

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

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our artillery
capability
is essential'*

Armed Forces minister addresses
concerns over Ukraine assistance

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CONTENTS



Cover picture: AirPir Dave Allen, AAC

COVER STORY

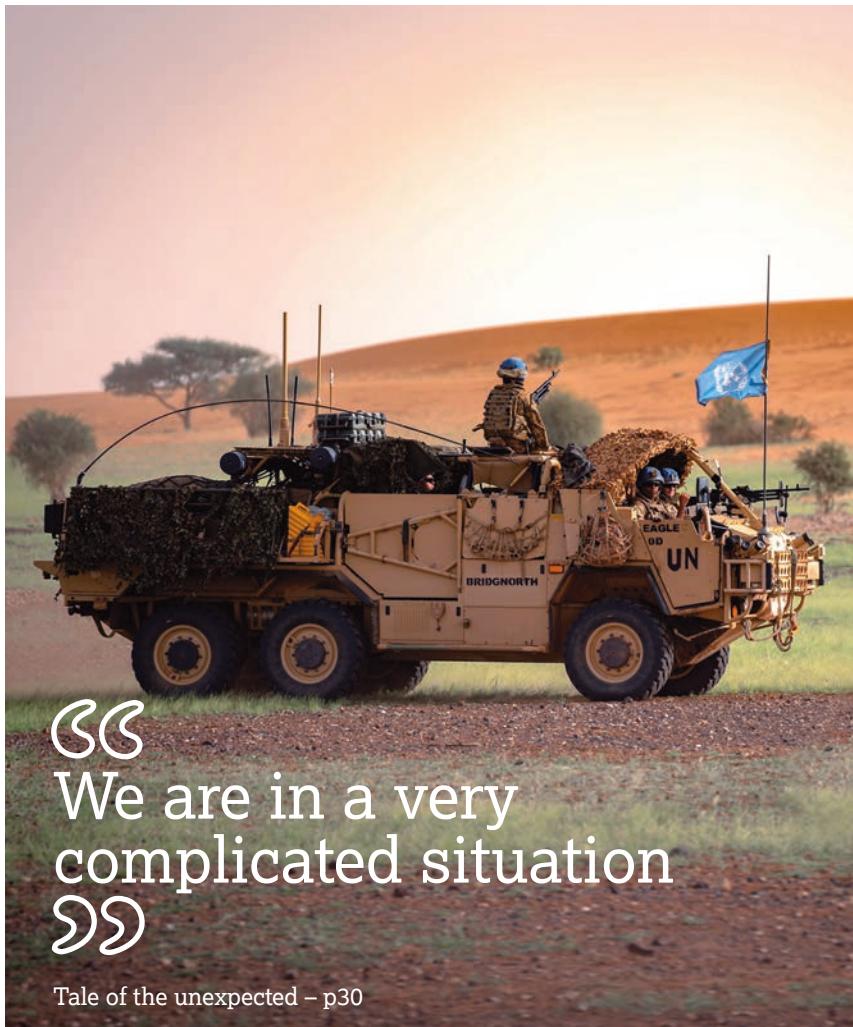
- 30 Tale of the unexpected**
Soldiers adapt in Mali
- 34 Wildcat: what you might not know**
Up close with the top recce asset
- 38 Ministerial musings**
James Heappey talks Ukraine
- 44 Last post**
Mail masters call time on trade

REGULARS

- 7 The Informer**
Top stories from across the Service
- 20 Need to Know**
Essential tips for today's personnel
- 48 Talkback**
Ruminations from the ranks
- 50 Bullet Points**
Troops' intelligence asset
- 55 Reviews**
Music, books, games and movies to fill your downtime
- 74 Final Word**
Remembering day one on the job

SOLDIERSPORT

- 62 Powerlifting**
Laird proves age is no barrier
- 65 Rugby union**
Army women win season opener
- 68 Judo**
Service showdown begins new year
- 71 Football**
Corps stalwart says farewell
- 72 Rugby league**
Rhinos call on Reds trio





Payloads and politics



BEING focused on the ranks, it's not often that *Soldier* gives over page space to government ministers – or politicians of any sort.

But with plenty of questions being asked about what the UK's latest show of support for Ukraine might mean for British troops and the availability of equipment on home soil, we quizzed Armed Forces Minister and former Rifles major James Heappey.

Turn to page 38 to find out what he had to say about donating British Challenger 2s and AS90s to the war effort, and what this will mean for our artillery capability.

Also this month, Wildcat crews give us a rundown of some of the lesser-understood elements of what they can bring to training exercises and operations across the world (page 34). Many thanks to the talented AirTpr Dave Allen (AAC), among their number, whose colourful photograph adorns this month's cover.

And finally, turn to page 68 for the *SoldierSport* lowdown on the Army Judo Championships, where there was more than one upset on the mat.

Enjoy the issue, and if you would like us to tell your unit's story in 2023 get in touch using the details overleaf.

Sarah Goldthorpe • Editor

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► Online

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Picture: Cpl Sam Jenkins, RLC

Bringing out the big guns in Ukraine

Tankies and gunners will feel the impact but benefits to ensuring Russian defeat, chiefs say

THE gifting of 30 AS90 self-propelled guns and 14 Challenger 2 main battle tanks to Ukraine will lead to short-term pain but long-term gain, say Chief of the General Staff Gen Sir Patrick Sanders and Armed Forces Minister James Heappey.

Both agree the move will accelerate the delivery of Challenger 3, which was expected to reach initial operating capability in 2027, and the replacement platform for the AS90, which was due to be phased out of service from around 2030.

In a statement to personnel on Defence Connect, Gen Sanders said: "Giving away these capabilities will leave us temporarily weaker as an army, there is no denying it. But ensuring Russia's defeat in Ukraine makes us safer and, as a leading member of Nato, we are protected by the principle of collective defence."

He added: "Our tank crews and gunners will feel the impact the most, but the decision also brings the opportunity to accelerate our modernisation and transformation.

"We'll accelerate the replacement of AS90, introducing it from 2027 along with fielding long-range precision fires and hypersonics. In the immediate term we will look at how to temporarily fill the gap in our armoury."

In an exclusive interview with *Soldier* (page 38), Mr Heappey confirmed that shorter timelines for Challenger 2 and AS90 replacements were "part of the deal" for gifting platforms, which also includes Bulldog armoured personnel carriers.

The UK was the first nation to commit to giving main battle tanks to Ukraine. And its hopes that other nations would follow suit were realised when Germany announced it would donate 14 Leopard 2 tanks and allow other nations to export the German-made platforms to the embattled country.

President Joe Biden also announced the US would send 31 M1 Abrams tanks, without giving details of the timing, while France was "hoping" to supply AMX-10 RC light tanks.

Ukraine has already received self-propelled guns from Germany, France, Poland and the US.

In another move of support, the UK declared that training Ukrainian troops will continue beyond 2023 if necessary.

The MoD hosted 10,000 personnel last year and, according to Mr Heappey, that will be repeated in 2023 as part of an "open-ended commitment".

The training of Ukrainian soldiers began in 2015 and around 20,000 have been taught combat skills under British military supervision to date. ■

SOLDIER

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A taste of Army activity across the world

GLOBAL SITREP



1. JAMAICA EXERCISE RED STRIPE

MEDICS from 1st Battalion, Welsh Guards have been honing skills far from home after joining Caribbean clinicians on their treatment front line.

The troops headed for Kingston Hospital in the Jamaican capital as they assisted with a spectrum of duties – including in a busy emergency department.

Part of Exercise Red Stripe, the four-day package saw them gain valuable experience in fields such as trauma management.

Senior leaders said they had also been exposed to cases they would not normally see in the UK as well as forging new friendships with their hosts.



2. ANTIGUA PULLING POWER PAYS OFF

A HARDENED quartet of Scots Guardsmen reached the end of their 3,000-mile row from the Canary Islands to the Caribbean after more than a month at sea.

Lt Max Lawrence, WO2 Tim Botes, LSgt James Tate and Lt Roland Walker completed the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge in a time of 39 days, three hours and five minutes – with Lt Walker marking their arrival into English Harbour on his bagpipes.

Speaking shortly after coming ashore, the squad recalled the challenges they had faced since setting out from La Gomera, including three snapped oars, capsizing on Boxing Day and even

visual hallucinations.

"I saw some UFOs," admitted Lt Walker. "But the biggest hallucination was experienced by Jimmy (Tate) – he thought his pet cat Gus was on board and kept leaving morsels of food out for him."

At one point the resourceful personnel had also fashioned what they dubbed "Franken-oar" out of two broken oars to allow them to keep rowing.

Collectively known as the Atlantic Guardsmen, the crew have been raising money for the ABF and Scots Guards Charity during the tough task. Visit atlanticguardsmen.com to give them support.



1. JAMAICA



2. ANTIGUA



3. ANTARCTICA ORANGE'S TRANSCONTINENTAL ODYSSEY

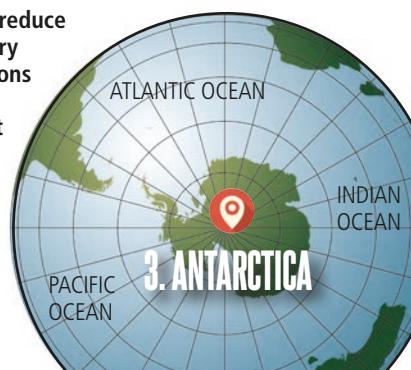
Picture: Shutterstock

VETERAN and endurance runner Sally Orange (ex-RAMC) has started her latest gruelling mission as she aims to complete the infamous 7-7-7 challenge – seven marathons on seven continents in seven days.

Beginning in Antarctica as this issue went to press, the route will see her running in Cape Town, Perth, Dubai, Madrid and Fortaleza in Brazil, before completing the last event in Miami on February 6.

If successful, the former major will become just the fifth British female – and the first former Servicewoman ever – to complete the epic achievement.

As well as furthering her campaign to reduce stigma around mental health, four military charities will be among seven organisations to benefit from her fundraising efforts – SSAFA, the Armed Forces Para-Snowsport Team, Walking with the Wounded and Scotty's Little Soldiers. To help her reach her £7,000 target, visit justgiving.com/crowdfunding/sally-orange-wmc



3. ANTARCTICA

INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

Brief the team now:



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5. JAPAN MAKING IT OFFICIAL

BRITISH troops are poised to operate with much greater freedom in the land of the rising sun – thanks to a new accord signed by senior politicians.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Japanese opposite number Fumio Kishida put their names to the Reciprocal Access Agreement – which will allow both nations to deploy their armed forces in each other's countries.

The pact was signed as British troops from 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team exercised near Tokyo – jumping with the host nation's parachutes.

Some 25 soldiers from the Pathfinders joined US, Australian and Japanese colleagues as they embarked on training – exiting from Chinooks.

The package culminated in a hammer blow against a mock enemy position with some 400 troops plus armour and attack helicopters involved.

4. KENYA BUSH TACTICS TESTED

RESERVISTS from the Rock are reflecting on lessons learnt during a stint on Exercise Askari Storm.

A platoon from The Royal Gibraltar Regiment were integrated into a battlegroup led by 1st Battalion, The Rifles for drills that culminated in combined arms live firing on the rugged terrain of Archer's Post.

Capt Rhodri Thomas (RG) said the manoeuvres had been "an ideal platform to learn bush tactics and practise hard soldiering".

"The live mortars and machine guns firing while the reconnaissance elements guided the companies into position before an arduous assault will be a memorable moment for all those involved," he concluded.

Describing the experience, Bdr Chris Kearney (RHA) said: "I had a fantastic view of Tokyo, which is just vast, and it really felt like we were jumping into the middle of the city.

"Mount Fuji was on the horizon, and it was all quite distracting, so I had to make myself concentrate on my landing drills."

'I was chuffed to do as well as I did'

Powerlifter shines down under – page 62



Pictures: iGDF

Brief the team now:



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6. BELGIUM TRENCH UNDER THREAT

A GROUP of military history enthusiasts are raising money to save a restored piece of the Western Front in Flanders.

The Yorkshire trench – so named because it was manned by soldiers of the 49th West Riding of Yorkshire Division during the First World War – was open to the public until weather damage recently forced its closure.

To help preserve the historic site visit [justgiving.com/crowdfunding/yorkshiretrench](https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/yorkshiretrench)



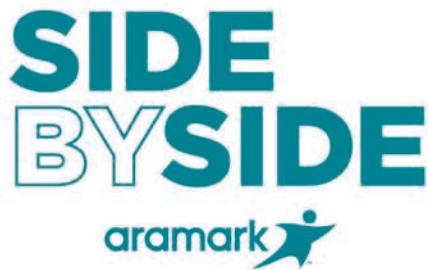
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All roads lead to home

...and Forces Help to Buy is making it easier for troops to own

WITH living costs becoming ever-more demanding, the Forces Help to Buy scheme is giving soldiers a golden opportunity to boost their deposits and buy their own home.

That was the message from incoming Chief of Defence People, Vice Admiral Phil Hally (pictured), as it was announced that the tri-Service initiative has been made permanent.

Speaking to this magazine, the senior officer said that more than 14,000 Army personnel had made use of the "popular and successful" programme since it began in 2014.

It works by letting them borrow up to 50 per cent of their gross annual salary – up to a maximum of £25,000 – in order to buy or self-build their own home.

The cash is interest-free, can be repaid over a maximum of ten years and is open to most Regulars with more than 12 months' service.

The advance must be settled before leaving the military, but this can be



done in different ways.

"With the publishing of the Defence Accommodation Strategy and the conclusion of the Forces Help to Buy pilot, it seemed the most appropriate time to enshrine this in policy, reaffirming our commitment to our Service personnel," said VADM Hally.

He added that the pilots had brought "real-time positive effects" to troops.

"Saving for a deposit to purchase your own home is no mean feat," the senior officer continued.

"And for many, it is a real impediment to getting onto the housing ladder.

"Forces Help to Buy is an important part of our 'offer' to members of the Armed Forces – the grounding effect of owning your own home and the stability it affords cannot be underestimated." ■

IN NUMBERS

14,300 soldiers helped by the scheme since the pilot began in 2014

'ADS ARE ON TRACK'

■ ARMY recruiters have defended the latest instalment of the "This is Belonging" campaign amidst criticism of the flood relief scenario it depicts. Featuring the strapline "nothing can do what a soldier can do" and appearing across TV, radio, social media and cinema screens, the advert shows troops rescuing a woman and baby from a submerged car.

Some commentators say it paints an uninspiring picture of soldiering. But Naomi Walter, Chief Marketing Officer, Army Recruitment, said research had shown that community

support activities were a major attraction for those thinking of joining up.

"We're proud of this advert, which raises awareness of the breadth of work the Army does," she added.

Meanwhile, Col Ross Cleland from Army Recruiting and Initial Training Command said the clip, along with its predecessor showing a robot on the battlefield, drew attention to cutting-edge tech and "the real future of the Service; its soldiers".

A HERO REMEMBERED

■ FRIENDS of a Grenadier Guards stalwart and Army mental health pioneer have been remembering his extraordinary life.

A funeral for Lt Col Richard "Skid" Dorney was held at Salisbury Cathedral shortly before this issue went to press, following his sudden death in November.

The 62-year-old completed six tours of Northern Ireland as well as deployments in Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan.

He had climbed the ranks, serving as RSM of 1st Battalion, Grenadier Guards before commissioning as an officer.

In 2008 he established the Army's Trauma Risk Management Training Team, an initiative to identify those vulnerable to mental health issues after incidents on ops.

Lt Col Dorney, who gained a masters degree in war psychiatry while being recognised for his service with a string of awards, had been running a civilian mental health consultancy at the time of his death.

His book, *The Killing Zone*, details his experiences in Helmand in 2007.

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LAST month's spine line clues – (Maj Ben) Attrell, (LCpl Fraser) Gee, (Maj Steven) Howard, and (Lt Col Will) Meddings – were all the names of Army personnel on the latest operational honours and awards list.

This month we have teamed up with innovative audio brand Majority (majority.co.uk) to offer one lucky reader a **K2 2.1 Channel Bluetooth Soundbar and Subwoofer**.

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Answers, including phone number, to the usual address or comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by February 28.

MAJORITY



SPINE LINE COMPETITION



View from the GROUND



LCpl Victor Ahiavor (RRF) believes there will always be a place for chaplains....

"I HAVE served in the Army for exactly 18 years this month – throughout that time the padre has been an important figure in my life, and those of my fellow soldiers.

It is no secret that I have a strong faith – but the chaplain is there for more than matters of God.

They are outside of the chain of command to help with very practical issues. I have had so many conversations with them about life in general over two decades – you can simply be yourself.

They are an important part of any base and their office is shown on your familiarisation tour in the same way as the cookhouse and the armoury. You look forward to seeing the padre when they are out doing their rounds.

But there is a huge value when a chaplain deploys with your unit – either on exercises or operations.

Most recently, they have come away with my battalion to places such as Canada and are there to help when you are far from home.

A little while ago, when we deployed to Afghanistan, a few of us went to our chaplain when we heard about operations on which we were about to embark.

We were prepared and trained to do our job but obviously worried about all that might happen – he was there to give us reassuring words.

Likewise, we drew comfort from our padre when one of our soldiers was killed in Iraq.

Some of us had questions about things that were happening and talking to him gave a sense of perspective.

You cannot place a value on this when you are witnessing events far from the experience of most people.

