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ARMY

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Cover picture: Graeme Main

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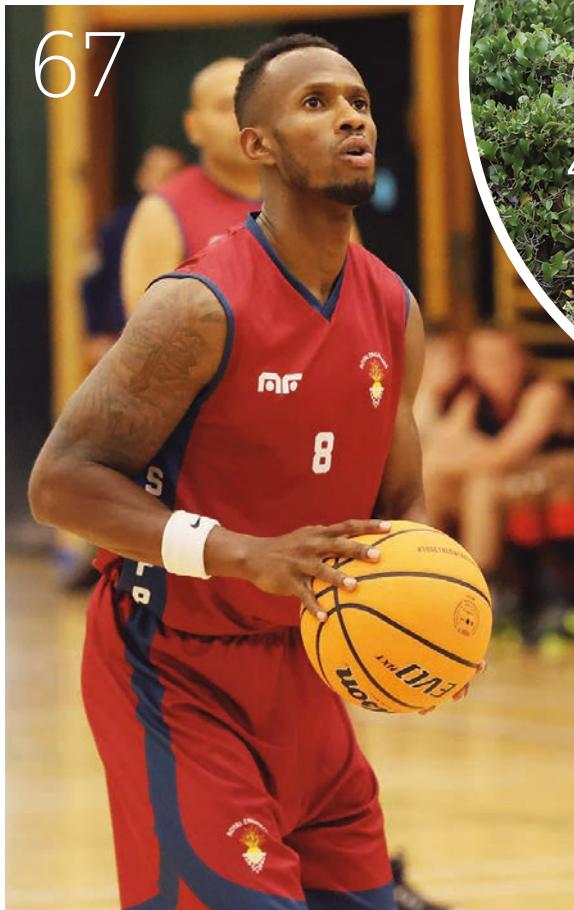
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“
This definitely provided us with a huge training opportunity
”

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Age concern



I WAS stopped in my tracks last month as three C-130s passed overhead during their farewell flypast of Britain (page 16).

When I joined *Soldier*, these beasts were being kept busy by the war in Afghanistan – packed with combat troops and equipment and making their trademark stomach-dropping descents into Camp Bastion.

I thought back to the grim days when publishing several pages of obituaries per issue was the norm for this magazine.

Seeing those same aircraft trundle through the UK's summer sky in 2023, it felt like the final close of that chapter.

But it was interesting to hear an ex-Regular soldier deployed on Interflex training (page 42) explain that the conventional warfighting skills he'd left service with pre-Afghanistan, were now firmly back in demand as he joined the Reserve.

“Because of that, I'm sometimes able to give suggestions to commanders that they'd never thought of,” he told me.

It's a timely reminder that, despite this shift in how the Army fights, the organisation's older personnel have as much to offer modern training and operations as anyone else.

But perhaps I would say that now that I'm on the wrong side of 40 myself.

Sarah Goldthorpe • Editor

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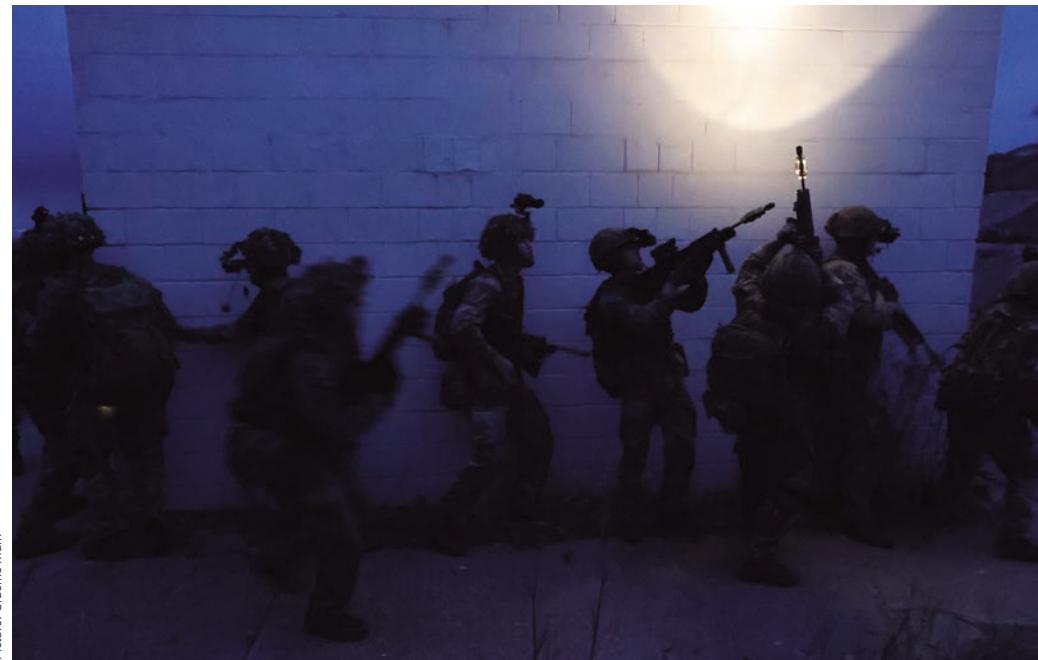


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Picture: Graeme Main

Fighting the frustrations

Satisfaction with the job and pay is dropping among soldiers, survey finds

CONTENTMENT with pay and allowances is dropping among soldiers, according to new stats. The 2023 Armed Forces continuous attitude survey (AFCAS) also found that troops are increasingly miffed with the promotion system and their married quarters – with just 18 per cent satisfied with responses to their repair requests.

That figure is a 14 per cent drop on the previous year, and follows sustained problems with overdue maintenance tasks by contractors Pinnacle, Amey and Vivo, leaving some families suffering damp and squalid conditions in their homes.

In March this year, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation's head of accommodation told *Soldier* that pressure was being kept on the companies to do better.

However, he warned that changes would not be seen overnight.

Some 2,889 AFCAS surveys were filled out by Regular soldiers and officers between September 2022 and February this year – a third of the number asked to take part.

The report said: "Compared to last year, the impact of the cost of living on Army personnel is evident with a decline in satisfaction with financial

packages, including basic pay and allowances, which has increased intentions to leave.

"There is also an increased emphasis on price and value for money when accessing unit catering facilities.

"More Army personnel have debt levels that concern them and more officers have reported that they do not own their own home because they 'do not want to risk losing money'." ■

2023 TAKING ITS TOLL

This year's AFCAS found...

