

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

ON POINT IN POLAND

Brits thrive on lesser-known
side of Op Cabrit


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APRIL 2026

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OUR CONTRIBUTORS THIS MONTH...



SJT TOM LINDLAR, RIFLES

ONE of several we quiz about rations on our back page, this protein-hungry NCO should have a keen interest in our feature on page 42 about the research going into next-gen feeding...



WO1 DWAIN OLIVER, RMAS

MEET Sandhurst's academy sergeant major, who spends much time touring units to raise awareness of instructor opportunities. This month, however, we've done the job for him by revealing all from page 48.



PTE MICA MOORE, RLC

THE Winter Olympian might not have medalled in Italy, but she smashed her way to gold at last month's Inter-Services Ice Sports Championships, along with Cpl Kewe King (RAMS). Get the lowdown on page 67.

Ready for something new?

IF WORK hasn't yet served you up the kind of excitement you were hoping for out of 2026, look no further than this humble mag.

Nobody likes to feel stuck in a rut – especially in a force that thrives on adventure and smashing obstacles. And although very few roles can offer 24/7 thrills, these pages show just how many challenges – from expeds and sport to new career opportunities – are up for grabs in addition to anything the boss may throw at you.

Turn to page 48 to discover how experienced NCOs can shake things up by taking on “one of the most rewarding roles on offer” – instructing the next generation of leaders at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

If that doesn't float your boat, perhaps you'd fancy turning your hand to sailing on a round-the-world trip (page 7)? Or what about submitting one of those great training shots to this year's Army Photographic Competition (page 13)?

If all else fails, the marathon runners on page 17 may just inspire you to start training for that famous 26-miler.

Call me biased, but I cannot think of any other forum that brings together all the variety of service life more colourfully than *Soldier*.

Every issue includes news of some fresh op, qualification, challenge or sport; each one with the capacity to turn the military experience around for someone. Indeed, we often receive letters telling us how 'it all started with *Soldier*' (an example on page 57).

So if you have a mate who is stagnating, struggling or just in need of a livener, why not chuck them a copy of this magazine? And thank you to all our contributors for demonstrating how adventure is all around, and not just on operations.

What will be the thing that turns 2026 around for you?

Sarah Goldthorpe • **Editor**

'Adventure is all around, not just on ops'





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APRIL 2026



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YOUR NEXT MISSION: HOME

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FANCY exploring the world by boat? Now could be your chance.

The Joint Services Adventurous Sail Training Centre is staging a world circumnavigation from September until May 2028, and personnel from novices to experienced sailors are invited to sign up to one of 24 legs.

Open to all regular and reserve units, the trip will cover 45,000 nautical miles and take in countries including the Caribbean, Maldives and South Africa. Read more in **DIN 2025DIN07-127**



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Adventurous training such as this climbing package in Brecon is set to become part of ALDP



Picture: Graeme Main

TRAINING REVAMP DROPS

CHANGES to career courses that will see junior NCOs undergo mandatory adventurous training as a prerequisite for promotion are set for roll out this month.

Under wide-ranging reforms to the army leadership development pathway (formerly programme, (ALDP)), lance corporals and corporals must now undertake five days of formal AT activity.

Meanwhile, the field exercise that made up part of their military training syllabus has been

removed. And starting from 2027, digital skills modules will be added to the curriculum at all rank levels to equip troops for an increasingly tech-based workplace.

Army HQ's Maj Caitlin Champion (AGC (ETS)) explained the overhaul would professionalise ALDP and make it more reflective of modern ops.

"We conducted a thorough review and extensive stakeholder engagement from lance corporal to three-star level and found that the

'Our troops will have the tools they need to operate in complexity'

programme had become outdated," she said.

"A lot of the content was a legacy of the Herrick era and it was duplicating what personnel now do elsewhere, either as part of their individual training requirements, the battlecraft syllabus or the land training system.

"These changes ensure our NCOs and warrant officers have the tools they need to operate in complexity and will, in turn, contribute to increasing fighting power."

As this issue went to press, adventurous training centres around the country were preparing to stage courses in all official disciplines, including mountaineering, sailing, parachuting, caving and more.

AT boss Col Neil Wilson described the inclusion of army leadership and resilience training – known as 'Alert' – into ALDP as "game-changing".

He added: "Alert is conducted in a consequential environment, where individuals are put under mental, physical and emotional pressure through a perceived and genuine risk to life in a way that replicates combat operations."

Facilities would be expanding capacity to meet the increase in demand and priority would be given to ALDP candidates, the officer also confirmed.

In any given year, some 9,500 soldiers take part in the pathway, which is completed in four stages as they climb the ranks.

Recently or soon-to-be promoted personnel should read ACSO 3234 and check out the NCO Academy's recent Tea and Toast Talk on the topic via Defence Connect.



Got a question about how ALDP reform affects you? Email news@soldiermagazine.co.uk and we'll put it to the experts in a future issue

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1 CALIFORNIA

Convergence kit trials

PREPARATIONS for this summer's Project Convergence Capstone in the US desert have been ramping up.

Personnel from the army's Experimentation and Trials Group (ETG) tested a raft of new capabilities – from unmanned ground vehicles (shown) to comms kit – at a Salisbury Plain event designed to iron-out any integration issues with the equipment before it is deployed in a tactical setting at Fort Irwin in July.

"This is about getting capabilities on the network so we can then experiment with how we would fight with them against a live opfor on Convergence," said Maj Andy Wright (RA), part of the ETG's robotics and autonomous systems team. Read more on page 25.

2 FALKLAND ISLANDS

Neigh-bourly work

SOLDIERS have been exporting their skills and abilities to the far-flung communities of the South Atlantic, helping islanders with their rural businesses.

And while troops are always keen to lend a hand, commanders have singled out reservists from 4th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment in particular for going above and beyond during the deployment.

Bringing civvy skills from their day jobs, the current cohort forming the Roulement Infantry Company have proved to be a real asset in the countryside.

Notably, LCpl James Marshall, a civvy equine veterinary surgeon in his day job, assisted a resident in the remote settlement of Fitzroy. Asked by a farmer if anyone could take a look at her miniature horses, the NCO carried out a quick examination before using a few tools on site to trim their hooves.



A TASTE OF ARMY ACTIVITY ACROSS THE WORLD

GLOBAL SITREP

3 MIDDLE EAST

Protecting UK interests

THE United Kingdom will continue defensive operations to protect military personnel, interests and allies in the Middle East amid the fast-moving crisis in the region, the defence secretary has said.

As this issue went to press, John Healey reiterated Britain would not be joining the United States and Israel in strikes against Iran, but stressed that actions to defend against the hardline regime's attacks on Gulf states would continue.

Iranian missile and UAS assaults had hit places including the UK base at Akrotiri in Cyprus plus the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. But projectiles were continually being intercepted and troops had taken down more than 40 drones. The Royal Navy vessel *HMS Dragon* had also arrived in the region.

Healey added: "We won't be drawn into a wider war – my priority is protecting British troops, interests and our allies."



Picture: ASJ Joshua Whiting, RAF



'Food is a key part of morale and a little piece of home'

Ration packs under the microscope, p42

4

FRANCE

Cross-Channel ferry

MULTINATIONAL personnel dropped into Brittany to take part in a major exercise flexing counter-insurgency and conventional warfighting muscles.

Soldiers from the Airborne Combined Joint Force – made up of 16 Air Assault Brigade and 11e Brigade Parachutiste – touched down on the Saint-Cyr Coetquidan training area for a mock campaign focused on defending a Nato ally.

Some 2,000 troops took part in the ten-day Exercise Orion, which saw allies fan out to tackle an irregular force while keeping an eye on a likely invasion from massing hostile armour. Led by the French, the manoeuvres were an opportunity to test an array of cyber capabilities and medical protocols, with doctors working closer to the front lines.

Out of the blue, p36



Picture: Cpl John Warburton, RLC



Picture: Duncan Campbell

5

GERMANY

New tactics take off

TESTING new drills and kit were top of the agenda as 350 members of The Queen's Royal Hussars took to Sennelager training area.

Personnel experimented with launching surveillance and strike drones from moving armoured vehicles while sharing live feeds across the formation in real time.

They also trialled a new helmet design that lets crews switch between their tanks and dismantled drills without changing headgear.

In addition, Exercise Senne Hussar saw the deployment of the Field Army's first find and strike squadron, which combines reconnaissance, drone and strike capabilities – enabling units to locate and engage targets faster and more effectively at greater distance.

Maj Douglas Graham (QRH), boss of B Squadron, said the concept would allow troops to "operate at a tempo unmatched by our enemies".

6

POLAND

Triggering spring

INFANTEERS from 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment emerged from the deep freeze of their Op Cabrit winter tour with an intense training burst.

The personnel – from the unit's Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Group – marked the start of spring in explosive style with the sniper operators' course and sister anti-tank package plus a light recce patrols cadre. It was the final phase in a busy six-month outing for the Poachers, based at the Benowo Piskie training area, who were the effective eyes of the US-led battlegroup on Nato's deterrence mission in Eastern Europe.

Capt Hamish MacKellar, commanding the group's anti-tank platoon, said: "Our soldiers have really thrived – there are always new things to take away."

The war game, p30

Picture: Beth Proddger



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A VIOLENT END...

RECRUITS attack sandbag targets during bayonet lanes at ATR Winchester last month.

The basic training establishment, which is due to close its doors this summer and move activity to Pirbright, ran the serial to introduce its trainees to controlled aggression, teaching them to fight well at close quarters when exhausted.

Picture: Graeme Main



Picture: Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC

FINAL CALL FOR PHOTO COMP



ENTRIES to this year's Army Photographic Competition close at midnight on April 17.

If you have an image to rival the above – just one of those shortlisted in last year's contest – then make sure you enter before the deadline.

You must be serving in the British Army and your pictures

must have been captured between February 1, 2025 and April 1, 2026.

Last year's professional winner told this magazine it had been "incredibly humbling" to get his work recognised.

"The experience showed me how powerful our stories really are," said photographer Sgt Donald Todd (RLC).

Amateur categories in the 2026 contest include People/Portrait (one image of a serving person), Capability (images of kit or equipment) and Amateur Photographer of the Year (a portfolio of four).

Professional categories – open to official army photographers only – are Photographer of the Year (a portfolio of six), Story of the Year (six images from the same event), Best Video and Best Showreel.

Send your entries to pics@soldiermagazine.co.uk and keep an eye on [@soldier_magazine](https://www.instagram.com/soldier_magazine) on Instagram for details of the winners, whose work will also go on display at a National Army Museum event.

Read our January 2026 issue on soldiermagazine.co.uk for more information on the competition and its rules.

NEW VOICE

A FORMER Royal Air Force officer was on the cusp of becoming the first armed forces commissioner as this issue went to press.

Polly Perkins – a retired air commodore – was announced as the government's preferred candidate for the role, which would see her be an independent champion of personnel and their families.

She appeared before the House of Commons defence select committee, which will provide a view before formal appointment.

Addressing MPs, Air Cdre Perkins – whose CV includes ops in Kosovo and Afghanistan – said: "I genuinely think it can make a difference. It is fundamental to

the credibility of the appointment that you have independence – my intent would be to operate at all times with utter transparency."





GROUND VIEW

Army Sergeant Major WO1 John Miller gives his take on service life...

FIGHTING continues in Ukraine and the most recent conflict in the Middle East again serves to show exactly how unpredictable the world can be.

From my perspective, we must pay heed and realise that we need to remain agile so that we are ready to do whatever is asked, whenever the call comes.

As soldiers, that means focusing on things within our control and making sure we get the basics right.

But I'd like to throw something else into the mix this month, too. The chief of the general staff has asked us to think about what the British Army might do differently, if we knew that we were going to war next year.

This an opportunity to look at anything in our gift to further increase fighting power. And innovation is key to this.

‘In the end, it’s marginal gains that will make a difference’

On page 39 of this issue you’ll see how the Phantom Platoon within my old formation – 16 Air Assault Brigade – has been raising a few eyebrows on exercise by working in the digital domain.

The idea for the platoon came from a junior leader. It is being used as a training aid at the moment but the team’s specialist knowledge is now showing some potency.

Similarly impressive capabilities have also been

demonstrated by 1st Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment and 1st Battalion, The Rifles.

I’d like to see more people using their initiative in this way. We need people to keep thinking creatively because, in the end, it’s the marginal gains that will make a difference.

That innovation thread will be part of the Regimental Sergeant Majors’ Convention in Sandhurst later this month, where we will focus on how a potential conflict could unfold in Europe – including how the Russian military thinks, operates and fights.

There will be sessions with senior officers, including the commander of Nato’s Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, and we’ll have guests from other nations and the defence industry.

The aim is to provide a checklist for RSMs to take back to their units ahead of a major Nato exercise next year.

With the world today as volatile as it is, let’s make sure that we are ready.

WO1 Miller’s month...

Visits

- 11 Brigade, Kenya

Impressed with

- Technical innovations across the service

Area of focus

- CGS’s war prep question

Coming up next

- Soldier of the Year and Meritorious Service Medal presentations; RSM convention



LANDY ROLLS INTO HISTORY...

Picture: Cpl Paul Squires, RLC

A BRITISH Army icon has begun its final road move into the history books after defence chiefs confirmed the retirement of the Land Rover fleet.

The workhorse, which has served the military in various forms for 70 years, will be gradually withdrawn with a replacement due at the end of the decade. Moves are now under way to identify the next generation of vehicles.

A special event to commemorate the much-loved ‘Landy’ at Bovington was attended by an MoD delegation that included Defence Minister Luke Pollard.

It was an opportunity to reflect on a platform that has served in theatres around the world with variants produced exclusively for military use.

As well as the more familiar

versions, some of the unusual models include the Amphibious SIIA 109, a prototype for sea landings and the V8 Centaur multi-role half track, an attempt by boffins to fuse a tank with a road vehicle.

Pollard said the off-road favourite would be fondly remembered – but the focus was now on finding a state-of-the-art replacement under the Light Mobility Vehicle programme.

The MP added: “The Land Rover and British Army share an incredible history and the image of a Landy in army livery is truly iconic – it is fitting to play tribute to this fleet that have served our armed forces so faithfully.

“I am firing the starting gun on the replacement vehicle competition, seeking to put a modern vehicle in the hands of our personnel.”

Band Major WO2 Jonathan Truscott keeps the young crowd amused



Picture: Graeme Main

CELEBRATING SERVICE

THE Band of the Coldstream Guards joined 200 schoolchildren and various other military personnel in Aldershot to mark the countdown to Armed Forces Day 2026.

This year's day of celebration will centre on the Borough of Rushmoor on June 27, with the main event held on

Queen's Avenue, Aldershot.

The national occasion honours serving personnel, veterans, cadets, and the wider armed forces community, with colourful events staged right across the country.

For more information visit armedforcesday.org



Picture: Beth Prodger

A DATE WITH DRONES

TECH-MINDED troops have until April 24 to apply for a slot on a new drone-related undergraduate degree.

The three-year residential course at Hereford's New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering is open to all ranks, with the first students set to begin their studies in September.

Up to five regular personnel will be accepted onto the accelerated programme annually as part of the army's drive to build expertise in uncrewed air systems.

For more information on eligibility and the application process read **ABN 012/2026**

MEDICAL APPEAL

DETECTIVES are asking for help from the army community amid a widening investigation into historic abuse during military medical examinations.

As this issue went to press, cops confirmed they were examining more than 700 reports as part of Operation Pianora, with incidents spread from the 1970s to 2016 and across all three armed forces.