Padres play an important part in welfare. They are as relevant practically, and spiritually, now in this changing world as they have ever been."

A UNIFYING FORCE

2 Para chaplain, Rev James Harding, during Ex Mayan Warrior in Belize, 2019



Picture: Cpl Jamie Hart, RLC

Could padres be the glue that binds our fast-changing Army together over the coming years? Chaplain General, Rev Michael Parker, seems to think so...

“We are modernising alongside the Service”



BRITISH Army chaplains are finding new and inventive ways to support soldiers as the military modernises.

Speaking to this magazine, Chaplain General Michael Parker (shown below) explained that his team was focused on providing care in a new era of readiness.

"The Army is good at the practical element of readiness – is my kit ready, is my body ready?", he said.

"But I think emotional readiness is a very different thing.

"To be emotionally ready is a big ask. How can you be ready for uncertainty?

"Part of readiness is learning to live with that uncertainty."

The senior officer, who came into post last year, said chaplains would be supporting soldiers with this new posture, using tools developed during lockdown, which had a "huge impact" on pastoral work.

"Some really creative stuff went on," Rev Parker explained of the pandemic.

"Padres found ways of getting online and interacting with groups of soldiers through various platforms.

"They upskilled. And it showed us the importance of using technology as an extension of our ability to care for our people."

Now, as overseas activity ramps up, chaplains are again looking at how best to evolve their support – whether on home soil or by travelling alongside soldiers on operations.

"Short visits in the deployment window – that is our bread-and-butter now," he explained.

"Who knows what the world is going to look like in future, but alongside digital communications there absolutely is still a place for expeditionary chaplaincy.

"Our padres certainly take the opportunity of face-to-face contact whenever they can."

He continued: "In many ways it is a new world for old problems, but we are modernising alongside the Army."

Employing more chaplains from other faiths and traditions, to ensure the team better represents the community it serves, was another important part of that mission, the chaplain general pointed out.

"We are engaging with the Service networks to help with our work advocating for people who don't always have a voice," he continued.

"Any organisation that relies on a sense of belonging, by its nature will sometimes leave at least a few people feeling that they don't really belong – that's inevitable.

"We are there for those who fall through the cracks."

"Perhaps they can't make friends or are left feeling outsiders for whatever reason, from not liking the chain of command to having disagreements in-unit." ■



Pictures: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC

Braced to stand guard

AIRBORNE sappers swapped bridge building for the parade ground as they prepared to stand guard over the royal palaces.

An 110-strong detachment from 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment was taking on its six-week stint of ceremonial public duties as this issue of *Soldier* went to press.

As shown, the personnel underwent rigorous inspection of uniform and drill at Rock Barracks, Woodbridge before resuming the role.

Maj Peter Dobinson explained that it had been an honour for him and his colleagues to be handed the responsibility in the same year as their regiment's 20th anniversary.

"Everyone is really motivated to put on our best show," he said. "But it has been a steep learning curve to get our ceremonial drill up to the incredibly high standard that is expected." ■



“
It has been
a steep
learning curve
”



GENERAL FOR A DAY

How would you use your newfound rank? news@soldiermagazine.co.uk

FIRST up I would introduce a new rule stating that all senior officers have to spend one day a month at the rank of lance corporal or corporal, to get a feel of issues on the ground.

That would allow them to see how things are, without any dressing up. Often people play the game with senior visits.

It would also help free them from their desks and be the troops they once were before the paperwork.

My view is that senior ranks have too much paperwork. It distracts from the job – for example, having to sign off competencies when several people have done so. There seems to be so much unnecessary doubling up.



I am lucky that I love my job but if someone doesn't, or they aren't feeling empowered, seeing seniors can give them a chance to understand why things happen – to question or help find solutions.

A good leader always wants other people's points of view.

At lunchtime I would go to the scoff house, but with the silver cutlery – I've heard officers get it in the mess and I want to know if it makes food taste any better.

Then I would put something out to thank everyone for their hard work, especially during the strikes over Christmas.

Feedback from a high level is always appreciated. Just before Christmas, we had a brief from our CO, where he gave us a rundown of everything we had achieved and what a cracking job we'd done.

That felt good – it gave us that extra bit of pride.

Then I would end my day in the officers' mess, enjoying the beverages and seeing what's around the building. There's a lot of speculation at my rank that their events are particularly well funded, so I would end my day by making the most of that!

“
A good
leader wants
other points
of view
”

People at my rank would benefit from seeing officers more, too. It enables you to understand the bigger picture – why are we preparing for this exercise?

It's good for the lower ranks to understand things like this. The more involved a soldier is, the more responsibility they want.

Rank/name: AirTpr

George Costello

Cap badge: AAC

Role: Ground crew specialist

Age: 23

Years in: 4

Deployments:

Oman





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Another new record

Pictures: Graeme Main and Roy James

Antarctic adventurer says podcasts and messages of support kept her going

ADVENTURER Capt Preet Chandi (RAMC) has set a new record for the longest solo, unsupported and unassisted polar expedition by a woman.

The physiotherapist, who a year earlier became the first woman of colour to complete a solo expedition to the Antarctic, passed the previous best of 858 miles – set by Anja Blacha in 2020 – as this issue went to press.

Capt Chandi, also known as Polar Preet, was attempting a full crossing of Antarctica via the South Pole – an effort that, if successful, would see her travel more than 1,100 miles while carrying all her kit on a pulk and battling temperatures as low as -50 degrees Celsius.

However, in an update on her blog on day 66 of the epic quest she revealed reaching her target would no longer be possible.

"I have been given my pick-up point which is about 30 nautical miles away from me," she said.

"I'm pretty gutted that I don't have the time to complete the crossing. I know that I have done a huge journey,

it's just difficult while I'm on the ice and I know it's not that far away."

A further update two days later highlighted the immense nature of her challenge as she closed in on her rendezvous point.

"I came into a lot of sastrugi (wind-sculpted snow features), fell several times and travelled slowly," the officer added. "It was very cold and the water in my Thermos flask even froze. I haven't made it to my pick-up flight yet, but I am not far."

The latest update on her progress showed she had covered 901 miles and Capt Chandi revealed that recorded messages from family and friends, as well as a varied playlist of podcasts, had kept her spirits high.

"Over the last week I have been listening to some comedians' audiobooks," she added.

"Romesh Ranganathan, Tez Ilyas, James Acaster... thank you for keeping me company and making me laugh out loud."

Read next month's issue for a full report on the record-breaking Antarctic expedition.



FEARLESS FUNDRAISING

TREES FOR TROOPS



Picture: Woodland Trust/Richard Faulls

A PAIR of Army PTIs ran 100 miles to fund a new area of woodland to commemorate the 457 British troops who lost their lives in Afghanistan.

SSgt Robbie Conway and SSgt Michael Tatton (both RAPTC) completed an ultra-marathon across Exmoor National Park, with the money raised enabling them to team up with the Woodland Trust to

TAKEN ABACK BY HONOUR

■ AN INSTRUCTOR described by colleagues as an "exceptional female role model" for young recruits has received royal recognition for her work.

Sgt Jade Baptie (AGC (SPS)) was awarded an MBE for her efforts training the next generation of troops.

The NCO – currently serving with 7th Parachute Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery – said she was taken aback by the honour, which was for her work as a section commander at Pirbright.

"I was speechless when I was told," the 31-year-old added. "I just feel I did my job."

Praising her relentless enthusiasm and drive, Sgt Baptie's citation highlights: "Through her tremendous work ethic and uncompromising personal standards, she has unlocked the potential in dozens of recruits."

The NCO was one of 59 Army personnel recognised in the New Year Honours list – the first endorsed by King Charles following his accession to the throne.

Other notable awardees included WO2 Godfrey Boyd Morris (RA), master saddler for The King's Troop, who also received the MBE.



“
Thank you for
making me
laugh out loud,
Romesh
”

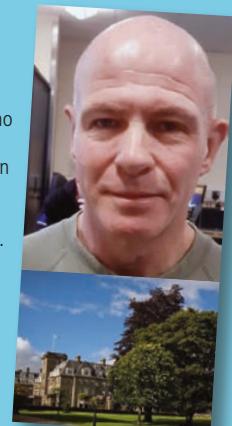


WINNER WINNER

■ A SENIOR NCO who tried his luck in our Gleneagles giveaway in December has spoken of his surprise at scooping the top prize.

Sgt James Kilbride (Para) said he was looking forward to sharing the luxury Scotland trip with his partner.

"It was a shock to win," the full-time Reservist admitted. "I couldn't get joy with the Spine Lines competition, so thought I'd try that instead. It's certainly something to look forward to."



Funds raised:
£3,312

plant saplings –
one for each of
the fallen – in
Willesley Woods,
Leicestershire, near an existing
military memorial grove.

"I wanted their memory to be seen as a life growing for years to come that will help us to remember their sacrifice," explained SSgt Conway (pictured right).

“I WILL MISS THE HIDDEN MESSAGE”



Serviceman shines spotlight on autism and the military...

AN ARMY officer is calling for better understanding of autism in the Forces after recently being diagnosed with the condition.

Maj Paul Robinson (AGC (SPS), shown) sought help via his medical officer after realising he struggled with certain social situations.

“I'll listen to the actual words someone is saying, but will miss the hidden messaging and pleasantries – and then appear rude and arrogant,” he told *Soldier*. “So people would find me difficult, but that's not a true reflection.

“I wanted to improve things in the working environment.

“I had to do a deep dive into myself and it hasn't been comfortable but part of putting this out there is so that if others notice certain traits, or their loved ones do, they will feel confident to explore it and get help if required.”

As well as sometimes lacking interpersonal skills, those on the autism spectrum may find it hard to understand how others think or feel, be distressed by bright lights or loud noises and display repetitive behaviour.

For Maj Robinson, a planner at headquarters Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, conferences and training courses proved particularly stressful.

But with the support of his chain of command, the 39-year-old father of two has found workplace coping strategies, including calming music, flexible working and regular exercise.

“If the Army doesn't understand its people, companies like Microsoft will, and we will lose good personnel who just think a bit differently,” he continued.

“Talking about and normalising autism is a start.”



Personnel at work on Christmas Island, 1959

Medal push pays off at last

Nuclear bomb test vets welcome news they will be decorated for their work

“The passage of time has tempered significant celebration”

Think you could be on the autism spectrum? Contact Maj Robinson on paul.robinson998@mod.gov.uk

VETERANS of the UK's nuclear test programme of the 1950s and 60s have welcomed news that they are to be issued with their own campaign medal.

Senior defence officials said they expected to release the full qualifying criteria for the decoration in the coming weeks. Around 22,000 former British and Commonwealth personnel are expected to be eligible.

Troops and civilians who deployed to areas including Christmas and Malden Islands, as well as Maralinga and Emu Field, will be among those in line for the award, which can also be presented posthumously to relatives.

The move is part of a wider programme to commemorate the nuclear test era.

This year will also see the Office for Veterans Affairs launch a special history project to give those involved a chance to tell their stories.

As reported in this magazine, troops who supported the atom and hydrogen bomb tests in the Pacific and Australia between 1952 and 1967 have long been campaigning for greater recognition.

Many claim to have suffered serious illnesses as a result of the programme.

Doug Hern (shown below), who served on Christmas Island during the Op Grapple hydrogen bomb detonations in 1957 and 1958, said he was pleased that a medal was finally being issued.

The former Royal Navy Serviceman and ex-national secretary of the British Nuclear Test Veterans' Association told *Soldier*:

“Obviously the passage of time has tempered any significant celebration, but this is good news.

“As much as anything, the new decoration is an acknowledgement that those who served on these operations were an active part of the Cold War.

“It is also good to see that the award is part of a wider package focusing on the era, which includes the forthcoming history project for our veterans.”

The new medal was announced by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak during a special event at the National Memorial Arboretum marking 70 years since the first test.

The PM told veterans their contribution during a volatile era had helped “preserve peace”.

“This medal is an enduring symbol of our country's gratitude to every person who played a part and the loved ones who supported them,” he added. ■





Ground view

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

EXACTLY one year ago this month, Russia launched an attack against neighbouring Ukraine in the first war we have seen on European soil for decades.

It was the beginning of a conflict that has seen thousands dead and injured, while countless others have fled. Critical infrastructure has been targeted – leaving many people living without the basics of heating and power.

The invasion changed the game for all of us in Nato, with the alliance taking rapid action in order to bolster its presence in the east.

For British troops, this has meant leading a larger Enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup in Estonia – a task they are continuing to perform with great professionalism.

I have had the opportunity to visit the latest Op Cabrit outing, led by The King's Royal Hussars, over the last few weeks and the soldiers are continuing to establish themselves on a daily basis.

The deployment now encompasses a large multinational force that includes troops from Denmark, France and the host nation.

The fighting in Ukraine – not too distant from the Baltic

state – has pressed home the reason for their presence.

Personnel from all Nato nations are showing an impressive level of resolution and, during my visit, embarked on a winter training package.

Meanwhile, on home soil, our soldiers and allied colleagues are continuing to instruct Ukrainian counterparts on Op Interflex.

We have now seen thousands of troops complete these courses, returning home with new skills and kit to help defend their homeland.

In April I'm hoping we can showcase and distil some of the learning we have accrued on ops at the Regimental Sergeant Majors' Convention.

And if all goes to plan, I'll be inviting some of the visiting foreign RSMs to see how Interflex is being delivered and watch their own instructors in action.

Under Op Mobilise, the Army must be ready for any future escalation in Europe. Operating alongside multinational allies – each with a different way of working – will be crucial to success. So it is vital we use every opportunity to hone skills and share best practice.

If the last year is anything to go by, we must expect the unexpected.

“
It is vital we share skills and best practice
”

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL



Q What's the craziest charity challenge you've ever done?

A A team rope climb, equivalent to the height of Mount Everest. I slept for 14 hours afterwards.



THE Army has not only been busy on the international scene over recent months, troops are once again back in the spotlight on the domestic front too.

Recent industrial disputes have proved a major challenge and I wanted to say a huge thanks to all who have been providing cover in roles such as driving

ambulances (shown above at Wellington Barracks in December) and assisting with vital admin at ports.

Just as in the Covid crisis, the Army is once again showing its versatility in supporting the civilian authorities and helping the public through a tough period

Your hard work is not going unnoticed.

ALL FOR A GOOD CAUSE

I'M HOPING Soldier readers will join me in offering some strong backing to our national Service charity – the ABF – over the course of the coming year.

At the moment I'm planning to tackle the organisation's Cateran Yomp challenge (pictured below) – a trek through the Cairngorm Mountains in Scotland – in the summer. I'll set up a Just Giving link in due course, but this is an early heads-up.

The ABF offers support to serving soldiers and veterans and is an important part of our military family. In potentially tough times ahead it – and other Forces charities – will have a vital role. Let's do our bit.





THE BIG PICTURE

Lydd and Hythe Ranges, Kent

On the front foot

TROOPS from C Company, 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment polish urban drills as they gear up for a busy 2023. In June they will deploy to Romania for multinational manoeuvres, before returning home to train Ukrainian personnel as part of Op Interflex. Finally, the end of the year will see them re-rolling as armoured infantry following the merger of the regiment's 1st and 2nd Battalions. Staged around their duties on Op Isotope – the tasking to support the UK Border Force response to migrant boats – the latest package was a chance to practise fighting in built-up areas and other basic skills such as section attacks, navigation, moving covertly and live firing.

Picture: Graeme Main



WEED TO WEED



WO1 Paul Carney, RE

Weighed down

Army Sergeant Major WO1 Paul Carney has been there too. This is how he took back control...

GDEBT has a nasty habit of creeping up on you – the problem often only becoming apparent when you have to fork out for something unexpected.

It might be a car breaking down or a household appliance that needs replacing – then you suddenly feel as if life is spiralling out of control.

I know because I've been there, owing tens of thousands on credit cards as a result of having a large mortgage and the legal bills that followed a divorce.

My financial mess happened several years ago.

Back then I was a staff sergeant with the Royal Engineers and my unit had just moved from Germany to the UK so my professional life was pretty demanding.

At the same time, my then wife and I owned a house we had to pay for but had less money because of the arrival of our son.

In retrospect, we had overstretched ourselves, although that is easy to say with hindsight.

But the real problems hit later on. My marriage broke down and ended in divorce.

The legal fees were

expensive and my credit card bills rocketed.

The debts were swallowing most of my pay.

After my monthly outgoings, my senior NCO salary was comparable to that of a sapper.

My immediate course of action was to shut myself away and try to deal with the situation alone.

At the time I was seeking promotion to WO2 and thought my career would be wrecked if people knew how much I owed.

