager in Helmand with a PG Tips monkey sticking from his webbing pouch.

This unprofessional profile does nothing for hearts and minds and the locals will never take us seriously if it continues.

It will not be long before he has cigarettes in his helmet like the Americans in Vietnam. Depressingly, his CSM – a WO – is with him and allows it to happen. – **Annoyed RSM.**



The cheeky chimp provided a morale boost for soldiers living in austere conditions on Op Herrick's front line, writes the Editor, although in fairness to Annoyed RSM, he wasn't the only one to express the views he did. Goldstreamers at Forward Operating Base Keenan award the toy to a "chimp of the week" – the most accident-prone soldier of the previous seven days. Wild horses couldn't drag from us the gaffe that led to Lt Green receiving the coveted prize, but suffice to say it was on merit. The soldiers we encountered maintained a high level of professionalism and the chimp did not detract from that.



More letters at **TALKBACK** online
www.soldiermagazine.co.uk

Red carded

I TOO have had a problem chasing up payment for enlisting someone into the Army and received a "not bothered" response (Talkback, Dec).

In 2004 my son enlisted and I went with him to Edinburgh Armed Forces Careers Office and saw him hand in the committal card I had given him.

He passed out of Harrogate, did his phase two training and is now serving with the 1st Royal Tank Regiment. I got no payment, despite chasing it up.

In January, my other son enlisted and gave a committal card to Bathgate Army Careers Information Office. He started his phase two at Catterick in January.

Am I ever likely to receive money I was promised and that in turn I promised to my sons? – **Cpl D A W Chapman, 1 Scots.**

Lt Col Douglas Wren, COS Recruiting Group, replies: *I would be interested who is "not bothered" about how your claim is progressing and will require some additional detail on each of your sons so I can examine their cases in detail.*

It is worth mentioning that the Recruit Bounty Scheme (RBS) covered only those recruited into the Infantry and Royal Artillery (not the RAC, for example).

Anyone enlisting before the RBS started in December 2005 is not eligible for the bonus, even if they joined either of these Arms. If your second son has completed phase two training you should be eligible to receive the bonus. I hope this is the case and I should be able to authorise the payment once you have made contact.

I RECRUITED a South African friend now with 5 Scots. We tried to hand in the red card for the bonus, but were told that as he is South African, I didn't qualify. Why? – **Cfn E Coetzer, SEAME.**

Lt Col Douglas Wren replies: *The RBS was aimed at recruiting British passport holders into the Infantry and Royal Artillery. Non-British passport holders were explicitly excluded under the conditions of the initiative. Only soldiers and officers in the Royal Artillery and Infantry were eligible to recruit and so receive a bounty.*

I regret to say that you were ineligible in both instances. The Defence Information Note published by Director of Manning (Army) clearly set out the terms and conditions of this initiative.

I AM writing regarding the golden hello payment scheme I was offered as part of my recruitment. Despite presenting my certificate twice since completion of my training in October 2006 I have still not received a payment.

What is my next course of action? – **Name and address supplied.**

Lt Col Douglas Wren replies: *I am sorry to hear that your golden hello payment was not sent to you when it was due. I have investigated your circumstances and am pleased to report that you should have received it by now.*

It appears that the notification of your completion of phase two training had not been forwarded by your unit to HQ Recruiting Group.

● **AS stated in last month's Update pages, if you believe you are owed money from either the Recruit Bounty Scheme or a golden hello you should first confirm the status of your application at unit level before contacting Recruiting Group Headquarters G3 Applications (01980 615367), who will investigate your claim further.**

I SIGNED off while on a tour of the Falklands in December 2006. I submitted the paperwork on the old system as JPA had not been implemented. Last June I returned to my unit in Germany, only to find that according to JPA my parent unit was still in the Falklands. This meant the unit clerks and stores could not access my details. For the next six months I tried to sort this out through the clerks and chain of command as it caused many pay-related problems.

IN Gosport lies the shell of the last Service hospital still in use by the local NHS trust but scheduled to disappear within a few years, leaving Britain as the only major country in the West without a dedicated Service hospital. Yet British forces still seem to take the lion's share in the fight against terror.

IT was a pleasant surprise to find a copy of the December magazine with its feature on the 40th anniversary of the withdrawal from Aden. I served at RAF Hospital Khormaksar Beach in Aden from 1954 to 1966 as a young nursing sister in the Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service.

WITH so many British soldiers injured in Iraq and Afghanistan, could the UK not introduce, like the US Army and French, a wound medal for operations?

IN January 1991, 40 members of the Territorial Army RMP volunteered for duty for Op Granby in Iraq. We had trained for years to go to war for provost ops but they sent us to BAOR to be policemen while the Regular RMP, who trained as policemen, were sent to the Gulf to do provost ops. Not one of those 40 was ever recognised.

I AGREE with Tony Moreland ("Give this man a medal", Feb). Medals for Cold War service should be instigated.



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A bit excessive

I TRAVELLED from Germany to the UK last year for a course and was charged €308 (about £220) for 31kg of excess baggage.

My unit clerk told me I was entitled to claim for only 20kg – or about £132. So, for volunteering for a course and packing exactly what was on the kit list, I am now out of pocket.

Since arriving in Northern Ireland a year ago I have not received NI allowance. JPAC and Glasgow insist I'm still based in Germany and need to get my unit to re-run my Arrivals Script.

Finally, I was promoted to corporal on December 1, 2006 and it took nine months for me to be paid as one. It's the same old story, with the clerks, JPAC and Glasgow blaming each other. – **Name and address supplied.**

Col Danny McCulloch, Col Current Ops, DSPS(A),



"I know it seems a lot, Miss, but I am going on a heavy weapons course."

responds: JSP 800 Vol 2 sets out the policy for travel on RAF AT/charter aircraft and by commercial air. It puts the onus on the individual and the unit by stating "If excess

baggage has not been agreed [in advance], the individual will be liable for all excess baggage charges at check-in." So it was up to the soldier to ensure he did not exceed the scales or to apply for an excess at the time of booking. Perhaps the joining instructions should be amended to make this clear.

It is regrettable that he has experienced delays in changes to his pay and allowances which, in part, appear to have been exacerbated by the transition from legacy pay systems to JPA. The time taken to resolve the issues is unacceptable.

His promotion to acting corporal on December 1, 2006 was delivered in August 2007 and the back pay the following month, in September. Some of his Northern Ireland Resident Supplement (NIRS) was paid in September; he received NIRS in January, and, since the arrivals process has been corrected, he received his back pay of NIRS in February.

Owed £1,233 Charge it to the Army

FOR a year now I have been owed disturbance allowance (DA) for my move from one regiment to another.

At the end of February last year I moved quarters smoothly enough.

It was not until I queried the allowance that I found I had been classed as married unaccompanied and that £495 had been taken out of my DA to pay for food unaccompanied, which obviously I didn't have to pay as I had just moved from one married quarter (MQ) to another.

This money was deducted without my knowledge. I did receive about £500, which made up the rest of the DA. I asked my admin cell to resolve this and they stopped the food unaccompanied after several months of trying, but also stopped my MQ payments for another several months.

I now owe the amount that went unpaid for my MQ, which I am paying off monthly. I am happy to do this but am no closer to resolving the DA issue. I am owed £1,233 in DA and food payments which I shouldn't have made.

Every time I try to recover the money I am told it will be in my bank the next month. This has been stressful for me and I would like it resolved before I go to Afghanistan this month so neither my wife nor I have to worry about it.

Will I have to pay tax on it twice? Finally, my pay levels have been wrong since last May. I am on 3 and should be on 5. – **Gnr Lloyd, 32 Regiment RA.**

Col Danny McCulloch, Col Current Ops, DSPS(A), responds: Gnr Lloyd received disturbance allowance but had food charges deducted from it in error. This happened because his move took place during the cutover to JPA when there were restrictions on access to both legacy pay systems and JPA.

This is regrettable and his unit HR admin staff have intervened and corrected the error, which was reflected on his March pay statement.

He can be reassured that there are no tax implications because DA, MQ and food charges are all non-taxable.

With regard to his pay level, he qualified at Class 2 on March 30, 2007 and subsequently at Class 1 on September 30, 2007 and on each occasion should have moved up one pay level. His annual increment on December 26 moved him on to level 5. His HR admin have taken action, including for the period prior to his record being on JPA, and this was reflected on his pay statement for March.

This unacceptable delay occurred because the information about Gnr Lloyd's qualifications had not been passed to HR staff so they could amend his JPA record.

I AM a 29-year-old Army officer serving voluntary unaccompanied (VOLSEP) and living in a Royal Air Force mess. RAF colleagues do not pay accommodation charges when serving unaccompanied.

I've been paying an accommodation charge since I married a year ago so thought it was an admin error.

I was mistaken. Army personnel under 37 serving VOLSEP pay accommodation charges but the RAF and Royal Navy do not.

The only provision made by the Army for those who seek to provide stability for their families by maintaining their own home is the over-37 package and I am several years away from it. – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: Single living accommodation (SLA) charging policy for VOLSEP personnel differs across the three Services. The Army encourages accompanied service, particularly for those below 37, and so only gives entitlement to a waiver of SLA charges for its personnel once they have reached 37. The policy was due to be reviewed within proposals for home ownership under the Strategic Remuneration Review, shortly to be decided. I anticipate no resolution, so we will return to the charge.

Official Government Environmental Data. Fuel consumption figures mpg (litres/100km) and CO₂ emissions (g/km). New Saab 9-3 Saloon range: Urban – from 16.7 (16.9) to 39.2 (7.2), Extra-urban – from 39.2 (7.2) to 64.2 (4.4), Combined – from 26.2 (10.8) to 52.3 (5.4). CO₂ Emissions from 147 to 259g/km. New Saab 9-3 Convertible range: Urban – from 16.3 (17.3) to 36.7 (7.7), Extra-urban – from 36.7 (7.7) to 60.1 (4.7), Combined – from 25.4 (11.1) to 48.7 (5.8). CO₂ Emissions from 154 to 266g/km.