Wiltshire Police, which is leading the investigation, said it was working with civilian forces across the UK as well as the Defence Serious Crime Command, the MoD Police and other elements of military law enforcement.

Senior investigating officer, Det Ch Supt Darren Hannatt, told *Soldier*: "The allegations relate to enlistment medicals for recruits and personnel who were serving at the time – this is, however, a complex investigation and will take time as we are covering a large timeframe and a large geographic area."

He added that concerns had been raised by serving personnel, veterans and applicants to the armed forces who did not go on to join.

Appealing for anyone who believed they could assist to come forward, the police officer stressed all information would be treated with the "utmost sensitivity".

Google 'Operation Pianora' to find the major incident public portal, where you can report details and get help.

KICKED OUT

THE following service personnel were dismissed from His Majesty's Armed Forces following conviction at court martial between January and February 2026...

📄 **Pte Raiv Francis (9 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps)**, aged 25, pleaded guilty to three offences relating to possessing indecent images of children and extreme pornography. Sentenced to 12 months' service detention at the Military Corrective Training Centre Colchester and ordered to complete a five-year sexual harm prevention order, which includes restrictions on internet use. Francis was told he would be detained for two-thirds of his sentence.

📄 **LCpl Ganeshkumar Lawati (30 Signal Regiment)**, aged 57, pleaded guilty to threatening his wife with a bladed article while she was in bed, and assault occasioning actual bodily harm against each of his two grown-up children during a separate disturbance. Sentenced to 18 months' service detention and reduced to the ranks.

To read the full transcripts of the sentencing remarks in the above cases log on to gov.uk/government/publications/military-court-service-sentencing-remarks-2026





RECCE ROUND

ROYAL Lancers soldiers knuckled down on Salisbury Plain during a dismounted training package focused on rural and urban observation posts, and designed to hone their recce skills for ops.

Picture: Sgt Adam Wakefield, RLC

DESERT, PEAKS AND PREP

A RESERVIST has taken the first steps of a mammoth 2,650-mile, five-month trek from Mexico to Canada.

Sgt Brian Hughes (Scots, shown) was three days into his quest to hike the Pacific Crest Trail on America's west coast as this issue went to press, carrying everything he needs for the endeavour on his back.

A former regular with more than 22 years' service under his belt – including ops in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan – the senior NCO has spent years researching the route, testing equipment and building experience of long-distance hikes across Scotland and the Alps.

As well as prolonged physical and mental stress, he will encounter some of the

toughest terrain found anywhere in the US and is prepped for possible extreme weather. But he said his fundraising cause, Combat Stress, was close to his heart.

"While military service builds resilience and strength, it can also leave lasting unseen wounds, and I have lost several close friends to post-traumatic stress and suicide," explained the 47-year-old.

"This challenge is driven by a deep commitment to honour them and support those still struggling."

Follow [@brianwithcombatstress](#) on YouTube to track Sgt Hughes' travels. To help him reach his fundraising target visit events.combatstress.org.uk/fundraisers/brianhughes



Sgt Hughes at the starting point on the Mexican border

Picture: Sgt Amil Gurung, RLC



NATIONAL PRIDE

HERITAGE and culture were honoured by troops on St David's Day and St Patrick's Day last month.

The Royal Welsh's regimental mascot, LCpl Shenkin IV (pictured), helped to mark the former event at Llandaff Cathedral in Cardiff, before the Irish Guards celebrated later in the month at a ceremony in Mons Barracks, Aldershot.

FORM OF SUPPORT

THE application process has changed for joining the Army Dependants' Trust – the charity that provides cash awards of up to £20,000 for families of troops who die in service.

A copy of form AF9284 should be sent electronically to records@armydependantstrust.org, where it will be securely stored.

Microsoft Excel summary sheets are no longer required.

All regulars and reservists are eligible to become members at a cost of £8.75 per year so that their loved ones can receive financial relief in the immediate period following their deaths.

MONEY BACK

ARMY cash gurus have been reminded they need not be left out of pocket to join their professional body.

Military management accountants who need Chartered Institute of Management Accountants accreditation for their role can request a refund of fees dating back to the beginning of 2020.

Claims can be made via JPA. Read [ABN 015/2026](#) for more information.



REVVED-UP TO RUN

AMONG those prepping hard for this month's London Marathon is Chaplain General Rev Michael Parker – pictured here getting some miles in at Tidworth Oval.

For him, the event on April 26 is all about numbers, having served as an army padre for 26 years, being the 26th CG and having trained alongside 26 other chaplains, each of whom ran a mile with him on recent visits to the UK and Cyprus.

Look out for the 55-year-old on the big day – along with 2 Signal Regiment's SSgt Harley Smith (below), a self-confessed running addict and championship entrant, who will be aiming to beat the world

record of 2hr 48min 48sec for the fastest marathon undertaken in Crocs.

"I have a 2hr 32min PB but I am expecting it to be a lot slower in the footwear," he told *Soldier*.

"I thought 'how can I mix it up and do something different?' I'm looking forward to it."

Picture: Graeme Main

SCOFF WITH A VIEW...

HUNGRY loggies from 17 Port and Maritime Regiment have some inspiring art to look at while they munch their lunch, thanks to two artists who adorned their Marchwood cookhouse with images of the unit's past deployments and taskings.

Regimental 2iC Maj Alex Howes (RLC) said the unit was "overjoyed" with the work of Mike Ness and Owain Nicholls, which was funded through various local donations.

He added: "This mural ensures every soldier – past, present and future – can see themselves in our story. It preserves our history."



Picture: MBN Arts



POSSIBLE savings on childcare for forces families living in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, thanks to a new scheme.

Parents stationed in the devolved nations currently receive less in early years support than those based in England and overseas, but from September the MoD will fund the difference for eligible military families across the UK.



diary dates

3

Desert drills

MILITARY personnel will be among the runners taking to the start line for a six-day, 270-kilometre slog across the Sahara Desert in the Marathon des Sables. Among them is a five-strong team from the Adjutant General's Corps' Educational and Training Branch dubbed the Endurance Army Educators (read the full story in our February issue). And after completing the World's Toughest Row early last year, Capt Sheridan Lucas (RLC) will face the searing heat in her latest physical test (see page 23).



22

Return to court

THE battle for honours in the Inter-Services Basketball Championships resumes, with the army hosting this season's tournament in Aldershot. The soldiers will look to defend their title in the men's competition, while the women's squad will be hoping for a stronger showing after losing both fixtures last time out.



Picture: ASI Josh Gorman, RAF



Picture: Craeme Main

21

Corps titles up for grabs

THREE days of hockey get under way in Aldershot at the annual Inter-Corps and Army Cup competitions. The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers downed the Royal Engineers 3-1 to lift the men's trophy last season, while the Adjutant General's Corps again triumphed in the women's draw. Who will top the standings in 2026?

23

Lord's looms

AN early season test awaits as the army men's team travel to the home of cricket for the Inter-Services Twenty20 Championships. The Royal Air Force will be the team to beat after two commanding victories last season saw them lift the trophy in style. The day also features a match between the UK Armed Forces women and Marylebone Cricket Club. Visit lords.org for tickets.



Picture: Lt Cdr Shaun Roster, RN

Last year's event



Picture: Graeme Main

25

Hot shots unite

SOME 52 regular and 17 reserve teams are set to hit the ground running at Lydd and Hythe ranges, Kent, for the 2026 Corps Operational Shooting Competition. Moved from Pirbright Camp where last year's event was held, the contest will present sharpshooters with a range of attacking and defending serials during a week of activity. Troops will also face drills including ammunition resupply and casualty extraction. Organiser Maj Neil Whitewick (RLC) told *Soldier* that numbers taking part were now back up to pre-Covid levels. "We are over the moon to see this," the officer added.

25

Imjin remembered

THE 75th Anniversary of the Battle of the Imjin River, a bloody engagement in the Korean War, will be marked at events on both sides of the globe.

In the Republic of Korea - or South Korea - Gloster Hill Memorial Park in Paju will form a focal point for remembrance, with local dignitaries, army personnel and veterans due to attend.

The site marks the place where, in April 1951, 1st Battalion, The Gloucestershire Regiment made a heroic last stand against Chinese forces. Lt Cdr Mat Askham, deputy defence attache at the British Embassy in Seoul, told *Soldier* the anniversary would be a moment of "profound significance".

The official added: "It honours the extraordinary courage and sacrifice of the officers and soldiers of the Commonwealth Division who fought to defend the Republic of Korea, and it reflects the enduring partnership between our nations, a relationship built on shared sacrifice, shared values, and a shared commitment to peace."

Back on UK soil, a special ceremony will be held at the National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire. Veterans of the Glosters and its successor regiments are invited to attend. Register before April 10 at glostersmemorial.co.uk/imjin75/



VISIT THE ARCHIVE: Read more on the battle in our May 1951 issue at soldiermagazine.co.uk

26

London Marathon

THE UK's highest profile running fundraiser will this year include 33 soldiers and veterans pounding the streets for the Army Benevolent Fund. One of those will be Chaplain General Rev Michael Parker, whose training exploits you can read more about on page 17. Good luck to all those taking part.



Picture: Mo Baig Images

skills



Picture: Cpl Vincent Price, RLC

FIGHTING TALK

Why learning a new language is a useful military tool



BRITISH troops hopping across the Channel to train with their closest neighbour have been finding that a bit of local parlance can be a potent battlefield asset.

French sessions were non-optional as 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment ramped up to Exercise Gaulish at the Cenzub urban facility near Reims, earlier this year.

And breaking down language barriers was also key for the Airborne Command Joint Force of 16 Air Assault Brigade and 11e Brigade Parachutiste when they took part in their latest manoeuvres – Ex Orion – in Brittany (page 36).

Good comms, in short, can prove decisive when it comes to a fight. And if the prospect of learning a new language feels a bit like being dragged back to school, thinking about it as part of soldiering's daily drills can help.

We asked MoD linguist Nadine Demontfaucon (pictured above) – author of a

new book called *French for British Soldiers: From Recruit to Fluent* – for her top tips.

Sound it out...

Train your ears before your mouth – listen to short audio clips, military briefings or news in your target language for five-to-ten minutes per day. You'll build familiarity with rhythm, tone and structure; the brain recognises patterns.

Go solo...

Speak out loud when you're on your own. Go over short texts, repeat phrases or describe what you're doing in daily taskings to build muscle memory. Remember – fluency is physical as well as mental. Your mouth needs training.

Think like a soldier...

Because language learning responds to discipline. Create a simple drill – ten words per day. Small, consistent actions outperform occasional, long sessions. Military training works through repetition; language training is no different.



TACTICAL FRENCH

Some good words to know

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Ammunition | <i>Munitions</i> |
| Attention (on parade) | <i>Garde a vous</i> |
| Battlespace | <i>Zone de combat</i> |
| Headquarters | <i>Quartier general</i> |
| Platoon | <i>Peloton</i> |

And if it goes pear-shaped...

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Gas attack | <i>Gaz empoisonne</i> |
| Hold on tight | <i>Tiens-toi bien</i> |
| Retreat | <i>Retrait</i> |
| You always need a plan B here | <i>Faut toujours prévoir un plan B ici</i> |

Pictures: Sgt Murray Kerr, RA



YORKS BLEND BATTLE DRILLS

VIRTUAL and real-life serials were on the cards for reservists from 4th Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment during Exercise Rural Strike in Catterick.

Personnel revisited fieldcraft basics and faced a variety of tactical scenarios, while officers and senior NCOs also completed an operational planning mission on the interim combined arms virtual simulation (ICAVS) system.

Maj Rob Phillips, boss of Alma Company, said using the mobile tool had enabled them to scale up the impact of the training.

He added: "As an army reserve unit it is difficult to generate sufficient mass to routinely test key command elements but ICAVS expands our capability to train our leaders at company and battlegroup level without deploying vast numbers of troops and equipment onto the ground."



ARMY'S GOT TECH TALENT

Sappers aim for repeat of skills triumph

ROYAL Engineer apprentices are set to pitch themselves against top young tradespeople as part of this year's World Skills UK contest – a nationwide show of technical talent.

With 23 sappers entered, the corps is hoping to repeat its strong showing in previous events, which saw five personnel make the national finals in 2025 – including 19-year-old Spr Isaac Jervis (see right), who bagged gold in the air conditioning and refrigeration fitter category.

Meanwhile, LCpl Luke Oliver – a winner in 2024 – will travel to Shanghai in September as part of the British squad competing in the international championships.

Several thousand youngsters will attend regional heats in the coming months, with carpenters, brickies, welders and plumbers among this year's military cohort.

Capt Matt Williams from HQ Royal Engineers said the competition was beneficial on several levels.

"The soldiers get additional trade experience, as well as being put under pressure in test scenarios and practising time management," he explained.

"Regiments embrace it because it makes personnel better at their jobs and showcases the high standard of military apprenticeship programmes."

Instructors and training establishments could use the competition's online 'learning lab' to benchmark prospective entrants against national averages before committing them, the officer pointed out.

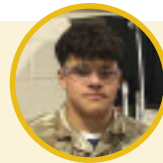
And with the event covering the likes of IT, accounting, catering and mechanics, other cap badges can get involved too.

Units wanting to find out more about the Royal Engineers' World Skills UK framework can email matthew.williams747@mod.gov.uk



Trade skills in action on Op Trenton

Q & A



Spr Isaac Jervis,
World Skills UK gold medal winner 2025

What was the route to the finals?

First, I took part in a theory-based exam, which allowed me to progress to the heats in Birmingham. The national finals were in Cardiff, where we had 14 hours to build and commission a refrigeration system from scratch.

How much extra work did you have to do to get ready?

Not a lot while I was doing my trade training, until about five weeks before when we put in some additional hours and practised paperwork. However, for the finals, I

had six weeks of preparation at 1 RSME, spending every day in the workshop and focusing more on time management and trying out new techniques and equipment.

What was the most challenging part of the competition?

The time management element. At certain points I rushed my work and at others I wasted a lot of time overthinking.

How did it feel to win?

I was very shocked when I found out that I had come first, as everyone I was competing against had finished their tasks to a really high standard.

What would you say to other soldiers thinking about entering?

Just go for it. I've had so many different opportunities simply because I competed. It will also give you a lot of extra time and experience working in your chosen trade.

What's next?

I'm waiting to compete for a spot on the UK team. If I secure that, I'll have the chance to go to Aichi, Japan in 2028 to take part in the international competition.

Picture: Sgt Christopher Moffatt, RE

phys

SMART SPINNERS

The next-gen fitness tool helping troops stay injury-free

ARMY gym-goers may have noticed some shiny new Wattbikes popping up in their local facilities of late.

A total of 200 high-tech AirPro models have replaced older versions, with another 100 inbound under a £17m-revamp spearheaded by the Regional Command Physical Development team (*Soldier*, March).

SSgt Tristan Willis, PTI at 4th Battalion, The Ranger Regiment (shown), described them as his go-to tool for low impact, beginner-proof workouts. Here's why...

The touch screen monitor is among a load of internal upgrades. This enables easy access to a wide variety of pre-programmed workouts, including military endurance programmes, high intensity interval training or ones linked to specific sports like football or rugby.

It's great for rehab because one of the key built-in options is the soldier conditioning assessment A3 test – the low-impact alternative to the run component aimed at injured personnel. It allows them to maintain aerobic capacity as well as giving them a quick physiological snapshot to establish baseline and goals.

They're ideal for 'off-feet' conditioning. Soldiers do quite a lot of arduous PT that is hard on the joints. But everyone should incorporate one non-load-bearing session per week – for example, swimming or a Wattbike workout – to reduce their risk of musculoskeletal injuries.