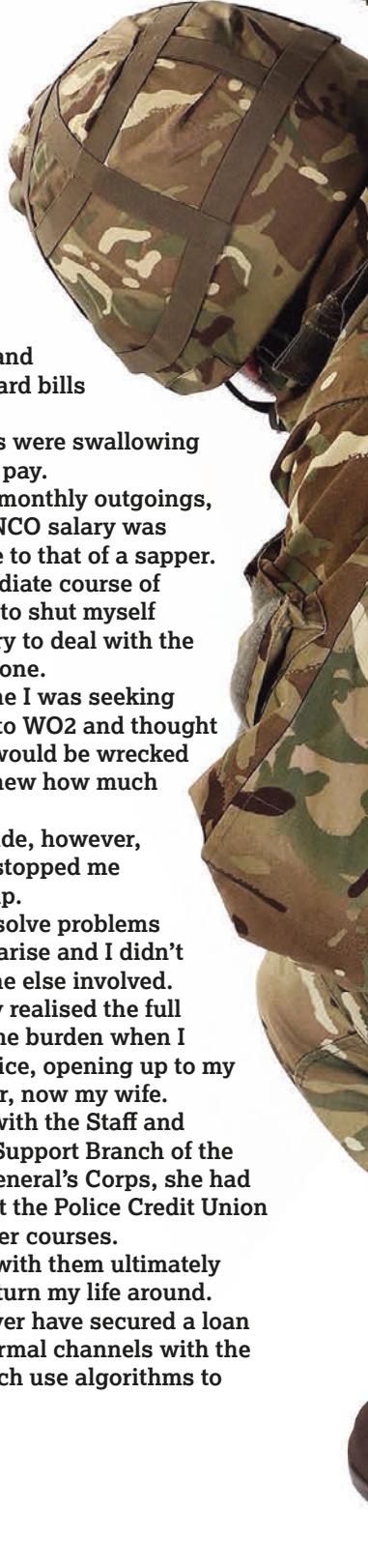
It was pride, however, that really stopped me seeking help.

Soldiers solve problems when they arise and I didn't want anyone else involved.

But I only realised the full weight of the burden when I sought advice, opening up to my new partner, now my wife.

Serving with the Staff and Personnel Support Branch of the Adjutant General's Corps, she had heard about the Police Credit Union on one of her courses.

Meeting with them ultimately helped me turn my life around. I would never have secured a loan through normal channels with the banks, which use algorithms to



by debt?

66

I thought my career would be wrecked if people knew how much I owed

99

decide on applications.

But after a traditional face-to-face interview with them about my personal circumstances, the loan was approved.

It was a game changer – the money allowed me to put all my debts in one place and deal with the credit cards.

Now I was actually paying off the money – and not just the interest – over a four-year period.

I've said it before in this magazine; we are all going to notice the rising cost of living this year.

The situation is going to affect society as a whole – soldier as well as civvy – so it is important we face up to any financial problems and address them before they spiral out of control.

With the help of others, my debts were paid off.

I came through it and carried on serving my country.

My promotion happened, and I continued to progress through the ranks.

These days I am the Army sergeant major, my wife and I are living a good life and there are savings in the bank once again.

When you share any problem, dealing with it truly becomes much easier.



TOP TIP

Don't suffer in silence

My mistake was to try and deal with the problem on my own but it was only when I asked for help that life started to improve.

Debt can be addressed without lives and careers being ruined but acknowledging the problem is the first step.

Agencies such as Citizen's Advice are a good place to go, while telling your chain of command

means you do not have to face a crisis alone.

Individual voluntary arrangements

Why they could be the answer to your debt dramas

► **WITH the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and a potential festive hangover in the shape of unpaid credit card bills, this time of year is tough for many.**

And according to stats from debt advice specialists Creditfix, the average level of unsecured debt among military personnel stands at £17,128 – seven per cent higher than the national average.

But help is at hand – a raft of military charities and other organisations can offer support (see panel).

Depending on your circumstances, one route out of the red could be an IVA – a legal agreement between you and the companies you owe money to to pay back all – or part of – your debts over a period of time at an affordable rate.

Although it might sound a bit daunting, here's how to work out if this option is right for you...

What is an IVA? A legally binding arrangement made between you and your creditors to pay

off your debts with a repayment plan that suits your circumstances. Once agreed, those companies cannot initiate court action against you, or continue to contact you. After making monthly contributions towards your debts for a set period of time – most commonly five or six years – anything left over will be written off, meaning you can move on with your life.

Who's eligible? **Anyone with £6,000 or more of unsecured debt owed to two or more creditors, who has a steady income and can consistently make payments of at least £90 per month.**

An IVA is only possible for those living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – in Scotland there is a similar scheme known as a Trust Deed.

What kind of debts are covered? **Most unsecured debts** – meaning those not tied to an asset such as your home or car. For example, credit cards, personal loans, overdrafts, council tax or energy bill arrears, income tax or national insurance arrears, tax credits or benefit overpayments, payday loans and debts to family and friends, among others.

What debts can't be included? **Secured debts** such as **mortgages** and **hire purchase agreements** as well as those incurred through **fraud, court fines, TV licence arrears, student loans or child support arrears**.

What's the advantage? **Interest and charges on your debts are frozen by law.** All IVA payments are based on what you

can afford and an insolvency practitioner will distribute them to creditors on your behalf, saving you the stress of dealing with them. Homeowners won't have to sell their home.

Will an IVA affect my credit rating?

Yes, it will show on your credit report for six years after it has been approved. However, this is the case for most debt solutions and your credit score will likely already have been affected by being in debt in the first place. Once your IVA is complete you can begin rebuilding your credit rating.

Will it impact my job? In most cases

it won't. However, in certain professions, such as accountancy and law, having an IVA may mean that you can no longer practise or you may only be able to continue under certain conditions.

Any other disadvantages? Spending restrictions

will be put in place and any windfall over £500 will be put towards your IVA. If you're a homeowner, you may be required to release equity from your property towards the end of your arrangement. Your IVA will also be recorded on a public register. It is important to discuss these and other considerations with an adviser to help you make an informed decision.

NEXT STEPS

Talk to someone. The following charities offer free, impartial advice on financial matters...

● **National Debtline** and **Step Change** – turn to page 50 for contact details

● **Royal British Legion** – visit the “get support” section at britishlegion.org.uk or call 0808 802 8080

● **SSAFA** – go to ssafa.org.uk/get-help and click on “welfare and benefits”, then “financial planning” or call 0800 260 6767

Alternatively, **Creditfix** are the biggest provider of individual voluntary arrangements in the UK. Visit creditfix.co.uk for further information. Initial advice is free. Fees only apply if you decide to enter an IVA.



Uphill struggle

► **MOTIVATION** – you've either got it today or you haven't. And the can't-be-bothered feeling can kick in at any time, especially in the winter. But Service personnel may have more control over their levels of drive than they think...

If you start doing the things you wish you felt like doing, you have more chance of stimulating your brain in a way that brings you that motivation

Sometimes the feeling is fleeting, sometimes it lasts longer. But when you start doing something, even if you don't feel like it, you can trigger a biological and emotional shift

Motivation is therefore a by-product of action. It's the feeling of energy you get as you leave a phys session, not arrive, when your body and brain start to rise to a challenge

So what we do with our body influences brain activity, which in turn influences our feelings

It's natural for motivation to go up and down

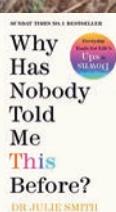
But the brain pays attention to what's happening in your body – heart rate and muscle activity, for example. It uses this intel to make judgements about how much energy to give to certain tasks

4 tips for boosting your drive

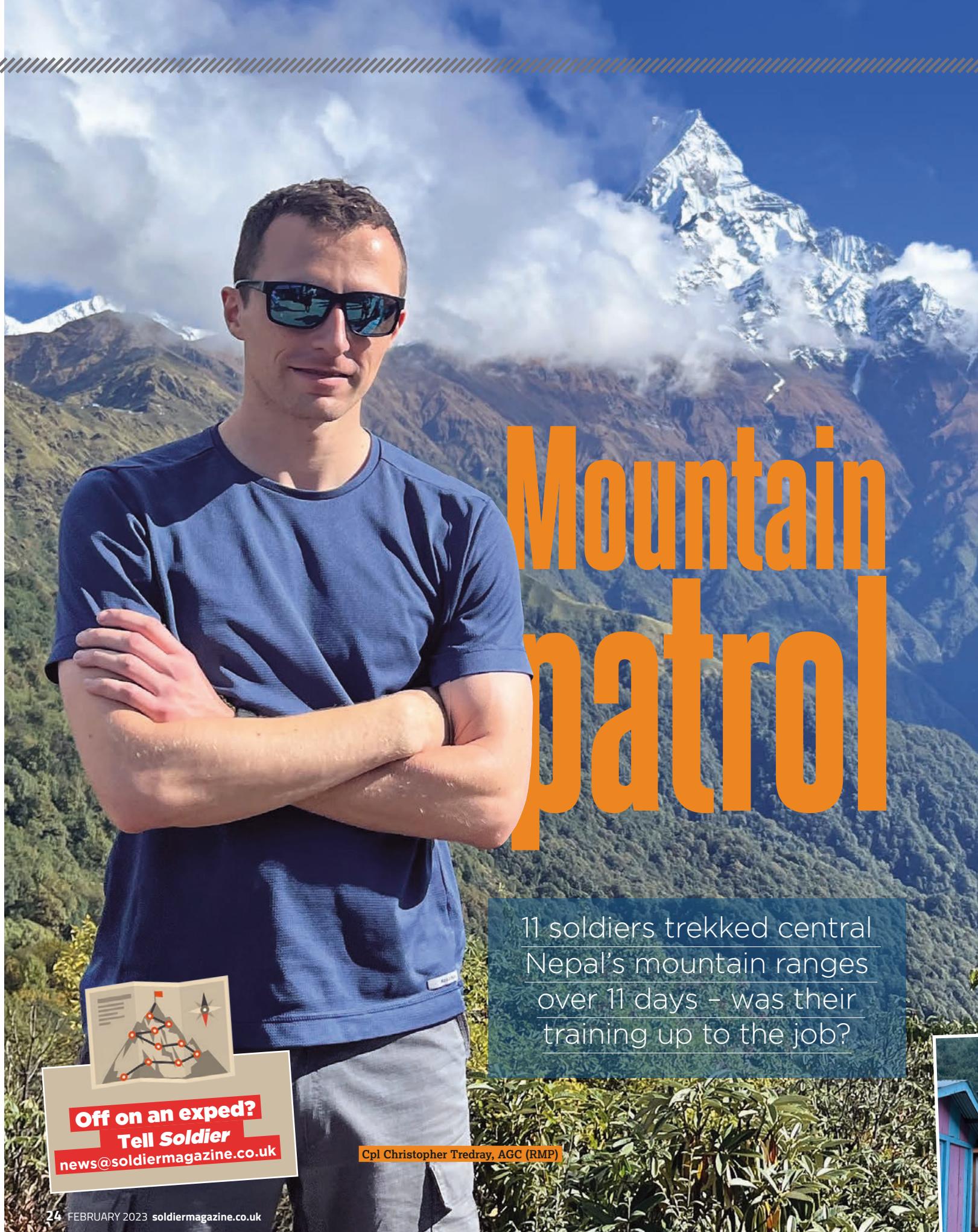
- **Move your body**
- **Stay connected with your goals** – perhaps by writing stuff down
- **Keep things small**. If a task seems daunting, find little goals or rewards along the way to keep the faith
- **Rethink failure**. If you beat yourself up when you fail, fear of getting it wrong can zap motivation. How do you talk to yourself when you go off track?

Not feeling it?

Anyone struggling with depression or other mental health problems may suffer from something called **anhedonia**. This is when you stop taking pleasure in things you used to enjoy. The natural response may be to wait until you feel like it. But motivation does not reappear on its own; it is created through action. This can take a while, so there is a period when sufferers have to grind, doing things that matter to them even though they are not "feeling it".



Information taken from *Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before?* by Dr Julie Smith



Mountain patrol

11 soldiers trekked central Nepal's mountain ranges over 11 days – was their training up to the job?



Off on an exped?
Tell Soldier
news@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Cpl Christopher Treday, AGC (RMP)

► AT MORE than 100 miles in length – and winding through paddy fields, subtropical forests, waterfalls and villages – the Annapurna Circuit is considered by many to be the best long-distance trek in the world.

But it also requires some serious stamina, with adventurers required to scale the heights of Thorong La Pass at 5,416m.

Here, three members of an exped team from the Defence School of Policing and Guarding give the lowdown on the challenge and whether their physical training paid off.



Capt Joshua Green, AGC (RMP)



Cpl Christopher Tredray, AGC (RMP)

AGE: 30

YEARS IN UNIFORM: 10

HEIGHT: 6ft

WEIGHT: 70kg

UNHEALTHIEST HABIT: Sugary drinks like Coca-Cola

TRAINING PREP: I put together an eight-week progressive training programme, due to not having many hills in Portsmouth, and put in more tabbing with weight, long walks to get miles in the legs and two strength sessions in the gym focusing mainly on exercises that replicate and assist in walking. The last couple of weeks consisted of a tapering-off phase to avoid injury and aid recovery.

TRAINING I WISH I'D DONE: Ideally, more altitude training. When that hits there is nothing like it.

STANDOUT MOMENT: The stunning views. You see it all the time in films and TV shows and think it's got to be CGI, but to see it for real is amazing and something I will never forget.

HAS THE EXPED CHANGED YOUR ATTITUDE TO PHYS? No – you have to work hard to get what you want. But I learnt that, regardless of how fit and how much training you have done, injuries and sickness can strike anyone. So don't take things for granted.



Capt Joshua Green, AGC (RMP)

AGE: 31

YEARS IN UNIFORM: 6

HEIGHT: 5ft 10ins

WEIGHT: 76kg

UNHEALTHIEST HABIT: Not certain if it is unhealthy but I can easily drink five or six cups of tea a day. Otherwise, my love of Chinese food knows no bounds.

TRAINING PREP: Two running club sessions a week, including technique sessions. I tried to stick with the eight-minute mile group. My unit PTIs knew about the exped and introduced more battle PT for my benefit. We were all getting fitter, but my popularity plummeted!

TRAINING I WISH I'D DONE: Single leg exercises such as reverse lunges or single leg deadlifts. You spend a lot of time balancing on unstable ground. So definitely more emphasis on lower limb strength and balance.

STANDOUT MOMENT: The river crossing after traversing a mud slide – it was the single hardest day I've had on a mountain.

HAS THE EXPED CHANGED YOUR ATTITUDE TO PHYS? It reinforced the difference between exercise and training. Exercise is non-specific and can be very eclectic. With training you need to focus and aim to peak for something. There was no point in me lowering my two-kilometre rowing time for this trip – what I needed was days moving weight up and down hills in the UK. In future I will write training plans and stick to them.

Sgt Adam Wright, AGC (RMP)

AGE: 38

YEARS IN UNIFORM: 12

HEIGHT: 6ft 4ins

WEIGHT: 113kg

UNHEALTHIEST HABIT: Probably opening the snack cupboard and eating my kids' sweets.

TRAINING PREP: Following a mixed programme of cardio and strength training created by a personal coach as well as attending staff PT.

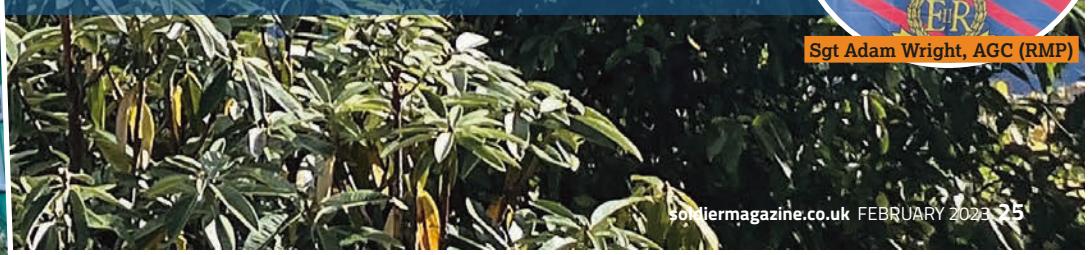
TRAINING I WISH I'D DONE: Longer walks, eight- to ten-hour days, not for a physical reason but simply to understand how walking consistently requires mental strength.

STANDOUT MOMENT: Reaching Manang – it was breathtaking and almost unworldly.

HAS THE EXPED CHANGED YOUR ATTITUDE TO PHYS? It has confirmed that appearances aren't everything. The fittest members of the team experienced issues, as well as the others. It confirmed that nature can affect anyone, regardless of age and physical ability. Any amount of pre-exped training will certainly help with the physical challenge, but nothing can prepare you mentally.



Sgt Adam Wright, AGC (RMP)



It's given us all a

Veterans mark one year of mission to help Ukraine

► AS Ryan Yates (ex-RA) watched Russian tanks roll into Ukraine last February, his thoughts turned to what he could do to help. A former member of 4/73 (Sphinx) Special Observation Post Battery with two tours of Afghanistan under his belt, he had set up a successful charity to support fellow ex-Service personnel in difficulty – Veteran's Army.

Together with the organisation's thriving community of volunteers, the 34-year-old set about collecting thousands of pounds' worth of medical aid, delivering the first consignment to the front line just days later.

Nearly one year on, he and his team were setting off on their 46th supply run as this edition went to press – a milestone that will also push the total value of kit donated past the £2m mark.

Here, he explains how the skills and determination they forged in service made it all happen...

GWhen the conflict first kicked off a few of us were like, 'this just isn't right, we're going to go and join the Ukraine Foreign Legion'.

I had military and operational experience and medical training, and that was my plan. But I soon realised I should check my ego.

Having spent seven years in recovery from PTSD I had to ask myself, selfishly, whether me with my rifle on a fire team in a section of trench was going to benefit me long term – or make any kind of difference to the war.

So we discussed whether there was another way to make an impact, and the answer was medical aid.

We heard of a field hospital that was crying out for equipment and that's where we started. We collected £75,000-worth of kit and by day ten we had made our first delivery.

Since then we have done 46 trips, totalling £2m in aid.