Model shown is Saloon Aero 1.9TTiD OTR £26,470 with optional ALU73 18" 10 spoke alloy wheels at £800. Military discounts are available to all serving members of UK Armed Forces, retired service personnel, MOD civilian personnel and HM Forces Reservists. The offer is also extended to the spouse/partner of the eligible applicant. No other marketing programmes apply. * New 9-3 Convertible Aero 1.9TTiD (180PS) auto.

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Invisible sacrifice

Nation has no real understanding of impact of operations on our families

IMAGINE, if you will, being newly married to a soldier; immersed into an "alien" environment where everyone wears green and speaks in acronyms, where you have to get past a man with a loaded gun to see your husband/wife at work, where everyone else seems to understand the way of life and you feel totally at sea.

Now imagine that the person you married is sent away for six months to a war zone and you are left to cope alone – in a nation where there is little understanding or empathy with Service life.

We all know that the extremely high current level of operational commitments has meant that Service personnel and their families have made significant sacrifices during the past five years.

With the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq on us, media coverage will bring about an awareness of these sacrifices – so for a couple of days at least the public will be reminded about those who have made the ultimate sacrifice and those who have suffered terrible injuries.

But how much recognition will be made of the invisible sacrifices made by the families?

The months spent apart, the missed birthdays and Christmases, the single-parent family coping alone while at the same time knowing that their loved one is being exposed to very real dangers.

All of these sacrifices are endured by the families with significant fortitude; their "can do" attitude carries them through the challenging times.

Perhaps because the families do not shout from the rooftops about their difficulties, there still remains a lack of real understanding in this country about the impact of Service life on family life.



A personal view from Mel Pullan, Director of Communications of the Army Families Federation

To their credit, the Government and the Army are trying to bridge this gap in understanding between the Armed Forces and the nation. Gen Sir Richard Dannatt, the Chief of the General Staff, has publicly spoken about it and the Government is developing a National Recognition Study to look at how the

nation's understanding and appreciation of the Forces can be strengthened.

And we do hear good news stories – the jubilant homecoming parades and last November's record sales of poppies.

So as a family it is even more dismaying to see media coverage of Service personnel suffering verbal abuse and being banned from wearing their uniforms in public, and to read that university students voted to ban the military from their campus.

I wonder if they have considered

how insulting this is to those who fight for their freedom and the democratic rights of their society – and also for the families who show their support by keeping the home fires burning.

The family provides the backbone of support to the soldier serving their country – so is it any wonder that family life makes its mark on whether a soldier decides to stay or go? We know that the chain of command cares for the welfare of its troops and families, and we do hear regularly about improvements such as the recent introduction of the childcare voucher scheme.

These are all welcome, but what can be done about the difficulties that cannot be addressed by throwing money at the problem?

The Army Families Federation recently did a poll to assess retention from the family's perspective.

The findings showed the split surprisingly even between people finding Army life better or worse than they had expected, as was the make-up of people who would feel happier if

their spouse left the Army. But when we asked what aspect of Army life would make them want their soldier to leave the Army, the majority of those who responded identified its impact on their relationship with their spouse: no Government strategy paper is going to be able to sort this one out. ■

‘It is dismaying to read of Service personnel suffering verbal abuse and of students voting to ban the military from their campus’

Want to know more about the Army Families Federation? Log on to www.aff.org.uk

The column that offers you a confidential way to tackle debt – and it won't cost you a penny

MANAGE YOUR MONEY

Credit Action President Keith Tondeur will be pleased to answer, in confidence, specific questions addressed to the Editor.



A year of gloom

THERE is little doubt that 2008 will be difficult for many of us. For years we enjoyed low inflation and unemployment, low interest rates and rising house values,

which encouraged us to borrow, so much so that the amount we owe in the UK is growing by £1 million every five minutes.

House repossessions [27,000+] rose last year and are expected to do so again in 2008. Things will be especially hard for 1.4 million households coming off low-price fixed rate mortgages so take steps now to improve your financial position.

Could you boost your income? For example: Could your partner earn more? [handle delicately!]. Do you have a spare room to rent? Are you getting your entitled benefits? Go to www.direct.gov.uk. Are you claiming your tax credits? See www.taxcredits.inlandrevenue.gov.uk. What about childcare vouchers? Go to www.childcarevouchers.co.uk. Make a budget (www.moneybasics.co.uk). Now look at spending. Are you spending on non-essentials? Could you be paying less for utilities (compare on www.uswitch.com)? Can you make your cash go further? Both www.creditaction.org.uk and www.moneysavingexpert.co.uk have good ideas. Most of all, talk – with yourself, your partner and older children, the Benefits Agency, your mortgage company; and creditors and debt advice agencies. Visit the Consumer Credit Counselling Service at www.cccs.co.uk

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Terms and conditions: Military discounts are available to all serving members of UK Armed Forces, retired service personnel, MOD civilian personnel and HM Forces Reservists. The offer is also extended to the spouse/partner of the eligible applicant. No other marketing programmes apply. Model illustrated Astra TwinTop Sport 1.6i 16v VVT with Plus Pack and metallic paint as extra-cost options.

Official Government Environmental Data. Fuel consumption figures mpg (litres/100km) and CO₂ emissions (g/km). Astra TwinTop: Urban - from 21.2 (13.3) to 37.2 (7.6), Extra-urban - from 38.7 (7.3) to 55.4 (5.1), Combined - from 29.7 (9.5) to 47.1 (6.0). CO₂ emissions from 159 to 228g/km.

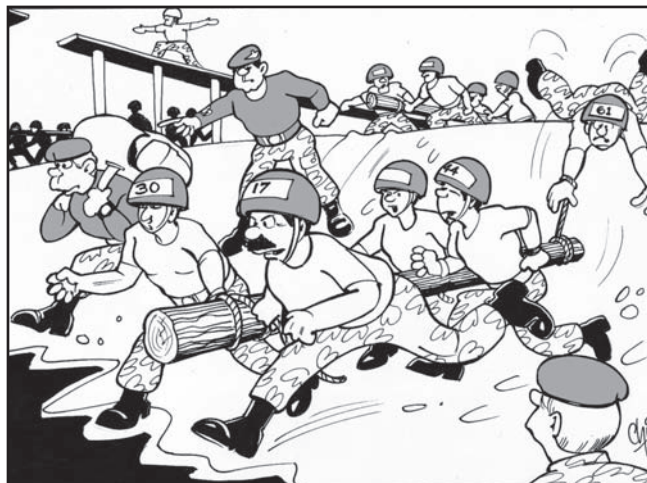
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NO. 797

HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU?

WIN £100



TEN details have been changed in the latest in the series of drawings by our cartoonist, Chip. Circle the differences in the left-hand image and send the whole panel to **HOAY 797, Soldier**, Ordnance Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU by April 30.

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

Name: (Give initials and rank or title)

Address:

February competition (No 795): First correct entry drawn at random and winner of the £100 prize was **Gdsm Davis 28, HQ London District**. Runners-up **K Bennett, Evje, Norway**, and **Arshad Rasheed, 1 R Welsh, Cyprus**, each win the equivalent of a £25 gift voucher.

The ten differences were: (clockwise from front left) hands on stopwatch; lieutenant's rank "pips"; letters on mortar shell casing; gaiter strap; knob on mortar tripod; tank hatch; splash of mud; water bottle top; gun on half-track; insignia on left sleeve of the soldier holding mortar baseplate.

**freeze
frame**

Winner of our February competition (inset)

THERE were some great entries for the February caption, but the prize goes to 150 Recovery Company REME admin officer Ian Goodwin-Reeves for his heartfelt suggestion: **"What do you mean you've forgotten your JPA password again"**.

We liked **"Come on, Sir, you'll enjoy being the Denials and Counter-Accusations Officer in the MoD Press Office"** from Graham Drew at the Army School of Ammunition, and **"The GHQ staff officer couldn't believe how close the lads just back from Iraq had come to finding weapons of mass destruction"** from M Pickering of Hyde, Cheshire.

"Ross Kemp on the phone, Sir. He wants to know if he can be in your gang" from WO2 G E McLorie, HQ 4 Div, raised a chuckle, as did **"But Sir, we can make a civil partnership**



work" from Maj (Retd) R A James, BFPO 39. The photograph's Scottish content moved P Clarke of Wokingham to offer **"Sir, you let the Regiment down badly . . . you were**



The RQMS had no option but to order size 1 boots for his newest recruit

WIN A BOOK: Write a caption for the photo, above, sent in by Bovington-based WO2 Jan Rennard, R Wx Y, and showing him and his father, WO2 David Rennard, then RQMS of The Yorks and Lancaster Regiment, at Saighton Barracks, Chester, in 1964, to reach us by April 30. The best, in our opinion, will win a copy of *Forgotten Voices of the Falklands* by Hugh McManners, in association with the Imperial War Museum (Ebury Press, £19.99.)

underpants" while N R Townsend of Reading reckoned on **"The unit entertainment officer despairs when listening to the RSM's sixth rendition of *Nessun Dorma* at auditions."**

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www.baff.org.uk

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www.armyaviation.co.uk

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www.armysafety.mod.uk

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www.rememuseum.org.uk

REME Museum of Technology.

www.armymuseums.org.uk

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

www.kingsownmuseum.plus.com

King's Own Royal Regiment Museum, Lancaster

A HEROES WELCOME

The Windsor Castle Royal Tattoo takes place from 8.30pm to 10.30pm on the evenings of Thursday 8th, Friday 9th and Saturday 10th May 2008.

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Defence directory

Armed Forces Christian Union: 01252 311221; www.afcu.org.uk

Army Benevolent Fund: 0845 241 4820

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

Army Families Federation: 01980 615525

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

Career Transition Partnership: 0207 766 8020

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

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

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

Family Escort Service: 020 74639249

Forces Pension Society: 020 78209988

Joint Service Housing Advice Office: 01722 436575

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

Mutual Support (Forces Multiple Sclerosis support group): 07962 023654, 01803 311527, www.mutualsupport.org.uk email welfaresupport@mutualsupport.org.uk

National Gulf Veterans' and Families' Association Office: (0900-1700); 24-hour helpline 0845 257 4853; www.ngvfa.org.uk; fax 01482 808731

Regular Forces' Employment Association: 0121 2360058; www.rfea.org.uk

Royal British Legion: 0845 7725 725

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

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

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

Services Cotswold Centre: 01225 810358

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

Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA): 0800 169 2277 (from UK); 0044 1253 866043 (from overseas) Medical Assessment Programme: 0800 169 5401

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

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

APRIL 2008

Reunions

Regimental Specialists/Duties: Reunion on April 26 at SEME WOs' and Sgts' Mess, Bordon. Ring SSgt Mick Newlands on (mil) 94291 5575, (civ) 01420 485575 or email cqmsqcoy@hqatra.mod.uk

11th Hussars OCA dedication of memorial at National Memorial Arboretum during annual reunion, May 17. Ring 01282 839773 for details.