The interface is foolproof.

Anyone with zero knowledge of physical education can jump on a bike and follow a six-to-12 week programme, without the supervision of a PTI. This means they are good for people training by themselves while away from their unit. You can download an app on your phone to track your data and you also have the option of using a heart monitor to ensure you're working in the right zone. It's actually hard to go wrong.



Picture: Graeme Main

'LEADER'S LEGS'

...and other mental hacks for smashing phys sessions, according to Royal Gibraltar Regiment troops

"I was quite unfit before I joined a few months ago so to get ready I did a lot of runs up and down the Rock of Gibraltar."



"I didn't want to be one of those blokes who's always at the back, hanging out, so I just told myself if I put myself through it now it will be it easier when I get there."

"The progression was massive and now I find phys fun."

Pte Harvey Michael

"When I'm on PT I know I'm being watched by the boys, so that's a bit of external motivation for me."



"Leader's legs is a thing. Commanders have to be at the front and setting a good example."

Lt Matthew Leech

"I always keep in mind that whatever they're putting me through – whether it's a run or soldier work – is to benefit me."



"So no matter how hard the training is, no matter how bad I feel, it's for my own good and it means the next time it will be easier."

"That's how I picture it."

Pte Rio Wilson



"I find keeping up with the boys during phys quite challenging. What helps me the most is the people either side of me."

"They keep me going."

Pte Sasha Read-Lunn

Pictures: Graeme Main



Q&A

Picture: Pte Kaldon Greene, R Yorks

Name: Pte Joshua Greenfield
Unit: 1st Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment
Role: Infanteer; unit PTI
Age: 32
Years in: Three
Ops served: None yet
Height: 176cm
Weight: 96kg

MY WORKOUT

JOINING the army might be a career move later in life for Pte Joshua Greenfield (R Yorks) – but it has not disappointed in the phys fest he hoped it would offer.

Just three years in, the ex-Team GB powerlifter has been making a name for himself in military sporting circles after taking the men’s British Army Warrior Fitness crown at Pirbright Camp last year.

Currently looking to promote and setting his long-range sights on joining the ranks of the Royal Army Physical Training Corps, he revealed how he stays in peak condition when we caught up with him at Catterick Garrison.

How often do you train?

Six times a week, in all. As well as competing in British Army Warrior Fitness, I’m also involved in powerlifting, weightlifting and strongman events.

So you must spend most of your time in the gym, then?

Indeed – the regime is gym-based as you might imagine. I’ve always been into this type of fitness and was involved in running a gym before I joined the service.

Have you had any setbacks?

Yes – the biggest of them was a tendon injury in my left wrist. When you get something like that you just have to avoid anything that is going to irritate it and make it worse. Getting through it was a matter of rehab and more rehab.

How do you prep for a workout when you’re not in the mood?

For me, I think back to where I started and why I’m showing up every single day – and I try and surround myself with an environment that is positive, with high energy. In Team GB, I was proud to wear the Union Flag on my shirt and – honestly – I have the same feeling serving King and country.

What’s been your biggest barrier to better health and fitness?

Flexibility and mobility – coming from

powerlifting this has been a huge focus for me, especially with the different disciplines of Warrior Fitness. I’ve needed to work on my all-round fitness in order to compete. The run was the biggest test for me at Pirbright last year – there was one hill that was so steep, I was on my hands and knees.

Tell us about mealtimes

I don’t eat a set diet, but I do track my calories and protein, except on a Saturday when I have a free day and eat as I please. But I still work hard that day as it remains a big day of training.

Any guilty pleasures?

Ham and pineapple pizza and cheesy chips with salad cream – Cadbury’s Freddo chocolate bars and Caramels are also a personal favourite. I can do a couple each of those.

Energy drinks – yes or no?

For me, yes – but only sugar-free and pre-workout.

How many hours’ sleep do you get a night?

Ideally, I try to average between seven and nine hours.



OCEAN TO DESERT

A SUPER-FIT loggie who pulled in a world-first after rowing 3,000km across the Atlantic will this month be hot-footing it through the desert for her second punishing challenge in a year-and-a-half.

Capt Sheridan Lucas – who was a member of the inaugural all-female forces crew on the World’s Toughest Row from the Canaries to Antigua in late 2024 (pictured) – is now heading for Morocco to run 250km across the Sahara in the Marathon des Sables from April 3-13.

The officer – who is raising money for military good cause Walking with the Wounded – is a career soldier, having completed a full stint in the ranks before commissioning two years ago. Head to marathon-des-sables.walkingwiththewounded.org.uk to donate.



Pictures: Ian Corless and World’s Toughest Row

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kit



GOING LIVE

New kit trialled ahead of stateside test

Pictures: Graeme Main



MORE than 40 new capabilities were under the spotlight on Salisbury Plain as part of the Experimentation and Trials Group's (ETG) latest outing.

A brigade-level technical integration event, the two-and-a-half-week test was a chance to identify and resolve issues with kit including unmanned ground and air vehicles and radar systems before it is deployed alongside troops on Project Convergence Capstone in the US.

Among the innovations trialled was the use of a first-person view drone to lay fibre-optic cabling that can be used to link communications equipment, therefore reducing radio frequency emissions and minimising drone threats (middle image).

Previously implemented by the Grenadier Guards to connect two command posts in the field, the system was picked up by 2nd Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment – the army's experimentation battalion – who initially ran it over 1.8 kilometres. The aim was to extend this to 4.5 kilometres by the end of the exercise.

"This is a conceptual trial," Regimental Signals Officer Capt Jack McCormack told *Soldier*.

"On the modern battlefield the threat from

drone attacks relies on you being found, and that starts with the electromagnetic spectrum."

Elsewhere, personnel got hands on with the Skydio X10D drone (main image) that is due to be rolled out across the army this year.

Primarily used for tactical intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, the modular device boasts a 360-degree obstacle avoidance system, a 128x camera zoom, thermal imagery and a maximum flight time of 40 minutes among its suite of capabilities.

"I have not seen anything better when it comes to camera quality and the feed you get from the drone," said LCpl Niall Brown (R Yorks), one of those to get hands-on with the kit.

"It is simple to use, the controls are easy and the obstacle avoidance makes it pretty much impossible to crash. I like it a lot."

Meanwhile, industry partners ARX demonstrated a range of UGVs including counter-UAS and load carrying variants (bottom right image), while ground and air loitering munitions were also incorporated.

The ETG will deploy on Project Convergence Capstone over the summer, where the kit will be assessed in a tactical environment.

... BUT TRUSTED TECH STILL HAS ITS USES

TRIED and tested systems that have their roots in defeating the roadside bombs of the Op Telic and Herrick years must be adapted to quickly deal with modern drone threats, according to defence boffins.

Experts say that modifications to electronic countermeasures can successfully be effected to help protect troops facing a proliferation of uncrewed aerial systems.

They were speaking at the recent Future Soldier Technology exhibition in London, where tackling drones was one of the topics dominating the agenda.

Timothy Coley, product boss at Thales – which makes the wearable Storm 2 counter-IED device now modified to deal with drones – stressed that the UAS threat was "pervasive and persistent" as well as evolving on a near-daily basis.

He added: "When any hard-won advantage can be countered in a matter of weeks on the front lines of Ukraine, the challenge for industry is to move faster – which includes adapting existing technology to meet the latest threats."

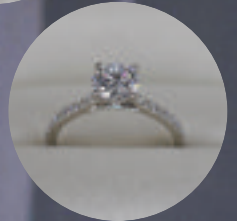


Troops carrying electronic countermeasures exit a Chinook in Sangin, Afghanistan in 2009

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welfare

BACK FROM THE EDGE

How a text service helped to save this soldier's life

IN EARLY 2021, amid a post-deployment relationship break-up and another Covid lockdown, reservist and high-altitude mountaineer SSgt Chris Proops (Int Corps) considered ending his life.

But thanks to support from the text helpline Shout 85258, things slowly began to look up.

Five years on, he shares his journey – along with his climbing expeds to some of the world's highest peaks – on Instagram, in the hope of helping others. And he told *Soldier* why it's so important to him to spread the word...

"I deployed to Iraq on Op Shader in 2020 and was there for seven months with no RnR due to the pandemic.

When I came back, the UK was still in lockdown and my relationship ended suddenly, which caught me off-guard.

Friends and family tried to reach out but they couldn't come and see me, so that made it even more difficult.

One day, while out on a walk, I decided I was going to kill myself. I knew how I would do it because one of my cousins had died by suicide and I was going to use the same method.

But sitting in my living room later, I just thought, 'what are you doing?'

I didn't feel like I could reach out to anyone because I thought maybe they would judge me or think I was being over-the-top, so instead I turned to Google and came across Shout 85258.

It was a number you could text, rather than call – being a guy, that seemed easier somehow than phoning.

The volunteer I was messaging – it was an actual person, not a chat bot – asked me when I was going to kill myself. They have to assess whether they need to call the police and that question threw me. It kind of snapped me out of it and brought me back to earth.

I began counselling sessions for a few months until I felt I didn't need them anymore. Journaling was also recommended as part of the recovery process and, again, I think as a guy, I found writing more helpful than talking.

Fitness and climbing have always been a big part of my mental health too. My attitude is just better when I've been for a run and in mountaineering there are times you need to be 100 per cent present because you are literally holding on for dear life.

Being in the middle of nowhere, in the silence of the mountains, gives you a focus – a bit like when you're on operations and only have one thing to think about.

I decided to use climbing as a way of raising money and awareness of Shout 85258 because getting that message out is really important to me.

In 2022 I went to Everest Base Camp. The following year I did Mera Peak and last year I summited Manaslu, also in Nepal. I'm climbing Mount Blanc in July and have plans to do Everest by 2030 too.

There are guys out there struggling, so by posting about my activities and at the same time talking openly about mental wellbeing I hope it will help people."

Name: SSgt Chris Proops, Int Corps
Age: 38
Military career: Joined in 2005 and has served in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Iraq
Civvy role: Head of intelligence for software company Blackdot Solutions
Follow: @chrisclimbs2022 on Instagram



REACH OUT

Text **SHOUT** to **85258** to access free, confidential support, 24/7.

Turn to page 62 for further mental health resources

BIG PIC



THE character, strength and individuality of female Chelsea Pensioners has been immortalised in a special set of photos.

Captured by Jackie King, the images went on display last month to mark International Women's Day and can be viewed at jackieking.com

Ex-servicewomen were first admitted to the Royal Hospital Chelsea in 2009 - 317 years after the iconic institution first opened its doors to former soldiers.



veterans



INHERITANCE TRACKS

Ex-NCO sets up unique historical resource

A ROYAL Signals vet turned researcher has recalled how experience in uniform helped set up an outfit charting the Caribbean community's distinct heritage.

Using an archive of documents handed down by his dad as a starting point, Matt Johnston recently established the Trust for Records of Enslavement and Emancipation (Tree) Foundation, charting a history that started in the 1700s era of colonialism.

He has also expanded the library to include docs that bring the story into the modern era – including items relating to the Windrush generation, the immigrants who answered government calls to rebuild the UK after the Second World War.

Now helped by teenage daughter Sunday, the former soldier, who served on Op Herrick, has been busy digitising the collection and making it available to the likes of schools and museums.

Johnston – who grew up in Colchester but whose family are originally from Jamaica – told *Soldier*: “The Tree Foundation started with my

father Desmond, who also served and was a member of the Royal Artillery – he collected these documents and handed them down.

“The skills I took away from the army helped with the project – for example, presenting to people from big organisations and getting key points across quickly.

“I have also been sharing this knowledge with my daughter, who is 15, explaining how you must approach serious work with both clarity and discipline.”

The 42-year-old (shown) said the family archive had now been carefully examined. New documents had brought the story up-to-date, with records relating to the 1980s and beyond.

As well as opening the collection up to well-known groups such as the National Trust, future activities including presentations were also being planned.

Johnston concluded: “We are aiming to make this one of the UK's major resources on the times that started with enslavement and emancipation, all with unique documentation.”



‘HELP FOR HER’ Campaign targets women

A LEADING military charity is beefing up services for female personnel after shock stats revealed that many are struggling to make the transition to civvy life.

Help for Heroes said women had a higher rate of medical discharge than men, still had to

IN NUMBERS: SOLDIER STRIFE

6
in ten vets didn't have a new job lined up on leaving

30
per cent of ex-servicewomen are classed as disabled

9.5
per cent of female veterans are in bad or very bad health

contend with ill-fitting kit and that many did not identify with the term ‘veteran’ due to the likes of unresolved stigma and shame.

In launching the new Help for Her initiative, the charity said services had been expanded to include a unique web page, information pack for health professionals and a series of women-only sports taster sessions.

Charity case manager Julie-Anne Fulford, who served with Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps, added: “The

new campaign is for every woman who wore a uniform; we understand that their experiences are all unique.”

Visit helpforheroes.org.uk for more information on the project.



INVICTUS VOYAGE SETS SAIL

A PAIR of square-rigged tall ships crewed by teams of wounded, injured and sick veterans are taking to the seas to promote the forthcoming Invictus Games.

The Full Circle expedition will see the *Spirit of Falmouth* and *Pellow* (pictured) sail from Cornwall to 22 ports in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland before returning to the West Country in mid-June.

A 70-strong team, rotated during the three-month voyage, will crew the vessels. Organised by charity Turn to Starboard, the ships will carry the Invictus Games flag in preparation for the prestigious competition in Birmingham next year.

THE WAR GAME

How troops on Cabrit's lesser-known front are preparing for conflict – with the aim of deterrence

POLAND might have been an age-old training venue of choice for Nato – but with the way world events are currently moving, there is now a tangible feeling of a transformation from exercise zone to operational area.

The war in neighbouring Ukraine has changed perspectives in the last four years. With drones from Russian forces straying across the border and scores of fleeing refugees arriving in country, it is impossible to ignore the close proximity of this conflict. If the Kremlin's leadership should ever expand their ambitions towards alliance territory, then the soldiers holding the line at Op Cabrit's eastern

flank would be first to meet the incursion.

And given the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, it is near-impossible to judge where events might lead. The latest escalation might be thousands of miles away, but Iran's hardline theocracy, now under attack from America and Israel, has been a lavish supplier of Shahed one-way drone tech to Vladimir Putin. Issues with oil supply and closure of the Straits of Hormuz in the Gulf have led to concerns over the availability of fuel – and the ramifications of a war well outside of the UK's remit could yet impact Europe.

Uncertainty, however, has always been par for the course in soldiering – and there has been a calm business as usual for personnel on the ground at the >>

Report: Cliff Caswell | Pictures: Beth Proddger



Main picture **A soldier moves to an objective during the tour's final training burst** Below **Troops work through a wood block** Right **Infanteers break cover as they advance**



‘Our soldiers have really thrived... we understand how the other nations operate’



» Bemowo Piskie training area, a two-and-a-half hour drive from the capital Warsaw.

While the focus of Nato’s Eastern European deterrence mission might squarely be on Estonia, where a battlegroup under British command is leading the charge, UK troops in Poland have been playing an equally critical role. And the latest personnel on the scene – infanteers from 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment – have been making their presence felt in support of the Americans.

“We are now into the 18th rotation of Op Cabrit in Poland – it was actually an earlier deployment than the one running in Estonia,” points out Capt Hamish MacKellar (pictured left), commanding the Poachers’ anti-tank platoon. “Here, our forces are integrated as part of the United States 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment Battlegroup – which is centred on heavy armour.

“As well as the Americans, we are also working alongside our Croatian and Romanian allies – so this presents some extremely good opportunities to train together with all of us working to the command of a Polish brigade.”