Because of our military mindset and understanding of conflict, we knew we needed to build our logistics chain backwards – from Ukraine to the UK – by developing relationships and ensuring we had the right permissions



and access in place.

A lot of organisations were just dumping stuff at the border because they hadn't thought about the process of getting in, weren't willing to accept the risk or just didn't realise how big the country is – that tourniquet you're delivering is needed at the front line, which is potentially another 1,500km in front of you.

We've been in Kyiv when it was being shelled, as well as Mykolaiv, which is very close to Odesa and Kherson and has been in Russian hands, so we've seen the aftermath. There's a lot of



turmoil and stress for the people who live there.

This is a very different kind of operation for me because I'm not at the teeth end; I'm seeing more of the humanitarian side and the impact of everything that has happened.

All the non-governmental organisations work with each other, so when we have space we also take refugees away with us – mostly women and children.

They are carrying their lives in plastic bags, but like all Ukrainians are so grateful for any help that it's humbling.

As a nation they are wholeheartedly convinced they are going to win this conflict.

I imagine it's like London during the Blitz. Everything is about the mission – all the men have gone off to join the fight.

They are an incredibly stoic people, in my opinion.

We have also trained more than 1,000 troops from the defence forces and militias in first aid and tactical combat casualty care.

Most of them have never done any



shared purpose'



military stuff before – there are guys who ran tech businesses and now they're in the infantry.

They all have different kit and do the best they can, learning as they go, but again they are very grateful for our knowledge and experience.

We are a tiny piece of a very big machine and I just hope in some way we've made an impact in this huge and important conflict.

Ukraine is not the only thing we do – before the war, Veteran's Army was providing mental health services, crisis loans, therapy dogs and more to ex-Service personnel and their families.

But because of our backgrounds and contacts, we had a massive network we could access when the conflict started.

I'm very humbled by the amount of support we've had – we've taken more than 300 wheelchairs, four £60,000 surgical suite beds as well as anaesthesia machines and crash carts. And when people tell me that stuff has saved lives it's really uplifting.

We run purely on crowdfunding and donations – if that were to stop we



IN NUMBERS:

2 million

value, in pounds, of **medical kit delivered to Ukraine** by the Veteran's Army team in the past year

60

weight, in tonnes, of **additional food and humanitarian aid** distributed

1,000

troops given **combat medical training**

FIVE

length of time, in days, **needed for the 1,700-mile journey from the UK to the front line**

wouldn't be able to continue. I can't stress that point enough.

I don't view this as a personal thing. It's not just me. If it was, we wouldn't be where we are. But I had an idea and other people helped grow it.

None of us get paid – we all do it for free. But we love it. It's like being back in the Army – even using the radios and doing route plans and orders before we go out.

It's given all of us purpose – even those back in the UK who are finding kit and fundraising.

A lot of the guys and girls have missed that sense of organisation and camaraderie – the feeling of being in the military – and when it winds down, I think people are going to struggle.

I know I will. I'm back making command decisions, with a team behind me and we're achieving an aim.



Support the cause

To help Veteran's Army continue their work in Ukraine and assisting ex-Service personnel visit veteransarmy.co.uk/support-us

Squaddie to stand-up

Why the Army is the ideal proving ground for a career in comedy

► IT MAY sound like a strange post-Service occupation, but according to Scottish funny man Gary Faulds the military set him up for success in the showbiz spotlight.

As an Army-obsessed youngster, he pestered his local recruiting office until he was given the green light to start the joining-up process aged 15 and nine months.

He then served in the Army Air Corps for eight years before family circumstances saw him reluctantly leave in 2012.

Now a gas engineer by day and stand-up comedian by night, the ex-soldier embarks on a five-month UK tour later this year – with a chunk of material focused on his previous life in uniform.

Here, he tells *Soldier* how the Army prepared him for an unlikely next step...

Endex

We would do skits at the end of an exercise; some lads would sing or even wrestle – I'd do stand-up comedy. I was always the man for morale and would perform on the back of a drops truck. I loved it. Even when doing comedy clubs now, it is never as nerve-racking as doing stand-up in front of my peers and mates. If you are rubbish, they will terrorise you. Nothing is as hard as an Army gig.

Thanks, sergeant major

I started out by doing open mic nights, which led to club nights. As I got better I got more time on stage, and then I started to get paid. I related it to when the sergeant major would ask me to give a brief while on exercise – I would have a map, explain the key points and try to make it funny so people would listen. The Army taught me a lot about good communication and when it comes to hecklers, there is nobody who can hurt your feelings like the sergeant major – it's great prep for stag and hen parties hurling abuse.

Out on the road

Faulds starts his tour in Kilbarchan, Scotland on June 2.

For full tour dates and ticket information visit garyfaulds.co.uk



Material aplenty

There are lots of silly stories to tell, particularly from basic training. There's one I tell about the time I fell asleep in a harbour area while stagging on. We were contacted and when I woke up later there was nobody there. I came out and saw my section commander running to find me – I knew I was going to be boasted for that.

Confidence is everything

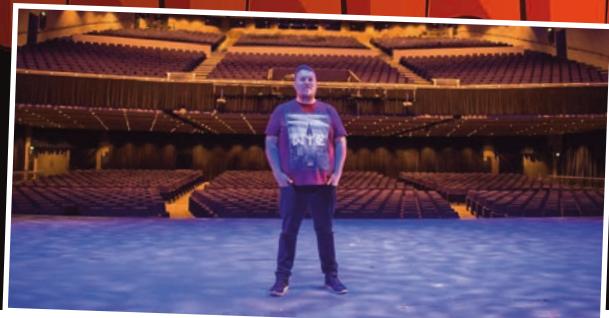
I was never a bright kid and if I had not joined the Army I would have got a basic-level job. The Service finds what you are good at and makes that your quality. I went on to become an Apache specialist; if you'd told me that as a young lad at school I would never have believed you. So confidence is one of the biggest things I took from my time in the military and that is all-important as a comedian.

It's good to talk

In the Army you have to speak if you want to get promoted – you cannot be a quiet lad and not communicate. There is always a story to tell or something to talk about, and you are constantly coming into contact with new people. And that's obviously key to what I do now.

Ability to adapt

I've got to slow things down for the next tour. My humour is very Scottish, and my accent is strong, so I have to switch a few things. With so many dates there will be some sleep deprivation – I'm just not in the Army and performing on the back of a drops truck any more. Moving from the military to comedy feels like a natural progression. It took me four years to break through but I'm now selling out gigs and doing well. But standing in front of 3,000 people is still not as terrifying as performing to the lads.



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LEVEL
PEAKS



Tale of the unexpected

Task group in Mali
takes charge of
brief in its stride



WHEN The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards arrived in Mali last November they could have been forgiven for thinking they knew roughly what lay ahead of them over the next six months.

They were, after all, heading up the fifth rotation of British troops providing a long-range reconnaissance capability for the ongoing United Nations stabilisation mission in the country.

After months of arduous training to take over from a UK contingent led by The Royal Irish Regiment, the plan was to continue undertaking patrols heading hundreds of miles out into the arid plains of this huge landlocked country – reassuring rural populations and scouting for Isis terrorist cells operating in the region.

However, within days of their arrival the UK government announced that British Armed Forces would be leaving the mission earlier than planned and this would be the last tour, citing coups, the Malian interim government's partnership with private military company Wagner Group and the restrictions placed on the multinational forces' presence as the reason.

The French had already decided to relocate their personnel to Niger and many other nations contributing to the UN presence in Mali were, and still are, considering their future commitments to the organisation's task force.

The requirement for the UK formation to conduct long-range reconnaissance tasks was cancelled with immediate effect and its size reduced. The personnel were told they could be brought home any time within the next few months.

"The decision meant we lost about 30 per cent of our capability – the elements that enabled us to carry out long-range patrolling," Lt Col Ben Parkyn (Scots DG), commanding officer of the Long-Range Reconnaissance Group, tells *Soldier*.

"The brief was changed; we were told we had to set the theatre for our redeployment and I had to organise a series of short-range patrols to prove that if the local situation changed we could react, mainly from a force protection point of view.

"We have done a number of day-long, and two short-range, patrols – the last one was the full operating capability patrol, which lasted seven days.

"Its purpose was two-fold – to confirm and transfer the »



skills and knowledge across the task group, and to confirm the situation in the operating area around Gao.

"On our return to camp we met the newly arrived theatre drawdown unit, the logistic specialists who will redeploy our kit and people over the coming months.

"We are now providing force protection for them and enabling their plan."

The change in brief has led to some frustrations within the task group, admits Lt Col Parkyn.

"There is a feeling of disappointment that we've not been able to do the long-range stints we trained so hard for," he says. "But there have still been loads of positive lessons for us that we'll take away from here."

"The handover from the Royal Irish was fantastic and they gave us a running start in getting us up to full operating capability, which was absolutely vital as the fleet is two years into being here."

"The soldiers have learned loads about prepping the platforms as the ground here is challenging and the dust gets into everything."

Being involved in a real deployment in an alien and unstable country also sharpens essential soldiering skills in a way exercises simply cannot, says Tpr John Jolly (Scots DG).

"The time spent out on the ground, being able to live and operate off your vehicle at reach and in challenging conditions, has been a real highlight for me," the Serviceman adds.

Cpl Seiorse Gaughan (Scots DG) believes that the troops' skills have been developed significantly, despite not undertaking the long-range patrols they had trained for.

"We've all improved through the short-range operations we've done and the build up to it," he says.

"Being in a closed environment with my soldiers has tested my ability to lead and manage them in situations I wouldn't have faced otherwise."

"Mali is a complex place that presents many challenges – understanding the environment has been a big learning curve for everyone, both physically and culturally."

"The physical challenges are the heat and the terrain. Drivers have had to hone their skills and the commanders have had to utilise all their navigational skills to manoeuvre efficiently."

"The language barrier has been challenging, too – especially in the intelligence gathering process – and everybody has had to understand and come to terms with the cultural norms, which are very different to the UK's."

With the situation in Mali now more unstable than it has been for many years, the British contingent have had to be on their toes, aware of the high-threat environment they are in and unable to relax – despite knowing their withdrawal is imminent.

"We are in a very complicated situation," continues Lt Col

Parkyn. "We have terrorists around Gao who are in a battle for control of Mali with the transitional government, who themselves are less democratic than they could be – having gained control after the second coup in as many years."

"There are also a number of non-terrorist armed groups in the region that provide local security in different zones and their allegiances change all the time."

"They exist mainly because Mali has no police force so they are, essentially, local citizens who have formed armed groups that establish and run checkpoints."

"On patrols we saw evidence of terrorist armed groups scouting us, so even though we haven't been doing entirely what we thought we would be doing there have still been some very challenging moments."

"There are not many opportunities to deploy on operations where there is a significant threat and we need to be alive to that and stay very sharp – there's a reason we are walking around camp with pistols on our hips."

Perhaps more importantly for the long-term, the deployment to Mali has provided the Scots Dragoon Guards with a priceless opportunity to work closely with a range of attached arms and capabilities over a sustained period of time.

This is proving crucial in their preparation ahead of joining Nato's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) – a formation of around 5,000 personnel, some of whom are required to respond to major crises at just 48 hours' notice.

The unit starts national validation in the autumn and after Nato validation on exercises Brilliant Jump and Defender in Germany in early 2024, they will slot into 7 Light Mechanised Brigade Combat Team as part of their three-year commitment to the VJTF.

"We rarely work closely with all the attached elements we have on this mission such as UAS, military intelligence, signals, military police, engineers, EOD and search and working dogs, among others," explains Lt Col Parkyn.

"Exercises can provide some good opportunities, but these capabilities are usually thin on the ground as their skills are often in high demand."

"However, when we move to the VJTF we will have to work closely with them all, so having them here in this type of environment, for this long, has been an extremely valuable aspect of the deployment." ■





WILDCAT

WHAT YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW

7 functions of the world-class reconnaissance helicopter that you may have overlooked...

THE battle-winning recce strike capability of the Army's eyes in the sky – the Wildcat – has been well established for almost a decade now.

But as with any cutting-edge piece of kit, there are certain tasks that this airframe and its crews perform that are perhaps not widely understood by troops on the ground.

On a recent visit to the Yeovilton base of 1 Regiment, Army Air Corps, rear crew member Cpl Halil Ahmet told *Soldier* it was vital for the wider Service to know the variety of functions that Wildcat can carry out.

"Even though our liaison officers spend time explaining everything we can do, some personnel still struggle to appreciate just how versatile Wildcat is," the 661 Squadron NCO explained.

"Recce is what we're here for. But within that role there are things we do which surprise people. And this helicopter also has the potential to be used for a number of other non-recce tasks, too, such as transport and force protection."

Here, members of 1 Regiment give a rundown of some of the lesser understood elements of the Wildcat helicopter – and how these things can assist soldiers, units and battlegroups when they are deployed alongside the airframe.



RAPID, VERSATILE DEPLOYMENT

With just ten feet of blade clearance required to land Wildcat – an area of about 25m in diameter – this helicopter can move in and out of confined places that many other assets cannot. Troops from specialist units could be dropped into austere environments, or supplies delivered to heavily wooded disaster relief zones, where the airframe's winching capabilities can also be deployed. "We can do winching on land, or even over sea if required," Cpl Ahmet said. "Its relatively low level of downwash means Wildcat is more able to land in tricky environments such as desert or on loose ground." And with its ground crew possessing a diverse set of skills to move, re-fuel and re-arm – including landing site recce and even their own force protection – this asset's flexibility is hard to dispute.

Words: Sarah Goldthorpe Pictures: Maj Paul Turner, Air Tpr David Allen, both AAC; Graeme Main

FORWARD AIR CONTROL / AIR OBSERVATION POSTS

1 Regiment's aircraft commanders are qualified to act as forward air controllers and air observation posts – enabling them to call in fast jets or artillery onto enemy positions. Exercise Khanjar Oman in 2021 saw the aviators partner with their Royal Air Force colleagues in this way for the first time. Then last year, on the same package, 661 Squadron aircraft crews controlled Omani F16s and 29 Commando, Royal Artillery guns. Wildcat commanders take responsibility for identifying a target, before allocating the appropriate resources to prosecute it. Training aircraft commanders to do this will be more widespread in the future. Along with those of 847 Naval Air Squadron, 1 Regiment's airframes are at the forefront of delivering the forward air controller role, essentially joining up the air and land manoeuvre elements of any given operation. The planned arrival of the tactical data link in 2024, allowing Wildcat to tie into the Bowman network, will enhance this even further on future missions.



PAIRING

The recce capabilities of Wildcat were united with the firepower of the Apache attack helicopter when 1st Aviation Brigade was established some three years ago. However, this asset's capability checklist does not end with attack pairing – it can talk to pretty much any other blades in the sky. This could be used to great effect if there was a requirement to scout ahead of an incoming force, for example, or to drop supplies or identify suitable landing points. "We can designate a target with pinpoint accuracy for land, air and sea," Lt Freddie Faux said.

»



FAST-ROPING

Any soldier trained in fast-roping – paratroopers specialising in forward reconnaissance, for example, or units requiring rapid means of insertion – can do so from Wildcat up to a height of 60ft. Combined with the helicopter's smaller size and ability to touch down where others cannot, this allows greater overall access to complex terrain – such as urban environments. "We can do this by day or night, and abseiling as well," added Cpl Ahmet. "The rear crew are qualified fast-roping instructors so it's entirely possible for us to do it."

PAX AND MATERIEL MOVEMENT

From ration supplies to additional passengers (up to five depending on the cabin configuration), Wildcat can be used for a plethora of movement and supply tasks on or off the battlefield. "People are really starting to understand this capability now," Lt Faux continued. "But what we struggle with is explaining what kind of troops we can move. Wildcat can carry helicopter snipers or even allow airborne command and control to happen due to its enhanced situational awareness capability." Its casualty evacuation potential is also being trialled by the Royal Navy to see if this could possibly be added to its brief.



FIRE SUPPORT

With either the 7.62 calibre GPMG or .50 calibre M3M mounted to its operational flights, Wildcat can provide direct fire support in some challenging scenarios. Crews describe a recent training scenario where the "J-turn" manoeuvre, which sees the aircraft spin 180 degrees while maintaining the same direction of travel, allowed targets inside a compound surrounded by friendly forces to be engaged from directly overhead. In this way it can produce accurate direct fire to complement the effect of other assets.



UNDERSLUNG LOADS

Another area where Wildcat's ground crew, and in fact all Army Air Corps ground specialists, show their versatility is with their ability to handle underslung loads – usually the preserve of the Royal Logistic Corps' Joint Helicopter Support Squadron. This allows its soldiers to step up to a range of critical resupply tasks within a weight limit of just under a tonne. Rations, ammo and Javelin anti-tank weapons have all been moved forward on recent packages by members of the regiment. ■

FANCY FLYING WILDCAT?

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Interview: Steve Muncey Pictures: Graeme Main; Shutterstock



“British troops are moving the dial on the biggest conflict we’ve had in Europe since the Second World War”

Supporting Ukraine is having major implications for the Army but maintaining our resolve is crucial, Armed Forces Minister James Heappey tells *Soldier*

“

We know a squadron of 14 Challenger 2s and 30 AS90s are being gifted to Ukraine, but which units will they be sourced from?

I think they will be taken from across all the units that operate these assets rather than one in particular, and the focus will probably be on which ones are in a condition to go out the soonest but, ultimately, it's a process for the Army to manage.