Airborne Ordnance: Reunion will take place at The Princess Royal Barracks, Deepcut, on May 30-31. Ring WO1 Hutch Hutcheon on (mil) 94214 5360 or (civ) 01252 833360 or email hutchabcto@btinternet.com

Sandhurst instructors 1975-79: Reunion at Sandhurst, May 31. For details, email Jane Butler at butlers.shrewton@btinternet.com or Tom Fairclough at tomfairclough@fsmail.net

Indefatigable Old Boys: 25th anniversary reunion, June 7, at Llanfairpwll, Anglesey. Email Howard Trillo at howardtrillo@yahoo.co.uk

251 (Sunderland) Medical Squadron: Reunion on June 12 at TA Centre, Dykelands Road, Seaburn, Sunderland SR6 8DP. Ex-members welcome. Ring Graeme New on 07769 948685 or email graemenew@btinternet.com

40th Regiment, Royal Artillery: Lowland Gunners reunion on June 14 at Alanbrooke Barracks, Topcliffe, Yorks. All ex-members welcome. Ring Capt Mark Wilson on 01845 595262 or email mark.wilson755@mod.uk

669 Squadron AAC: Coyote Dinner at Dishforth Airfield, June 14, for past and present members. Ring Sgt Ben Wildblood on 01423 321729 or email coyotedinner08@hotmail.co.uk

144 Para Med Sqn (V)/144 Fd Amb/23 Para Fd Amb (PFA): Reunion past and present dinner will be held at the TA Centre Hornsey, London N8 7QT on June 21. Ring Capt Roy Hatch on 0208 3413664 or 07730 977989, or email royhatchbem@fsmail-net

215 (Essex) Sqn RCT (V): Reunion at the Tilbury Community Centre, Essex on June 28, starting 1930. Contact Mark Hull on 01375 673254 or email info@sigmastudies.co.uk

Warwick/Worcester Yeomanry: Reunion to be held in June. Ring R Hartill on 01789 205031.

Royal Berkshire Regiment: Reunion at Brock Barracks, July 26-27. Ring Stan Knipe on 01452 728823 or email stanknipe@tiscali.co.uk

Royal West Kent Regt: Reunion at Maidstone, Sept 14. Ring Brian Bartlett on 01322 346053.

Queen's University OTC: Centenary Ball at La Mon House Hotel, Belfast, Oct 11. Email uotcqueens-adj@mod.uk or ring Dereck Wood on 02892 260464.

5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Gds: Southern area annual weekend at Falklands House UOTC, Oxford. Nov 14 – regimental curry evening. Nov 15 – local military visits followed by gathering in Oxford. Ring Steven Hunt on 07880 909050 or email jwalker77@hotmail.co.uk

Searchline

Windsor School, Hamm 1953-83 society. Ann Blunn is searching for ex-pupils, staff and anyone connected to Windsor School to join a thriving society that holds regular reunions and publishes newsletters. Details from Ann Blunn, 6 Merrytree Close, West Wellow, Romsey, SO51 6RB or email rwagb@btinternet.com

Aden veterans in Gloucestershire area are sought for an informal tri-Service get-together. Ring Denis Sparrow on 01453 763552.

Gertrude Heranhof wishes to contact **Richard Marshall**, who was stationed in Villach, Carinthia, with the Military Police in 1948-49. Email estherjosteiner@googlemail.com or ring 0043 6505268695.

Dennis Lillie seeks sappers from **66 Field Company RE** who served from June 1944 to November 1945, to attend a wreath-laying ceremony at Mantes on the Seine on Nov 11. Contact Sherrie-Lyn Bentley, Managing Director, The Silver Tulip, PO Box 31363, Lusaka, Zambia.

News sought of **Sgt J Murray** by ex-Cpl **W Bowes**, a friend who served with him 40 years ago in **Mulheim** (113 Coy RASC) and 13 Coy RCT in Nelson Barracks. Ring Mr Bowes on 02890 869366 or write to 4 Longfield Gardens, Green Island, BT38 8TR.

Former **Sandhurst instructors** are trying to locate **Alan Dawes, SASC, Chris Slater, LG, Ted Lowe, IG and Dave Ridley, Gren Gds**, all based at Sandhurst 1975-79, for a reunion. Email Jane Butler at butlers.shrewton@btinternet.com or Tom Fairclough at tomefairclough@fsmail.net

Appointments

Maj Gen: B Brealey, late RA, to be GOC Theatre Troops, in Nov.

Competitions

iPod Nano: B Barton, Colchester. **Answer:** Chuck Berry.

Somme DVD: E Gough, BFPO 39; Maj A Powell, Leicester; M Rodger, BFPO 772; Ms S Jackson, Kempston, Beds; Ms C Sullivan, Bristol. **Answer:** France.

Copy of Andy McNab's Crossfire: WO2 S Coles, BFPO 5319; Cpl P O'Dwyer, Port Talbot; WO2 B Law, Chatham; Maj Quince, BFPO 26, Sgt C Corry, Arlington, USA. **Answer:** Who Dares Wins.

Commando DVD: LWtr A Lappin, Navy Desk, Gosport; Maj A Fisher, Donnington; Lt Col P Corden, Picton Barracks, Bulford; Sgt L Parsons, HQ 3 (UK) Div, Bulford; Martin Kerry, Nottingham; M Bell, Sheffield. **Answer:** 1st Battalion, The Rifles.



● **MEMBERS** of The Queen's Royal Hussars gave their latest four-legged recruit a royal welcome when he was presented in full regalia to the Duke of Edinburgh.

Alamein – the new ceremonial drum horse – was put at immediate ease when he was introduced to the special guest after a St Patrick's Day event in Germany. The five-year-old Irish Grey, who measures 17 hands, took pride of place at the Sennelager ceremony and proved an immediate hit with soldiers and their families.

Defence diary

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

April 1-27: Contact, George Rodger's war photographs – Free exhibition celebrating the centenary of the birth of photojournalism pioneer Rodger, who documented the Second World War for an American audience. Imperial War Museum North, Trafford Park, Manchester.

April 26: Coldstream Guards' Op Herrick homecoming parade, Windsor. For more information contact etsofficer@yahoo.co.uk

May 8-10: Windsor Castle Royal Tattoo – Featuring troops from regiments recently returned from operations and entitled "A Heroes Welcome", this not-for-profit event is being held in recognition of the selfless service of soldiers and the support of their families. Tickets for the tattoo, which will take place from 2030-2230, are priced at £15, £25, £35 and £45, and are available online at www.windsortattoo.co.uk

May 22: Commemorative service to honour the 55 personnel who lost their lives in Bosnia, those injured and the many thousands who served there throughout the 15-year deployment. National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire. Call the free ticket hotline on 0800 169 2277.

June 7-8: The Chelsea Pageant – This show chronicling the early years of the Royal Hospital

The Duke of Edinburgh, who is Colonel-in-Chief of the QRH, presented sprigs of shamrock to 200 former soldiers from the regiment's Old Comrades' Association.

Maj Damian Briggs-Wilson said: "I'm delighted with the way the day went and I take my hat off to all the guys who have grafted so hard to make this really come together.

"We are a family regiment with a lot of history and, as such, we have a lot of old comrades who we like to bring together for a reunion."

Chelsea, from its founding by King Charles II through to the entry of the first pensioners in 1688, is being held to raise funds for the Chelsea Pensioners' Appeal. Tickets can be purchased from Ticketmaster on 0844 847 2309 or online at www.ticketmaster.co.uk

September 10: A commemorative service to mark the end of operations in Northern Ireland will take place at St Paul's Cathedral, London. The service will pay tribute to the 763 personnel killed in NI, and the 300,000 who have served in the province since 1969. Ticketing details to be confirmed.

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

Roadshows

THE Army Presentation Team wants to hear from members of the public who would like a personal invitation to attend its dynamic roadshow, which begins with a reception, is followed by a presentation and questions-and-answers session and finishes with a finger buffet. Military personnel will answer all your questions about the British Army. Call 01276 417000 or email your name and address to apt.mod@btinternet.com with the event you are interested in attending.

Apr: 8, Swindon; 9, Cheltenham; 10, Salisbury; 22, Dunfermline; 23, Aberdeen; 24, Hawick. **May:** 13, Llandudno; 14, Newport; 15, Merthyr; 27, Aylesbury; 28, Reading; 19, Southampton. **Jun:** 17, Anwick; 18, Hexham; 19, Hartlepool; 30, Tower Hamlets.

British Army Badges

By Lt Col (Retd) Robin Hodges

Cap badge

ALL ranks of The Life Guards and The Blues and Royals wear the Household Cavalry cap badge on the forage cap, with regimental badges being worn on the Service dress cap and beret. The Household Cavalry cap badge was introduced in 1913, with the cypher changed for each Sovereign. The crown changed from the Tudor (or King's) Crown to the St Edward's (or Queen's) Crown on the accession of Queen Elizabeth II in 1952.



Formation sign

THE formation sign of 3rd (United Kingdom) Division was chosen in 1940 by Maj Gen Bernard Montgomery. The triangular design represents the wartime 3rd Division with its three infantry brigades, each with three infantry battalions. The inspiration for the design may have been the label on Bass bottled beer, or alternatively the shape may have represented the three corners of Great Britain, which the division was preparing to defend against German invasion. The present badge was introduced in 1993.



Specialist badge

ONE of the Yeoman Warders at HM Tower of London holds the voluntary appointment of Raven Master, responsible for overseeing the well-being of the Tower's ravens which, since the 1660s – or 1897 depending upon which version of the story is believed – will guarantee the continuation of the Monarchy. The badge is worn on the right forearm.