12

per cent of Army personnel have debt levels that concern them

A decreasing number (29%) think the X factor properly compensates troops

46%

are satisfied with welfare support on return from ops

1/3

believe the promotion system is fair – the lowest level since 2007

33%
are satisfied with basic pay (down 7%)

“
More have debt levels that concern them
”

SOLDIER

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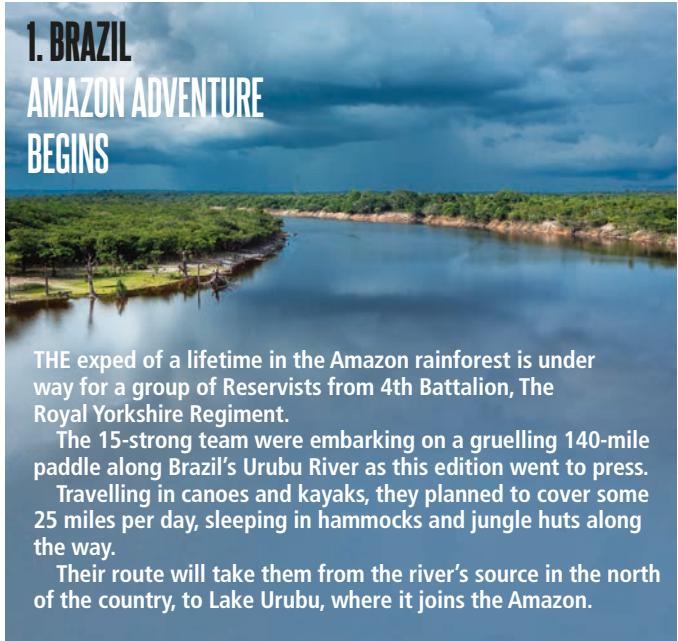


GLOBAL SITREP



Picture: Shutterstock

1. BRAZIL AMAZON ADVENTURE BEGINS



THE expedit of a lifetime in the Amazon rainforest is under way for a group of Reservists from 4th Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment.

The 15-strong team were embarking on a gruelling 140-mile paddle along Brazil's Urubu River as this edition went to press.

Travelling in canoes and kayaks, they planned to cover some 25 miles per day, sleeping in hammocks and jungle huts along the way.

Their route will take them from the river's source in the north of the country, to Lake Urubu, where it joins the Amazon.

2. FALKLAND ISLANDS TABS FOR THE MEMORIES

AIRBORNE troops serving down south had a particularly poignant Liberation Day commemoration as they marched in honour of a past generation.

Soldiers from The Parachute Regiment's 2nd and 3rd Battalions – currently forming the territory's Roulement Infantry Battalion – tabbed from Port San Carlos to Stanley as they remembered comrades who took part in Op Corporate 41 years ago.

They were joined by veterans and Armed Forces colleagues as they converged at the Liberation Monument ahead of commemorations on June 14.

The event was the culmination of an arduous phys programme undertaken by the troops, during which they also ran, swam, cycled and rowed the equivalent of 16,000-miles – the distance from the UK to the islands and back again.

The paras played a key role in the 1982 conflict, including at Goose Green and Wireless Ridge.



Picture: British Forces South Atlantic Islands

“
We felt the
weight on our
shoulders
”

Sappers reflect on Sudan call-up – page 28

2. FALKLAND ISLANDS



3. ITALY UPLIFTING ACHIEVEMENT

A ROYAL Signals officer celebrated victory at a powerlifting competition on the Italian island of Sardinia.

Capt Michelle Margrie triumphed in the under-80kg bench press category of the World Drug-Free Powerlifting Federation championships, and was runner-up in the sub-80kg deadlift.

The 43-year-old, who has also competed in Ironman and triathlon, only took up the sport 16 months ago.

“I have always been active and dedicated to my training whether that has been running, cycling or powerlifting,” the mum-of-two said.

“I take huge satisfaction from chasing the numbers and trying to improve myself.

“Winning the world championships is a huge achievement and, although I am relatively late to the sport in terms of my age, it is proof you are never too old to try something new.”

INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

Brief the team now:



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4. UKRAINE A HIGHER CALL

A COHORT of military chaplains have returned to their Eastern European homeland after a stint in the UK honing skills to support troops.

The ten padres are back on the ground in Ukraine and putting into practice the knowledge from a fortnight-long course with British counterparts, during which they learned more about delivering pastoral care on operations.

Multi-faith chaplaincy was only formally established in the Ukrainian forces two years ago and the UK training was requested by the country's top brass.

Rev Robin Richardson (RACHD) – who developed the course – commented: "These ministers are driven by their faith to step out of the door, unarmed, into the face of the enemy."

"The hope is that the planning tools, religious and pastoral resources and hands-on experience we have provided will only make them more effective in their roles on the front line."

5. UK

'TOP MARQUES' FOR GUARDSMEN AT RALLY LAUNCH

TROOPS from 1st Battalion, Welsh Guards hosted a send-off for high-end motoring fans embarking on a 1,000-mile plus European road trip.

Combermere Barracks in Windsor provided the perfect springboard for the Cannon Run drive from Britain to Rimini, Italy.

In a route encompassing Luxembourg and Monaco, the so-called Mega Run was an opportunity for petrolheads to showcase their luxury supercars.

Event founder Jay Cannon had been seeking a prestigious, historical venue from which to launch the rally.

Sgt Chris Morgan (WG) – who helped host the pre-event party – told *Soldier* the unusual occasion was packed with entertainment, including music by the Corps of Drums.

"It was a night of excitement, spectacle and tradition that encapsulated the spirit of a grand journey," he added.



Pictures: Sgt Chris Morgan, WG

Brief the team now:



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6. INDIA VALOUR REMEMBERED

SERVING and former members of The Royal Irish Regiment have gathered in Chennai and at war cemeteries around the world to honour the sacrifices of their forefathers.

As this issue hit the shelves, ceremonies were being held at the grave sites of 18 Victoria Cross holders who fought with the formation's antecedent units.

The commemorations were due to take place at 1100 local time on July 1, at locations including Madras War Cemetery, India; Haifa, Palestine; the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey and the Thiepval Memorial in France.

A further aim of the project is to ensure that all of the headstones are well maintained.





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Military talent on parade

King's Birthday Honours list recognises devotion and inclusivity



Picture: Cpl Nathan Tamku, RLC

MORE than 60 soldiers and officers have received royal recognition in the first Birthday Honours list released by King Charles.

They've been rewarded for tasks ranging from cutting-edge training to outstanding ceremonial duties, far-flung mentoring operations and success promoting inclusivity.

The MBE recipients include WO1 Robbie Beech (QARANC), commended for his work in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear medicine.

A specialist medical adviser, he played a key role in writing policy for this discipline and was credited as being "instrumental to training, delivery and development". He now leads education in casualty decontamination and first aid.

Sgt Thomas Couper, master tailor to 3rd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland, ensured hundreds of ceremonial uniforms were kept in peak condition after the passing of Queen Elizabeth II (pictured above during the funeral parade in Edinburgh).

"This often involved him working extended hours and sleeping while he could, often in the tailoring room," his citation reveals.

Meanwhile, WO1 Deborah Penny (RLC) has been recognised as a "torch bearer" for transgender Service personnel and was praised for her efforts – which include co-authoring the Army recruitment and management policy on the subject.