When are they due to be shipped out to Ukraine?

The Challengers and AS90s will be married up with their crews and training will have begun in a couple of weeks but when they actually arrive in Ukraine and are operationally ready depends on how well the training goes.

Both those platforms are very complex beasts that require lots of TLC, so will you be training Ukrainians to maintain them and provide spares as part of the support package?

Definitely. I suspect the REME will be tasked to provide quick, immersive courses in Challenger 2 and AS90 maintenance as well as the other armoured platforms that we are gifting – and no doubt Ukrainian ingenuity will play a big part too. The Challengers will all be in good working order, as will one battery's worth of the AS90. The others will be coming from the fleet that we hold at extended readiness and may not be in such prime condition, but when I spoke to my Ukrainian counterpart very recently he was keen to have them nonetheless. The Ukrainians have proven to be very adept at getting kit back on the road. They have dozens of M109 howitzers that were gifted from around Europe which they've pressed into service and kept going and they're confident they can do the same with the AS90s once they've had the training from our teams of technical personnel.

The Challenger has a rifled barrel that other armies don't use so presumably we'll have to donate significant amounts of 120mm ammunition too?

That will certainly be gifted along with the tanks. Quite how much we take out of our stockpile I cannot disclose for operational security reasons, but we should also be mindful of the ability of Ukrainian industry to manufacture stuff and I suspect that's what will happen here; they will invest in production lines to manufacture the ammunition and parts they need for the assets they've got.

Will the Ukrainian crews be coming to the UK for training?

The training package will definitely be delivered by UK troops, and most will take place in the UK. However, we are trying to develop an armoured battlegroup with the Americans who have gifted armoured infantry fighting vehicles and it may be that collective

training for our tanks and the American platforms will be jointly delivered with the US somewhere in Europe. The location is yet to be confirmed and it may therefore have to remain confidential.

We are also supplying Bulldogs, so that obviously means a considerable number of British Army personnel will be tied up training Ukrainian troops...

That's correct and it will be in addition to all the amazing work the British Army is currently doing to support Ukraine. We have four battalions' worth of trainers covering infantry, medics, surveillance, and many other specialist capabilities that we've been delivering for months in the background in relatively small volumes. Now we have this to do as well, training engineers to give them the best chance possible of sustaining Challenger 2, AS90 and Bulldog in the field and, of course, we will need to do this at a sprint. That's no mean feat because the driver and gunnery courses would normally take a few months. I suspect the most the Ukrainians will give us is a few weeks so lots of Army personnel are going to be very busy and I want them to know that we really appreciate their efforts.

Will training Ukrainians take priority over the Army's regular exercises and its own training demands?

In the short term, yes.

And the training of infantry troops is to be extended too?

It looks that way at the moment. We trained 9,900 infantry personnel on Op Interflex last year and hundreds more as part of bespoke requirements, from the Starstreak missile system to medical skills. To put that into context, we were mighty proud to have trained 10,000 personnel on Op Orbital in the seven years prior to the war in Ukraine. Now the plan is to train another 10,000 Ukrainian troops this year. The pace won't be letting up any time soon.

So the training of Ukrainians has effectively become an open-ended requirement for the British Army?

Yes, and the Ukrainians really value it. The reality is these volunteers could be going to fight for their homeland armed only with their courage, so just being able to give them five or six weeks of basic infantry training massively improves their chances and is hugely important. I know there are plenty of people in the Army who are frustrated they are not in the fight themselves but the politics of that would be disastrous. Putin wants to paint this conflict as a war against the West, to justify to the Russian people the hardships they are living through, but this is a war against Ukraine and Ukraine's friends are helping them.

What difference do you think we are making?

The work British troops are doing is really moving the dial on the biggest conflict





“ I suspect that in the future, when looking back, we will regard this as a truly catalytic moment ”





» we've had in Europe since the Second World War. They've been an integral part of delivering the success that Ukraine has enjoyed so far, and they will be absolutely indispensable to Ukraine's attempt to push Russia out of their territory this spring. I know we are taking away the British Army's tanks, artillery, armoured personnel carriers and protected mobility vehicles; I know we are taking our troops off their routine exercises in order to train Ukrainians; I know at times our people will be frustrated because ranges and ammunition will have been taken away from them. However, fundamentally they are all part of a team that is doing something that was unimaginable 12 months ago – which is to support Ukraine to an extent where it could win this war. Every single person in the British Army should be very proud of what they have been, and are, doing.

The Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Patrick Sanders said the British Army will be weakened by the gifting of hardware to Ukraine. What will be done to replenish our equipment levels?

Patrick is a very sensible and honest CGS. He is right to say that if we take away this kit then, by definition, the British Army must be weaker. However, people who would twist that to say it will lead to a major reduction in capability in the future are wrong. I actually think that, perversely, it's having

completely the opposite effect. AS90 and Challenger 2 are both nigh-on obsolete and are due to be replaced by the Future Fires programme and Challenger 3 respectively. The decisions that have been taken will lead to the Army having these replacements sooner than it would have done because when the Service doesn't have the tanks and artillery it is designed for then clearly you must replace them. The Treasury is ready to fund that process.

So the money for those replacements will definitely be available to deliver them sooner than the current schedule states?

I'm certain of it, that's part of the deal. The secretary of state has said the replacements will arrive sooner and that there could be more of them than currently planned for, particularly tanks. He said he is going to review that and I suspect that in the future, when looking back, we will regard this as a truly catalytic moment.

Do you have a revised timeline for the arrival of those replacements?

Challenger 3 is expected to reach initial operating capability in 2027 but there will be lots of effort to try and bring that forward now. The AS90 replacement was due around 2030 but that will be brought way forward. It's necessary because one lesson from

“

They are all part of a team that's doing something that was unimaginable 12 months ago – which is to support Ukraine to an extent where it could win this war

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Ukraine is that the artillery battle is key and until the 2030s we were going to have a very out of date system. Bringing the date forward so that our artillery capability is replaced in this decade is essential in my opinion.

Have your experiences as an infantry officer in Iraq and Afghanistan given you a particular view on the usefulness of heavy armour?

I know that you need it to do major manoeuvres on battlefields of the size they have in Ukraine. If they are to retake the territory they need to in order to bring this war to an end on Zelensky's terms, they must have properly organised and trained armoured formations. The UK is not only playing its part in delivering that, but our early announcement to supply our main battle tank will, we hope, encourage other nations to make the same commitment. We want Ukraine to end up with hundreds of tanks, not just the squadron's worth the UK is providing.

Does this finally quash the murmurings a few short years ago that the era of tank warfare is over?

The secretary of state has said in the Commons that he has asked the MoD for an analysis of that to be done. Instinctively, you'd think that if tanks are useful enough to gift to Ukraine then we too would want lots of them in our Army. I think that's

broadly correct but the only proviso I would put forward is that missile technology is in the ascendency right now and, as a result, armour is more vulnerable than it has been in the last 20 or 30 years. I don't think anybody feels it has had its day, and that narrative already feels out of date, but we'll see what the analysis throws up. Ben Wallace and I, and other ministers in the MoD, have always said we'll be guided by what that military operational analysis concludes and if that says we need more tanks than the Integrated Review originally stated then we will not be scared to revise the figure.

Presumably the Army will have a say in the content of that report?

Of course. But we must be clear-eyed about this. We cannot let nostalgia get in the way of considering the future of any one platform or cling on to totemic figures of the past – for example, that you need a certain number of tanks to be considered a proper army. Those numbers are pretty meaningless in the age of hypersonic missiles that can travel 1,500 kilometres and hit a target the size of my laptop. We have to deal in facts, but if we are supplying tanks to Ukraine they clearly have utility in the modern battlespace and that means we should at least be open to the idea that the British Army may need more of them than we originally thought. ■



”

Reserve postman WO2
Rob Jones (RLC, left)
in action during a
demanding six-month
Herrick outing

LAST POST

Reservist mail workers reflect
on a critical delivery as the
sun sets on their trade





IT WAS a vivid reminder that a traditional front line did not exist where Iraq was concerned, that everyone outside the camp gates could be vulnerable to ambush.

Back in 2003, with Operation Telic under way, a huge logistic action to consolidate the British presence in theatre had been launched. But amid a growing insurgency, it was Reservist posties delivering morale-boosting mail that were among the first to find themselves in the sights of the terrorists.

"There was one occasion not long after the invasion when four of our troops were attacked," recalled retired captain Kev Thornley (ex-RLC), who served as ops officer on an early outing with 88 Postal and Courier Regiment.

"They were moving post up from the airfield in Basra to a palace that had belonged to dictator Saddam Hussein – where we now had a base – when an angry mob turned on them at a notorious place called the Fish Roundabout.

"Although one of the two vehicles managed to push on through to alert our quick reaction force, the other – a truck that we knew as the bread van with the mail inside – was surrounded and the crowd managed to set it on fire."

The enraged civilians then turned on the soldiers as the flames began to take hold.

"They were fortunate that a sympathetic taxi driver quickly pulled over and gave them protection in his vehicle before our soldiers arrived," Thornley added.

It was a horrifying near-miss, but far from unusual at a time when high intensity brigade-level operations were happening in Iraq, and later Afghanistan.

In an age when the internet was far less common on ops, thousands of tonnes of post had to be delivered to personnel. And hauling the mail in the world's most dangerous places fell to a group of Territorial Army volunteers.

Now, two decades after an extraordinary call-up, the Reserve postal and courier trade is being disbanded. With new tech meaning far fewer letters pass between troops and their families, the remaining soldiers – long subsumed into 162 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps – are being re-rolled. Postal work is being maintained by Regulars at South Cerney-based 29 Regiment.

The volunteers, however, have certainly left their mark. The final parade at Grantham was a proud commemoration of more than 140 years of service from the part-time troops – beginning in 1882 when the Army Post Office Corps was set up following a royal warrant from Queen Victoria.

Having seen action from the outset with the 24th Middlesex Rifle Volunteers during

Report: Cliff Caswell Picture: Cpl Jon Bevan, RLC



» an uprising in Egypt, the trade was expanded with the creation of the part-time Territorial Force – later to become the TA.

Realigned under the Royal Engineers, personnel served throughout both world wars plus the Cold War standoff with the Soviet Union. Their capabilities were far more comprehensive than delivering mail alone – they were trained to ferry vital orders around deployed units.

After the Berlin Wall fell, the Reservists moved to the RLC – with 86, 87 and 88 Postal and Courier Regiments the sole survivors after the major 1992 Armed Forces restructure.

But the deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan were to prove a game changer as it became clear that scores of trained personnel would be required to handle packages being sent to and from both theatres.

Lt Col Kev Bingham (RLC), a postal veteran who had joined as a Regular in the 1970s, suggested to top brass that volunteers could provide the significant punch required.

His advice was heeded and the invasion of Iraq initially saw some 70 troops mobilised for roles in the British



Forces Post Office at Mill Hill in London, with further call-ups following in short order. It was not long before soldiers were heading for theatre to assist with deliveries at the sharp end.

"It was a really hectic time and I'd said that calling on our Reservists could help free up full-time colleagues for other duties," Lt Col Bingham said.

"I once again ended up back as a full-time soldier myself as the mobilisation gathered pace and, in 2005, became the commanding officer of 88 Postal and Courier Regiment as we continued to support operations."

Recognised for their professionalism, the British troops also found themselves taking over postal provision for ongoing deployments in the Balkans as well as assisting American colleagues at their bases in the UK.

"There was a period in which the Reservists were entirely responsible for the postal ops," Lt Col Bingham added. "We had soldiers working in 11 countries around the world – I found myself busy visiting all of our locations."

As time passed, the level of risk grew with increasingly determined insurgent forces escalating their attacks. The



former CO recalled contacts in which gunmen opened fire as well as near misses with IED strikes.

He continued: "We had posties in the Iraqi capital Baghdad – and there was one occasion in which a round passed through a vehicle on the route between the airport and the city's Green Zone where many coalition troops were based.

"A roadside bomb had exploded earlier too – there was still blood on the road."

Despite the danger, those deployed said the experience had been worthwhile. Maj (Retd) Cameron Hill (ex-RLC), who enlisted as a postal Reservist as a sapper in the 1970s, said he had





Far left: A soldier plays his part in sorting the 40,000 letters and 300 bags of parcels for delivery to the UK from Germany soon after the Second World War

Left: Reservist Pte Paul Brannon pitches in with 884 Squadron, 88 Postal and Courier Regiment, RLC in Afghanistan

Main picture: Another Helmand delivery arrives from Camp Bastion to patrol Base Shizad

Below: Sappers at the Army Home Postal Depot, Mill Hill, London handle parcels in the early Cold War years



relished the challenge of operations.

“I went out to both Iraq in 2003 and to Afghanistan a few years later,” he added. “The two operational tours were demanding – in order to serve the Iraq deployment we had to set up in six different countries and 13 locations.

“The Herrick outing was particularly tough – a number of British troops were killed and many others injured during a demanding tour in Helmand.”

But there were no regrets.

“I had joined up because a good friend of mine in my civvy job at Royal Mail was in the TA and said it was a chance to travel and make lifelong friends,” Maj Hill continued. “As it turned out, he was right on both counts.

“Obviously, it was sad to see the disbandment parade, particularly as the postal Reservists have a long history, but I am very proud to have served.”

Lt Col Bingham shared the sentiment. “It has been said that food and mail are the most vital commodities for Armed Forces personnel,” he concluded.

“Seeing a postie definitely lifts the morale of soldiers when they are deployed – receiving mail from their loved ones back home is a high point.” ■



Above: Sorting duties at the Army's London Home Postal Depot in 1957

ARMY POSTAL SERVICES: KEY DATES

1882

Army Post Office Corps established by royal warrant; service in Egypt with 24th Middlesex Rifle Volunteers

1885-1902

Troops see further action in Sudan and Boer War

1913

Soldiers rebadged as RE

1914-18

Mobilised for First World War

1939-45

Second World War rages

1945-89

Posties assist Cold War comms

1992

The new RLC takes responsibility for posties. Three Reservist units remain – 86, 87 and 88 Postal and Courier Regiments

1999

86 Regt disbanded

2003

Volunteers mobilised for Iraq war; further call-ups follow

2006

87 and 88 Regts amalgamated to leave just 88 Regt

2013

88 Regt absorbed into 162 Regt RLC

2022

Reservist posties disbanded

Cycle to Work

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

✉ mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk

“ I want to use an e-bike ”



Cycle scheme's major pot hole

COULD someone explain to me why the Army has not signed up to a cycle scheme that full-time Reserve service (FTRS) personnel can join?

Due to the current cost of living increases I want to use an e-bike to ride the 40 miles from my home to work and back each day.

This will result in a saving of around £180 per month in fuel costs, but as I am employed on an FTRS limited commitment (LC) contract I am not eligible for the initiative.

MoD civilians can access this and they receive up to 47 per cent off the cost of hiring an e-bike, with payments made through salary deduction.

Regulars can claim the home-to-duty travel pedal rate in place of the scheme, but I'm not entitled to this either. — **SSgt Neil Connor, REME**

Col Louise Green, Army Pay Colonel, responds: A lot of positive work was undertaken in 2022 to enhance commuting allowances for those who are entitled to them.

Home-to-duty travel (HDT) and get-you-home travel (GYH(T)) were both increased by seven per cent last August.

All are subject to scrutiny from His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), and HDT can be paid to Regular personnel as they are considered to be mobile throughout their careers.

Within the HMRC agreement, Reservists and Cadet Force adult volunteers are also entitled to HDT.

To attend training they will normally already have commuted to their civilian place of work, and thus should not be liable for a second lot

of commuting overheads.

FTRS (LC) personnel are not part of the mobile workforce, and therefore are not eligible – with the exception of those working in inner London for which a specific, limited waiver was negotiated with HMRC.

FTRS (full commitment) soldiers are eligible for HDT as their contract has a requirement to be mobile.

As for the Cycle to Work scheme, this was previously considered for the Armed Forces and was rejected.

As this and HDT are subject to HMRC regulations, personnel could not claim both at the same time.

For the majority of people, HDT is a more valuable allowance anyway – and many have a journey which could not realistically be cycled every day.

The tax rules would not allow individuals to switch back to this allowance (for example, if they were injured and had to start driving to work) until the Cycle to Work scheme's hire period was complete. It is therefore considered less flexible and more difficult to deliver.

Instead, those who are entitled to HDT are encouraged to cycle to work and claim the home-to-duty pedal rates.

In 2022, this was increased to 20 pence per mile with only a one-mile personal contribution.

The tax-free nature of HDT is a carefully protected concession and provides valuable support to a large number of our people.

We must ensure allowances are delivered in line with HMRC requirements so they can continue to be paid to those who are eligible.

CRASHED COURSES

● CAN you tell me why the Enhanced Learning Credits Administration Service (ELCAS) will only allow funding for level three courses and above?

I am a veteran with two remaining enhanced learning credits and I want to do courses that cost £3,000.

They cover aircraft passenger handling, emergency response and on-scene emergency firefighting.

They are run by an internationally recognised supplier and so provide me with promotional opportunities in my new career. The course provider knows about the ELCAS scheme but these courses don't qualify.

This is very frustrating as they are in-depth and come with challenges that most level three courses lack.

I understand there have to be rules to stop individuals taking advantage of the scheme, but if serving personnel or veterans want to do a course that demonstrably enhances their prospects why can't it be acceptable for the credits?