Tactical recognition flash

THE Royal Signals adopted a TRF in 2003 based upon the Second World War Arm-of-Service stripe. The badge is worn blue to the front.



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



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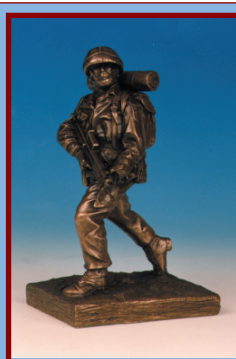
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Jennifer (46), 5.7", blonde teacher. Enjoys reading, the theatre, music, photography and history. Seeking honest, genuine pen pals around the same age. P028

Kerry (36), 5'4", brown hair, medium build and blue eyes. Enjoys music, the theatre, the cinema, history, socialising, fun days out and spending time with her children. Seeking pen pals, 33-38. P029.

Nikki (37), 5'10", fun loving blonde from Kent. Enjoys mountain biking, playing squash (badly), motor sport, DIY and the cinema. Seeking to make contact with single soldiers (please include photo), 30+. P030.

34-year-old female, redhead, GSOH with a medium build, pretty chilled, laid-back person and easy going. Enjoys the outdoors, walking, cycling, animals, reading and watching rugby. Seeking pen pals, any age group. P031

Monica (39), average build. Enjoys the cinema, shopping, going out for a meal and a drink. Seeking pen pals in the Forces, any age group. P032

Ruthy (24), enjoys history, reading, writing letters and clubbing. Seeking pen pals to write too, 18-28. P033

Cathy (34), 5'6", single, curvy, average build with shoulder-length brown hair and hazel eyes. Kind, caring, honest, genuine, supportive, lonely and shy at first. Enjoys reading, watching football, rugby, animals, especially horses and cats, museums, the countryside, the cinema, days out and cosy nights in. Seeking genuine single male pen pals, will answer all letters. P034

Elaine (30), 5'5", slim with brown hair and green eyes. Enjoys going out to pubs, clubs and keep fit. Divorced with two children and seeking pen pals, 25-40. P035

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Movies

A P R I L R E V I E W



Lamb to the slaughter?: Michael Pena, left, plays a US Ranger in Robert Redford's all-star political drama. To have a chance of winning one of ten copies of *Lions for Lambs* (DVD), tell us the codename the Americans gave to their operations in Afghanistan in 2001. Answers by postcard or email (comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk) to reach us by April 30.



Politics of war

Hard reality for actor playing a US soldier caught in the 9/11 crossfire

LIONS FOR LAMBS' rapier-sharp script and Hollywood cast-to-die-for move this intelligent drama's take on the political machinations behind the US war in Afghanistan along at a thriller's pace.

Inspired by their class assignments to engage with politics, two college friends sacrifice their education to join up and fight the war on terror.

As soldiers they pay a heavy price when their political masters action a risky military strategy to nail the Taliban and recoup waning public support for the six-year-old campaign.

Oscar-winning Tinseltown legend Robert Redford takes both directorial and acting credits in this 90-minute movie of three separate vignettes.

Each section gives a different perspective to the story behind unfolding tragic events occurring in southern Afghanistan over a single hour.

Redford's role as professor Stephen Malley brings colour to his former

students, who lie seriously injured in sub-zero temperatures after their mission goes wrong. As they await rescue, Senator Jasper Irving (Tom Cruise) spars with journalist Janine Roth (Meryl Streep) about his "winning" military master plan.

The film's focus remains firmly on the plight of US Army rangers Ernest Rodriguez (Michael Pena) and Arian Finch (Derek Luke).

Caught in the Taliban gun sights, they are also unknowingly stuck in the political crossfire of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre and the US-led invasion of Iraq two years later.

As a newcomer to the silver screen and working with an acclaimed cast, Michael Pena undertook some concentrated military training to make his performance of a critically wounded American soldier realistic.

"The part where I was shooting and had to reload took a lot of training. It's only three seconds in the movie, but

it took me three weeks to learn how to do it," admitted the actor, whose TV credits include *The Shield* and *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*.

"To me it's one of those things that if it doesn't look good in the movie, people will tell that I'm just faking it.

"I did some research on pain and consciousness. When the body is hurt like that, there's a sleepy feeling and pain helps you.

"You drift off but then the pain shoots you up with adrenaline and wakes you up a little more."

Pena also drew on his own experience as a boy soldier. He briefly considered a career in green, as did some of his childhood friends who eventually joined up. "I was in the school cadets and we'd dress up and march and learn about the rifles. And the person who was running it suggested the military.

"I thought about it for a week or so but after that week the feeling never came back," Pena said, adding that it



was important not to judge whether his character made the right decision in going to war.

"I just look at him and wonder whether he made an honest decision about himself.

"It helped that I had friends from the neighbourhood I grew up in and from places in LA who also made that decision, and they have gone on to fight in the war.

"I was thinking of joining when I was 19, but I didn't, obviously."

Lions for Lambs does not preach but it does raise a lot of questions. The facts and arguments used by those for and against military intervention in suspect rogue nations are presented in a way that informs, involves and entertains the audience. But, for Pena, engaging with the world around you was pivotal to the plot.

"I think the through line, which is pretty evident, is to get involved. And I think that viewpoints are necessary and accepted.

"When I read a paper I want to see, 'Oh this guy is pro but why is this guy not?'"

"It's interesting if they both put up really good arguments and then you can decide for yourself. It's good to be engaged." ■

***Lions for Lambs* (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment) will be released on DVD on April 21.**



Rescue Dawn, available on DVD from April 7

CHRISTIAN Bale's devotion to his film roles brings added authenticity to this already mind-blowing true story of one man's survival against the odds. Sacrificing his own physical well-being and *Batman*-honed physique, *The Machinist* star brings a visual gravity to the plight of his character, Dieter Dengler, a US fighter pilot who was shot down after being sent on a secret air raid over the jungles of Laos during the Vietnam War and held captive in a small Laotian prison camp. As the film reveals how Dengler relied on the most primal qualities of evasion, endurance, tenacity and courage to try and make his way home, his epic efforts are reflected in Bale's emaciated, skeletal appearance. A phenomenal performance worthy of a heroic tale.

● We have ten copies of *Rescue Dawn*, released on DVD to rent and buy by Pathe Distribution Ltd, to give away. To have a chance of winning one, tell us who Christian Bale succeeded as the caped crusader in *Batman Begins*. Answers by postcard or email (comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk) to reach us by April 30.

SOLDIER is on the lookout for movie reviewers. If you fancy yourself as the next Barry Norman, Jonathan Ross or Mark Kermode (or just want to get your hands on some free DVDs) we want to hear from you. Just send an 80-word review of your favourite flick so we can judge if you have what it takes. Write or email: Movie Reviews, Soldier, Ordnance Road, Aldershot, Hants GU11 2DU; asimms@soldiermagazine.co.uk



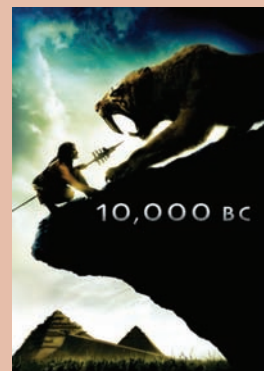
Cashback, in cinemas April 25

HAVING been described as *Clerks* with lots of nudity and featuring a cameo of the "talents" of **Keeley Hazell**, *Cashback* promises to be one of the few romantic comedies that boyfriends will be readily volunteering to see. However, **Sam Ellis's** Brit flick, which tells the story of an artist (**Sean Biggerstaff**) who takes a night-shift job at a supermarket after a difficult break-up, has more to offer than just bare flesh. The boredom evasion tactics of Biggerstaff's checkout compatriots ensure viewers aren't short-changed on the laughter front.



Memory, available on DVD from April 7

BILLY Zane's performance here is weak. He appears to be in a perpetual state of confusion before even experiencing the hallucinogenic visions which kick-start this film. A disparity in the timing of events soon reveals itself to be a well thought-out plot, however, **Bennett Davlin** is in such a rush, the opening scenes leave you feeling empty and unfulfilled. This could have been so much more but it felt like a low budget movie. A thriller with some interesting turns, *Memory* is a rent, not buy, feature. **WO2 Andy Draper, AGC**



10,000 BC, in cinemas now

A MAMMOTH movie in every sense, **Roland Emmerich's** sweeping odyssey into a mythical age of prophecies and gods is set to trample all over its box office rivals. Big on action, special effects and with a suitably grand musical score, the only thing not super-sized about *10,000 BC* is its script. However, who wants complex dialogue when you have saber-tooth tigers, epic battles, spectacular vistas and the beauty of **Camilla Belle** to fawn over? Emmerich has a track record of delivering memorable big-screen images – such as the White House explosion in *Independence Day* – and this film is full of such moments.



Vegas Baby, available on DVD now

MORE Blackpool than Las Vegas in the entertainment stakes, **Eric Bernt's** (*Romeo Must Die*) rite of passage "comedy" about five friends who head to Sin City on a stag-do is, to use a gambling analogy, a dead cert to disappoint. Despite a plot that delivers the absurdities only The Strip can deliver – strippers, Elvis impersonators and an Ultimate Fighting champion – *Vegas Baby* somehow fails to emulate the boys' own laughs of previous high-rollers such as *Bachelor Party* or *Swingers*. Save your hard earned chips and rewatch any of the *American Pie* series instead.

Games

A P R I L R E V I E W



Shooting match: Army gamers have been proving a fearsome opposition to cyber insurgents going up against them



Realising realism

British soldiers trade rounds on virtual battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan

Report: Cliff Caswell

IT is a familiar sight in Iraq – troops in desert fatigues piling into the back of a Warrior armoured vehicle against the backdrop of Basra's Contingency Operating Base.

In the distance, a Royal Air Force Merlin helicopter is taking off, carrying soldiers to the insertion point of another op while elsewhere squads are planning their next mission, analysing intelligence and sizing up what the enemy might do next.

WO1 Alan Rudduck of The Light Dragoons, however, is some 3,000 miles from Iraq. Based at Blandford, he is in front of his PC playing *Project Reality*, a virtual military campaign that is becoming a cyber space phenomenon.