She was described as a "powerful advocate, who challenges presumptions and champions diversity and inclusion". Her citation added: "Her work directly appeals to those who might otherwise feel disengaged or disenfranchised."

Further afield, a project led by WO2 James Rochester (RE) in counter-IED skills was saluted.

While serving with the British Peace Support Team (Africa) in Ghana he created the blueprint for a dedicated unit and a teaching curriculum. His expert work in the region has also become internationally recognised. ■

THE PERFECT FATHER'S DAY GIFT FOR LOGGIE SOLDIER

■ BEING made an MBE in the King's Birthday Honours was the second life-changing event in a matter of weeks for Cpl William Ross (RLC).

The 33-year-old NCO held his new baby daughter in May – and it was revealed that he had been awarded the prestigious medal just before Father's Day.

"I was absolutely speechless to be honest," he admitted. "I didn't know what to say – it hasn't sunk in."

Cpl Ross was recognised for coordinating the transport of gifted military kit and ammunition after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He produced a complex movements plan involving 200 vehicles and 1,000 personnel across five Nato states in an achievement that caught the eye of his leaders.

"That he did this as a junior soldier, at pace, operating well beyond his training and out of his comfort zone is humbling," the citation said.

“When I was told I was speechless to be honest”



Torchbearer for transgender troops:
WO1 Deborah Penny, RLC



Outstanding counter-IED mentor:
WO2 James Rochester, RE



FEMALE FITNESS BOOSTER

■ FEMALE law enforcers have received top tips on bolstering their health and fitness from an elite sportswoman.

Triathlete Jane Hannah took soldiers and officers from 1 Regiment, Royal Military Police through topics such as sleep, nutrition and the menstrual cycle.

Discussions were also held on female-focused issues including training support, fitting of sports bras and sanitary products.

A poll found that many were unaware of issued kit such as the urinary support device and smaller Virtus.

Troops praised the day for bringing women up to speed.

Cpl Roxanne Glynne-Jones said: "It's nice to know awareness has been raised on these issues and that some of my female peers have somebody they can put questions to."



Picture: Capt Sam Davies, LD

SAPPERS' SUPER EXPED

■ A JOINT venture between the Royal Engineers' mountaineering and sailing clubs has resulted in a monster exped across Lanzarote, Rio de Janeiro, Port Stanley and South Georgia.

Around 100 troops will be involved, as a succession of 15-person crews take the helm of the 72-foot Challenge yacht (shown above on a training trip). The vessel set sail from Chatham at the end of last month.

Ten mountaineers will join the boat in the Falkland Islands in September.

Their goal is to ascend several peaks in South Georgia that have never been climbed before while the sailors will navigate the daunting South Atlantic.

The trip was organised with the Joint Services Adventurous Sailing Training Centre and should conclude in January, capping two years of preparations.

"This is the first time the two clubs have cooperated like this," says Capt Joe Robertson (RE), the mountaineering lead. "It might be the start of something regular because there are lots of great climbing spots that can be easily accessed by sea."

"That would create lots of great adventurous training opportunities for engineers in the future."

UNION JACK FIGHTBACK



A PLANNING battle is rumbling in London amid claims that a "catastrophic" development could overwhelm a popular military venue.

Bosses at the Union Jack Club in Waterloo said they were heartened by huge support after contesting plans for a 20-storey office building, which they say will wreak havoc on the area's character.

Some 1,800 letters of objection, many from furious former and serving members of the Armed Forces, have been received by Lambeth Council since the application was lodged by Bourne Capital late last year.

The developer has insisted the project will deliver "real, positive change" to the area. Local authority members will now meet to discuss the proposal but a date had not been set as this issue went to press.

As reported in January's *Soldier*, Bourne's proposals would see the construction of a 70-metre towerblock. Union Jack Club CEO Hugh Player (pictured) said the plans would have a "catastrophic effect" – wreaking havoc on the character of the area and blocking out light in rooms at the venue.

He continued: "We're not opposed to the area being developed, but to the overwhelming nature of these plans."

However, Bourne Capital boss Ben Bourne insisted the work would support Waterloo's role "as a cultural hub for London", in addition to creating "a world class amenity, community arts and performance space".

Got a view? Tell *Talkback*
mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk



Pictures: Tpr Joe Turner, QRH

“
The win sends
a strong
message
”

QRH top the tank charts

Shooting competition shows Brits to be the best trained soldiers

THE Queen's Royal Hussars sent some strong messages, both to allies and would-be aggressors, by winning the prestigious tank shooting competition Exercise Iron Spear.

The most recent staging of the twice-yearly event, held just prior to Exercise Spring Storm in Estonia (page 33), saw six teams compete in the main battle tank category at the Adazi range in Latvia.

The British crew, currently on duty with the enhanced forward presence in Estonia, outperformed a Spanish Army Leopard 2, a US Army Abrams, two T-72-based platforms from Slovakia and Poland, and an Italian Ariete to claim the prestigious prize.

"The soldiers are really pleased with their efforts and know all their hard work has been worth it; that they are

the best trained troops there with the kit they had," said QRH regimental gunnery officer Capt Harry Harmon.

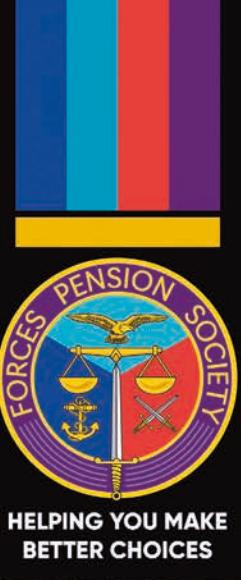
"The win sends a strong message about the relevance and lethality of Challenger 2 too, particularly in mind of the UK's gifting of the platform to Ukraine.

"It also confirms to the Estonians that having Challenger 2 in their country is a highly effective deterrent because, regardless of people saying how old the kit is, we have personnel with the skills that prove it's very effective, even against the most modern platforms."

The contest saw crews drive down range, firing at an enemy asset ahead of them, then at three targets in a crossover lane. They also had to undergo an extraction that simulated the end of a main battle tank engagement. Scoring was calculated through a combination of targets hit and time taken to complete the course.

"The time we spent training in Finland on Exercise Arrow, building skills in a different environment, followed by Tallinn Dawn in Germany, undoubtedly contributed to the win," said Capt Harmon. "It shows that deploying tanks at reach to new areas in complex exercises is very beneficial." ■





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STERLING EFFORT

Troops excel at first King's birthday parade in 70 years

HOUSEHOLD Division personnel have been commended for delivering a day to remember at the King's first Trooping the Colour.

More than 1,400 soldiers gathered in central London for the event, which was also the first birthday parade that a monarch has ridden on since 1986 (see image top right).

The Welsh Guards had the privilege of trooping their colour, and operations officer Capt Aaron Gould said it had been a "fantastic honour".

"Our Welsh spirit was evident in every drill movement and enthusiasm for His Majesty's first parade shone through, despite the stifling heat," he said.