It has certainly been a demanding tour for the seasoned infanteers, centred on the battalion’s Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Group.

Their six-month winter outing, in temperatures that have plunged well below zero, has seen them take part in a major exercise. And most recently they have been honing support weapons drills – notably with the sniper operators’ course and anti-tank package that saw troops break out the Javelin and NLAW anti-armour systems, plus the reconnaissance patrols cadre.

“Honestly, our soldiers have really thrived,” adds Capt MacKellar. “As the army has been working on Cabrit for several years now, we understand how the other nations operate – but there are always new things to take away.”

A foray to Estonia (*Soldier, March*) was a case in point for new learning.

“We all literally took the plunge on the cold weather operators’ course, which is an experience in itself, and went on to play the opposing force on Winter Camp for the Royal Tank Regiment-led battlegroup,” he continues.

While the latest cadres are a familiar feature of army life on UK soil, conducting them with Nato allies brings an added dimension to well-understood serials.

Notably, the anti-armour package saw the troops get up close and personal with the formidable American M1A2 Abrams main battle tank as they worked through a serial that also featured vehicle recognition and counter-ambush drills. And they were able to learn from other nations in the battlegroup as they were put through their paces in sniping and recce disciplines. »

Main picture **Infanteers size up their options as they work through the trees**

Top left **Troops move through dense forest foliage** Bottom left **A soldier sets his sights on the task in hand**

» "It has been great working at Nato level in Poland," says Capt Cameron Johnstone, who has been on his first major deployment with the British Army. "I've been the liaison officer to the US battlegroup, which has helped build my experience - you gain a lot from being somewhere for six months.

"The British element here are effectively the eyes for the American firepower and, as such, we have been kept very busy throughout the tour."

While operating in brutal weather had proved a test of its own, soldiers had risen to the challenge professionally, Capt Johnstone adds. "Working in extreme cold, with temperatures of -20 Celsius, has been a first for me," he continues. "But we are out on ops, doing the job we are trained to do."

LCpl Jordan Redway shares the sentiment, adding that soldiering with other Nato nations on a day-to-day basis had been an invaluable experience for the infanteers. He also points out that the proving ground is varied, with environments for fighting in woods and forests plus built-up areas.

Working with allies from less familiar nations such as Croatia and Romania had been especially eye-opening as the Brits traded both skills and knowledge.

"We managed to overcome the challenges facing us, especially the language barrier," the NCO says. "The teamwork has been great."

And Cpl Joe Ramsden (pictured right) - who has been managing the Poachers' fleet of 20-or-more Jackals and Coyotes during the tour - was also kept busy, ensuring the kit was fit for purpose during the extreme weather conditions.

Winter Camp had been a particular test, with temperatures sliding towards -30 Celsius in Estonia. He says: "This is the first time I've done Cabrit and I've been cutting around all over the place to ensure the vehicles are working - the soldiers have done well in solving problems themselves.

"Working with other nations has also been great - the USA has always been a close counterpart - and the tour has been a good opportunity to learn."

The NCO certainly has a point - accruing this type of experience is critical for troops. Whereas major multinational deployments of Afghanistan and the Balkans once provided regular rotations and exposure to the Nato environment, such large-scale deployments are now scarcer. Cabrit offers a unique opening to a large op and the chance to embed in the alliance.

In these uncertain times, the mission of collective defence via ceaseless preparation for conflict becomes evermore important. Amid the proverbial wars - and rumours of wars - deterrence is perhaps the best weapon in the toolkit. <<





FACT FILE

3rd Battalion,
8th Cavalry Regiment

Nickname: War Horse

Op Cabrit role: Leading multinational
battlegroup, Poland

Equipped with: M1A2 Abrams tanks;
Bradley AFVs

Attached to: 1st Cavalry Division

Normally based: Fort Hood, Texas

2nd Battalion,
The Royal Anglian Regiment

Nickname: The Poachers

Op Cabrit role: Intelligence, Surveillance
and Reconnaissance Group

Equipped with: Jackal and Coyote

Attached to: 7th Light Mechanised
Brigade

Normally based: Cottesmore, Leics

‘I’ve been cutting around
all over the place to ensure
the vehicles are working’

Right **Troops from 2 Para drop in on Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan training area** Below left **A paratrooper observes from a concealed position** Top left **A British section boards a French helicopter**



Report: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Cpl John Warburton, RLC



OUT OF THE BLUE

Airborne allies take the high ground on major multinational outing in France

I **T WAS a masterclass in precision delivery – carried out with a professionalism forged through years of joint training.**

Gliding through the skies of northern France, the elusive human cargo of a Royal Air Force A400M Atlas headed towards their target.

From the ground, it was hard to believe these pinpricks were freefalling troops with the power to smash a gap in air defences and pave the way for an assault force.

But their quiet approach was the calm before the storm.

Touching down on the Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan training area in Brittany, the Pathfinders and their French counterparts from Groupe Commando Parachutiste were

quick to ply their lethal trade.

Securing a drop zone, the way was clear for a 180-strong cohort from a battlegroup built around 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, who were inbound on two other transports. Exercise Orion had begun.

“The more we train together, the more we are ready to operate together,” explained Maj Dan Lauder (PWRR), part of the team coordinating the mock deployment, as personnel in the assault team consolidated their positions.

“The partnership between the British and French is capable and historic – with a mindset allowing us to work together in a way that is unique and effective.”

By all accounts, the exercising 16 Air Assault Brigade and 11e Brigade Parachutiste >>

Clockwise from top left **The Royal Military Police join the fray; a French soldier lends support on the ground; 2 Para UAS operator Pte Stuart Hay launches a drone; Paratroopers approach the drop zone in a RAF Atlas A400M**



‘The partnership between the British and French is capable and historic’



» have developed a formidable relationship since coming together to form the Airborne Command Joint Force 13 years ago.

Interoperability is more than a buzzword for these two formations, who also serve as their own nations' rapid reaction forces, and working within each other's operational structures is now instinctive.

They have constantly adapted to a changing world since 2013, deploying new technologies while assimilating lessons from conflicts and incorporating them into training. Command is rotated between the two states every two years.

Orion marked another milestone in the relationship. Involving 2,000 troops, the exercise saw personnel face a mock campaign by irregular fighters with a hostile conventional force readying nearby.

"As a mission set it could not be more realistic or relevant given the global context," said 2 Para commanding officer Lt Col Craig Shephard.

"The exercise is about supporting a Nato ally in deterring an aggressive insurgent force with tanks massing on a border."

The outing was a complex affair from the start. Led by 11e Brigade, the nine days of operations began with British planners assembling at a combined headquarters at the Orléans-Bricy airbase, close to Paris.

Following advance actions by the Pathfinders, two French battlegroups took off from the runway at HQ – bolstered by hundreds of 2 Para colleagues – to descend over Brittany, while other British troops boarded aircraft back at RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire.

Meanwhile, Italian counterparts from the Brigata Paracadutisti Folgore jumped into the exercise area after flying across from their home soil.

Once in situ, the multinational troops were moved across theatre by helicopters as they battled the local insurgency.

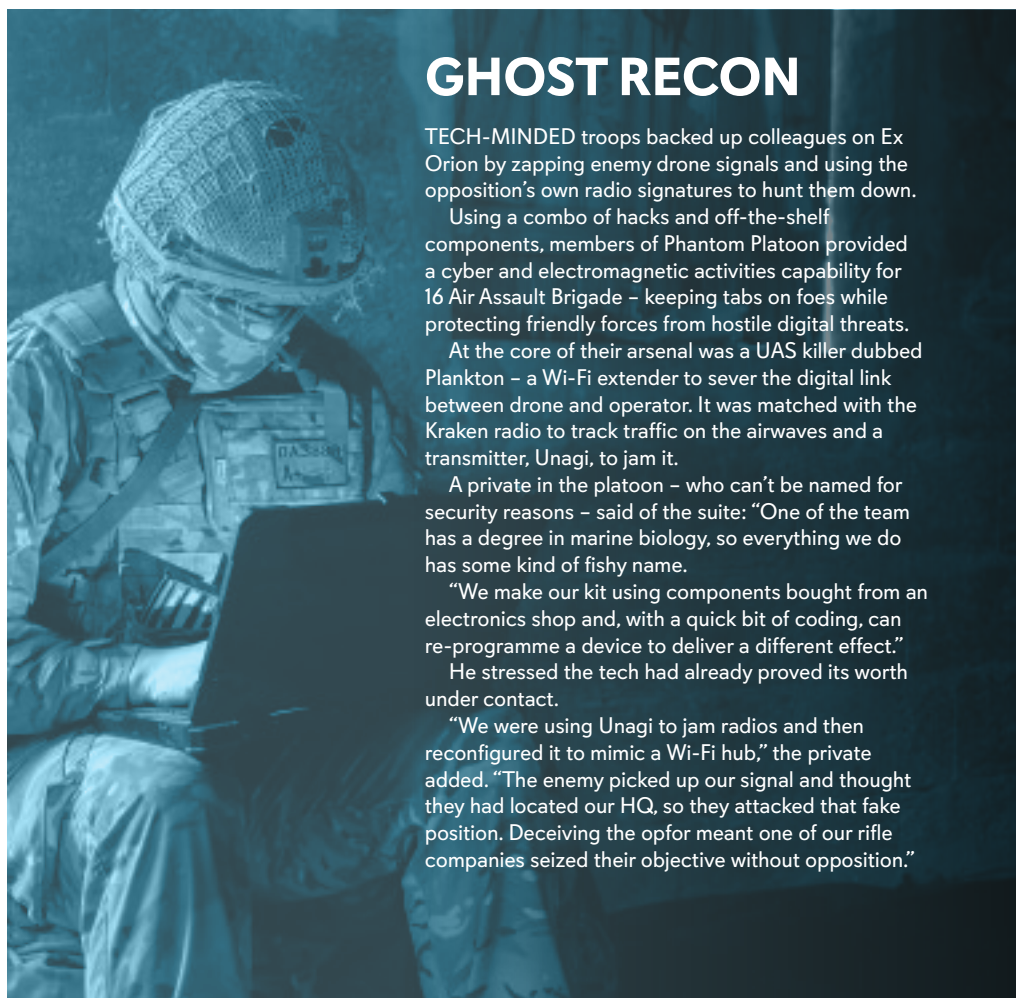
But with one eye on the emerging conventional threat, they had to think about defensive positions too.

Lt Col Shephard compared the combined operating model of the joint force to a boxer facing an opponent in the ring.

"We provide the right hook, the French the left-hand jab, and 11 Brigade serves as the brain to stitch it all together and coordinate our actions," he quipped.

"We have also operated with new technology, using drones to advance how far we can see," he said – adding that a new Phantom Platoon had been tasked with harassing the enemy's digital capabilities (see panel right).

But soldiering had been crucial to success, with troops sustaining themselves and remaining agile despite the hardships of the field. »



GHOST RECON

TECH-MINDED troops backed up colleagues on Ex Orion by zapping enemy drone signals and using the opposition's own radio signatures to hunt them down.

Using a combo of hacks and off-the-shelf components, members of Phantom Platoon provided a cyber and electromagnetic activities capability for 16 Air Assault Brigade – keeping tabs on foes while protecting friendly forces from hostile digital threats.

At the core of their arsenal was a UAS killer dubbed Plankton – a Wi-Fi extender to sever the digital link between drone and operator. It was matched with the Kraken radio to track traffic on the airwaves and a transmitter, Unagi, to jam it.

A private in the platoon – who can't be named for security reasons – said of the suite: "One of the team has a degree in marine biology, so everything we do has some kind of fishy name.

"We make our kit using components bought from an electronics shop and, with a quick bit of coding, can re-programme a device to deliver a different effect."

He stressed the tech had already proved its worth under contact.

"We were using Unagi to jam radios and then reconfigured it to mimic a Wi-Fi hub," the private added. "The enemy picked up our signal and thought they had located our HQ, so they attacked that fake position. Deceiving the opfor meant one of our rifle companies seized their objective without opposition."

Far right, top **A 2 Para soldier maintains a low profile** Far right, below **A section works to extract a casualty** Below **British troops hone airborne insertion skills**

» “It is great to observe paratroopers with that airborne forces mindset; ready to interact with any problem and living off what they carry,” said Lt Col Shephard.

Elsewhere, medical and logistic chains were tested.

Operating at reach, doctors treated casualties in positions further forward than they normally would – the aim being to give lifesaving treatment at an earlier stage.

And resupply was provided by Royal Logistic Corps troops from 47 Air Despatch Squadron, who unloaded 18 tonnes of food, supplies and ammunition.

“This was a sortie that we incorporated into our routine training schedule, but it was definitely an interesting mix of kit that we put out,” Maj Sam Kennedy, OC of the Brize Norton-based sub-unit, told *Soldier* following the action.

“There was everything from quad bikes to rations included in the drop to the 16 Air Assault Brigade units – it was a good exercise, out to France and back to Oxfordshire, and I was pleased with the way everyone performed.

“Our soldiers are doing sorties all the time, every week dropping different kit – it is always great for the squadron to have opportunities to give support.”

Top brass were also satisfied with the outcome, with 11e Brigade commander Gen Renaud Rondet the first to praise troops for their performance.

“The deployment demonstrates the responsiveness and capability of this force, ready to fight in extreme conditions and complex environments,” he said

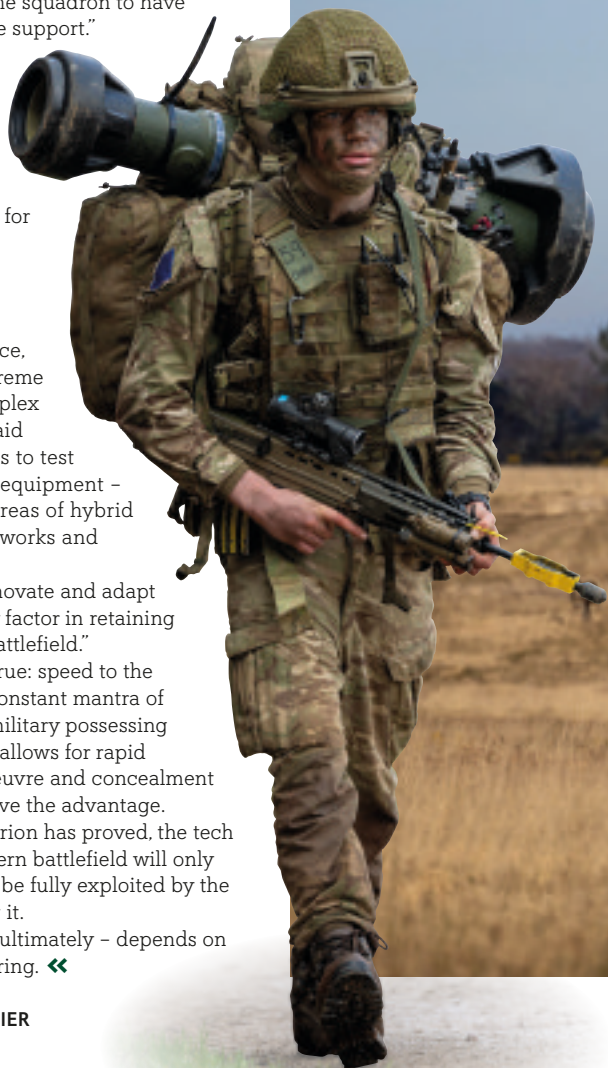
“It also allowed us to test new structures and equipment – particularly in the areas of hybrid communication networks and drone integration.

“The ability to innovate and adapt quickly is now a key factor in retaining superiority on the battlefield.”