The brainchild of Swiss game designer Noel Tock, *Project Reality* is a specially modified version of Electronic Arts' *Battlefield 2* package. The free-to-download add-on has been given a full overhaul by a team of volunteers

to include the latest British uniforms and equipment. Maps of southern Iraq are already available while a virtual environment of Sangin, southern Afghanistan, is under development.

"Once you play this you are hooked," admits WO1 Rudduck, who is a member of the Active British Army (ABA) clan that regularly patrols the game. "To join our team, you have to prove that you are a soldier and we will check up on you to make sure."

While anyone, serving or not, can play *Project Reality*, you should not expect a simple first-person shooter. Weapons take longer to reload, vehicles behave in a realistic way and stray bullets can put you out of action immediately. The emphasis of the game, which requires the original *Battlefield 2* disc to play, is on tactics and teamwork as well as dexterity.

"Noel had seen that there was a community in the UK that wanted a game that realistically represented British military forces,"

says Jason Dooley, one of the senior members of the development team based in Michigan, USA.

"From previous examples in games we had seen, the portrayal of British Forces was half-hearted, so getting it right was one of the areas we wanted to focus on."

And the developers' efforts have not gone to waste. *Project Reality* is now a weekly, Thursday night ritual for members of the ABA team and their experience has made them formidable opponents.

One of the regular players, SSgt Craig Turner, LD, is also a military adviser on the *Project Reality* development team, where he has been helping to bring the latest British kit to life.

And he certainly has the right credentials for his consultancy role – the Army has been his way of life for nearly 20 years. The senior NCO, who is now on a second tour of the Communications, Information and Systems School in Bovington, has



served in Iraq, Cyprus and Bosnia.

An enthusiastic gamer since 2003, when he set up an online network to play the original *Battlefield Vietnam* game with friends, his involvement with *Project Reality* began when he heard from a friend that a British Army modification of the game was being created.

"I later had an email from someone on the project asking if I would be an adviser," SSgt Turner recalls. "My job is to look at the models of the equipment and say what is right and wrong about them."

For the volunteers designing the kit, making sure details are accurate is key.

"I got into all this by playing games," says Steve Kennedy, who crafted the Apache helicopter in *Project Reality*. "When drawing up designs I look at photos and, in some cases, have model kits made."

The future promises to be interesting and gamers can expect an increasingly realistic experience.

"With the game being online, British soldiers can meet wherever they happen to be based," says SSgt Turner. "We already have one person based in Germany and another in Tidworth joining us in the ABA. You can get totally immersed." ■



Bleach: Shattered Blade, Nintendo Wii

BEAUTIFULLY drawn Manga-style graphics set the tone for one of Sega's finest fighting games to date. In an unashamed arcade hack-and-slash adventure, players get to take down enemies in the style of *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter*. All of the characters in *Bleach* have their own abilities and the game captures the flavour of a Japanese comic book. *Soldier* was particularly impressed with the way Nintendo's motion sensitive controller can be used to pull off some nifty fencing moves. *Bleach* adds a new dimension to fighting games.



Lost: Xbox 360

FANS of TV phenomenon *Lost* can explore the show's mysterious island in this adventure title. Taking control of a photographer with amnesia, players are thrust into the action immediately after the crash of Oceanic flight 815. Gameplay is a mix of island exploration and flashbacks where the player must take a photo of a specific moment in time to gradually regain his memory. All of the show's main characters are present and correct and, although the game's structure is fairly rigid, the plot keeps things ticking along at a good pace.



Pro Evolution Soccer 2008, PSP

THE battle between Konami's *Pro Evo* and EA's *Fifa* series continues to be closely fought. And the PSP version of the Konami title certainly has the edge over its rival this time round. The 2008 edition is superior in just about every respect, with better gameplay and more challenging opposition. Artificial intelligence is first-rate and getting the ball into the back of the net is a tough affair. The only element lacking in *Pro Evo* is a full set of licensed clubs and kits – as there are in the EA game – although this fails to spoil an otherwise outstanding title.



Medal of Honor Heroes 2, Nintendo Wii

THE Second World War continues to rumble on among video gamers with the latest instalment in EA's series. And even though *Soldier* is growing increasingly weary of 1940's action, this is the best shooter we have seen on the Wii. Graphics are superb, the action slick and the controls simple to master. The game can also be used with the Wii Zapper gun attachment to give the action a new dimension. A combination of secret service missions and all-out pitched battles with the Nazis make this a winner.



Frontlines: Fuel of War, Xbox 360

SOLDIER previewed this much anticipated THQ title last month and can confirm that it fully lives up to expectations. A first-person shooter set against the backdrop of a global war for oil, players get to fight their way through grimy environments, braving hostile fire from all directions. *Frontlines* doesn't score on the originality front, but this is a polished offering with plenty to offer fans of the genre. Graphics and sound are spot on, the action is paced well and the storyline reasonably credible. Recommended.



Dark Messiah: Might and Magic Elements, Xbox 360

FANTASY novelist JRR Tolkien has a lot to answer for. While his masterpieces have inspired some outstanding video games, the worst of the *Lord of the Rings* clones are cheesy and cringeworthy and have a tendency not to make any sense. *Dark Messiah* fulfils all three criteria. The booming Gandalf-like voice sets the tone for a journey into a clichéd fantasy land where magic, monsters, wizards and warriors are the order of the day. Combat is an uninspiring affair and gameplay tedious. If you want a decent fantasy adventure, try *Oblivion* instead.



Rise of the foot soldier: Jamie Fineran provides his own brand of jailhouse rock during a charity gig at Her Majesty's pleasure



Prison break

Former infantryman rocks inmates with a live gig behind bars

Interview: Cliff Caswell

WHEN Jamie Fineran's angry father ordered him to learn the guitar as a punishment for misbehaving as a child, he could never have known the path on which he had set his son.

Taking to music like a duck to water, the youngster – who grew up in Wroxhall on the Isle of Wight – quickly came to love the instrument. And it would later become his constant companion on his travels all over the world when he grew into an adventurous teenager, eager for escapades with the British Army.

Now aged 30, he has come full circle. Having returned to his roots on the island, Jamie's band, The Kurves, has been hitting the headlines for their talent as well as taking their music to a new and unconventional audience. During their latest gig, the rockers played for hardened criminals in jail.

"It's funny because I actually started

writing my own songs while I was serving at the Maze Prison during my second tour in Belfast," the former member of the 2nd Battalion, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, told *Soldier* in an interview.

"I used to sit with a friend under the machine-gun tower and we would play music together – it was really my way of escaping what was going on around me."

By all accounts, Jamie's days in the Army have provided him with an abundance of material for songs. As well as operational deployments in Northern Ireland, he deployed on exercises in Kenya and Botswana.

He admitted that his songs for The Kurves, which also includes Chris Laurence-Tilley on lead guitar, Robert Hopkinson on bass, Wes Maynard on drums and Richard Thornett on piano, had been heavily influenced by his military experiences.

"I generally write songs about things I have seen and done, particularly as a

young man in Northern Ireland," Jamie said. "I like all music, from classical to rock and roll, although The Kurves is classed as a rock band."

"We have been together around a year now and we've played quite a few gigs. We've also got our own MySpace page on the internet."

But Jamie admitted that playing at the high security Camp Hill Prison, near Newport on the Isle of Wight, had been the most unusual and satisfying performance the band had given, particularly as it had hit all the right notes for charity.

"The prisoners earn around £8 a week for the jobs they do in jail, and from that sum they donated 50p to charity. I congratulate them for that gesture," he said.

"To be honest, I was scared at first because there were some really hard people in there, but in the end our music went down well – I'm now waiting to hand over the cheque



for the money raised to the Earl Mountbatten Hospice."

Despite enjoying success with the band, however, Jamie admitted that he had not found his readjustment to civvy street an easy experience, adding that it had taken several years for him to find his feet after hanging up his Army boots.

"I was 17 when I went in and I did so much while I was serving – it was so different to this life," he said. "I travelled, joined the battalion skydiving team and had been about to go to Bosnia when I decided to say goodbye to it all.

"In civilian life you get out of bed and you repeat what you do all the time, but in the military there is always something completely different every day.

"It took me a good five years to fit back into life after I left the Army in 2001."

Having enjoyed success with The Kurves, however, Jamie admitted that his music has given him the same inspiration as the military career he had loved so much.

"I grew up with films like *Rambo* and had always wanted to be a soldier," he concluded.

"But I have quite a lot of songs written now, we have a great fan base and we are headlining at gigs and on radio shows – I'm enjoying life with the band." ■



Music Force live at Worthy Down

LIQUID Lunch, The "U" Boys and Maneline (pictured) shook Worthy Down Station with their sets of guitar-thumping 1970s' rock to chart-toppers **Snow Patrol**. **Music Force** brought the Rifles', Gurkhas' and AGC bands together, raising more than £1,200 for Help For Heroes. But Capt Lawrence Sale, Director of Music, wants to go on tour. He said: "It would be great to take the whole package out on operations. It's all ready to go with lighting rigs and sound systems – all we need is the transport to get us to where the British Army needs us most."

Karen Thomas



Detours (Sheryl Crow)

AS with previous releases, **Sheryl Crow** employs a range of instruments to add colour and a traditional folk feel to her latest CD. This is undoubtedly the artist's most mature and political album to date. But the appearance of **Bill Bottrell**, who produced Sheryl's debut album *Tuesday Night Music Club*, also marks a return to her musical foundations. While *Detours* is a fine CD, it does have some weak points. Most notably *Out Of Our Heads*, a Euro dance-pop experimental track, is something of a blemish on an otherwise great recording.

Cpl Tom Robinson,
151 Tpt Regt, RLC



Year Long Disaster (Year Long Disaster)

THIS band has been championed by the likes of *Kerrang* and *Rolling Stone* magazines. But if this is the sound of happening new talent then the cupboard must be bare, for this band has served up a debut album of uninspired hard rocking catastrophes. Their sound conjures up visions of sweaty blokes with guitars jumping around in tight spandex pants and playing second-hand power chords while the singer wails without charisma. While I'm still searching for a positive in this dirge, you can check the band out for yourself via the internet at MySpace.