Some 8,000 ticketed spectators descended on Horse Guards Parade, with a record 250,000 applying to attend in the public ballot. ■



“Enthusiasm shone through”



GENERAL FOR A DAY

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

SOMETHING that I'm mega keen on is Regulars and Reserves working together a lot. In the ten years I've been a Reservist integration has definitely got better, but if I was a general my priority would be to push that even more.

There's just so much you can learn from each other. And I know a lot of



but you also break a lot of boundaries and get some really decent mutual understanding.

I've seen lots of good examples of that.

For instance, our battalion sent quite a lot of blokes out to Kabul on Op Toral – and after that some of them went straight onto full-time Reserve service.

Another big thing for me is kit and equipment.

I'm a big believer in fighting how you want to fight, so I think soldiers investing in their own kit is a good thing. And frankly the stuff we get issued is not always fit for purpose.

So if I was a general I would relax the rules on standard-issue clothing.

If you have a soldier who is keen enough to buy their own stuff so they can fight better, why would you ever say no?

Name: LCpl Ellison Ainsworth

Cap badge: R Yorks

Role: Section commander, 4 R Yorks

Age: 33

Years in: Ten

Deployments:

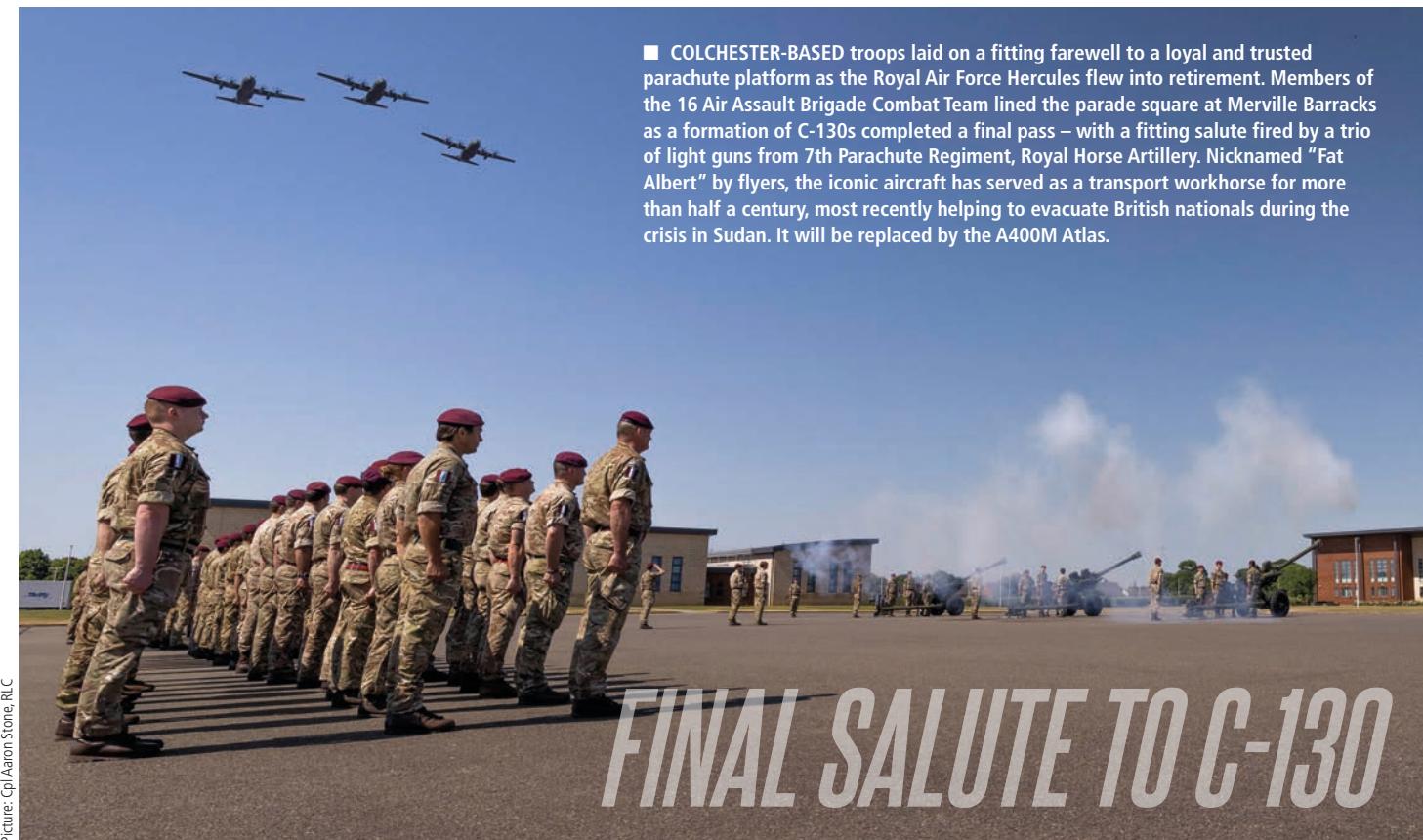
Kenya; Australia;

Op Rescript, UK

“Investing in their own kit is a good thing”

our guys and girls in 4 R Yorks are keen to work with Regulars more to see what that life is like. When you do, you get past the jokes and stigma of being 'TA' pretty quickly.

Of course, you get some who can't be arsed with us and are standoffish,



■ COLCHESTER-BASED troops laid on a fitting farewell to a loyal and trusted parachute platform as the Royal Air Force Hercules flew into retirement. Members of the 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team lined the parade square at Merville Barracks as a formation of C-130s completed a final pass – with a fitting salute fired by a trio of light guns from 7th Parachute Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery. Nicknamed “Fat Albert” by flyers, the iconic aircraft has served as a transport workhorse for more than half a century, most recently helping to evacuate British nationals during the crisis in Sudan. It will be replaced by the A400M Atlas.

FINAL SALUTE TO C-130

Picture: Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC



VR TRAILBLAZERS

■ MORE than 40 soldiers from 207 Armoured Signal Squadron, 15 Signal Regiment became the first in their corps to hone driving and fighting skills on the interim combined arms virtual simulation.

The system presents users with digital scenarios, which they navigate using XBox and PlayStation controls and VR headsets.

Bulldog driver Sig Edward Pasquini said: “It was great fun. The controls are very similar to gaming consoles so it was quick to pick up.”

The troops will build on the package in the real world when they deploy to Germany later this year.

“
His loss will leave a gap in the Fijian community
”



Rfn Israel Delanimiti

DIED JUNE 3, 2023
OP CABRIT, ESTONIA

FRIENDS and colleagues have been remembering a “good humoured and kind-hearted” infantryman after his death on a Nato deployment in Eastern Europe.

Defence officials confirmed that Rfn Israel Delanimiti of 3rd Battalion, The Rifles died after an incident in Tartu during “a period of operational stand down”.