This is certainly true: speed to the trigger has been a constant mantra of commanders. Any military possessing the technology that allows for rapid engagement, manoeuvre and concealment will undoubtedly have the advantage.

But as Exercise Orion has proved, the tech that overlays a modern battlefield will only be effective if it can be fully exploited by the personnel operating it.

Fighting power – ultimately – depends on the quality of soldiering. «





‘It could not be more realistic given the global context’



SPECIAL EFFECTS

How future rations could give troops a battle-winning boost like never before

FROM the morale sweets handed round in freezing-cold Estonia to the ration-pack curry munched in an OP in Kenya, the well-worn saying that 'an army marches on its stomach' is as true today as it has ever been.

But growing understanding of nutritional science and human performance has put operational ration packs under the microscope of defence boffins. And their findings suggest these food parcels have the potential to unlock an impressive new level of human advantage which could boost fighting power.

In a piece of world-leading research that has turned the heads of partner nations including the US Army, UK defence nutritionists at the Institute of Naval Medicine (INM) have designed a next-generation feeding system.

Not only is the rapid insertion ration (RIR) lighter and more compact as you might expect in an age of dispersed fighting and drone resupply, but it is seriously smart on the nutritional content front.

With items that are colour-coded according to the functional benefits they bring (long-range or fast fuels, for example), the products are fortified with various ingredients to support soldiers when they need it most.

Collagen, proteins and vitamins, to name a few, help with things like injury repair, bone strength, immunity and mood. And the supplies can be deployed in different combinations to match any particular operational requirement – slow releasing carbs for long-term patrols,

for example, or quick energy bursts for night attacks.

The study was led by the research and experimentation branch of Defence Support.

Known as the Future Defence Deployed Nutrition project, its findings are part of a bigger idea the scientists have put forward around leveraging nutrition as a capability.

Programme lead Dr Jo Fallowfield told *Soldier* the RIR had been trialled by various UK high-readiness units over the last four years, with feedback positive and evidence suggesting this could deliver strategic benefits on the battlefield.

Putting together the prototype had, she said, required moving away from an energy-provision mindset to one that embraces "all the different functional characteristics of food".

"Tasty food is way more important than just fuel," the expert added.

"We wanted to think much more scientifically about how we enhance the performance of our soldiers.

"At the moment, when you open the operational ration pack you find breakfast, a main meal and an assortment of snacks. But we wanted to include components that deliver strategic effects – products for bursts of energy, for example, or hydration. It was about thinking differently about composition and trying to get away from 'it's this time of day, so I need to eat a meal'.

"We parked that because, as we know, when on ops you don't follow the normal 24-hour clock. >>



Ingredients:
Potatoes (1.25
Black Salt
Marjoram
Nutritional
Energy (kJ)
Fat (g)
Of which
Carbohydrate
Of which sugar
Fibre (g)
Protein (g)
Salt (g)
Storage: Store in a cool, dry place.
Preparation: Follow the instructions on the packet.
Date: 10/10/10
Pack size: 100g
Lot No.

» “The whole point was to work with the most nutritionally challenging model – very high readiness forces on complex tasks – and come up with a solution, then seeing what we can pull through to other operational arms so we do the best for everybody.

“But food is also a key part of morale and a little piece of home, so it needed to taste good.”

After examining current ORPs, her team drew up a list of all possible nutritional ‘superpowers’ that could be used to support land forces – for example, bovine collagen to help with muscle repair, antioxidants to mitigate tissue effects of thermal stress or antimicrobials to cut infection risk.

Trying to incorporate these benefits into a ration pack weighing no more than 8kg and that lasts for seven days, they then scoured commercial off-the-shelf products to see what could meet this criteria.

Working closely with a team of military chefs and scientists, they went about compiling the RIR, a commercial example of which can be seen below.

It contains a higher number of calories than the current ORP but in fewer items of better quality, with less refined sugar and more complex carbs.

However, recognising that rapid sugar boosts can be vital on ops – not to mention good for morale – there are still plenty of tasty treats to be found inside this version, including fudge fortified with collagen and a chocolate bar developed by a military chef/chocolatier with vitamin D and calcium to support stronger bones.

The UK Commando Force has understood the need for a smaller and more nutritiously dense ration for quite some time, and has been closely involved with the project from the start.

Lt Col Bernie Manning (RM), one of the senior officers supporting the work, explained how commandos had been quick to see the benefits of the RIR when they tested it during long-range patrols and on mountain leader training in Norway last year.



“It’s lighter, has lots to it, and is more intelligent in terms of how it can be used,” he explained. “Whether it tastes good is arguably the most important feedback, though, and the comments we had from the field were that, yes, it does.

“Clearly, some real consideration has gone into this. There are some really interesting ideas of flavours, too, which is great to see.

“The lads were encouraged that people are thinking about this stuff and how it can contribute to their health and endurance when it counts, to deliver operations.

“And importantly, they said they still found them palatable 14 weeks in. For anyone sat cold and wet, and unsure when a deployment will end, morale can often come from the ration packs.”

Lt Col Manning has been a big fan of the British ‘ratpack’ during his 28 years of service.

“In the time I have been in, they have certainly come on leaps and bounds,” he continued.

“But in the same way we are now asking people to do different roles than before with updated kit – nutrition needs to be understood as a capability that keeps troops in the fight for longer.

“The type of people we are recruiting into the military now are also very savvy about nutrition, good eating and health, so it’s only right that our feeding meets what it is they expect.”

It is a sentiment echoed by performance food consultant Jase Tooley (ex-RM), who helped put together a commercial variant of the RIR pictured here, which was tested by the commandos.

“Soldiers today walk around with millions of pounds’ worth of equipment

Top right **A soldier munches the army’s current ration pack** Below **Examples of the functional food inside the RIR**



Make your views known on current ration pack meals – fill in the HQ Field Army questionnaire above before the end of June

but then open a box of empty calories and are expected to perform at an elite level," he commented.

"But with these rations, not only are you optimising performance with better, cleaner nutrition, troops also told us it was great to feel invested in.

"I have trialled this ration extensively now with tier one and two units in defence, and quite a few military units on short-term missions are starting to factor this sort of food into their budgets.

"We have seen it used in places from Norway to the jungle, and the colour-coded packs can be put together for different environments or requirements.

"Everyone who's tested them says they're a game changer."

Lt Col Simon Watkins (RLC) from Defence Support is unequivocal that lighter, smarter rations have the potential to become another important weapon in a fighting formation's arsenal.

"What's the most complex capability we hold in defence? The human body," he said.

"You can absolutely see a scenario one day where the QM and chefs sit in on an O-group and as everyone is briefed on a requirement, they can allocate food and rations that will help to deliver those effects.

"There is potential for our military chefs to become nutritional experts in their own right, and in fact nutrition is already being included in our chef training today."

It is this idea of a wider system of nutritional capability that underpins the RIR trial.

As Dr Fallowfield concludes in one of her reports: "A whole system approach - with a focus on nutrition quality as well as quantity - is required.

"Provision, education and delivery should be tailored to the end user and to each phase of the human capability cycle, to enable members to prepare, perform and recover optimally, in garrison, training or theatre."

Last year, after reading this research, the US Army introduced its new-look close combat assault ration.

Using the findings of Dr Fallowfield and her team, the Department of Defense commissioned, tested and procured a variant of the RIR within nine months.

And it has now been issued to the country's very high readiness troops.

The same work has also attracted the attention of various other Nato nations.

Back on home soil, it remains to be seen how these findings could be used to inform future feeding - currently, the strategic use of functional food is not part of the army's specification for UK ration packs (the army is the lead command for rations) and its current contract with Vestey Foods is not up until 2028.

However, as this issue went to press, Defence Support was running a wider scoping exercise to see what other off-the-shelf products exist for lighter, highly nutritious and more compact rations.

In the meantime, the great British ratpack will continue to have both lovers and haters.

Turn to **Final Word** on page 74 and **Talkback** on page 57, where troops share their views on dream rations and an excess of bean curries.

Whatever comes next, there is one thing this exciting research makes clear: if British fighters weren't terrifying enough on the battlefield, turbofuelling them at just the right operational moment - and giving them a good dose of morale in the process - could certainly spell endgame for their enemies. <<

HIT THE GROUND MUNCHING

5 ways to ensure you are physically ready for ops

1 BALANCE YOURSELF
 Eat from each food group (fruit and veg, dairy, protein, starchy carbohydrates), while minimising the intake of processed foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar. This will help provide key nutrients and an appropriate amount of energy.

2 FUEL UP
 Increase your intake of starchy carbs in the days leading up, to ensure muscles are well stocked with energy. Add portions of oats, bread, pasta, rice and potatoes to meals.

3 HYDRATE
 A simple way to support performance. This can be monitored by checking your urine, with a clear to pale yellow colour the target.

4 REMEMBER VIT D
 Most of us are vitamin D insufficient or deficient during the winter, which can be a problem due to the role it plays in injury and illness prevention. Taking an 800-1,000IU supplement for eight weeks prior to deployment will help increase blood levels.

5 TRY A PROBIOTIC
 There is evidence that taking a daily probiotic can reduce illness and the risk of traveller's diarrhoea when transiting through multiple time zones. Probiotics contain live bacteria which support gut health.

Tips from human performance scientist Shaun Chapman, Army HQ

Army
Benevolent
Fund

CATERAN YOMP

54 MILES. 24 HOURS. 6-7 JUNE 2026.

A (54 MILE) WALK IN THE PARK.

The CATERAN YOMP is the ultimate endurance event that raises vital funds to support soldiers, veterans and their families in times of need.

Each year, soldiers and charity supporters from across the globe gather in the Scottish wilderness to trek through the stunning foothills of the Cairngorm mountains. To complete the Yomp takes mental toughness and peak physical fitness.

Sign-up for a truly unforgettable experience and provide vital support for the Army Benevolent Fund.



ACHIEVE GOLD DISTINCTION - THE MARK OF EXCELLENCE

Last year, 13 teams achieved the Gold Distinction Award. Exclusive to serving soldiers, the award challenges teams to start and finish all 54 miles together, as a team, in under 24 hours.

Here are the 13 Gold Distinction teams from 2025:

- 1 LANCS
- 1 LANCS AA
- 1 LANCS CIS
- 2 FS BN REME
- 7 SCOTS
- 9 Regiment RLC
- 11 EOD&SEARCH Regiment RLC
- 77X
- 150 Regiment RLC
- ATR (Winchester)
- ITC Catterick
- TDDG CMC
- The King's Royal Hussars

Military teams may be eligible for support through public or unit/service non-public funds to cover entry fees and transport for the event. For full guidance, refer to ACSO 1209. Most of the key details needed to secure funding, complete admin instructions, or submit risk assessments are available via the QR link below, so you can get everything squared away and be ready to yomp.

HAS YOUR UNIT GOT WHAT IT TAKES TO JOIN THEM?



Put yourself to the test, scan the QR code or search 'Cateran Yomp' to register your place.



Below **Candidates on the Sandhurst instructor aptitude cadre dig deep on a log race in front of the New College building**



Report: Becky Clark Photos: Graeme Main

FORGING FUTURE LEADERS

Behind the scenes of
Sandhurst's instructor
selection process »



Below **Exercise Long Reach** sees potential instructors complete a 35-mile tab across the Black Mountains, plus various command tasks, in 36 hours

» **WATCHING TV one Saturday morning in his accommodation, Sgt Michael Jasper (RE) heard a sound that instantly turned the clock back to his days as a fresh-faced recruit.**

“I was having a cup of tea and doing my ironing while Trooping the Colour was on,” he recalled.

“The Coldstream Guards were shown rehearsing, and this voice was barking out words of command.

“All the hairs on the back of my neck stood up, I looked over and it was my lance sergeant from basic training.

“It was like I was back on the parade square – you never forget your instructors.”

It’s an anecdote that illustrates just how formative those early days in the army are for soldiers, when the shock of capture is still raw and the realities of life in uniform begin to sink in.

And it’s no different for officer cadets arriving at the gates of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst for the very first time – a rite of passage that even the chief of the general staff no doubt remembers vividly.

Given that they will become the leaders of the future, at the sharp end of whatever conflict scenario the army finds itself in, the institution is rightly choosy about who it entrusts with their transformation from civvies to

‘It’s one of the most rewarding roles’

competent commanders.

Of the latest cohort to attend the Sandhurst instructor aptitude cadre (SIAC), less than half made the cut.

Over the course of four weeks, applicants must demonstrate top-notch soldiering skills, including fitness, navigation and drill, as well as a sound grasp of military planning and the ability to deliver clear and engaging lessons on a variety of topics.

They also complete Exercise Long Reach alongside officer cadets – a 35-mile, 36-hour endurance march across Wales’s Black Mountains with navigation and command tasks thrown in.

As *Soldier* discovered when we dropped in on this year’s package, candidates commonly have a wealth of experience in previous training roles and are passionate about the chance to help mould the next generation.

Sjt Dale Dannatt (Rifles) explained how stints at phase one establishments, teaching NCO cadres and working with Ukrainian recruits on Op Interflex, had influenced his decision to apply.

“I’ve taught throughout my career – I love it,” he said.

“I like being able to give back to people and impart a bit

of wisdom and knowledge.

“This is also a great learning experience for me. As a senior NCO, you’re sort of at the top of your game and being at battalion becomes a bit rinse-and-repeat, so coming here and competing against others who are also at the top of their game puts you under pressure and is educational at the same time.

“Whether I’m successful or not, I will definitely be better for it as an individual.”

With the course open to sergeants of two years as well as staff or colour sergeants, applicants have around a decade-and-a-half of service under their belts – more than enough time to have encountered good and bad examples of leadership.

Reflecting on the qualities he would aim to instil in future officers, Sjt Dannatt continued: “I’ve worked with some brilliant leaders and others less so.

“For the good ones, the underlying factor is that they look out for their people and aren’t in it for themselves or to advance their own careers.

“Whether you’re a platoon commander, a company commander, the CO or CGS, you’ve got to look after your





PERMANENT STAFF SPEAK OUT

ON LIFE AT SANDHURST...

"It's **fast-paced**. As we tell the candidates, you don't come here for two years off, you come here to **train the leaders you want**, and that the British Army deserves.

And it's not nine-to-five. Sometimes you start at four in the morning and you're in the office until 2000. But no matter how hard you work, you definitely **see the rewards** at the end on Sovereign's Parade – it's an extremely proud day for the instructors, as well as for the officer cadets and their families."

CSgt Lewis Dunbar, R Yorks
SIAC instructor



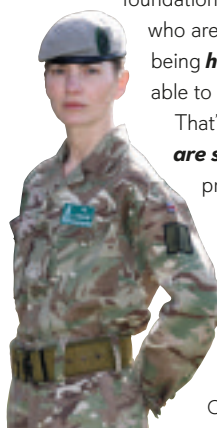
ON TALENT SPOTTING...

"Candidates obviously need to be credible and have good foundations, but we want people who lean in and who are team players. We look for qualities such as being **humble**, having a **good work ethic**, being able to self-reflect and **adaptability**.

That's a big one because the **officer cadets are super-diverse**, from royalty to non-privileged backgrounds, graduates and non-graduates.

Nobody wants a textbook leader, we want authentic leaders. And that's what we're looking for here – **authentic instructors**."

WO2 Cally-Jay Brunton, RAMS
Company Sergeant Major, Malaya Company



ON CHANNELLING DISAPPOINTMENT...

"For those not selected, the four weeks they spend here is never wasted. Whether it's through the course content or the influence of their peers, **they will leave here better senior NCOs**. So we invite other training organisations such as Army Individual Training Command, Collective Training Group and the Infantry Battle School to brief all the candidates on the final day about the **opportunities** they have available for instructors.