Cpl Charlie Lloyd, RLC



Carved in Sand/Masque (The Mission)

THIS triple CD re-release was my introduction to **The Mission**, a band that has been around since the mid-1980s. Their sound does not appear to have changed over the last couple of decades and seems too cheesy and melodramatic in places. While they are undoubtedly a talented bunch – these Leeds-based rockers have been coming up with the musical goods for well over two decades – the story-like lyric and rustic/troubadour style guitar was a bit too much for me. However, there is no doubt that fans of *The Mission* will appreciate this latest collection.

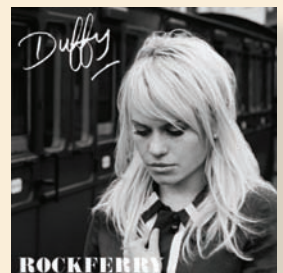
Bdr Luke Stevens-Burt,
5 Regt, RA



Antidotes (Foals)

EVERY so often a band comes along that makes you sit up and listen – and **Foals** is one of them. This Oxford-based five-piece has delivered a debut that's accomplished, energetic and features some of the tightest guitar licks and banging rhythms in a while. It's a fresh, fiesty and satisfying sound. Last year **Reverend and the Makers** emerged from the north. This is the answer from the south. It may be a bit leftfield of the mainstream but make no mistake – Foals has pitched up with a high quality album.

Cpl Charlie Lloyd, RLC



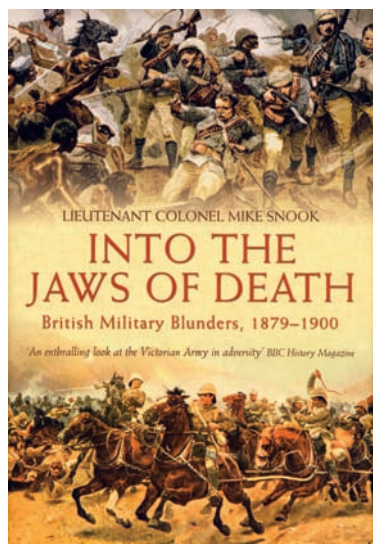
Rockferry (Duffy)

THIS debut album from the young Welsh soul sensation has already reached number one in the UK charts. The wistful style of the music makes an immediate emotional impact, with beautiful lyrics shining through. The instrumentation and production are also strong and every track plays its part in this superb collection of music. Based on the evidence of this recording, **Duffy** looks set to emerge as one of the UK's greatest contemporary musical talents. This is, without doubt, one of the best albums of the year so far.

Pte Patrick Jordan,
RAMC

Books

APRIL REVIEW



Military miscalculation: British dead line their defensive trench on Spion Kop in South Africa, victims of Boer artillery and sniper fire



General woes

Incompetent leadership blamed for defeat at Colenso and Spion Kop

Into the Jaws of Death by Lt Col Mike Snook (Frontline Books, 432pp, £25).

Review: John Elliott

FROM time to time over the past 350 years Britain has asked too much of its Army, especially when it has been deployed with too few resources to make war in faraway places.

In the face of thrifty politicians largely insensitive to their needs, brave soldiers have improvised, adapted and, for the most part, overcome.

"Only at times of crisis does the wider public begin to comprehend what extraordinary demands have been made on the military and what miracles are being worked in its name by tiny

handfuls of soldiers," writes Lt Col Mike Snook, R Welsh, in the preface to his new book on the military blunders of the late Victorian era.

The author, currently serving at the Defence College of Management and Technology at the Defence Academy, Shrivenham, is an expert on the Zulu Wars, on which he has written three well received books.

He concludes that military disaster is almost always traceable to political indifference or the neglect of the high command. All too often one or other is exposed by the fact that extreme adversity usually brings out the best in British soldiers. Where others might withdraw, they fight to the last bullet, for which reason the British public takes "a peculiar pride in the Army's off-days".

Occasionally, however, military disaster is an indication of systematic failure, no more so than

in the last years of Queen Victoria's long reign and particularly in the Boer War.

Mike Snook's clinical analysis of heavy defeats at Colenso and Spion Kop points the finger of blame at generals who had little grasp of what they were getting themselves into.

Of Gen Sir Redvers Buller, the C-in-C, and Lt Gen Sir Charles Warren, who commanded at Spion Kop, he writes of their failure to think ahead:

"... it is extraordinary that no follow-up plan was laid, either by Warren or Buller. It is such a fundamental omission that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that we are dealing with men who, while they enjoyed the pay and laurels of general officers, possessed few of the requisite attributes."

Hard on the heels of humiliation at Colenso, their miscalculations, confusion and inept leadership at Spion Kop cost the lives of hundreds of their soldiers, particularly of the Lancashire regiments, who were left exposed to lethal Boer artillery despite occupying

Soldier ordering service

BOOKS mentioned on these pages are available from Helion & Company, who can also supply 14,500 in-print military books and operate a free book search; p&p is extra. Major credit/switch cards taken. Allow 28 days for delivery. Helion & Company, 26 Willow Road, Solihull, West Midlands B91 1UE, England (tel 0121 705 3393; fax 0121 711 4075). Email books@helion.co.uk Website www.helion.co.uk



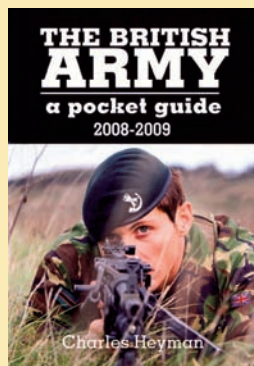
the supposedly battle-winning high ground. Ironically, the British losses were mirrored among the ranks of the burghers, who were streaming away from their side of the hill as Warren's badly mauled battalions scrambled down theirs.

A golden opportunity to smash through the Boer line along the Tugela River and relieve besieged Ladysmith was lost.

The men who died in their trench on Spion Kop – the iconic photograph reproduced above was taken on the day after the battle – lie there still, buried where they fell in a war grave tended today by the Republic of South Africa.

The author reserves some of his strongest criticism for Fd Marshal Lord Wolseley (“undeniably a nasty piece of work”), whose hand-picked “ring” of generals owed their appointments to his patronage. Three – Buller, Colley and Butler – “came within a hair’s breadth of losing South Africa”, concludes the author. But the defeats took their toll and the Wolseley Ring was seen to have had its day. The defeat of the Boers fell to a man Wolseley hated as a “scheming little Indian”, Fd Marshal Lord Roberts, and to his newly appointed chief of staff, Maj Gen Lord Kitchener of Khartoum. ■

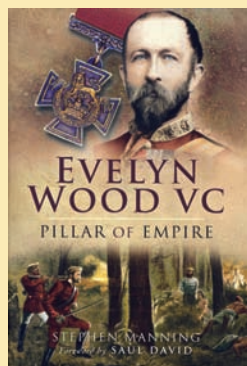
For more reviews, go to www.soldiermagazine.co.uk



The British Army: A Pocket Guide 2008-2009
by Charles Heymer

UPDATED edition of this popular mini-reference book. Given the pace of change forced on military equipment by current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, keeping this annual pocket guide current must take some doing. Mastiff, the heavily protected troop carrier now having an impact against the Taliban, makes its debut. *Soldier's* writers and photographers never go on assignment without a well-thumbed copy to hand.

Pen & Sword,
231pp, £5.99



Pillar of Empire by
Stephen Manning

EVELYN Wood, one of the most colourful officers to serve in Victoria's Army, saw action throughout the Empire, **writes Maj Mike Peters**. Although it lacks maps, this is an engaging account of a brave, well connected soldier never far from scandal, controversy or battle. A fascinating insight into the British Army of the day. The contribution of Wood to military reform and his influence on his successors is particularly interesting.

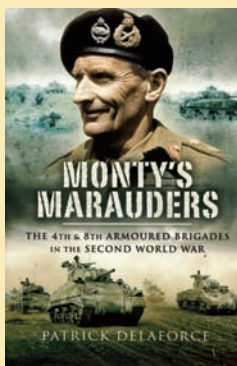
Pen & Sword,
265pp, £19.99



The Long Hard Slog
by Richard Doherty

THE Eighth was surely one of the most effective British armies of modern times, **writes Maj Mike Peters**. Campaigns fought under Monty in North Africa are well documented but this covers the lesser known struggle to liberate Italy. This costly expedition was fought over mountainous terrain defended by some of Hitler's most capable fighting formations. This authoritative account highlights the multi-national make-up of what was known as a British Army.

Pen & Sword,
234pp, £19.99



Monty's Marauders
by Patrick Delaforce

FIRST published nearly 15 years ago, this new edition takes the reader on a fast-moving account of the 4th and 8th Armoured Brigades and their victorious Second World War campaigns. Both brigades had earned their combat spurs in heavy fighting in North Africa, Sicily and Italy, and were earmarked by Fd Marshal Montgomery for leading roles in the invasion of Europe. At one stage or another they supported every British division on the way to Berlin.

Pen & Sword,
224pp, £19.99



Tank Men by Robert Kershaw

A TURRET-eye perspective of tank fighting from British, German, Russian and American tankies who took part in the armoured battles of the Second World War. Former Para Kershaw has compiled a very human history from interviews, letters and diaries. Britain, he says, lost her 1918 tank ascendancy in the early 1930s, after which she was always third or fourth in the tank pecking order throughout the war, a fact which placed her brave tank crews in an “unenviable predicament”.

Hodder & Stoughton,
462pp, £20



Commando to Captain-General by Alison Michelli

PETER Young lived his life to the full, becoming a historian, a renowned commando leader, historical re-enactor and war gamer, **writes Maj Mike Peters**. During the Second World War he rose from 2iC of a battalion to lead a commando brigade with distinction. His service took him from Dunkirk to the Arakan and into the boiling pot of Palestine with the Arab Legion. I thoroughly enjoyed this account of the life of a charismatic and innovative man.

Pen & Sword,
251pp, £19.99



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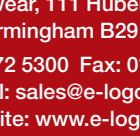
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SOLDIERSPORT



SHOT DOWN

Rivals end Reds' reign

Game over: Despite some strong individual performances from the likes of Sgt Glen Davidson (RMP), pictured, the Army could not extend their Inter-Services winning run to four successive titles

Picture: Graeme Main

TOP BOXERS OF THE BRITISH ARMY



SPR ADAM WHITFIELD



Flyweight
Record: 34-22-12
Achievement: Junior ABA champion 2005
Aspirations: Represent England



The experienced flyweight won his first Inter-Services fight last year and is confident the Army can retain the title this time around. The former England junior international is a fast mover with good footwork.