If I want to learn about dog grooming or child minding ELCAS will help out, but for this highly technical package I have to pay for everything myself. – **Richard Murphy, ex-RLC**

Rebecca Rixon, Personal Development and Education, Defence People, replies: In order to access enhanced learning credits and publicly funded further education/higher education funds the learning provider and courses must be listed on the ELCAS approved courses list.

This means they are a minimum of level three on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), or level six on the Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF).

The courses you would like to utilise your remaining credits for have not been registered with these bodies but both are delivered by Opito – an approved credit rating body for SCQF.

Going forward, if that organisation can fulfil the requirements so that these courses are included on the SCQF (at level six or above) or RQF (level three or above) you would likely be able to utilise your remaining credits to contribute to the cost of enrolling.



HOUSING HORRORS



In December Defence Infrastructure Organisation Chief Executive, Mike Green, wrote an open letter to military families about the long-standing shortfalls in maintenance and service for defence housing. He admitted the current state of affairs was "not satisfactory" and more needed to be done. Below are two letters received since then, which highlight just how serious the situation has become...

'Problem has become acute'

IT IS clear that no effort has been made to address poor accommodation since my last letter on the subject (*Soldier*, June 2022).

The problem has become yet more acute over the winter period: posts detailing the inadequacy of both camp accommodation and family quarters have become a daily feature of social media accounts such as *Fill Your Boots*.

It defies belief that any Service housing should go without heating or hot water for days at a time.

The litany of posts detailing how personnel spend hours on hold on Pinnacle's "emergency" line, only to be cut off, need not be detailed here.

Furthermore, as far as I am aware, not one senior figure from the contractors has got ahead of the issue with a public statement.

As an officer I am fortunate that this year I have had the means to buy my own house. Any issue with my household is mine alone to solve.

Yet many of those who I exercise command over are not so fortunate.

As I said in my last letter, more than once I have struggled with the question of how I would convince a private soldier to not sign off were he or she to cite issues with accommodation, because I am entirely unconvinced that any action would be forthcoming to address them.

An aspect of military life that is essential for morale and motivation is entirely outside of our control, and appears to be run by people for whom no degree of shame or embarrassment is enough to make them recognise the problem.

– **Capt Robert Abernethy, RLC**

'Nothing seems to be changing'

AT WHAT point do we as an Army stop contracting out everything we do?

Service family accommodation is a prime example of how we are being taken for absolute fools.

There cannot be anyone out there who truly believes that we are getting a good deal for our money.

The houses are in a complete state of disrepair – even the newer houses are beginning to show signs of wear and tear which could be fixed with a bit of work on them – work that shouldn't be taking as long as it does.

The contractors and sub-contractors regularly delay or even miss scheduled appointments and are extremely quick to blame each other.

This is having a hugely detrimental impact on the lives of us all, which is unacceptable. But nothing seems to be changing.

The complaints procedure is slow, laborious and generally unworkable, more often than not resulting in a £20-30 voucher.

The helplines are not that helpful and can never do anything other than what the computer tells them, while the schedulers are terrible at informing people when visits are taking place, resulting in many missed appointments due to the

ridiculous lack of communication.

I know of many individuals who have resorted to hiring companies to cure problems that Pinnacle and Vivo take too long to sort out. This is potentially against the contract, but it gets the work done and makes the house more liveable quicker.

At some point the senior echelons of the Army need to take note and ensure the contracts getting signed are actually beneficial for its personnel who have endured this problem for too long.

The inefficiencies in the contracts are staggering and those who are suffering are soldiers, officers and their families. – **Name and address supplied**



BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know



CAREERS

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

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



COMPETITIONS

December 2022

Glenegles winner: Sgt James Kilbride, Colchester. **HOAY winner:** Michael Furlong, Wareham. **Spine line winner:** Andrew Gladen, Montgomery House, Aldershot.



SEARCHLINE

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

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



WELFARE

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

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

Army Hive

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

army.mod.uk/hives

Forcesline

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

ssafa.org.uk/get-help/forcesline

Army Welfare Service

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

ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

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

Drinkline

A free, confidential helpline 0300 123 1110

NHS support

nhs.uk/livewell

BULLYING/HARASSMENT/DISCRIMINATION

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

Army Speak Out Helpline

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

Defence BHD Helpline

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

CHILDCARE/CARING/FAMILIES

Army Families Federation

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

Flexible working has been

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

DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

Forces Pension Society

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

forcespensionsociety.org

Joining Forces Credit Union

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

Money Helper

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

National Debtline

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

nationaldebtline.org

StepChange Debt Charity

The UK's leading debt charity offering free, confidential advice 0800 138 1111

stepchange.org.uk

GAMBLING

National Gambling Helpline

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

GRIEF

Cruse Bereavement Support

0808 808 1677

SSAFA support groups

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

HOUSING

Joint Service Housing

Advice Office

The MoD's tri-Service focal point to provide Armed Forces personnel and their dependants with civilian housing information 07814 612120

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

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services

01748 833797
spaces.org.uk

Veterans Gateway

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

INJURY/SICKNESS

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

LONELINESS

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

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

Samaritans

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

samaritans.org

The Royal British Legion

Contact the friendly team for information about local groups and support services 0808 802 8080

britishlegion.org.uk

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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

Combat Stress 24/7 Helpline

0800 138 1619

Headspace

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

work.headspace.com/britisharmy/member-enroll

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

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

Samaritans
116 123
samaritans.org

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

troops and veterans
0333 900 1028
theripplepond.org

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

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN/ABUSE

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

stalking 02394 216 816
aurorand.org.uk

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

Relate
UK provider of relationship support
relate.org.uk



REUNIONS

The 25th Anniversary of the **Artillery**

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

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

HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU?

No. 969

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TEN details have been changed in this picture of soldiers from 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment undergoing urban drills at Lydd and Hythe Ranges.

Circle all the differences on the left image and send the panel to HOAY 969, *Soldier*, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU along with your contact details, including email address, by February 28.

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

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

soldiermagazine.co.uk

The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win a PS5 console plus a copy of the excellent beat 'em up *Cobra Kai II: Dojos Rising* courtesy of US developer GameMill Entertainment.

Receiving a four-star rating in our January issue, the game is based on the hit Netflix TV series and will provide hours of downtime fun.

The next-gen PS5 hardware offers state-of-the-art graphics and sound in an all-round entertainment system – the perfect platform on which to hone your martial arts moves.

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





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15 x	£200
10 x	£100

Since its creation in 1993 the Army Sports Lottery has:

- Raised **£50 million** in proceeds
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- Awarded over **£25 million** in grants to Army personnel

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

For further details visit our web at: www.armysportlottery.com

CONTACT US

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Aldershot, Hampshire, GU11 2LB
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ADR011088

LOOKING AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Where can I seek help?

Make an appointment with your GP

Your **Unit Welfare Team** can provide advice
and signpost you to further support

All Service Personnel can contact the
Army Welfare Service directly
Email: RC-AWS-IAT-0Mailbox@mod.gov.uk
Tel: 01904 882051/2053

Irrespective of faith, your **unit chaplain**
can provide pastoral and moral guidance

In a crisis if you are concerned about your health
or the health of a colleague contact:

Your **Unit MO** during routine hours
Your **Unit Duty Officer**
Samaritans on 116 123
If in imminent danger call 111 or 999



Defence Safety Authority

**The Defence Accident Investigation
Branch (DAIB) has a new telephone
notification number**

Call: 01980 348 622

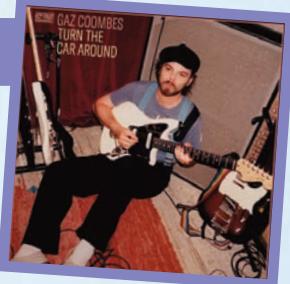
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REVIEW

PICK OF THE MONTH

Turn the Car Around



Fourth solo outing is a hit for veteran indie frontman

» BACK in the dim-and-distant days of the 1990s – when Britpop dominated the album charts – **Supergrass** were key players in an influential music scene.

Mixing it up with the likes of **Blur**, **Oasis** and **Pulp**, the band proved a favourite with fans and critics alike as they delivered a repertoire as raw as it was melodic. They were, by all accounts, a powerhouse in a competitive field of talent – with frontman **Gaz Coombes** carrying the outfit's charismatic on-stage presence.

With the passing of three decades, the now seasoned artist's songwriting and performance acumen is underscored with the fourth of his solo outings. A collection of nine personal songs, *Turn the Car Around* is a polished work featuring thought provoking lyrics matched with solid musicianship throughout.

While the underpinnings of his Britpop roots are still evident, Coombes also shows his depth of experience in the recording. This is the work of a seasoned pro, drawing on a range of influences to produce a compelling range of songs.

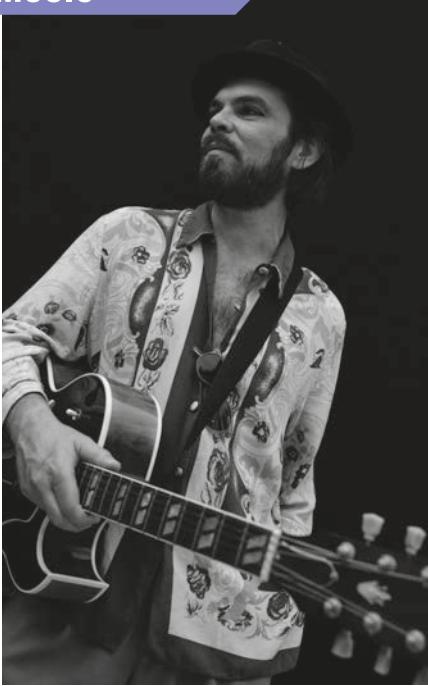
Indeed, diversity seems to be an overarching theme of the album, featuring prominently in the lyrics as well as with the range of different styles deployed.

Don't Say It's Over has echoes of **David Bowie**'s work on *Station to Station*, while there is an experimental vibe to *Feel*

Pictures: Tom Cockram



MUSIC



» *Loop (Lizard Dream)*, with a pulsing synth bassline and driving guitars reminiscent of Ian Brown's solo offerings.

Long Live the Strange – which was released as a single ahead of the album – is the most radio-friendly of the pack and the most clearly influenced by the 1990s Supergrass era. With the vocals celebrating those who are different and a catchy indie riff, the track carries the theme of the collection well.

Other highlights include *Sonny the Strong* – another standalone release and a haunting piece apparently loosely based on the life of British boxer and world middleweight champion Randy Turpin. A salute to sidelined heroes, the track is a powerful ballad to a legend of the ring taken well before his time.

All in all, it is hard to find a poor track on the album, which fulfils its diversity ambitions well on all fronts, defying categorisation and delivering a broad mix of styles with aplomb.

With several tour dates now confirmed by Coombes for the spring, it will be interesting to see how *Turn the Car Around* translates into a live performance. ■

VERDICT:

A diverse album, well delivered



REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, *SOLDIER*

BOOKS

PICK OF THE MONTH

The Warrior, the Strategist and You

Veteran's compass model plots pathway to success

FOR those of us struggling with the general "meh" vibes of February, it could be because we've yet to find our "Super North Star".

That's according to special forces soldier-turned author and development coach Floyd Woodrow, whose book, *The Warrior, the Strategist and You*, promises readers a roadmap for reaching their goals via his "Compass for Life" philosophy.

Drawing on the leadership skills honed during 23 years in the Special Air Service, his studies of psychology and a post-Army career in business, the concept uses the four cardinal points as a guide to answering the big questions – who am I, where am I going, what do I want to be?

Curious whether the approach could help shake off the post-New Year slump, *Soldier* asked him to explain a little more...

What do you mean by the "Super North Star"?

The north point on the compass is about where you want to be in the next three, five or ten years. It can be as big as changing the world or as small as learning to play the piano, but what it tells you is how to really highlight what you want to do from a personal and professional perspective. Then the south cardinal is about the strategy you're going to use to get there – the milestones and skills you need to develop to achieve your goals.

How about the other two cardinals?

East is your ethos – your values – making sure you've got the right characteristics and have the

right team around you. And then the west pointer is the warrior – it's about mental and physical fitness, and understanding the key aspects of that, including nutrition, sleep, movement, mindfulness and positive self-talk.

Who is the philosophy aimed at?

Everyone. I work with children as young as five to top CEOs across the world and in every business sector, from education to prisons, sports teams and the Armed Forces.

Doesn't goal-setting happen

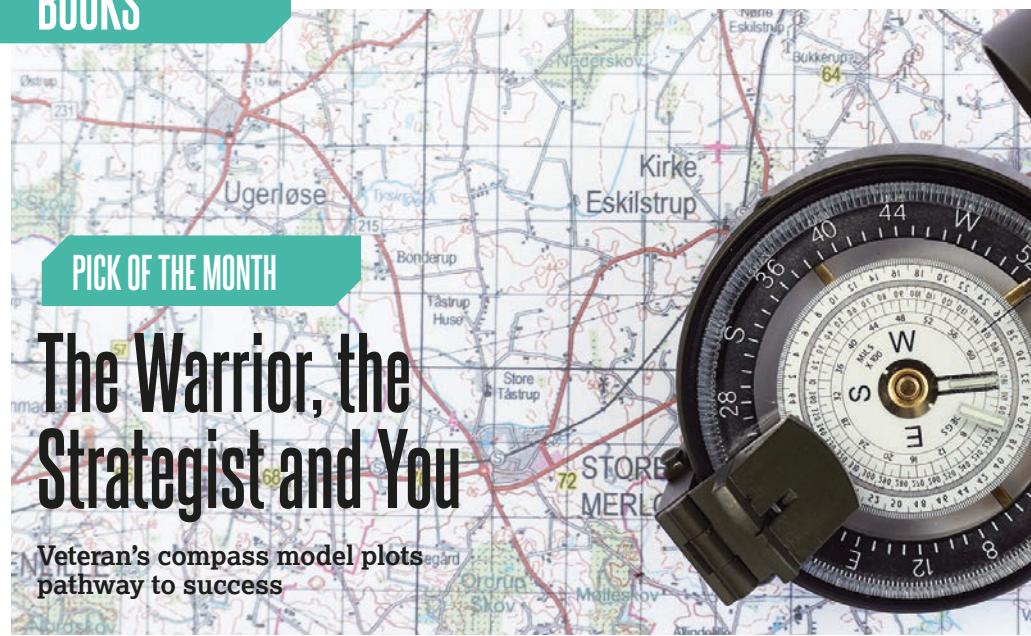
naturally in the Army, where you are always looking to your next promotion?

Yes, but I think you're being directed – you're following the sat nav rather than asking "is this what I really want to do?". When I work with military personnel I talk about that ability to step back and think whether this is the path that you actually want to go down.



Can you give an example?

Even something like joining the special forces is achievable as long as you're thinking about the steps you need to take to get there. So I make soldiers draw a map, with their Super North Star at the top, and we break the journey down by looking at what they need to do to make this happen. The first thing could be as simple as researching what the course looks like, or how to apply. The map helps because you are 42 per cent more likely to do something when it's written down, but you also find this is when the reality check comes in – do you really want this, and more importantly are you willing to pay the price to do it?





What if you don't have a goal?

Asking for a friend...

I've yet to meet a kid who didn't have a Super North Star, but our dreams are taken away from us or blunted at an early age and as adults we are scared to say what we truly want because then we'll have to take responsibility for it. If you're unsure, explore and do as many things as possible – at some stage you will come across someone or something that will help you think "that's what I want to do". Having that adventurous spirit is important – it's not going to come to you – you have to go out and make that journey.

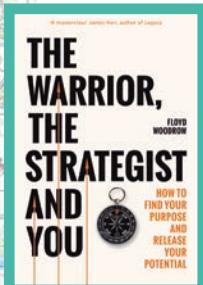
What do you hope soldiers will take from the book?

Maximise every opportunity the Army offers you. And don't wait until two years before you leave to do it. I started looking ten years before retirement – I took every course I could and put myself in a position to get those skills and capabilities, which helped my transition to the civilian world. Now I do a job that I love.

Profile

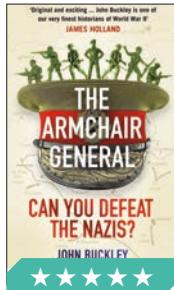
Name: Floyd Woodrow**Military service:** Became a paratrooper in 1981 before serving 23 years in the SAS, rising to the rank of major**Civvy career:** Leadership specialist, author and entrepreneur. Head of values-based coaching organisation Super North Star and charitable foundation Compass for Life, which runs educational programmes for disadvantaged children

INTERVIEW: BECKY CLARK, SOLDIER



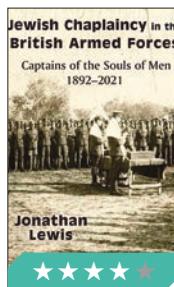
The Warrior, the Strategist and You by Floyd Woodrow is out now in paperback, published by Elliott and Thompson and priced £9.99

BOOK RELEASES



The Armchair General
by John Buckley

I LIKED this book. It takes eight scenarios from the Second World War and invites the reader to choose the best course of action. Of course, we know what actually happened from history, but this presents the evidence and then asks for your decision. For example – who should be the UK's prime minister after Chamberlain, Halifax or Churchill? Should the invasion of Europe take place in 1943 or 1944? The approach makes for a really good read and gets you to think about what politicians and senior officers had to consider. There is a bit of "what if", but only to assist the decision process.