They said thoughts were with the soldier’s family and friends. No further details had been released as this magazine went to press.

Known as Del to his pals, Rfn

IN MEMORIAM

Delanimiti had joined 3 Platoon, A Company late last year and had immediately started pre-deployment training for Op Cabrit.

The 24-year-old rapidly proved his mettle, achieving his Javelin gunner qualification and showing clear potential with his willingness to learn.

Leading the tributes, 3rd Battalion CO Lt Col John Barry said the soldier had been a “cherished” part of his outfit.

The officer added: “Good humoured, kind-hearted and softly spoken but with an iron will – Rfn Israel Delanimiti was the personification of selfless commitment.

“He was the most collegiate of souls, a core member of our Fijian cohort...and all those who knew him speak about his irrepressible smile – a blast of Pacific sunshine to warm the bleakest of winter nights on a north European plain.”

The soldier’s platoon commander 2Lt Annie Smith shared the sentiment, adding: “He embodied the ‘thinking rifleman’, always looking to further his military knowledge.

“He will be remembered as polite, well-mannered and softly spoken but not for lack of confidence – he was a key member of his section.

“His loss will leave a gap in 3 Platoon, within the Company and Fijian community of 3 Rifles”.

Emma and Steffan
EXPLORERS & TRAVELLERS

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A MILITARY SEND-OFF

A FORMER soldier has set up a new – if sombre – line of business by offering unique transport to take lost comrades to their last resting place.

Colin Port (ex-AGC (RMP)) started Hero's Farewell after buying an ex-Royal Artillery Land Rover and gun tractor and providing them for use as a hearse.

The veteran – who served in the Army for six years before joining the civilian police – told *Soldier* he started the business after a suggestion from an undertaker.

"I'm hoping to provide a good service and send-off," he added.

TIME TO TALK?

THE Army is always trying to improve the way it communicates with its people and as part of this effort it is inviting personnel to complete a short survey. Without feedback things can't be improved. Scan the code to take part:



“
Just go and
see your
doctor
”



WHEN TO GET THEM CHECKED...

The most common symptom of testicular cancer is a lump or swelling. Other signs could be:

- Heavy feeling in the scrotum
- Dull ache in the abdomen or groin, or back pain
- Pain or discomfort in a testicle or the scrotum
- Enlargement or tenderness of the breasts
- Shrinking of the testicle



FEARLESS FUNDRAISING

24-HOUR WORKOUT

A YORK-BASED fitter section stalwart lived up to her job title by organising a charity endurance event.

LCpl Paige Bellerby (REME) of 2 Signal Regiment led a day-and-night gym and running challenge with troops pounding out a mile-and-a-half run, 40 press-ups and 50 sit-ups every hour on the hour. Better known for her success in

Funds raised:
£600
For: SSAFA

Paige Bellerby



Picture: Graeme Main

Red caps reform

Army police have upskilled, reorganised and are ready for future taskings

NEW KIT to speed up investigations and closer working with fighting formations. These are just two of the ways that Service police are reshaping for future conflicts.

Speaking to this magazine, outgoing provost marshal Brig Vivienne Buck – the head of the Royal Military Police (RMP), Military Provost Staff and the Military Provost Guard Service – said that a recent restructure would allow her personnel to deploy more easily and work seamlessly with other cap badges when they do.

RMP sub-units are now aligned to specific brigade combat teams, allowing them to build "a closer relationship when the bullets are firing".

Alongside this, better use of technology will help investigators – especially with cyber crime.

A professional development programme has also put their qualifications on a par with civvy street forces.

"Future Soldier was a good opportunity for us," Brig Buck continued. "We had to restructure to deliver the same outputs with fewer people, but in actual fact it allowed us

to do things better.

"We needed to improve our technology, and that will happen with September's introduction of a new police record management system – the same used by many Home Office forces.

"This will speed up investigations. At the moment we are still dealing with big case files, which is totally inefficient.

"It's good news for victims and also for suspects, who often face long waits for their day in court.

"If anything, our capabilities now are better than before."

Other recent reforms to the Service justice system include the establishment of the Defence Serious Crime Unit last year to investigate the most serious offences.

The tri-Service, independent body has replaced the single service Special Investigation Branches.

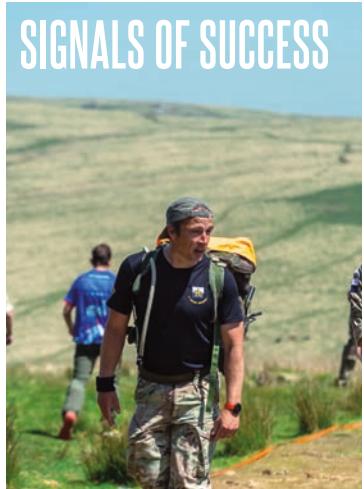
A centralised Victim and Witness Care Unit has also been set up to ensure those impacted by serious crime committed by military personnel are given the right support – a responsibility that previously lay with investigators. The unit can be contacted on 07974 074 259. ■

Before you go...

RESERVISTS quitting the ranks are being urged to complete an online survey to explain why. It poses several questions about their Army experience and reasons behind the decision to go. Lt Col Glenis Maloney (R Signals), who helped devise the initiative, said dozens of responses had been received so far and it was set to become a regular feature of the departure process. She added: "Over time, this will help us establish trends and potentially help improve the experience on offer. While there are some areas of a soldier's life over which we have no control, the Reserve exit survey may identify others that the Army can influence. Over a number of years this could help us to improve retention rates." Turn to page 32 to take part.

“
This will
speed up
investigations
”

SIGNALS OF SUCCESS



SIGNALLERS took on the rugged terrain of Dartmoor Training Area during this year's Lanyard Trophy endurance event.

Tabbing in teams of six to eight, personnel covered more than 40 miles while carrying 30lbs in weight – with the contingent from 22 Signal Regiment winning the male category in a time of 17hr 11min.

The honours in the female and veterans contest went to troops from 30 Signal Regiment.



Picture: Graeme Main





IN NUMBERS

30

Age of the **Royal Logistic Corps** in years. The milestone was marked with a parade through Winchester last month, attended by the Princess Royal, after troops were granted the freedom of the city. The corps was formed in 1993 from the amalgamation of the Royal Corps of Transport, the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, the Royal Pioneer Corps, the Army Catering Corps and the Postal and Courier Branch of the Royal Engineers.



Pictures: Cpl Anil Gurung, RLC



MEMBERS of **16 Signal Regiment** have returned to work better soldiers after two weeks of trekking in Peru. Fifteen individuals deployed on the AT package – which team member Capt Will Spencer-Jones (REME) said had been a “once-in-a-lifetime” chance to hone important skills. “It provided an opportunity to develop leadership and planning capability in a high risk and remote area, while offering respite from the day-to-day work of a constant stream of exercises and operations around the world,” he said.