CPL JAMES ALLEN

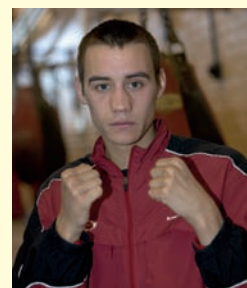


Featherweight
Record: 44-35-9
Achievement: England schoolboy
Aspiration: Become a full international



Allen is a former national champion at light flyweight and has also won a multi-nations competition gold. He will be gunning for his third Inter-Services win in 2005 and 2006.

PTE MARTIN STEAD



Lightweight
Record: 72-59-13
Achievement: Junior Olympic gold medalist
Aspirations: Win world title



Stead is an experienced international having boxed 14 times for England around the world, including bouts in America, Sweden and France. The hard-hitting luggie hopes to win a professional world title.

LCPL STEVE TURNER



Light Welterweight
Record: 58-46-12
Achievement: 2004 Army champion
Aspirations: Represent England



A 2005 Inter-Services champion, Turner has returned to the squad after taking a break to concentrate on his Army career. The former England schoolboy finalist believes the current team's depth is its main strength.

SPR SCOTT SOUTHEY



Bantamweight
Record: 16-9-7
Achievement: Champion schoolboy boxer
Aspirations: Win on CSBA debut



Bantamweight Southey set his sights on joining the Army boxing team during basic training. The rangy boxer will use his height and long reach to his advantage against the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force.

LCPL GAVIN MCGEE



Welterweight
Record: 23-21-2
Achievement: ABA Class B champion 2007
Aspirations: CSBA win



With an impressive Army record containing just two defeats to date, McGee wants his form to continue into the Inter-Services tournament. The Irish Guard also wants to end 2006 with a strong performance in the ABAs.

CPL KIBRIA SUBHAN



Light Flyweight
Record: 9-4-5
Achievement: ABA Novice finalist 2007
Aspirations: Win ABA title



A former civilian boxer who has competitive experience with a club in Reading, Subhan has set his sights on claiming a Combined Services Boxing Association title at Maida Gymnasium.

Golden gloves

Army boxers look to make history with 25th successive Inter-Services title

APIECE of sporting history was at stake at last month's Inter-Services boxing championships as the Army looked to extend their winning run to a quarter of a century.

Under the tutelage of head coach WO2 Chris Bessey (RLC) and former team member Sgt Darren Dugan (PWRR), the Reds were due to face the best boxers from the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force as this issue went to press. With the prestigious event being held in front of a partisan Army crowd at Maida Gymnasium, Aldershot, rather than its usual home in the Royal Navy heartland of Portsmouth, Dugan was confident his team would do themselves justice.

"We have had some good results so

far this season, but the biggest thing for all of us is the Combined Services," he said. "The Royal Navy have come on as well and they are looking quite strong, but we are pulling through the extra training sessions.

"It is obviously going to help that we will be fighting in front of our home crowd and I'm confident we will put on a good show for them."

Since joining up with the team, Dugan has revolutionised the Army boxing team's training regime by shifting the focus to strength and conditioning work. The changes have resulted in a real test of the boxers' physical and mental determination, but Dugan points to wins such as last year's 6-4 victory over London as evidence that his

charges are already reaping the rewards.

"We have placed a big emphasis on slowing things down and teaching the guys the actual art of boxing," he continued. "That has been helped by their improved core strength.

"The technical side of things is much better now and the guys realise it's working when they have a fight. It helps that they are hard workers and keen to learn. We have got rid of any troublemakers and that has left us with a group of lads that we know want to improve as boxers.

"They work for each other and if someone is struggling in training then there is always someone else willing to hang back to help bring them back up to speed." ■

SIG NIKI GITTUS



Middleweight
Record: 46-33-13
Achievement: Junior ABA champion 2004
Aspirations: Turn professional

Gittus is in his first season with the Army team after a glittering career on civvy street that included a cap for the England junior squad. He said: "Our training is second-to-none and we are all very confident."

PTE KEITH SPONG



Light flyweight
Record: 24-14-10
Achievement: Welsh international boxer
Aspiration: Turn professional

International boxer Spong will be hoping to win a sixth consecutive Inter-Services bout at Aldershot. The multi-nations competition silver medalist has also reached the last three Welsh ABA finals.

CPL TONY RICHARDSON



Light Heavyweight
Record: 33-28-5
Achievement: Army individual champion 2004
Aspirations: Represent England

The 2006 Combined Services Boxing Association champion is in his fourth year with the Army team. Richardson is a former ABA Class B champion and also won the Army individual title in 2004.

LCPL ANDREW CHILCOTT



Cruiserweight
Record: 16-12-4
Achievement: ABA Class B champion 2007
Aspirations: Win 2008 ABAs

Cruiserweight Chilcott is enjoying a successful first full season in the Army squad after joining up halfway through last year. He thinks the current team will benefit from boxing in front of a home crowd.

SPR ALEC MACDONALD



Heavyweight
Record: 9-9-1
Achievement: Royal Engineers champion
Aspirations: Win ABA title

The Army's heavyweight contender is in his second season with the squad and served in Afghanistan in 2007. Macdonald has plenty of experience boxing at regimental level and is a fan of Dugan's training programme.

SPR DAVE JONES



Super Heavyweight
Record: 10-8-2
Achievement: ABA Novice finalist 2007
Aspirations: Win CSBA title

Jones is flying the flag for the Army in the heaviest weight category and hopes to win an Army and CSBA double in 2008. "We have all done a lot of work coming into these championships," he said. "I know it has made me a better boxer."

SGT DARREN DUGAN



Coach
Record: 118-92-26 (retired)
Achievement: CSBA boxer
Aspirations: Coach winning CSBA side

Coach Dugan boasts an impressive boxing pedigree having won 92 times for the Army between 1989 and 2000. He is a former Army judo champion, a PTI and also competes on the British mixed martial arts circuit.



INTER-SERVICES
TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP
TROPHY



Running scared

British champion Thaxton accuses rival Khan of dodging lightweight fight

Interview: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Graeme Main

IT is an exceedingly brave man who accuses British boxing sensation Amir Khan of being a coward.

The Bolton teenager, who swept to fame on the back of an Olympic silver medal in Athens in 2004, has hardly broken sweat in dispatching all 16 opponents since he turned professional.

But if British lightweight champion Jon Thaxton is to be believed, Commonwealth title holder Khan's winning streak will end the day he dares to step in the ring with him.

"Amir Khan is running from me," Norwich-native Thaxton told *SoldierSport* during training at the city's Kickstop gym. "I want the fight and it should have been made. I'm number one for his title, he's number one for my title and he should be prepared to fight the best, but he's not because he's running scared."

Thaxton's confidence is borne out of a professional career comprising 33 wins – 18 by knockout – and seven defeats from his 40 fights, which came either side of a temporary retirement from the sport following a car crash.

Despite his impressive winning ratio, it took the southpaw until the age of 32 to claim his first major title when he defeated Salford's Lee Meager with a unanimous points decision at Dagenham to claim the British lightweight title.

The victory represented the culmination of a long-held sporting dream for the Norfolk athlete, who admits that he relies on his supreme fitness levels to compensate for an unorthodox fighting style.

"I'm the first to admit that I'm not good at the game," he laughed. "But I work and train bloody hard and I'm passionate and disciplined about what I do. I always go into the ring with the mentality that to beat me you are going to have to kill me."

Although he does not have any personal connection with the Army, Thaxton attributes his fitness to a rigorous training regime that has its roots firmly in the military.

As a youngster, Thaxton attended his local gym with a friend who was in the Army and he continues to use the experience to keep himself in prime physical condition and to run team-building courses for his events company, Pathfinder. "I have known this friend since I was 14 and I have learnt a lot from him," said Thaxton.

In a career that started in 1992, Thaxton singles out his title-winning bout against Meager in December 2006 as the highlight.

It was a fight in late October 2000, however, that he remembers as

'I might entertain people, but the soldiers do a fantastic job keeping people like me safe'

being the biggest test of his boxing acumen.

In front of a packed Wembley Conference Centre, Thaxton landed a thunderous first-round blow onto the left eye of Mancunian Ricky Hatton and the Hitman required 28 stitches to stop the bleeding.

Thaxton went on to lose the fight on points, but he can look back with pride at having almost got the better of one of the country's biggest boxing talents.

"To prepare for that fight I did 5,000 sit-ups every day because he hits so hard to the body and I was proud of how I performed," he said. "Ricky Hatton had to change his game plan to cope with me and to be fair he came back and beat me fair and square."

"When people ask me what my favourite fight is, I say that apart from the Meager fight when I won the British title it has got to be the Hatton one. It goes to show that I am only beaten by the best."

"Although I didn't win I could not have given anything more and I have no shame in saying that I was beaten by the better man."

As a keen supporter of British troops, Thaxton was only too happy to accept a recent invitation to visit the boxing team of The Light Dragoons, at their Swanton Morley base in Suffolk.

In addition to passing on tips and advice, Thaxton also stepped into the ring to spar with each of the boxers and admits to being surprised by the soldiers' response.

"I said to them I wanted to use it as a workout and do a bit of training, so I lined them up and

said I would do 20 minutes straight through without a break," he said.

"Each soldier got two minutes and I thought it was going to be a case of me being a marked man, but it turned out that there was nothing but respect from them for me and also from me for them."

"They are raw, rugged, determined and fit. Sometimes their style isn't all that, but they like to get in there and use all of their determination, guts, heart and passion. They weren't there to make a name for themselves, they were there to learn as much as they could and you have to give them credit for that."

With his team working hard behind the scenes to coax Khan out of hiding for a potential fight later this year, Thaxton has been putting the hours in at the gym to ensure he is fit and raring to go should the "boy from Bolton" accept his challenge.

But whatever challenges Thaxton faces in the ring, he is acutely aware that they pale in comparison to the task faced every day by soldiers on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I do a lot of team-building and leadership training and people always ask me if I'm ex-military because there are a lot of parallels between what I do and what they do."