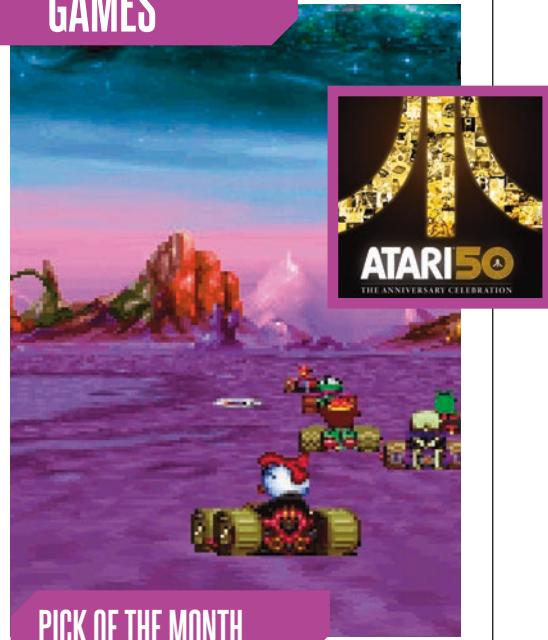
Andy Kay, ex-RS

Jewish Chaplaincy in the British Armed Forces
by Jonathan Lewis

RECENT study into the work of military chaplains on the Western Front has refuted the widely accepted view that they delivered bloodthirsty sermons while staying out of danger. These men served heroically, rescuing the wounded in no-man's-land and assisting in field hospitals. This well-researched, comprehensive book brings a Jewish perspective to the story by explaining Jewish chaplaincy's expansion in both world wars and how patriotic British Jews volunteered to serve a country they believed had treated them better than any other. Informative and clearly written, it also throws light on many interesting facets of Jewish life in Britain.

Rodney Atwood, military historian

GAMES



PICK OF THE MONTH

Atari 50: The Anniversary

Out now on all formats

Soldier blasts the past in a new compilation

► WITH the latest console titles sporting cinematic visuals, surround sound and blockbuster budgets, it is perhaps curious that a sizeable number of players are looking into the archives for their gaming fix.

It is certainly true that the industry is a relatively young beast and there are a fair few people who remember its humble beginnings. But nostalgia only carries so far with titles that are unrelentingly basic compared with those of today.

And yet collections of these bygone games seem to be constantly in the charts. Whether it is the likes of Capcom's *Arcade Stadium* or *Space Invaders: The Invincible Collection* from Taito, the appetite remains insatiable.

Now in the mix is *Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration* – marking the half-century of a legendary company that brought the world coin-op classics such as *Breakout* and *Asteroids* while pioneering the first home consoles.

This package, however, takes a distinctly different approach to many of its contemporaries – which often



GAMES

.. ATARI ORIGINS



» simply provide a disparate group of titles accompanied by scant lines of background to explain their historical relevance.

Instead, *Atari 50* effectively immerses players in a digital museum where the games are among the exhibits. A plethora of interviews with developers and journalists are available to watch, while documents, photos and other paraphernalia from the era are hosted via an easily navigable timeline.

The virtual tour spans the entire video game period, starting with the 1970s arcade offerings, through to early 1980s cartridge-based consoles and the company's subsequent outings with the acclaimed handheld Lynx machine.

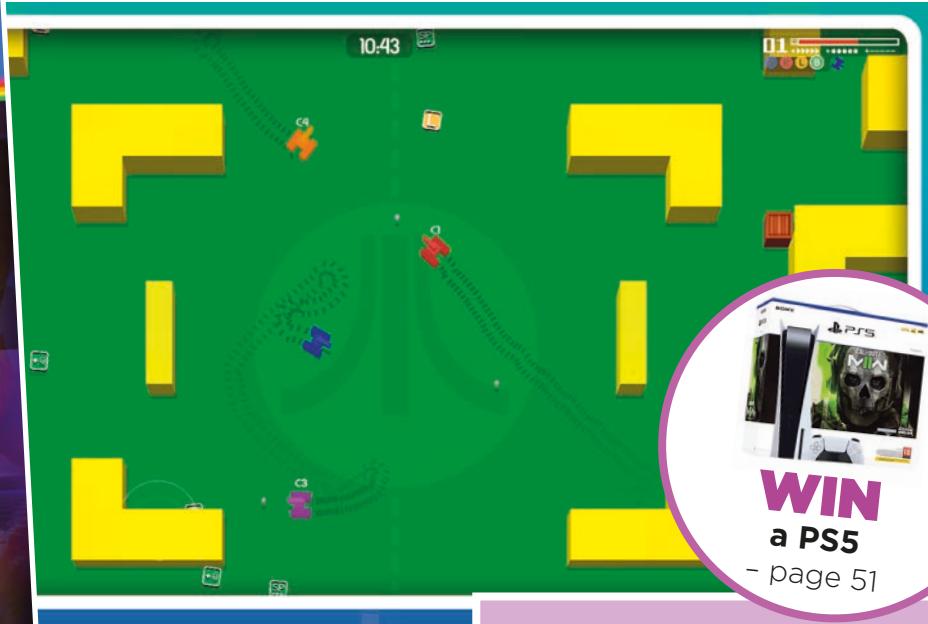
Latter stages of the tour reference the mid-1990s Jaguar system which, while technically solid and featuring some gems in an albeit sparse library, flopped as the Sony PlayStation began its all-conquering advance.

Players can either try out the 100-plus games during the tour or delve directly into the archive and seek out their favourites.

The vault includes seven new offerings under the Re-Imagined banner including a modern mash up of iconic games in Vctr-Sctr, and a reworking of the early *Tank* console classic.

Having spent teenage hours feeding pennies into machines in a coin-op arcade that once faced Aldershot's Airborne Forces Museum, it could be argued that this more elderly reviewer's retro tendencies might be colouring his opinion.

However, there is certainly an ageless quality to some of these titles – with a playability and class that has kept the generations of gamers returning for more.



Collectively, they also form the underpinnings for the slick titles of today and – from this perspective – could be considered historical documents.

And *Atari 50* excels with style on both the entertainment and education fronts. Watching the interviews with developers and exploring the context in which the games were released is arguably as much fun as playing them.

As well as celebrating the firm's success, the title does not duck the controversies either – notably some of the horrendous marketing decisions as well as the reasons behind the failure of certain promising-looking products.

Downsides are few, but there are some standout titles that are missing from the line-up. They include the Jaguar incarnation of *Aliens vs Predator*, a classic first-person shooter, and *Firefox* – a coin-op spin-off on the early 1980s *Clint Eastwood* movie that showed the potential of full-motion video.

The £35 price tag might also put some off but, rest assured, there is an extremely healthy bang-to-buck ratio in the best retro package *Soldier* has seen to date.

Atari 50 offers a good way of busting the winter blues and will give busy troops a fair few hours of downtime fun to dip in and out of on exercise or ops. ■

VERDICT:

A thoroughly enjoyable retro ride
★★★★★

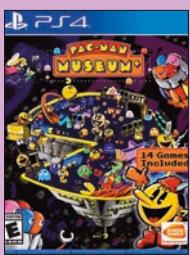
REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, SOLDIER

Enjoyed *Atari 50*? Try this pairing for a further retro fix...



SNK 40th Anniversary Collection

A PACKAGE commemorating the landmark anniversary of another Japanese developer, this compilation includes a raft of later legendary arcade titles. They include the memorable run and gun outings *Ikari Warriors*, *Victory Road* and *Guerrilla War* – released in the second half of the 1980s when *Sly Stallone's* action movies commanded huge cinema audiences. All remain hugely addictive and tremendously playable today while accompanying history and artwork from the era explain their context.



Pac-Man Museum+

THERE are fewer more recognisable modern cultural icons than the chomping yellow mouth and the neon ghosts who pursued him through countless mazes. *Pac-Man* has gone through several reinventions over the decades and this collection references most of them. Set in a virtual arcade, players can try out the machines while setting the decor of the venue to their own taste. Light on history but huge fun and highly recommended.

Renegades

Out now on digital formats

Ex-squaddies take on criminal kingpin in revenge thriller

► FILMS about London's gangland have become something of an institution over the last two decades with the very British character of the UK's seedy underbelly proving a fascination for audiences around the world.

The likes of *Snatch* and *ID* lay bare the violence of crime syndicates in business as well as the brutal gang rivalries of the 1970s and 80s football scene. And now *Renegades* drags the Army into this burgeoning genre with a flick that shows messing with toolled-up former squaddies is probably unwise.

Briefly, the tale focuses on ex-Royal Green Jacket Burton (Nick Moran), who has taken to sleeping rough following some disturbing, though unexplained, episodes while out in the Balkans and Middle East.

But after being taken in by an old family friend and one-time US Green Beret Carver (Lee Majors), he begins talking through his experiences in sessions run by the officer.

His fellow reprobates include Woody (Billy Murray), Harris (Paul Barber) and Peck (Ian Ogilvy), who runs the boozer where the ex-soldiers drink. All from different cap badges, they are hardened from years of service as well as private contractor work.

Unbeknown to all, however, their American friend's daughter and local councillor Judy (Patsy Kensit) is being threatened by members of an organised crime syndicate and Carver's brutal murder while trying to stop them comes as a shock.

The killing prompts the veterans to take the law into their own hands, pooling the weapons they have illegally pilfered from various deployments around the world and turning their expertise to avenging a friend.

You can easily guess the rest...an awkward mixture of *Rambo: First Blood*, *The Dirty Dozen* and *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* ensues as the elderly force engages mobsters with all the expected mayhem.

British gangster flicks tend to fall into two camps – either excelling as classics or falling short completely. *Renegades* manages to occupy a rare middle ground with a barely plausible story and, at times, awful dialogue just about redeemed through its acting talent and some



spirited cinematography.

While the main protagonists generally carry off the posture of former soldiers reasonably well, their use of US terminology little-spoken by British troops is clunky.

And the addition of an ill-fitting hip-hop soundtrack gives the film a vibe that is more New York Bronx than London's East End.

Indeed, it generally feels as if the script has been ported wholesale from a US to a British setting without accounting for the different nature of law enforcement in the two countries. The wooden and unconvincing portrayal of two Met detectives in the story is a particularly wincing flaw.

Casting is solid, though, with 83-year-old Majors – who was a 1970s television icon in *The Six Million Dollar Man* – providing some gravitas while the British contingent of largely television

drama and soap actors all deliver.

There are some good fight scenes too as the gang members come under contact from the troops, and the movie is largely well-shot with the London skyline providing an impressive backdrop to the near-relentless action.

It adds up to a reasonable – and just about mediocre – outing. Don't expect miracles but, on the plus side, this is a passable 90-minute time filler to download or stream. ■

VERDICT:

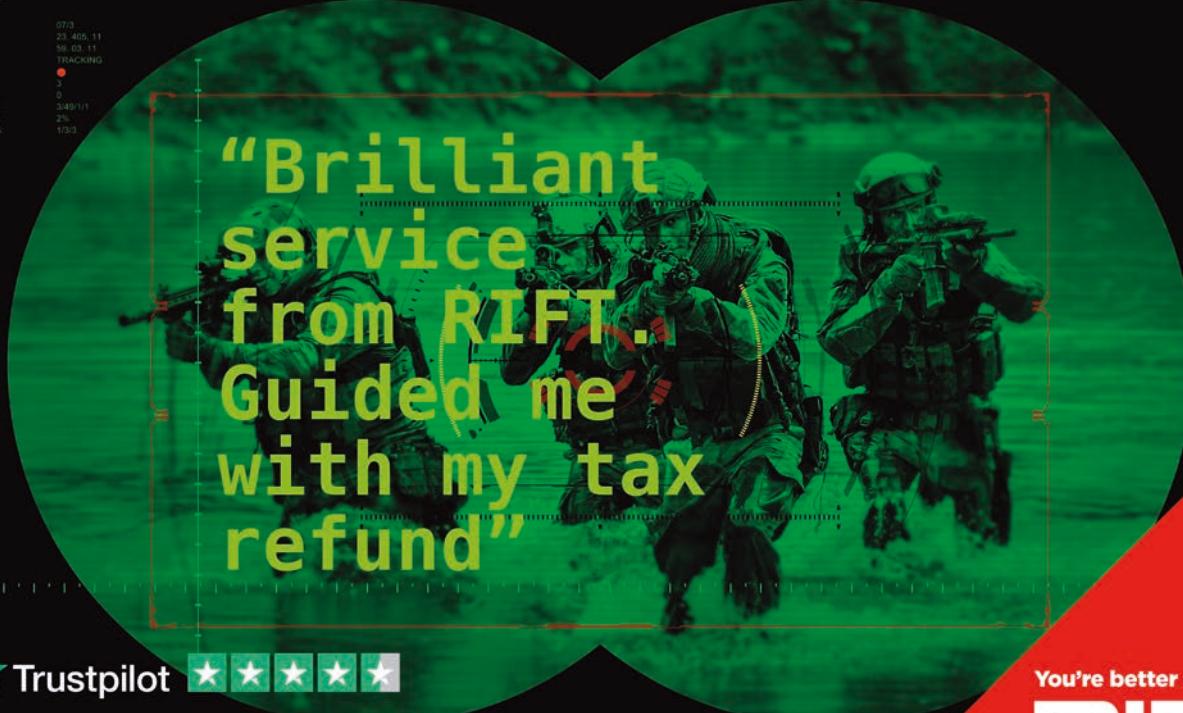
A flawed but passable gangland outing



REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, SOLDIER

SECTOR 5202-312

AREA:	07.0
POSITION:	23.405.11
ANGLE:	56.03.11
STATUS:	TRACKING
REC:	3
TASKS:	0
WARNINGS:	0
CORE DAMAGE:	348/11
RADIATION:	2%
SECTOR STATUS:	1/3/3



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SOLDIER SPORT

BACK ON THE MAT

THE new year started on a high at the Army Judo Championships as personnel sought an early taste of competitive action. The sport also hosted a fully subscribed training camp in the build-up as new talent continues to filter through. Read a full report on pages 68-69...



LAIRD FINDS FORM ON FRESH SPORTING JOURNEY

POWERLIFTER Sgt Joanne Laird (AGC (SPS)) has proven that age is no barrier when it comes to taking up, and excelling in, a new sport.

The 50-year-old is currently in full training mode ahead of the British Bench Press Championships in March – an event that will form the latest chapter in her remarkable rise.

As a relative newcomer to the discipline she only started lifting in 2021 but, just over 18 months later, returned from her first international competition – the IPF Commonwealth Championships – with an impressive four-medal haul.

“I’ve only been powerlifting for two years and when I got selected for the Commonwealths, I was still in my first year of competing,” the athlete, who serves with York-based 2nd Signal Regiment, told *SoldierSport*.

“I’ve been in the Army for 30

years and have done a range of pursuits in that time, including cycling, hockey and swimming.

“Impact sports are not good for me now, but I still wanted to compete in something that suited my body type. I’m not really a marathon runner, so I decided to try powerlifting.”

Laird began training in January 2021 and won her first novice-level competition with the Army Powerlifting Union in June of that year.

In 2022 she started competing under the banner of the British Powerlifting Federation, winning gold in the bench press and full power disciplines at the All England Championships and then finishing second at the British Masters.

Those performances saw the soldier selected to represent England in the 84kg+ ranks at the Commonwealth Championships in New Zealand, where she set a new personal best of 100kg as

she claimed silver in the bench press event.

Two further silver medals and a bronze followed in the full power competition.

“I went in thinking I’m not going to compare myself to the others,” Laird, who lifts in the 50-59 age category, said as she reflected on her performances down under.

“I just thought it would be nice to win a medal, but there were a lot of home lifters who looked very strong.”

“I was absolutely chuffed to do as well as I did – I was really happy considering it was my first international event and I was so proud to represent my country.”

Laird has another busy schedule planned for 2023 that will hopefully include the World Championships in May, followed by the British Masters and European Bench Press Championships.

However, her immediate focus



**“AGE IS
JUST A
NUMBER”**

is on returning to full fitness following a four-week break after her exertions last year.

"I take it one competition at a time," she explained.

"I set myself goals to hit, even if it's just an extra two-and-a-half kilogrammes on a lift."

"When I first started out I didn't have a clue what I was doing, and I was not that strong."

"I can be quite hard on myself but when I did a comparison from the summer of 2021 to a year later my total had gone up by 50kg, so I thought I had not done so bad."

"I lifted 352kg in my first full power competition. I then set a target of 400kg, which I have beaten, and the next is 450kg – I'll pass that this year."

"I describe myself as the Benjamin Button of powerlifting – I started late in life but am getting stronger."

"Hopefully I can continue doing that, rather than becoming weaker, and I am now hooked on the sport."

"I want to become British number one, I'm already ranked second and some people have taken years to get to that point."

"I also hope this can motivate older personnel in their sports – I am new to this and have improved so much. Age is not a barrier; it is just a number." ■



LAIRD IN NUMBERS

SILVER MEDALS, AND ONE BRONZE, WON BY THE SOLDIER DURING HER EFFORTS IN NEW ZEALAND

3

MAJOR COMPETITIONS ENTERED LAST YEAR – INCLUDING SUCCESS AT THE ALL ENGLAND CHAMPS

4

DATE, IN MAY, OF THE WORLD BENCH PRESS CHAMPS IN SOUTH AFRICA – FOR WHICH LAIRD HOPES TO QUALIFY

20

MONTHS SINCE THE LIFTER'S DEBUT CONTEST

19



AGC TOAST DOUBLE DELIGHT

THE Adjutant General's Corps underlined their status as the Army's premier netball outfit by celebrating double success at the Inter-Corps Championships in Aldershot.