Nuclear test vets decorated

“I honestly think it is justified”

THE first batch of decorations for ex-troops involved in the UK’s nuclear test programme will be ready for presentation at the end of the summer, defence chiefs have confirmed.

Forms for the Nuclear Test Veterans Medal are now available online via the MoD Medal Office and ex-personnel are encouraged to submit their applications.

A history project collating stories of those on the atom and hydrogen bomb tests in the Pacific from 1952-67 has also been launched by the government – interviews with witnesses will be held in the British Library.

Veterans have given the thumbs-up to both initiatives, pointing out that those who served during the era had long deserved recognition.

Ex-sapper Brian Hogan, who arrived on Christmas Island in 1958 for the Op Grapple H-bomb tests, said the medal

was a welcome move.

He told *Soldier*: “I’m 84 years old now and it has been a very long time coming – but I honestly think it is justified given all we experienced.”

As reported in this magazine, veterans of the tests have long been campaigning for recognition.

Many claim to have suffered cancers and other serious illnesses as a result of radiation and toxins related to the numerous explosions.

The new medal was announced late last year by PM Rishi Sunak, although the qualifying criteria has only recently been fully firmed up.

Around 22,000 former British and Commonwealth personnel are expected to be eligible for the decoration, which can also be presented posthumously.

See the medals section of **ukafvp.mod.gov.uk** for further details. ■



Ground view

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

PHYSICAL fitness is not the only part of being a well-rounded soldier.

It's also vital to nurture our connections to others. It's what bonds our teams together, keeps us motivated and is the bedrock of our success.

On an individual level, having meaningful personal relationships is good for our mental health, while in the workplace it fosters trust, good communication and a sense of belonging.

I'm lucky in this job because a lot of it is based on meeting and talking to colleagues and new people.

And many of my best memories involve my Army mates.

But not everyone is confident socialising, while others may lack a strong network. So I'd like personnel to make sure that their "social fitness" is squared away.

This doesn't just happen – we need to seek out and involve ourselves in shared experiences and challenges, as well as investing time in and cherishing our friendships.

For the most part, we're pretty good at looking after each other in the military and spotting when someone isn't their usual self, but we can always do better.

I'd ask junior NCOs

to reach out to new members of their unit to make sure they're not alone in their rooms. And everyone should use range time and exercises to lift their heads up from their phones and get to know their colleagues.

This is especially important as thoughts turn to the summer break. During periods of extended leave, without the close support of the Army family, people can feel detached or lonely, so we should all check in with each other regularly.

That point also underlines an area that I definitely need to work on myself – making sure we build relationships outside of the Service, too.

Lifelong soldiers like me tend to put all their eggs into the military basket and can find themselves adrift when they leave.

While it's hard, given the pace of this role, I'm making an effort to establish a network in the village where my wife and I recently bought a house.

It takes work, but the more I learn about what is important in the world, and life in general, the more I value the relationships I have.

So I commit to not taking them for granted and urge you to do the same. Good social fitness is our super-strength.

“
Don't take your mates for granted
”

Last year's Exercise Ares Storm in Cyprus



Picture: Graeme Main

Sunshine tour is no picnic

ON a recent visit to Cyprus I met troops from 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment and 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, who talked about their support to the mission in Sudan.

For me, it was a great demonstration of Op Mobilise – soldiers and units being ready to deliver at short notice.

But while a posting to the island offers a host of opportunities, it places

additional burdens on families. Living abroad while dealing with the uncertainty of the serving partner being on very high readiness has an impact on relationships that must not be underestimated.

Finally, keep Cyprus in mind if you're planning AT or sports training camps – the access to great facilities, service accommodation and trooping flights makes it a highly attractive option.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Q Who are your favourite bands?

A It's Britpop all the way for me – Oasis, Blur and co



IT'S NOT ALL BAD...

■ THE latest AFCAS results make for sobering reading (page 7), but while things aren't perfect in the Army – just as they aren't on civvy street in these financially difficult times – it's starting to worry me that people don't recognise the benefits the military can bring.

Cheap accommodation (albeit not without its flaws), personal development, trade qualifications, adventurous training, top-level sport, travel, flexible working, the continuity of education allowance, wrap-around childcare, comprehensive resettlement and pension packages – these are just some of the things that make us a great employer.

And backing all of that up is an organisation that will look after you – on full pay – if you get injured or your mental health suffers. No civilian company offers anything like that.

We all like to vent, but if you only focus on the things that aren't so good, it's easy for negativity to take hold.

THE BIG PICTURE

Rovaniemi, Finland

Bark and bite

A DISMOUNTED soldier from 5th Battalion, The Rifles patrols on foot to recce a challenging woodland route during Exercise Northern Forest. The multinational training package saw the riflemen integrated into a Finnish battlegroup, strengthening understanding of how the different militaries might work together on future ops.

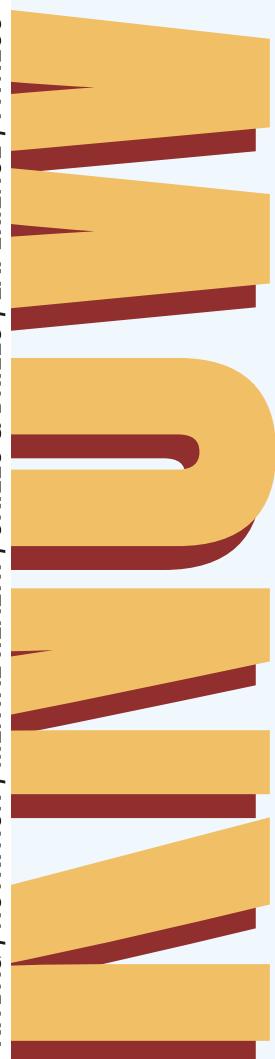
Picture: Cpl Nathan Tanuku, RLC





WEED TO

Kitbag / Nutrition / Mental Health / Skills & Drills / Experience / Fitness



Gun compare

How does the Army's interim artillery system stack up with the outgoing AS90?

WITH 32 AS90 guns gifted to Ukraine – and a permanent replacement not expected until the end of this decade – the UK has acquired Sweden's Archer system to plug the gap.

The first 14 platforms are due in service in 2024, promising greater range and packing more of a punch than their predecessor.

Working to a tight timeframe, staff at the Royal Artillery Trials and Development Unit are currently busy assessing how best to integrate them into the Field Army – with the first training package for personnel slated to start in the autumn.

Manufacturers BAE Systems Bofors designed Archer to "shoot and scoot" repeatedly for long periods, firing off rounds in quick succession before moving to avoid being targeted by the enemy.

Capable of firing all types of 155mm munitions, including extended range and precision anti-armour shells, it can also be fitted with a remote controlled weapon station – mounting either a 40mm grenade launcher, a 12.7mm heavy machine gun, or a 7.62mm general purpose machine gun.

And representing the next generation in wheeled artillery vehicles, it can travel some 200km further than the tracked AS90.