"The difference as I see it is that I might entertain people, but the soldiers do a fantastic job keeping people like me and my family safe."

"For me to get the chance to meet some of these guys and give them some support and help them out is a great opportunity and a great honour." ■



Name: Jon "Jono" Thaxton

Age: 33

Record: 40-33-7

Division: Lightweight

Honours: British Champion

Toughest opponent: Ricky Hatton



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Going down: Army striker LCpl Mick Brown (RLC) is sent tumbling by a robust Navy tackle during a physical encounter at Aldershot Town's Recreation Ground

Picture: Graeme Main



Champs shot down

Royal Air Force bring Army's reign of Inter-Services dominance to an end

SURRENDERING their Inter-Services footballing crown for the first time in four seasons, the Army were sent spiralling to a third-place finish by a sustained salvo from the Royal Air Force.

After being shackled to a 1-1 draw by the Royal Navy in their opening fixture of the tournament, the holders found themselves on the receiving end of a remorseless pounding by the airmen before succumbing to a 3-0 defeat at Uxbridge.

The loss marked the end of a disappointing Inter-Services campaign for the Army squad, whose title defence was ultimately scuppered by some resolute defending by their rivals.

The competition had started promisingly enough for the Army, when LCpl Danny Haley (R Signals) took a 21st minute lead against the Navy at the home of Blue Square Premier leaders Aldershot Town.

The striker used his strength to work an opening on the right edge of the sailors' penalty area. His pull-back ricocheted conveniently off the legs of a defender, and Haley was well-positioned to thump the loose ball firmly into the back of the net.

He almost repeated the trick minutes later when AET Roy Emmerson, brother of the Army's Cpl Keith Emmerson (AGC (RMP)), fumbled a cross. Haley arrived on the scene and sent a shot towards the top right corner only for Emmerson to recover brilliantly and make a desperate save.

Despite the Reds showing promise up front, the Navy equalised shortly before half time as LPT Steve Young took on LBdr Jim Carver down the right flank before a header from POET Phil Archbold levelled the scores.

With the game becoming increasingly scrappy after the interval – and in a bid to break the deadlock – Army manager Maj Steve Jackson (R Signals) sent livewire forward Cpl Colin Thomas (AGC (SPS)) on in place of LCpl Gary Simpson (R Signals).

The 29-year-old almost made an immediate impression when some nifty footwork inside the box gave him the space for a shot, which was deflected wide of the near post.

Although the Army remained the

most likely to snatch a winner, Navy captain Cpl Graham Carr marshalled his side well and the match finished all square. Despite being held to a draw, Army boss Maj Jackson was happy with the way the team had performed in the face of tough defending.

He added: "I thought that for the first 30 minutes we were easily on top of the game. We played some good football, challenged for everything and won the majority of the tackles.

"The Navy did come back in to it after that, but we kept our heads when they pulled it back to 1-1 and I thought we could have won it towards the end.

"I am pleased with this result and with our performances over the season as a whole. We have had a number of good matches and won the majority of our games."

Despite the manager's optimism, the Reds were to later rue their inability to sink the Senior Service, when, as this issue went to press, they came up against a rejuvenated RAF squad on top of their game. ■

'We played some good football, challenged for everything and won the majority of the tackles'



Neil Thomas

In Profile:

Titles: BDFPA National Bench Press Champion 2004/5/6/7
WDFPF European Bench Press Champion 2004/6/7
WDFPF World Bench Press Champion 2005/6/7

Favourite other sport: Rugby league.

Sporting hero: Sprinter Alan Wells. He trained hard for years with little chance of glory, but he persisted and when he got his chance he took it.

Sporting ambition: To bench press 250kg before turning 40.

Proudest sporting moment: First 200kg bench press, in 2006.

Interview: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Graeme Main

A POWERLIFTER who went from complete novice to world champion in a matter of years wants his experience to encourage more people to give the sport a go.

Since setting up the Army Power Lifting Association in 2003, strongman WO2 Neil Thomas (REME), who is soon to be promoted to captain and attached to 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) at Woodbridge in Suffolk, has gone on to claim the biggest prize in the single lift bench press discipline in 2004, 2006 and 2007.

Speaking during a break from training at Wattisham Station, Thomas explained that anyone with the right discipline and dedication can reach the top of the sport.

"I don't like to strut around like the big I am, but of course I am pleased with what I have achieved," he told *SoldierSport*. "I want to use my example to bring other people in because five or six years ago I hadn't won anything either. Any person in the world has the ability to train. They might not become the next world champion, but with determination and self-belief, it's amazing what can be achieved."

Starting from a base of just three



Lift off

World champion Thomas harnesses his expert background to bring powerlifting to the masses

members following its creation in 2003, the Army Power Lifting Association has more than doubled in size each year since and currently has 74 members on its books.

It is now the country's largest Service club – outstripping the well-established Royal Air Force association – and boasts world, European and British championships among its ranks.

Thomas puts the consistent growth of the club down to the facilities available to Army lifters and the parallels between the skills required both in the

sport and in the military. And despite the obvious strength of the current Army squad, the world champion insists that his members are not élitist and will

do their best to train anyone who shows an interest.

"Powerlifting places a massive emphasis on strength and conditioning, which is obviously a big part of

military life," he continued.

"Most gyms have the facilities to do powerlifting, so all we are doing is giving them the opportunity to take it further and really test themselves.

"I don't like to strut around like the big I am, but of course I am pleased"

"There does seem to be a misconception that it's ultra-competitive, but the truth is that you lift against yourself to see how far you can go. Regardless of the standard of someone when they come in, we have respect for them for wanting to lift and will help them to progress."

The Army team made its competitive debut in 2003 at the World Uniformed Service Games in New Zealand, and has been represented at events around the world ever since.

Much like boxing, competitive powerlifting takes place under the auspices of a number of governing bodies. All Army lifters compete under the British Drug Free Power Lifting Association and Thomas is pleased to be linked with a group that takes a hard-line approach on testing athletes for illegal substances.

"We're very proud of the commitment we've shown," he said. "Powerlifting is often linked with illicit substances, but with us being subject to compulsory drug testing, we are doing everything we can to avoid that reputation."

Going into the 2008 season, Thomas wants to replicate his success from last year when he completed a clean sweep of the British, European and World single lift bench press championships.

The soldier, who used to weight train on exercises by lifting broken pieces of tank track, is also a leading light in making powerlifting available to disabled athletes, including Servicemen injured on operations.

Thomas has negotiated for a private company to donate a specialist bench for disabled lifters and his work in setting up a club for adults and children with physical and mental difficulties resulted in him receiving awards from the BBC and Sport Suffolk.

"The specialist bench is going to help make use of the existing strengths of injured soldiers to allow them to start powerlifting," he said. "Soldiers are going to be at a level of fitness above the average civilian anyway and there are so many potential paralympians among them who don't even realise what they could achieve. I think it's important that we start pushing them through."

In an age of pampered professional athletes, it is refreshing to learn that Thomas, whose wife Ann is also a competitive lifter, still has a full-time day job and fits training into his own free time. He expects the same levels of dedication from every Army powerlifter and that professional attitude is sure to keep the association's members at the forefront of Britain's strongman scene.

"We make sure that anyone who joins up is always able to pass the military fitness tests," Thomas concluded.

"We have had individuals who have turned up thinking powerlifting was a ticket for them to have an easy ride by getting out of work, but that will never be the case." ■

Going green

The regular feature in which we ask soldiers for their views on a hot topic

We asked troops from 3 Commando Brigade what attracted them to the coveted green beret and what it is like working with their Service rivals

Gnr Oliver Amsbury, 29 Cdo Regt RA

I liked the idea of being a bit special but the All Arms course is pretty difficult. The Marines are good lads and there's a lot of friendly banter. We make fun of each other but it's all done in good spirit. Their course is longer than ours, so they think we're all cheaters and do the easy stuff.



Spr Dan Murray, 24 Cdo Engr Regt

I did the All Arms course to better myself and be among people with the same interests as me. We've not worked with 45 Cdo on ops so they didn't know our full potential out in Norway. But when we worked with 42 Cdo in Afghanistan, they came to realise what we could do for them and then they didn't have a bad word to say about us.



Mne Jake Gilchrist, RM

When we were out in Afghanistan we gelled with the Army commandos who were with us. The 29 Cdo Regt lads definitely knew their job and if it weren't for them we would have lost more of the lads. But it's not so good when there are different attitudes and not the same work ethos as us.



Gnr James Feasey, 29 Cdo Regt RA

I did the All Arms course to test myself and get into good green soldiering. The arctic warfare training is my first time working with 3 Cdo Bde and it's been good. There are no real differences between the Royal Marine and Army commandos, as long as you do your job and muck in.



Cpl Naresh Limbu, 24 Cdo Engr Regt

Being commando-trained means you get more infantry training because we have to carry extra explosives. The last time I was on Op Herrick I was with them all the time and I made a lot of good friends. There was a good exchange of info and we don't have any problems because they are happy to have us along as a big asset.



Sgt Rick Townsend, RM

The Army commandos have been with us for so long it would be hard to imagine the brigade without them. To be a commando you need to be motivated and over my time with the corps I have not met or been deployed with gunners or sappers who haven't impressed me with their assets and their skills.



Bdr Gavin Groves, 29 Cdo Regt RA

I was an instructor on the All Arms course and physical training is important but you don't have to be particularly fit. We have a good relationship with the Marines although the younger RM lads get a little bit brainwashed that they're better. But when they see the fire support teams on Op Herrick, they see how good we are.



LCpl Jonathan Hancock, 24 Cdo Engr Regt

There's a healthy rivalry between the Royal Marine and Army commandos but working together is extremely important, as the better we know each other the better we work as a brigade. There are brilliant blokes on each side and they understand that getting on and working together is going to pay dividends when you go to theatre.



Mne Neil Morgan, RM

I wanted to join the Royal Marines from an early age and be part of the best. I've worked with lads from 24 Cdo Engr Regt and they are professional. They bring certain parts of the job that we don't specialise in. I also worked with the Rifles on Op Herrick and, although there were a few minor differences, they were pretty good.



Interviews: Karen Thomas Pictures: Graeme Main

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We join troops from 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment and 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland on the streets of one of the world's most dangerous cities – Baghdad



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