Rather than leaving here disgruntled, I hope they will consider using their **skills and experience** in other roles."

WO1 Dwain Oliver
Academy Sergeant Major



soldiers. And I think humility is key – remembering where you started and that others have helped get you to the position you're in."

The fact that some of today's officer cadets will one day reach the very highest echelons of leadership was also not lost on CSgt Aaron Forrest (Coldm Gds).

"Ultimately, the people who come through Sandhurst will go on to be commanding officers, in charge of battalions, all the way up to the individuals running the army one day," he said.

"When you consider that bigger picture and the part you could play in their development, I think it's one of the most rewarding roles on offer."

While infanteers form the bulk of each intake, academy staff are keen to encourage personnel from other cap badges to put themselves forward so that the instructor cohort is drawn from a wide range of backgrounds.

Along with the Royal Engineers, the Adjutant General's Corps, Royal Signals, Royal Logistic Corps and Royal Tank Regiment were represented on the last course.

Meanwhile, Sgt Sam Bailey (Para) said those thinking of applying – whatever their background – should not be >>

Top left **Sound navigation skills are a key requirement on the SIAC** Top right **Candidates tackle a command task in Brecon** Bottom right **Assessing a mine awareness lesson**

» discouraged by rumours surrounding selection.

"I heard a lot of horror stories in the past, for example that you get treated like day-one recruits by people just one rank above you, but that's not how it is at all," he added.

"I've enjoyed pretty much every second and learnt a lot. The tempo has been steady - you're not up until three in the morning prepping lessons.

"We've been given ample time to plan and administer ourselves correctly. The staff have made us feel comfortable and they're very professional."

Two-day briefing courses take place three times per year to bring prospective candidates up to speed on the instructor role and its requirements.

Some cap badges also run additional preparation packages to set their personnel up for success.

Beyond that, it is up to applicants to ensure they give themselves the best chance of progressing.

Fitness is paramount, it goes without saying, but Sgt John Adcock (R Anglian) also recommended squaring other fundamentals away ahead of time.

"You have to prep your kit," he said. "Get brand new sets of uniform and make sure there are no holes anywhere so you look the part.

"And then you should go over your military knowledge, navigation theory and all that basic stuff."

With the spectre of conventional war looming once



'Nobody wants a textbook leader – we want authentic'

more, equipping officer cadets with solid soldiering foundations is as important as it's ever been - and like much of the army's training activity, the cadre is updated on a rolling basis to incorporate lessons from Ukraine.

While direct combat experience has dwindled in the post-Afghanistan and Iraq era, the latest cohort of instructor hopefuls are still of the generation who deployed on high-intensity ops as youngsters.

Just as Sgt Jasper's first instructor made a lasting impression, he still vividly recalls the impact his leaders had in Helmand.

"We were constructing an IED-proof road between patrol bases in Babaji and the NCOs and troop commanders played a massive role in our morale and the overall operation," said the sapper (right).

"There were bad days, but we were like family and we had a good ethos, driven by the officers and sergeants.

"Because I went through basic training when Afghanistan was active, the lessons were all about, 'you need to know this because it could save your life, or your basha partner's life'.



"It will be the same for those joining now, who could be going out of the door soon too."

With such realities in mind, only the best of the latest crop will report for duty at Sandhurst come the new term in September.

After a month of all-out effort, 34 of the 63-strong group to start SIAC 2026 received a recommendation from academy staff, with the final cut for the 27 available slots made by the Army Personnel Centre in Glasgow.

Successful applicants will undergo a number of mandatory courses before taking up post, including advanced drill and, for the first time this year, a new tactics standardisation package.

And despite the disappointment, all is not lost for those not selected.

In a move aimed at harnessing instructor talent, personnel are signposted to other training roles across the army. So although only a few earn the opportunity to shape the leaders of tomorrow, every candidate leaves the cadre stronger and in a position to channel their skills for the benefit of the wider service. <<



INTERESTED IN SIAC 2027?

» You must have been a substantive sergeant for 18 months by Feb 2027

» The application deadline is **December 11**

» The next two-day briefing course at RMAS takes place May 18-19, with another to follow in September

» The month-long SIAC then begins **February 14, 2027**, with selections made in March and the new intake reporting for duty in September

» For full details of the application process and prerequisite qualifications speak to your RCMO





A 2 PARA soldier observes from a concealed position during Exercise Orion in France. Read all about the joint rapid reaction force manoeuvres in our feature from page 36.

Picture: Cpl John Warburton, RLC

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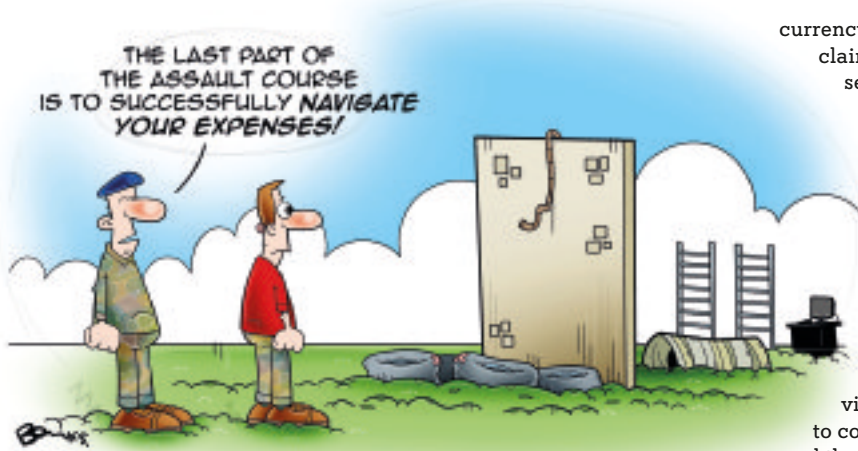
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TALKBACK

mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk WhatsApp +447789 034748

YOUR letters provide an insight into the issues at the top of soldiers' agendas... but please be brief. Messages 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 obtain an answer via your own chain of command.

Know your lines on *MyExpenses* claims...



'HOW AM I EXPECTED TO CORRECTLY IDENTIFY EACH PART?'

THE *MyExpenses* function on Defence Connect is potentially fantastic for those of us who don't have access to Modnet and thus JPA. But having just become a user, I recently had all my claims rejected. The reasons weren't clear, but an error message told me I had submitted more than one for the same day. This was indeed true, I'd sent UK subsistence, foreign

currency subsistence and taxi claims which required separate lines.

But how am I expected to correctly identify each part of the claim if I have to put it all on one line? Do I need to write an essay to explain the elements?

Also, the system via Modnet permits you to contact the person you send the claim to in case it is rejected and needs amending. But this function doesn't appear on non-Modnet devices. Is that correct and, if so, how are we expected to resolve any failed claims on other UINs? - **Name and address supplied**

Eamon Baker, Product Manager, Digital Foundry, Defence Digital, responds: *MyExpenses* allows multiple lines (up to ten) within a single claim,

rather than multiple claims for the same day. Different costs incurred should each be entered separately using the appropriate 'expense type' from the dropdown menu.

Subsistence claims require additional mandatory information, such as country, which enables the correct rates to be applied. Taxi and similar costs are treated as generic expenses and should be entered on their own line.

Each line has its own short justification field; there is no need to combine different expense types or give lengthy narratives.

MyExpenses allows users to view the status of a claim, but it does not provide a function to directly contact the authoriser or individual who rejected it. If this happens, personnel should contact their HR admin for clarification and resolution.

You can also use helpdesk.defencegateway.mod.uk for assistance by searching for *MyExpenses* and submitting a new ticket. Under the services list, select the Army>MySeries options.

Spilling the beans

WHAT'S with all the beans, lentils and chickpeas that now seem to fill every ration pack?

I get they're a good source of protein and calories (especially with meat featuring less) but the digestive repercussions can be unpleasant. Those with IBS or inflammatory bowel disease also find legumes hard to tolerate - the last thing they or their colleagues want on exercise!

As much as I love a 'Ruby Murray', I don't want it at every meal. Yet bean-based curries seem to feature on practically all the menus. Meanwhile, the most popular bean dish by far - the breakfast sausage and beans - has disappeared. Bring it back, please, along with the Lancashire hotpot, corned beef hash and fruit salad pudding. - **Name and address supplied**



23 years later...

BACK in October 2003 your magazine did a little piece on our three-year-old son reading *Soldier* sat in his paddling pool in Larkhill. Sam is now 26 and a Reservist with 104 Regiment, Royal Artillery.

We are so proud of him and his love for the army. Thought you might appreciate an update! - **Michelle Hayward**



Picture: Pixel-Shot/Shutterstock

REVIEWS

★ GAMES ★ MOVIES ★ BOOKS ★ PODCASTS ★

GAME

Fallout 4: Anniversary Edition

Out now on Switch 2



AMID the real-world backdrop of missiles being hurled across the Middle East to apparently stop rogue states from acquiring nuclear weapons, a game set in a wasteland fried by a conflict of annihilation has a distinctly chilling edge.

Even before the latest America-Iran war, the *Fallout* story of an apocalyptic showdown between the USA and China – in which survivors huddle in underground shelters called vaults – had an uneasy feel.

The tale of a 1950s utopian society turned into a radioactive ruin, Bethesda's role-playing game paints a picture of a post-war world in which corruption is rife, life is cheap and where people will do anything to survive, the end usually justifying the means.

With the recent success of an Amazon Prime TV drama based on the franchise, it is perhaps unsurprising that the game series has been given the remix treatment.

The makeover of *Fallout 4*, arguably the best instalment, was completed and released to



PlayStation and Xbox communities last year. But the more recent appearance of the title on the

Nintendo Switch 2 after *Soldier's* last edition hit the presses is especially noteworthy as it marks

an impressive handheld debut for the series.

Beginning on the day that the first nuclear bombs fell on October 23, 2077, the story follows the fortunes of a New Jersey native and ex-soldier who manages to evade evaporation by taking to a shelter with a spouse and baby son.

Having avoided death, however, the handful of survivors of Vault 111 face a new horror as they unwittingly become test subjects in a secret experiment to see if their bodies can survive cryogenic stasis.

As a result of this government-sponsored deception, the player wakes a couple of hundred years

GAME

War in Spain 1936-39

Out now for PC

WHILE the Spanish Civil War might not seem like the natural choice for a military title, this is certainly an accurate recreation of events in Southern Europe during the early 20th century.

But while there is depth and granularity aplenty, these strengths are also a burden. The set-up and layout take a little getting used to

and there is a lot to assimilate given the complexity of the war.

Once you get used to the enormous level of detail however, gameplay is compelling.

The visuals are your typical map layout so don't expect anything too exuberant, but the interface works well with what you need to do. This is primarily one for die-hard enthusiasts, though.



Review: David McDougall, civvy



later, only to witness their other half being shot dead, son kidnapped and the rest of the shelter's cohort all killed by a catastrophic failure of life-support machinery.

Thus begins a free-roaming quest to find the truth in the post-Armageddon world known as the Commonwealth, centred around the east coast of the United States.

It is a reality inhabited by the remnants of humanity – many mutated by the long-term exposure to fallout – as well as some vile creatures that have emerged from the poisoned annals of the animal kingdom.

It's a horrific, unforgiving place in which exposure to unhealthy doses of radiation will slowly kill, bad guys will zap you for a couple of bucks and where the Darwinian concept of survival of the fittest is taken to its logical conclusion.

Yet the adventure is a truly compelling affair that is very hard to put down.

In pushing the limits of the Switch 2 hardware, the environments of civilisation's end are beautifully rendered, along with eerie soundscapes that make this reality all the more convincing.

Movement, conversation with non-player characters, and general interactions are seamless.

The combat system – which can be played in classic first-person shooter style or via a more tactical approach using action points – also works well, with the whole interface tactile, well thought through and suited to on-the-go play.

Given that the initial Xbox incarnation of the series, *Fallout 3*, first appeared on *Soldier's* desk in the dim and distant days of 2008, it is satisfying to see how this apocalyptic world has evolved.

While the franchise has undoubtedly been bolstered by the television adaptation, its success shows that solid writing and decent gameplay will stand the test of time.

Fallout's Switch 2 debut – which features a host of downloadable extras included in the package – is a standout offering.

The console is fast developing a library of acclaimed RPGs from times past – among them *Hitman: World of Assassination* and *Star Wars Outlaws* – which are transferring well to the handheld format and attracting new fans as a result.

Style, as they say, never dates.

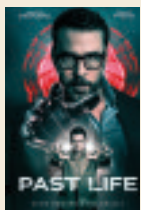


Review: Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*

MOVIE

Past Life

Out this month on digital formats



TAKING part in a celeb hypnotist's telly act when you are a war reporter with PTSD, have a pushy editor and are about to become a dad

is probably not the most sensible course of action – but then curiosity can often land hacks in hot water.

The trait certainly spells trouble for Jason Frey (**Aneurin Barnard**) who, facing all of the above, adds to his woes by discovering he might be a reincarnated serial killer after a session with quack Timothy Bevan (**Jeremy Piven**).

Still haunted by his own flashbacks of an incident in Syria in which a colleague was

murdered, Frey sets his dramas aside in a quest to find the truth behind this supernatural episode, despite the protestations of pregnant wife Clair (**Pixie Lott**).

Teaming up with the hypnotist, he discovers the odd visions are not all they first seem to be.

Soldier admittedly sighed when this appeared on our desk – horror films are two-a-penny and can often spectacularly crash on every front. But this holds up well with originality, pacing and a decent cast on its side.

While there are some questionable performances – pop star Lott's acting foray being a case in point – these don't detract from the overall experience. *Past Life* stands firm as a tense and compelling thriller that will please fans of the genre.



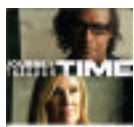
Review: Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*



PODCAST

A Journey Through Time – Chernobyl

by Goalhanger



AS THE 40th anniversary of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant

approaches at the end of this month, this recent six-partner from David Olusoga and Sarah Churchill is well worth digging into.

Despite the passage of time,

the events of 1986 continue to reverberate today, with the war in Ukraine laying bare the ongoing dangers posed by the contaminated area.

The Soviet culture of lies and denial that contributed to the accident also rings uncomfortable bells in this 'post truth' era.

Fans of history podcasts will find these eps – and the wider back-catalogue – bingeable fare.



Review: Capt Mike Owens, RE

BOOK

A Road for All Seasons

by Harry Bucknall

QUESTIONING how well he knew his country in the wake of the Brexit referendum, former Coldstream Guards officer Harry Bucknall set off on a 1,600-mile journey of discovery around the UK.

On his travels, recounted in this book, he met people from all walks of life – young and old, rich and poor, country folk and city dwellers, some born here and others more recently arrived.

While travel memoirs and their TV equivalents generally aren't my bag, I enjoyed this offering.

It is delivered in beautiful prose, with musings that paint a vivid snapshot of the nation, its citizens and its history.

The vignette of Belfast – much changed since the author's time there as a platoon commander during *The Troubles* – is particularly poignant.