But how do the rest of the stats measure up?

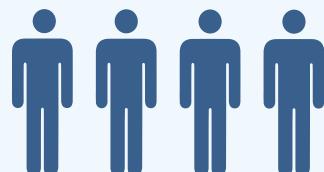
5

Range of Archer's gun, in kilometres,

double that of the AS90 – equivalent to firing from central London to Sandhurst

650

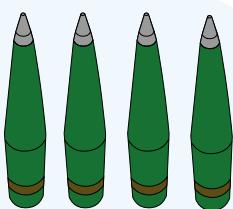
range, in kilometres, of the Swedish platform – a 6x6 articulated truck based on a Volvo chassis. In comparison, AS90 covers a maximum of 420km



maximum number of crew required to operate Archer, one less than the AS90

SEVENTY

top speed of Archer, in kilometres per hour, versus the AS90's 53kph



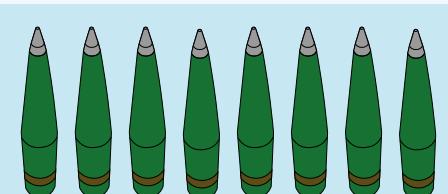
FOUR

rounds fired by Archer in simultaneous impact mode, meaning several shells are launched in succession with different trajectories so they hit the same target at the same time

20

time, in seconds, it takes to load and fire Archer's main armament.

The operation is handled from inside the armoured cabin, with the unit ready to move positions in another 20secs



8

maximum number of rounds Archer can fire per minute (against AS90's six). In intensive fire mode it can empty its 21-projectile magazine in less than three minutes



14.3

Archer's length, in metres – 5.23m longer than AS90



52

calibre of Archer's fully automated, self-propelled howitzer – outrunning AS90's 39-calibre barrel

You are what you eat

Army PTI Sgt Mario Woods (RAPTC) shares his diet and workout regime – and it's not for the fainthearted

► "I EAT 4,000 calories per day to make sure I fuel my body properly for all the activity I do."

I train daily and at the weekends I also play football, rugby or volleyball.

My diet is pretty strict. I'm pescatarian and I steer clear of processed foods, even tinned veg. I also fast for 16 hours a day – only eating between the hours of 1000 and 1800.

I do have cheat days – I love biscuits and chocolates, but I'll only have these before a workout and never after 1500. That way I can burn it off and keep my weight stable.

This is what a typical day looks like..."



Top tips:

Build habits over time. If you want to make changes, start slowly – like swapping to healthier meals for a week or two, then adding a training programme. By becoming consistent you will create habit, which in turn creates discipline – and soon it will be routine

Learn how to cook for yourself – that's the biggest game changer. I live in the mess during the week so I've taught myself to cook with minimal equipment. Invest in a George Foreman-style grill and an air fryer. They're brilliant, you can chuck everything in – protein, veg, carbs – and it's done in less than half an hour

Q&A

What's your preferred form of phys?

Hypertrophy training – building muscle, not to look good, but to get stronger and stay injury-free. I also compete in natural body building events

Favourite meal?

Air fryer sweet potatoes, mixed veg and calamari

What podcast do you listen to when out walking?

Diary of a CEO with Steven Bartlett – he discusses things like human performance and personal development

Profile:

Name: Sgt Mario Woods

Age: 40

Military career: Joined The Royal Anglian Regiment in 2007, transferring to the Royal Army Physical Training Corps in 2021

Good GRIEF

The dos and don'ts of helping the bereaved

► WHEN someone you know experiences a loss, it can be hard to know what to do or say. You may feel awkward or that you'll upset them further if you get things wrong.

But Joanna Williams, head counsellor at online bereavement support service GriefChat, says that discomfort around death and dying can make the experience even more isolating for those left behind. These are her recommendations for how best to offer support...

Do: ✓

Say something. This is almost always better than saying nothing at all. You can even tell them, "I don't know what to say". Sometimes there are no words. You're acknowledging the pain of the loss and that goes a long way

Share a personal experience or impression of their loved one.

Commenting about a particular memory or characteristic of the person who has died – for example how kind or cheerful they always were – shows that you are genuinely thinking about them

Check in later, and on key dates. The initial wave of support can fade away after the funeral and bereaved people may feel that everyone has moved on with their lives while they are left with their grief. Reach out with a

message just to say you are thinking of them, especially on milestones such as birthdays, anniversaries and dates like Mother's Day or at Christmas

Give them time. There is no quick fix for grief, nor should there be. Resist the temptation to encourage your friend back to "normal" activities until they feel ready

Don't: ✗

Be vague in your offers of help – or put the onus on the bereaved person to reach out. "Call me if you need anything", may seem like a supportive message but an overwhelmed, grieving person may not know what they need. Or they might worry about burdening you with their feelings. It's more helpful to do something practical – drop round meals for the freezer or pick up the kids from school

Talk too much about your own experiences or say, "I know how you feel". Grief is unique to the individual and their relationship with the deceased. The truth is, nobody knows how they're feeling but them. You might have had a similar loss but talking about that too much isn't helpful

Use "at least" in an effort to make them feel better. Phrases like, "at least they didn't suffer", or "at least they're in a better place now" are scant comfort and could even be interpreted as suggesting they should be grateful in some way. It's far better to acknowledge they are in pain and show you are comfortable being with them just as they are

Thanks to a partnership with insurers Absolute Military, Service personnel can talk directly with GriefChat counsellors free of charge online. Visit absolutemilitary.co.uk/grief-chat weekdays between 0900 and 2100



Running repairs

How airborne sappers worked through the night to ensure safe flights out of Sudan

► WHEN the short notice call to deploy to Sudan and help evacuate eligible citizens was made, the Army's Air Manoeuvre Battlegroup was boarding flights within hours.

Key to the formation's success in the African country were the personnel of 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment, who performed through-the-night airfield repairs at Wadi Sayyidna to allow military transport aircraft to fly civilians to safety.

Designed for much lighter planes, the runway suffered under the high tempo of larger platforms arriving and departing – meaning the sappers' skills were in high demand.

Here, Maj Mark Borley – OC of 51 Parachute Squadron – and lance corporals Harry Rose and Bradley Gent tell *Soldier* about their efforts on the ground...

How do you prepare for a tasking as rare as this?

Maj Borley: "At a regimental level, we conduct Exercise Eagle Sapper once a year. The first serial is airfield seizure and repair. The runway will have a few craters dug into it and the squadron will simulate parachuting in with the equipment needed and then carry out those repairs. At squadron level, we practise the detailed and technical side of the role regularly."



When did the call to deploy come?

Maj Borley: "We had just finished a day at work – but the lead elements, with their kit, were ready to go at 0200. The next day they were issued with armour plates and food and were then on a mid-afternoon flight to Cyprus. The squadron had been on the ranges at the Stanford Training Area and other elements were on Exercise Wessex Storm. Some soldiers went from their bashas straight to Brize Norton, deploying with what they had."