Spearheaded by former Fiji international Sgt Ellie Nawe (pictured), the reigning champions made a successful defence of their crown in the competition's A League final.

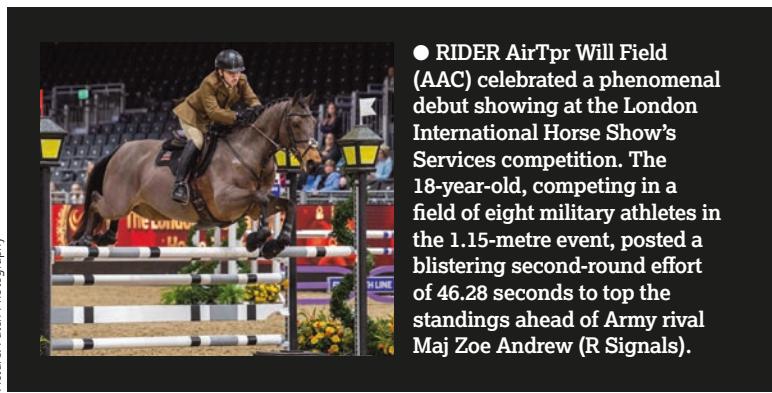
Nawe's accuracy in front of goal helped her side to a hard-fought 14-10 win over the Army Medical Services, and

the two set-ups resumed battle in the event's B League final.

Unfortunately, it was a similar story for the AMS as their rivals overcame a 5-0 deficit to secure further silverware with a 12-7 victory.

Speaking afterwards, AGC skipper Sgt Nordia Masters said she was overjoyed to retain the title.

"It gives us so much pleasure," she added. "You have to come out and be the best you can, which makes it more difficult, so winning tastes far sweeter." ■



Picture: Patch Photography

● RIDER AirTpr Will Field (AAC) celebrated a phenomenal debut showing at the London International Horse Show's Services competition. The 18-year-old, competing in a field of eight military athletes in the 1.15-metre event, posted a blistering second-round effort of 46.28 seconds to top the standings ahead of Army rival Maj Zoe Andrew (R Signals).



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Pictures: Alligin Photography

SAPPER'S SUCCESS

ARMY rugby union star Spr Michael McDonald (RE) is looking forward to further tests on the international stage in 2023 after an encouraging start to his career with Germany.

Hailing from a Service family, the soldier – along with younger brother Spr Cameron McDonald (RE) – was born in Germany and, with their mother and grandfather also coming from the country, their ties run deep.

McDonald reached out to the nation's sevens set-up during Covid and both he and Cameron were later invited to a four-day trial, before making their debuts in Zimbabwe as the team won the Zambezi Sevens.

He then played in an international tournament in Dubai.

This year the Germans hope to take the next step in their journey towards sevens' elite level and McDonald said there will be a lot of travelling involved.

"We're playing at Twickenham, Toulouse and in the whole Challenger Series," he explained. "If we finish in the top four, we'll play the bottom four of the World Series to see who gets into that competition next season."

"I'd like to think we'd be pushing for that. Everything we enter we want to win."



Pictures: Alligin Photography

MITCHELSON MAKES WINNING START



WO tries from newcomer Spr Lauren Brooks (RE, pictured above) ensured the Army women's rugby union team made a winning start to the new campaign.

The Reservist and Harlequins star crashed over twice in the first half to set the Reds on their way to a 18-5 win over Sweden in what was their first competitive outing under new coach WO2 Sarah Mitchelson (RLC).

Pte Courtney Pursglove (RLC) – one of the Army's breakthrough stars in 2022 – added eight points from the tee as the hosts built a commanding lead but their resolve was tested in a challenging second period, where their defensive play was very much at the fore.

"We got what we wanted from the game," Mitchelson told *SoldierSport*. "It was important to get the players out on the pitch and playing at a good standard."

"We knew Lauren was a good addition and it was nice to see her fitting into the team and the way we want to play."

"There were a few frustrations with the overall performance; in the second half we didn't keep hold of the ball and gave away possession too easily.

"However, there were definitely more positives than negatives."

Mitchelson used the match as an opportunity to blood a number of individuals who excelled in the team trials before Christmas, and they combined well with the more established stars who were also selected on the day.

The coach was set to use the same approach in the team's clash with the British Police as this issue went to press and will then name the squad she intends to take forward into the Inter-Services campaign.

"Apart from the senior members, it will be a completely different group of players against the police," she added.

"They are giving me something to think about as we move forward. We now have players who are hot on the heels of those already in the squad, which gives confidence to everyone." ■



MONTH IN SPORT

February's key dates...

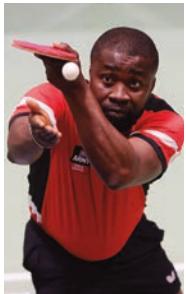


WHAT: Army v RAF – Inter-Services under-23 football
WHEN: February 15, 1500 kick off
WHERE: Aldershot Military Stadium

NEED TO KNOW: The Reds will look to make home advantage count before travelling to Portsmouth to face the Royal Navy a week later



WHAT: Army Indoor Tennis Championships
WHEN: February 15 to 17
WHERE: Aldershot
NEED TO KNOW: This is the sport's first key fixture of 2023. Emerging players will be looking to catch the eye ahead of the Inter-Services Development Championships next month



WHAT: Inter-Unit and Army Table Tennis Championships
WHEN: February 20 to 23
WHERE: Aldershot
NEED TO KNOW: More than 80 players

have attended this event in recent years, which starts with a training camp under professional coaches and progresses to team and individual competitions



Pictures: The Guernsey Press

COURT STARS SEEK CROWNING GLORY



**"THE
TALENT
WAS
ALWAYS
THERE"**

THE Army men's volleyball team have set their sights on defending their Crown Services title after a second-round national cup exit.

Victory in last season's final – when the soldiers came from 2-0 down to defeat the Royal Air Force 3-2 – capped a remarkable turnaround for the set-up, which emerged from the Covid pandemic in rejuvenated form following years of underachievement.

Success in the tournament set a new high for the squad following their run to the third round of the Volleyball England Cup and the quarter finals of the national shield.

Hopes for another push on the elite stage were high for this season, but a lack of player availability saw them fall short of the standard set 12 months earlier.

Attention now turns to a run of friendly fixtures this month, ahead of the

inaugural Inter-Corps Championships in March and the Crown Services in June.

"If we'd had a full selection, we would have shocked a few people," head coach WO2 Alex Menya (AGC (SPS), pictured left) said as he reflected on the team's national cup disappointment.

"Going into the Crown Services I am confident that, if we have all our players available, we can win.

"There will be pressure, but I want them to go out and express themselves."

Menya has overseen a dramatic transformation in the sport, with the squad size growing from 18 to 47 in the space of just two years.

He attracted fresh talent via weekly remote sessions during the pandemic, so once restrictions eased they were primed for action.

"It was a process of discovery," he said. "The talent was always there, it just had to be harnessed." ■

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GET ON THE MAT: VISIT THE BRITISH ARMY JUDO ASSOCIATION
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TALENT POOL RUNS DEEP

JUDO'S STRENGTH IN DEPTH SHOWS ENCOURAGING SIGNS AT ANNUAL ARMY CHAMPIONSHIPS

THE standard on the mat proved to be as high as ever as the Service's judo stars started the new year in style at the Army Championships.

More than 65 athletes entered the draw across the various weight categories and there were two notable upsets in the competition's key finals.

In the men's under-81kg senior showpiece, Cfn Vladimir Oleinic (REME) – a bronze medallist at the last British nationals – was defeated by Pte Aiden McDonald (Para) in a match spanning more than 14 minutes. And in the under-91kg final, Team GB hopeful Cfn Sam Dalby (REME) lost to Pte Seb Potter (London Gds).

Elsewhere, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers triumphed in the team competition, ending the eight-year winning run of the Royal Engineers.

"The thing that impressed us most this year was the depth we now have in every weight category," Lt Col Jim Crompton (AGC (ETS)), secretary of the Army Judo Association, told *SoldierSport*.

"In the past we maybe had one or two who could potentially compete for a GB spot, now we have at least three or four in each category.

"It is incredibly competitive, and that leaves us perfectly placed for the Inter-Services later in the year. We also expect to be well represented at the national team championships."

Before the event started, the set-up welcomed 54 personnel to its latest skills course – 20 of whom were novices.

Sgt Lewis Hannington (REME) was lead coach for

the training camp and was well placed to pass on some expertise having been crowned British masters under-81kg champion before Christmas.

"It is definitely the pinnacle of my career," he said. "I was counting down the days until I was old enough to have a go at it. Even though I'm a little older now it is nice to know that I can still perform at that level."

Hannington, who later won gold and silver medals alongside Crompton at the British Judo Council National Kata Championships, was pleased to report the course was fully subscribed and believes the future is looking bright.

"There are a lot of novices coming through and we also have a host of experienced players," he explained. "However, we are a bit lacking in that middle ground.

"While we are attracting novices, it is crucial we keep them involved.

"The Army Championships are one of the most important competitions we have. It allows us to build from grass-roots level and bring talent through.

"It doesn't matter what background you have, it is always so competitive. The standard is so high."

A hamstring injury ruled LCpl Christi-Rose Pretorius (AGC (RMP)) out of the Service showdown but the set-up has high hopes for her moving forward, with competing at the Olympics the ultimate target.

The 19-year-old won both the junior and senior titles in the +78kg field at the British Championships – a feat that was made more impressive by the fact she hadn't competed for two-and-a-half years due to



**"THIS IS
MY LAST
YEAR AT
JUNIOR
LEVEL,
SO I
WANT
TO DO
WELL"**

Covid and joining the Army.

"I was really proud of my performance," the soldier, who represented Zimbabwe at the Youth Olympics in 2018, said.

"I wasn't expecting it. I was invited to an Army training camp at the British Judo Centre of Excellence last year and got speaking to the GB coaches.

"They were very positive about the prospect of me training with them full-time, so I thought I'd give the national championships a go.

"I was very nervous on the opening day of the junior competition. But as soon as that first fight was over, I could feel the confidence returning and that helped me win.

"It was a big tournament with some tough fights against the top players in the country."

Pretorius (pictured left) has now set her sights on the Junior World Championships in October and hopes to establish herself in the Team GB fold.

"This is my last year at junior level, so I want to do well," she added. "Judo is quite a small sport, but the Army team is such a successful environment.

"Having people like Cpl Sarah Hawkes (AGC (RMP)), who fought at the last Commonwealth Games, involved makes me even more excited for the future – one day that could be me."

"I'm still working and training part-time. I spent a year on my training with the Royal Military Police and it is important I find the balance between my career there and my judo." ■

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SPORT SHORTS



Reds braced for Bears test

THE Army men's rugby league team have been handed a home clash with Lancashire outfit Ashton Bears in the first round of the Challenge Cup.

The Reds were playing Kells ARLFC in a warm-up fixture as this went to press and will welcome their cup opponents to the Army Rugby Stadium in Aldershot on the weekend of February 11/12. The date and kick off time have yet to be confirmed – follow [@ArmyRugbyLeague](#) on Twitter for updated information.

After a disappointing Inter-Services campaign, the soldiers will be hoping for an extended run in the competition. They suffered a second-round loss to the Royal Navy (pictured) in 2022.



Medals mount on debut

NOVICE skier Pte Sonny Ashworth (Yorks) enjoyed a month to remember at Exercise Frosted Blade – the annual Infantry Alpine Championships.

At the start of the camp the soldier could not even ski, but by the end he had collected four medals.

Ashworth claimed gold in the super giant slalom – a race in which competitors can reach speeds in excess of 100kmph. He also took silver in the giant slalom and sealed bronze medals in the downhill and combined events.

LESTER ENDS CORPS CAREER



WOMEN'S corps football has bid a fond farewell to a stalwart of the sport who has been a mainstay since the competition launched more than two decades ago.

WO2 Maria Lester was a founder of the Intelligence Corps team that lined up for the inaugural league campaign in 2001/02 and finally called time on her career last month as the side slipped to a heavy defeat against the Army Medical Services.

In that time, the 60-year-old – who left the Service just days after the match – has performed roles including player, coach, manager and tour organiser as one of the Army's smallest corps battled their bigger rivals season in, season out.

"We had a limited number of players," Lester told *SoldierSport* as she recalled the team's early days. "We had a strong seven or eight, but I would have to ring round friends or drag people out of lessons to make up the numbers.

"Because the corps is always away on ops we suffered badly. Our greatest defeat was something like 21-0. I was hoping for a cameo in my final game, but we only had ten players, so I played a full match.

"It was throwing it down with rain and blowing a gale and we got beaten 15-0 – so nothing much has changed."

Despite battling against the odds Lester's commitment did not waiver and she was proud to be associated with the squad until her final days in uniform.

"It was always a case of on to the next game," she said. "We knew we could not compete with the likes of Royal Logistic Corps or Adjutant General's Corps.

"We would celebrate a draw as if it was a win as we were always up against it. We managed to beat the Royal Signals last year and they were distraught.

"The team was like a family to me – it is the end of an era."

In her time with the set-up, Lester organised tours to the likes of Las Vegas and New Zealand. She also launched an inter-unit six-a-side competition in memory of her late friend Cpl Sue Yost.

WO2 Jodie Tester has now taken the helm and Lester believes further progress will be made.

"The team is in very capable hands," the now ex-soldier, who served for 23 years as a Regular and a further nine as a Reservist, said. "The player pool is getting bigger with more recruits coming through who have an interest in football." ■

SPORT SHORTS



Going for gold

THE Grand Military Gold Cup returns to Sandown Park on Tuesday, March 7.

The event forms part of the wider Grand Military meeting consisting of six races – four for professional and two for Service jockeys.

Potential riders will come from an array of ranks from all three military branches and the standard this year has never been higher.

Premier tickets can be purchased at the discount price of £14 using the code **GM2023** when booking in advance at thejockeyclub.co.uk/sandown

Discounts are also available for regimental or corps boxes.



Survey support needed

BROADCASTERS Forces News and BFBS Sport are appealing for feedback from viewers to help shape their future coverage of military sport.

Open to serving personnel, veterans and civilians, the organisations have launched a survey to give their audience a say on what they see, understand what platforms they use and the type of coverage that appeals most.

Scan the QR code to complete the short questionnaire.



Pictures: John Shiras

RHINOS RECRUIT REDS' LEADING LIGHTS



"I'VE LEARNT SO MUCH"

REIGNING Women's Super League champions Leeds Rhinos have bolstered their ranks ahead of the new season by signing three of the Army's rugby league stars.

Bdr Beth Dainton (RA), Cpl Kaiya Glynn (RAMC, pictured above) and Pte Jenna Greening (RLC) have all penned deals for the 2023 campaign and the trio have impressed head coach Lois Forsell in training sessions ahead of the competition's return in March.

Dainton, a dual code international for Wales, played rugby union for Harlequins last season and also helped the Army to Inter-Services glory but said the time was right to make the switch.

"I really enjoy league as it suits my style of play," she added. "It's fast and you have to be fit, with good ball handling skills."

"I've been training with Leeds for a few weeks, and it's been really good. I know the team are ambitious and

want to win more silverware this season – I am looking forward to playing my part."

Glynn was the Army's top points scorer in 2022 and was named player's player of the season – form that saw her selected for the England Community Lions.

She admits she's still a novice in the game and believes joining Leeds will help her progress further.

"This is a fantastic opportunity," she said.

"The standard is a lot higher and it's a great jump. Hopefully I can develop my game and become more of a transitional player and build in confidence."

Reservist Greening took a ten-year break from the game before returning to the field with the Army and, like her fellow soldiers, sees the move as the ideal opportunity to develop as a player.

"I've already learnt so much in the short time I have been with the club," the 31-year-old (pictured left) said. "I'm looking forward to lining up with some great players." ■



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I'd say I felt anxious and excited but they mix into one, so you don't know where one ends and the other begins. I've been in the Army about two years now – I joined because I didn't want to sit behind a desk all day.

Pte Thomas Price



I don't remember being too worried when I first joined – you're so busy, there's always something going on. Being away from home is hard on everyone but, honestly, training was brilliant and so was getting to battalion. I think you tend to keep hold of the good memories more than the bad ones.

Pte Chris Curley

Interviews: Becky Clark Pictures: Graeme Main



I went in with high hopes and full determination and I never questioned whether I'd made the right choice because it was something I'd always wanted to do since I was little. Then I found out my first posting was to Cyprus, so that was pretty exciting. Five years on I still enjoy it – there haven't really been any moments when I've thought, 'this is pants, I don't want to be here anymore'.

LCpl Peter Beckett

It's a bit of a blur because you're picking up new skills from day one, but you're guided through everything. You're apprehensive – as with anything unknown – but everyone is in the same boat and you are put at ease pretty quickly by the instructors.

Cpl Matt Brock



Rookie reflections

As Army recruiters target the next generation of troops (page 11), soldiers from 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment remember being the newbies...

I joined back in 2013 and I was a bit nervous because it was a totally different environment to back home in Fiji, but the instructors and other recruits helped me settle in. I'm glad I made it through.

LCpl Mosese Lekutu



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