Review: Becky Clark, *Soldier*



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DIRECTORY

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know

WELFARE

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

Army HIVE

These centres provide information for the whole military community on a wide variety of topics affecting their everyday life, including relocation, accommodation, health and wellbeing, 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

Army Welfare Service

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

Forces Connect

A free, simple, advert-free and confidential app that signposts soldiers, veterans and families to local and national organisations that can help them with everything from crisis support to business advice or housing. No personal information required.

forcesconnect.co.uk

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

Various information can be found at 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**

DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

Forces Pension Society

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

forcespensionsociety.org

Joining Forces Credit Union

Saving and affordable loans for the armed forces community from not-for-profit financial cooperatives

joiningforcescu.co.uk

Money Helper

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

moneyhelper.org.uk

National Debtline

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

nationaldebtline.org

StepChange Debt Charity

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

0800 138 1111

stepchange.org.uk

GAMBLING

National Gambling Helpline free information, support and counselling for problem gamblers in the UK **0808 8020 133**

GRIEF

Cruse Bereavement Support **0808 808 1677**

cruse.org.uk

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

RESETTLEMENT

Career Transition Partnership employment fairs help support the transition to civilian life by providing resources, networking opportunities and direct access to forces friendly employers. To book your place at an event visit modctp.co.uk

Maidstone – April 23

Edinburgh – April 29

Plymouth – May 21

Ipswich – July 1

Newbury – July 8

HOUSING

Single living accommodation

Faults and issues must be reported to the local contractor – Vivo, Mitie or Vinci or your unit quartermaster, depending on location. Check common areas for posters detailing local procedures. Inform your chain of command if you believe repairs are not being properly dealt with.

Pinnacle Home Services Team

The primary point of contact for families for housing, the allocation of SFA and details of local housing officers **UK 0800 031 8628**

Overseas +44(0) 161 605 3517

pinnacle.servicefamilies.co.uk/contact-us

Forces Help to Buy

For home ownership support offering free, confidential advice gov.uk/guidance/forces-help-to-buy

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services

01748 833797

spaces.org.uk

Veterans Gateway

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

INJURY/SICKNESS

Personnel Recovery Centres

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

LONELINESS

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

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

Samaritans

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

116 123 samaritans.org

The Royal British Legion

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

britishlegion.org.uk

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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

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 or Modnet email address. To try it out visit work.headspace.com/britisharmy/member-enroll

Mind – The Mental Health Charity

0300 123 3393 mind.org

NHS

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

COMPETITIONS

FEBRUARY 2026 WINNERS

HOAY 1005 (Trailer bag): Wendy Sparrow, Andover
REVIEWS (Turtle Beach headsets): Rob Wilcock, Suffolk;
Andrew Williams, York; Montse Simpson, Aberdeen

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Op Courage

A specialist NHS service for armed forces leavers, reservists, veterans and their families. Search for it on nhs.uk to find your local team

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
togetherall.com

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN/ABUSE

Aurora New Dawn

Safety for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking
02394 216 816
aurorand.org.uk

ManKind

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

Relate

Relationship support
relate.org.uk

SEXUAL OFFENCES

Anyone wishing to report an incident can do so in multiple ways. It does not matter if your allegation is not recent, or if you believe there's no evidence. There is no need for anyone to speak directly to their chain of command.

The **Defence Serious Crime Command**

is responsible for investigating crimes such as sexual assault and harassment within defence and operates independently of the three services. Contact them 24/7 via the Service Police Crime Bureau on 02392 285 170

Crimestoppers can be reached at 0800 555 111

Alternatively, complaints can be reported directly to the **civilian police**

To discuss victim support contact the **Victim Witness Care Unit**, which operates independently from the chain of command, on 07974 074259 or via people-dsc-wwcugroup@mod.gov.uk. Your information will be treated in confidence and you can discuss your options for reporting any allegations.

Further support can

be found on the **Defence Connect Call it Out Hub** or via the **Speak Out Helpline** on 0306 770 4656 or army-speakout@mod.gov.uk

STAFF NETWORKS

The following groups are open to regulars and reservists and civil servants.

LGBTQ+ Network

army-lgbt-network-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk

Multicultural Network

army-amcn-network-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk

Parents Network

armypers-parents-network@mod.gov.uk

Servicewomen's Network

army-servicewomen-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk

NCO ACADEMY

Development Days 2026

- May 13 Bramcote (30 Sigs)
- May 21 MoD Lyneham
- July 8 Edinburgh
- Sept 16 Thorney Island (16 RA)
- Oct 21 MoD Lyneham
- Oct 26 Chepstow (1 Rifles)

Search for the NCO Academy on Defence Connect for more information

REUNIONS

The 13 HQ Bty (Martinique 1809) Past and Present Members' Association

will hold its biannual reunion and inaugural meeting on **May 23** at Bosworth Hall Hotel and Spa, CV13 0LP. The function includes 13 Fd Bty, 13 HQ Bty and HQ Bty 19 Regiment. Cost £35 each. For details contact bambra@hotmail.co.uk

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This six-day package is the first step for anyone wanting to attempt selection for UK Special Forces - regular or reservist. For more on 2026 courses search **UKSF** on Modnet or Defence Connect.

| Course name | Date |
|-------------|-----------|
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| 6/26 | Sep 6-11 |
| 7/26 | Oct 18-23 |
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TEN details have been changed in this image of French and British personnel on the range together during Exercise Orion in France (read more from page 36).

Circle all the differences on image **B** and send the panel to HOAY 1007, Soldier, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU, along with contact details, including email address, by April 30.

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

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Picture: Cpl John Warburton, RLC

SOLDIERSPORT



DRAMA AT THE DEATH



Gnr Bryant Polius (RA) struck a last-gasp winner for the Reds

FOOTBALL (MEN)

SUBSTITUTE Gnr Bryant Polius (RA) was the hero for the army as his clinical strike at the death sealed a 2-1 win over the Royal Air Force in the Inter-Services Football Championships.

The winger pounced in the seventh minute of added time when he curled a low shot beyond the grasp of keeper AS2 Matthew Laycock and into the bottom corner as the defending champions started their campaign in dramatic style.

His goal sparked wild celebrations at the home of Aldershot Town and with the final whistle sounding just seconds later there was no time for the RAF to respond.

The outcome was somewhat harsh on the visitors, who had the upper hand in the first half and proved more than a match for the soldiers in the second until Polius produced his

moment of magic.

The Reds were indebted to the form of keeper Sgt Luke Cairney (RE, pictured below) early on as he twice thwarted striker Flt Sgt Michael Campbell – the first with a stunning full-length dive to tip a shot wide.

However, he was powerless to prevent the RAF from taking a deserved lead in the 20th minute as Cpl Henry Jordan cut in from the left byline and bent a superb effort across goal and into the far corner.

A further chance fell to Campbell in the 27th minute as he connected with a deep cross only to flash wide with a volley and they were punished moments later as the hosts converted from their first attempt on target.

With the RAF failing to clear on the edge of the area Cpl Jack Barber (RAMS) drew a foul from AS1 Daniel Dixon and Cpl Sean Woolley (RLC, pictured left) swept home the resulting free kick to restore parity.

Further opportunities came the light blues' way in the dying embers of the half as AS1 Josh Randall scuffed an effort at Cairney before Sgt Michael Goddard headed into the side netting following good work on the wing by the impressive AS1 Joe Spalding.

The introduction of LCpl Franklin Fitzmaurice (RE) gave the army greater control in midfield after the break, and they were the first to threaten in the second period as a neat turn and shot from Barber produced a smothering save from Laycock on the hour mark.

And they went on to build momentum in the closing stages as Woolley and Spr Ryan Fagan

INTER-SERVICES MEN'S FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

ALDRESHOT

ARMY **2** V RAF **1**

(RE) both went close, before LBdr Harry Beckley (RA) blazed over from a cut back by the latter.

With the clock ticking down it appeared to be the last chance for the soldiers to snatch the win, however, Polius had other ideas.

"They were really strong in the first half, and we had to weather the storm," skipper Sgt Craig Stevenson (RE) told *SoldierSport* at full-time.

"A good free kick got us back in the game. We felt we controlled it a bit better in the second half and worked hard to get something late on.

"We wasted a few chances so to finally convert one at the end was brilliant. I would have preferred it a bit earlier, but we were glad to get it.

"We had to dig deep and were under the cosh for long periods but we kept persevering until we got the goal."

The army were in action against the Royal Navy in a winner-takes-all clash as this issue went to press, with Stevenson predicting a tough contest in Portsmouth.

"They had a good win against the RAF," he added.

"We watched that game and have picked up some points we think we can work on to nullify their strengths.

"We haven't got them sussed by any means but will go there with a gameplan to get the win."

RAF SURGE TO SIXTH SUCCESSIVE TITLE

FOOTBALL (WOMEN)

THE army women stumbled at the first hurdle in their latest quest for glory in the Inter-Services Football Championships.

A 3-0 defeat to the Royal Air Force at the home of Bracknell Town saw their rivals claim the silverware for a sixth successive season – a result and performance that underlined their status as the military's premier outfit.

Having beaten the Royal Navy 2-1 in Lincoln a week earlier the light blues headed to army territory with the trophy firmly in their sights and they showed little sign of it slipping from their grasp.

The soldiers were firmly in the contest for the first half hour until a defensive lapse allowed their opponents to open the scoring.

A poor back pass was seized

upon by AS1 Lucy Farrow and the forward rounded keeper Pte Tyrii Bell (R Anglian) on the edge of the area before firing into an empty net.

Bell, who was making her Inter-Services debut, denied Farrow with a diving save moments later but the stopper was beaten again in the 39th minute as a low shot from Flt Lt Jeorgia Carr evaded her grasp and nestled in the bottom corner.

Striker Carr then rattled the cross bar from 20 yards before being thwarted by a sprawling Bell from close range as the RAF chased a third goal ahead of the break.

The half-time whistle offered welcome respite for the army, but they suffered further agony in the 51st minute as AS1 Abi Hayes was played in on the left and lifted a shot over Bell and into the far corner to seal the tie.

The Reds remained committed to the cause but struggled to create clear-cut opportunities, leaving their rivals to go on and celebrate another trophy.

They were in action against the navy in the tournament's concluding fixture as this issue went to press.

INTER-SERVICES WOMEN'S FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

BRACKNELL

ARMY **0** V RAF **3**

FOOTBALL BY NUMBERS

2 Seasons at the helm for head coach Capt Al Brown (RE)

2 Free kick goals in two Services games for Cpl Sean Woolley (RLC)

5 Games played in the Inter-Services build-up – three wins, one draw and a loss

16 Players who have made army debuts this season



Picture: Graeme Main

Sgt Milly Price (R Signals) launches an army attack



INTER-SERVICES
NETBALL FINAL

ARMY 43 V RAF 35

GOAL POWER SEES ARMY STAY ON TOP

NETBALL

THE army underlined their status as the military's premier netball outfit as they secured an eighth successive title at the Inter-Services Championships.

The Reds showcased their customary ruthlessness at the net to down a much-improved Royal Air Force outfit 43-35 in the tournament's concluding fixture, a result that followed on from a 48-29 triumph over the Royal Navy first up.

Skipper SSgt Ellie Nawele (AGC (SPS)) was in sublime form from the off against the RAF, scoring seven goals in the opening quarter. Goal attack Sgt Milly Price (R Signals) added a further six to give the soldiers

a 13-10 lead at the break, an advantage that extended to 21-19 at half-time.

However, their rivals avoided the army's traditional second-half blitz to stay in the contest, with the accuracy of goal shooter Fg Off Maisey Osborne proving a potent weapon.

The defending champions found additional firepower of their own in the shape of Cpl Laura Butler (Int Corps), who came off the bench to replace Nawele and plundered nine goals in the third quarter, with a further eight in the fourth.

Those efforts allowed her side to pull clear of a dogged opponent late on and ultimately lift the trophy once more.

"It was a very well contested match," Nawele told *SoldierSport*.

"I don't think the final score reflected how well they played and we only pulled away in the last quarter.

"Like every other year, we had great strength on the bench.

"This was Laura's first Inter-Services; she has been involved for a couple of seasons but has deployed and is now back from maternity. She has great netball knowledge and has fitted in really well.

"We also have the advantage of having some experienced players who have represented their countries and played in the Super League.

"We have been together as a team for such a long time and the commitment and discipline the girls show throughout the season is brilliant."



NETBALL

VICTORY at this season's Inter-Services Netball Championships saw SSgt Ellie Nawele (AGC (SPS), pictured above) end her 22-year career as an army senior player on a high.

The former Fijian international has captained the side for the past five seasons and will now go on to represent the set-up's masters' squad as the mission to develop new talent continues.

"I could not have done it without the girls I have played alongside - they have carried me through," she said as she reflected on her longevity.

"This is such a good environment to be around and having a passion for netball has helped. I was quite emotional at the end, knowing it was the last time I'd be on court with them.

"But me going to the masters next year will allow some of our younger players to come through."

Elsewhere, the army development team (below) retained their Inter-Services trophy, but a narrow defeat to the navy saw the masters miss out on silverware.

The soldiers defeated the RAF 40-25 in a men's exhibition match.





MOORE BOOSTS THE RANKS

ICE SPORTS

WINTER Olympian Pte Mica Moore (RLC) made a successful debut in army colours as she claimed top spot in the women's bobsleigh at the Inter-Services Ice Sports Championships.

The 33-year-old, who took 14th place for Jamaica in the monobob at the Games, paired with Cpl Kewe King (RAMS) to seal gold ahead of Royal Air

Force duo Fg Off Ashya Colvin and Cpl Lucy Robinson.

Moore travelled directly from Milano Cortina to Lillehammer to compete in the event, creating a formidable partnership with King, who has represented Nigeria on the international circuit this season.

The men's squad was boosted by an Olympian of their own in the form of LCpl Nick Gleeson (Para) – part of the Team GB set-up in 2018 and 2022 – and he

duly delivered alongside LCpl Tom Harris (Rifles).

In one of the closest finishes in recent years, the duo posted a combined time of 3min 23.55sec to take gold ahead of the Royal Navy's AB Shakeel John and Cpl Taylor Lawrence.

The women also claimed the team honours, with the men finishing second in their respective field.

In the luge, there was a victory for Capt Lucy Wyatt (RE) in the women's event, while Cpl Scott Pearson (RAMS) missed out on gold by just 0.97sec as the RAF's Fg Off Luke Farrar topped the men's standings. The light blues also narrowly triumphed in the mixed team competition, beating the army by just 1.46sec.

Pearson went on to make his GB debut at the Nordic Cup in the days after the event.

There was further success for the RAF in the skeleton as Flt Lt Nicole Burger, fresh from representing South Africa at the Winter Olympics, won the women's race, with Flt Lt Rhys

Thornbury taking the men's crown ahead of Capt Arran Holmes and Cpl Connor Hoad (both RE). The army had to settle for silver in the men's team event and bronze in the women's.

"The RAF have a couple of strong international sliders, but that was the closest gap we have had to them in the skeleton for more than ten years," Wyatt, who is also chair of Army Ice Sports, told *SoldierSport*.

"Our women's number one crashed on her third run which meant we ended up with bronze; however, we had a number of novices on the team, so it was excellent experience for them.

"Mica drove straight from Italy to Norway to compete in the bobsleigh, joining us halfway through our training week. Again, we had a few novices, and it was great for them to be on the ice with an Olympian and other Team GB athletes.

"Overall, we saw some of the tightest racing in a while – particularly in the men's luge – and everyone performed well."



Capt Lucy Wyatt (RE) on her way to luge gold

Pictures: Sgt Cameron Eden, RLC

RUGBY LEAGUE CAPITAL CHALLENGE

ARMY **25** **V** ST HELENS **18**



SAINTS DOWNED AS REDS START IN STYLE

Picture: Beth Proddger

RUGBY LEAGUE (MEN)

THE army men's rugby league team will head into the new season in buoyant mood after recording a 25-18 win over the young guns of Super League giants St Helens.

Victory at the home of The Honourable Artillery Company avenged the heavy loss suffered by the Reds in last season's fixture and saw them move on from their defeat to Wests Warriors in the first round of the Challenge Cup in January.

Kgn Jeremia Daveta, LCpl Pita Tamani (both Lancs), Pte Dylan Jackson and Pte Aborosio Sovatabua (both RLC) all crossed for tries to seal victory in style and head coach Cpl Leigh Paul-Rientoul (R Yorks) was delighted with his team's performance given the fact key personnel were missing.

"We had a lot of players

out due to deployments and injuries, so I'm really pleased we managed to get the result against a well drilled side," he told *SoldierSport*.

"We set some goals before the game and discipline was the key area to work on.

"Secondly, we had to earn the right to play and not be too expansive early on. We were patient, and that paid off.

"The players now have a spring in their step. Hopefully, they can do the hard work needed outside of camp, stay injury free, play in the Lawson Cup and then go again."

Fullback Gdsm Semiti Driti (Coldm Gds) and wing Sovatabua both impressed with their physicality in a succession of strong carries, while Capt Ben Waud (Ranger) played a starring role at prop as he continued his return from injury.

With the new campaign now

under way, attention turns to the Inter-Services and Paul-Rientoul said he and his coaching staff will be keeping a keen eye on fixtures in the corps-level Lawson Cup as squads for that tournament take shape.

"It is a chance for us to identify players and initially draft them into our academy side," he added. "That system is working really well.

"We took a lot of positives from last year, despite losing to the Royal Navy, when injuries cost us.

"If we can stay at full strength there is no reason why we cannot turn that around.

"We got a good result against the Royal Air Force and hopefully that can continue. We will go all out for two wins."

Elsewhere at the HAC, the Infantry defeated the Royal Artillery 36-14 to retain the 1925 Rebels Cup.

UP NEXT...

THE new army season officially launches at the Naivalurua Nines in Aldershot on April 22.

The inter-unit showdown features cup, plate, bowl and shield competitions, meaning every team has the chance to claim silverware. The Irish Guards won the top prize last year, defeating 1st Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment in the final.

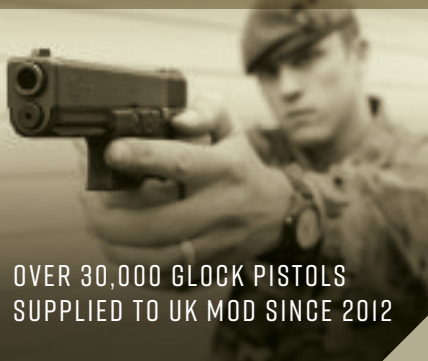




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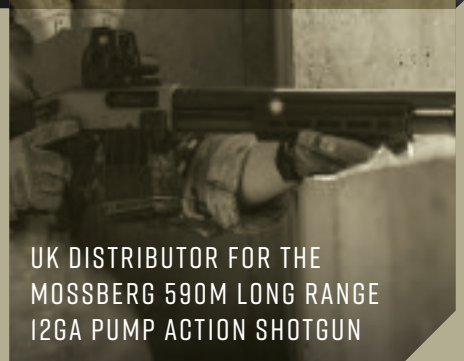
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COZENS' DOUBLE SEES REDS RETAIN

HOCKEY (WOMEN)

IT PROVED a debut to remember for 2Lt Hannah Cozens (RE) as her two late goals fired the army women to glory in the final of the Inter-Services Hockey Championships.

Having already defeated the Royal Navy 3-1, the soldiers headed into their clash with the Royal Air Force in confident mood, but the two sides cancelled each other out in a cagey opening quarter.

Cozens recorded the first opportunity of note in the second period as she fired narrowly over from a short corner. She then saw a penalty stroke saved by Cpl Kiera Hayman in the RAF goal as the score remained 0-0 at half-time.

The light blues missed a penalty of their own after the break as skipper AS1 Alex Naughalty's effort crashed against the post, and they also failed to capitalise on their numerical advantage when the army were temporarily reduced to nine players courtesy of two yellow cards.

Back to their full complement, the Reds made them pay in the final quarter as Cozens drove into the area before firing a low shot into the bottom corner.

The contest was over moments later as the officer seized on a mistake at the back to emphatically fire home.

Their rivals applied some pressure late on, without creating clear chances, and the army held firm to claim the win and retain their title.

"It was a fantastic game, and the RAF are a phenomenal outfit," Cozens said.

"Getting on the scoresheet is great, but this has been a team effort.

"Heading into the final quarter it was about finding the gears to go through and if an opportunity arose, we had to take it.

"The girls have put in a massive shift. We played our game today and it paid off."

'THIS HAS BEEN A TEAM EFFORT'



2Lt Hannah Cozens (RE) drives the army forward

Picture: Graeme Main



TITLE HOPES END IN CRUSHING DEFEAT

HOCKEY (MEN)

WHILE the army women prevailed in their clash with the Royal Air Force in the Inter-Services Hockey Championships finals, it was an entirely different story for the men's team.

Needing only a draw - or even a slender loss - against the airmen to seal the silverware, the defending champions crashed to a miserable 6-0 defeat in Aldershot as the title slipped from their grasp.

There was little sign of the destruction to come in an evenly fought opening quarter, with Cpl Scott Rawlings (REME, pictured right) threatening early on.

However, the RAF edged ahead in the second period courtesy of Flt Lt Finn Carvalho before three strikes in the third - two of which were converted by Cpl Scott Perry from short corners - saw them take control.

Perry completed his hat-trick in the final quarter, and the impressive Cpl Owen Stephenson sealed the victory with a clinical finish across goal following good play on the left.

The soldiers had earlier beaten the Royal Navy 5-3, with the senior service later downing the RAF 4-1.

However, the light blues' demolition job in the final saw

them go on to claim the trophy on goal difference.

Elsewhere, the army had cause to celebrate in the masters' competition as they claimed the men's and women's honours - the highlight of which saw the former down the RAF 7-1. The women also thrashed the light blues 9-1.

However, the soldiers missed out on the silverware in the under-25 draw, where the navy topped the standings.



Picture: Graeme Main

REME RISE TO THE TOP



Picture: Graeme Main

INTER-CORPS BASKETBALL
REME **V** RLC
80 **62**

BASKETBALL (MEN)

A THIRD-quarter onslaught propelled the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers to glory in the men's final at the Inter-Corps Basketball Championships.

The defending champions scored 20 points to the Royal Logistic Corps' four in a devastating ten-minute burst to open a 59-46 lead, having narrowly trailed their rivals at

half-time.

A further 21 points followed in the final quarter as they went on to triumph 80-62.

Victory by such a margin appeared unlikely at the break as the Loggies hit their straps in the second quarter - recording 26 points as they overturned a 19-16 deficit to lead 42-39.

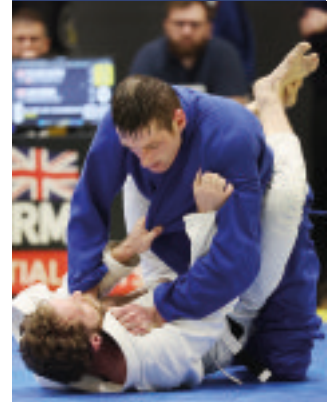
But their accuracy at the net deserted them after the break and with the REME - inspired by army and UKAF player LCpl

Anish Tamang (pictured) - dominating the rebounds, they seized control of the contest.

"It feels like we deserved it, we worked hard and were the better team," he told *SoldierSport*.

"We tend to start slowly but have the ability to remain composed and the experience to understand there are four quarters to a game.

"It was nice to win this last year and it feels even better to win this time round."



BRAZILIAN JIUJITSU

MORE than 120 athletes took to the mat for the latest Army Brazilian JiuJitsu Championships.

The event, primarily aimed at those at grassroots level, saw personnel face-off across a host of weight categories with the top performers earning selection for this year's Inter-Services.

Sgt Josh Gibbs (RAPTC), part of the organising team and a double bronze medallist at the European Championships in January, said the strong turnout - and standard of competition - was an indication of the sport's growing popularity in the ranks.

"When I started out as a white belt there were 40 people on the mat," he told *SoldierSport*. "Here we are ten years later with more than 100.

"This is the first step to them getting on the army team, competing at the Inter-Services and then making it to the international stage.

"This is such a friendly community, and everyone is equal - that is what draws people to the sport."

Gibbs will be imparting further wisdom at a week-long skills course in Aldershot this month, which is already fully subscribed.



Pictures: Graeme Main

MEDICS MARCH ON



Picture: Graeme Main

BASKETBALL (WOMEN)

IT WAS business as usual for the Royal Army Medical Service as they claimed another women's title at the Inter-Corps Basketball Championships.

Facing off against the Royal Logistic Corps, the defending champions made a slow start but managed to lead 14-11 at the end of the first quarter - an advantage that stretched to 24-15 at half-time.

However, the medics hit top form after the break, plundering 17 points to the Loggies' five in the third quarter before sealing a 55-27 win and lifting the trophy for a third successive season.

"It was difficult," RAMS captain Cpl Jess Moon told *SoldierSport*. "Nerves played a part in the first half but once we found our rhythm we were able to get the victory.

"We managed to get ten girls available for today, which meant we had a big bench, and that makes a difference."



INTER-SERVICES
AMERICAN FOOTBALL

ARMY **20** V **0** NAVY

DEFENCE PROVES KEY



AMERICAN FOOTBALL

DEFENSIVE strength formed the cornerstone of a convincing win for the Army Jackals in their opening fixture in this season's Inter-Services American Football Championships.

The soldiers recorded the first shut out in the competition's history as they defeated the Royal Navy 20-0 – a result that set up a winner-takes-all clash with the Royal Air Force Mustangs as this issue went to press.

Despite fielding a raft of rookies, the army proved too strong for the senior service as a first touchdown in team colours from running back LCpl Will Howe (RTR), along with a brace from stalwart Maj Drew Newiss (R Signals), did the damage.

"Defensively, we were phenomenal," general manager WO2 Abe Day (RA) told *SoldierSport*. "We only gave up four first downs in the entire game and every time their offence got on the field we sent them back.

"We were a bit slow in offence as some of our younger players were finding their feet, and it could easily have been more.

"We've lost quite a few running backs, but Will Howe looked impressive and had a great first half, while Drew Newiss started and ended the scoring. He made himself team captain in our first ever game and has been a very good leader – he makes the difference for us."

Reservist Gdsm Alexander McDonald (Ldn Gds) was another to impress, throwing for two touchdowns as quarter back, while OCdt Harrison Cooper formed a potent weapon in the special teams.

"He is one of the best punters I have seen," Day continued. "Every kick got to their five-yard zone, which meant they really had to work for their yards.

"That complimented our defensive efforts and is the reason why the navy got nothing.

"Having that confidence in our defence meant we could rotate the rookies and not worry if they made a few mistakes."

REDS FIND TRY-SCORING FORM

Picture: Cat Goryn/Alligin Photography



RUGBY UNION (MEN)

POINTS have been impressively piling up for the army men's senior team as preparations for this season's Inter-Services Rugby Union Championships ramp up.

The Reds crossed for ten tries in a 66-7 victory over a Rams development side in Aldershot before defeating a youthful team from Championship outfit Coventry 44-26 (pictured).

Bdr Pete Austin, LBdr Onisivoro Nayagi, LBdr Semi Tokadua (all RA) and Rfn Jamie Diamond (Rifles) all went over for first-half scores as the soldiers took a commanding 24-7 lead at the break.

Braces from Hldr Tomasi Vula (Scots) and Cfn Penaia Tagutu (REME) completed the scoring in the second half.

The team were in action against the French Army in Lille as this went to press – an

encounter they won 47-12 on home soil last season – with further friendlies this month still to be confirmed.

Their opening fixture in the Inter-Services will be the Army-Navy game at Twickenham on May 2 before taking on the Royal Air Force at Gloucester's Kingsholm Stadium in the tournament finale on May 16.

Ticket details for both matches can be found at armyrugbyunion.org.uk

RUGBY UNION (WOMEN)

INTERNATIONAL opposition have been testing the army women ahead of their title defence in the Inter-Services Rugby Union Championships.

First, the soldiers travelled to Dublin to face the Irish Defence Force and ran in six tries on their way to a 34-5 victory.

Three weeks later they hosted the Canada under-21 squad but the visitors proved too strong as they inflicted a 58-10 defeat in Aldershot (pictured below).

Like the men's team, the Reds were in action against the French Army in Lille as this issue went to press.



Picture: Cat Goryn/Alligin Photography

BOXING

FLYWEIGHT star LCpl Niamh Brookes (REME) gained further experience on the international stage as she claimed a bronze medal for Wales at the Bocskai Istvan international tournament.

The soldier emerged victorious from her opening bout in Hungary but was then defeated by French rival Wassila Lkhadiri in the semi-finals.

"This trip has been a big step forward for me," Brookes said.

"It was about learning, improving and seeing where I stand against top-level competition."



Picture: Graeme Main

GUNNERS ON TOP

Picture: Graeme Main



RUGBY UNION

ARMY skipper Bdr Pete Austin was among the scorers as the Royal Artillery recorded a convincing win in the men's league one showpiece on Corps Finals day.

The Gunners ran in seven tries on their way to a 37-19 victory over the Royal Engineers in Aldershot, with Sgt Owain Davies boosting the champions' cause with a further 12 points from the boot.

The result was the second successive loss for the Sappers in the final following their 32-15 defeat to the Infantry last season.

Elsewhere, the Royal Logistic Corps claimed the league two silverware with a 29-24 triumph over the Royal Armoured Corps.

The league three clash was also a close-fought affair as the Royal Army Medical Service beat the Royal Army Physical Training Corps 22-17.

However, the women's final proved one-sided as the Loggies downed the Gunners 55-5.

Fantasy food

We asked potential Sandhurst instructors what would be inside their dream ration pack

Interviews: Becky Clark Pictures: Graeme Main and Beth Prodger



I'm from an Indian background so I like the curries, but I would probably add some more meat ones rather than all the chickpeas. And I'd take out the oatmeal blocks – they just get chucked. The British Army should follow the Americans – their rations are gleaming.

Sgt Robinson Anton-Wilson, AGC (SPS)

More protein – you need it to replace broken down muscle and keep your brain and body working. Sugar and carbs give you a short-lived energy boost but protein keeps things consistent.

Sjt Tom Lindlar, Rifles



Anything along the lines of meat or four-cheese ravioli. I always bring a bag of pasta and a tube of tomato puree with me when I deploy. I'm half-Maltese so I'm pasta and pizza all the way.

CSgt Aaron Forrest, Coldm Gds



The mango cake that used to be in the ration packs brought me so much joy when I opened the box and saw it there. It was covered in sugar and, together with a coffee, just took you away from being cold, wet and miserable into your own little bubble of happiness.

Sgt Sam Bailey, Para

The all-day breakfast should stay – it just starts the day off right and is a good morale raiser. I'd also like to see the old ginger pudding with sauce brought back. That was a right winner.

Sgt David Higgins, RE

Branded chocolates like the Americans have, such as M&Ms or Reese's Pieces, or the Yorkie bars we used to have would be a little morale boost. Also, some kind of wrap. Currently we get the burrito filling but no burrito to go with it.

Sjt Dale Dannatt, Rifles



I'd add beef jerky back in. I like meat, it's got protein and fats and is quick and easy to eat on the go. Plus, it tastes better than chickpeas and tikka masala.

Sgt John Adcock, R Anglian



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Kane served in The Rifles Regiment for five and a half years before being medically discharged in 2021. He enjoyed his time in the Army but had some difficulty adjusting to civilian life. Thanks to funding from our charity Kane was able to train as an Arborist and has now successfully gained full-time employment.



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