Tell us about the airfield at Wadi Sayyidna and its state of repair.

Maj Borley: "It had been used by the French and Germans before the British arrived. It is a Sudanese air force base for flying fast jets, but C-130s and A400Ms had been landing for a few days and had churned up the airfield. Pilots were reporting the damage was getting worse and worse. It was built in the 60s or 70s and you could see it had been repaired before. By the time we arrived the Royal Air Force were landing in a section that was just a third of the entire runway."

Describe the damage.

LCpl Rose: "There were some big ruts in the airfield. It was a mix of potholes; Tarmac being peeled up and severe gouges in the surface. The capping layer was coming off and breaking into pieces – you cannot have that getting into engines. We fixed 13 potholes in total, each measuring five or six metres in diameter."



How did you carry out the repairs?

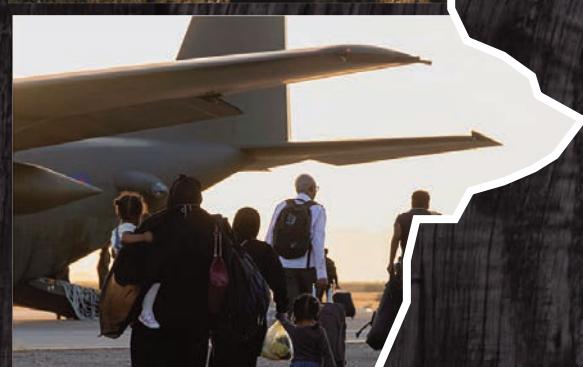
LCpl Rose: "Similar to what you see on the roads, we would start by removing debris from the airfield and the potholes themselves. You need a clean finish so cannot have any damaged edges. It is a case of compacting what is left in the bottom of the hole and then filling it with a ready-made Tarmac, before levelling off and sealing the outside."

What challenges were there with this?

LCpl Gent: "We normally use a cold-pour system that is quick setting but that was back in the UK, so we had to source materials in Cyprus. We only got the sledgehammers and wheelbarrows we needed on the last night. Before that we were using sandbags and lifting everything by hand. Being an airborne engineer is all about improvising to get the job done to standard."



Maj Borley: "Daytime temperatures got up to 50 degrees Celsius and the cold pour we were using cannot set in that heat, so we did everything at night. We would get three to five hours to carry out the work, but it is a Sudanese airfield, and they were fighting a civil war – they would scramble their planes with little notice, and we were almost caught out on a couple of occasions."



IN NUMBERS



7 tonnes of asphalt used by the sappers, along with...

300 litres of bitumen

FIVE nights of airfield repair work



Finally, describe the sense of satisfaction from the task.

LCpl Rose: "In training, we do this and then rip it out again, but in Sudan we felt the weight of the task on our shoulders – this was the real deal. It was good to perform a role we have rehearsed quite a bit and we were the linchpin to the whole operation."

LCpl Gent: "It was an incredible experience and hard work at the same time. It was one of my first times working in intense heat and

we were constantly drinking water. But I feel privileged to have been part of the team helping the UK evacuation."

Maj Borley: "We were burnt out, but when we got the call it was a case of 'yeah, this is good'. That feeling of satisfaction meant we were raring to go. While we only had six soldiers out there, we were part of a much wider team. The regiment was in Cyprus and without having people in various headquarters it would have been very difficult to coordinate our efforts." ■

On top of the world

How Hari Budha Magar's record-breaking Everest climb went down to the wire

► LAST month, *Soldier* reported on Gurkha veteran Hari Budha Magar becoming the first above-knee double-amputee in history to scale the world's highest peak.

Hampered by bad weather, his team were unable to rest at camp five as planned and endured a 25-hour slog to the summit and back as oxygen supplies dwindled.

Now safely back on home soil, the 43-year-old former corporal tells the story of the gruelling ascent and the tough decisions they had to make along the way...

G We started out from camp four at 2150 and arrived back at 2300 the next day.

The first summit push was horrible – so bad that one team member suggested that we finish and go down.

We had to go so slow and hunker down at times and wait for the weather and

conditions to improve.

This meant oxygen supplies ran low and some people had to turn back for their and the team's overall safety.

I also wanted to give up at least three times. The Sherpas, which included my brother, reassured me we could make it and the oxygen would last, however even they could not predict how long the elements would delay us.

But we pushed hard and five of us made it to the summit; my brother Nanda Bahadur Budha Magar, Mingma Sharpa, Pasang Sherpa, Jit Bahadur Tamang and I.

We had reached the top of the world. But then we had to get back down with little oxygen, very late in the day, with an ice storm coming in.

Two Sherpas had nearly finished their cylinders at the Hillary Step, so they left me and the remaining team members to rightly preserve their lives.

My oxygen was about to finish on South Summit. I was never so scared in my life – even when I was injured and the time I crashed my car.

Once my oxygen finished, one Sherpa gave me his and carried on down. Now, my brother

and I were left with very little oxygen – enough for around 30 to 45 minutes – but we still had a long way to go.

I felt like we would die once it was finished. We looked for some of the oxygen bottles left on the mountain, but they were all empty.

I told my brother to go and I just went down on my bum all the way to the wall of camp four.

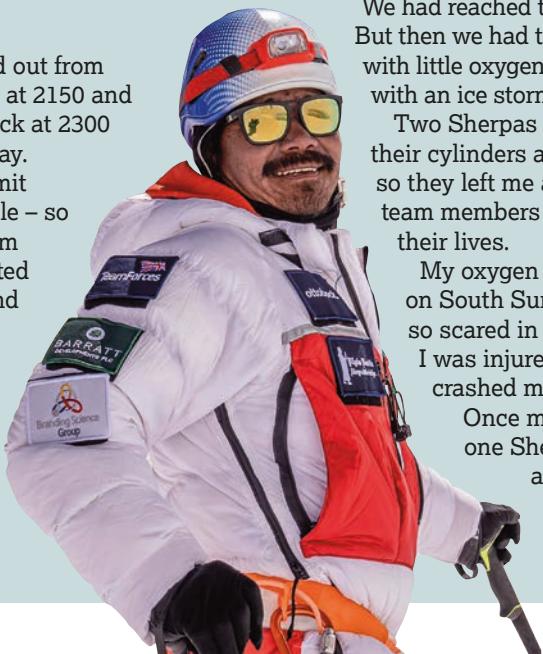
We had no radios, but we had a satphone, so were able to call base camp and relay messages.

Finally, a Sherpa from camp four came up with oxygen and hot water and met us below the balcony and saved us, before two others came and took us back to camp.

The immediate danger had passed. Over the next two days the team and I went down to camp three, then two and back to base camp.

This experience has really hit home for me that if we are passionate, disciplined, work hard and believe in ourselves, nothing can stop us from achieving our dream.

We proved nothing is impossible.



Fighting back to fitness

How to tackle phys when you're not A1

► AMID Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, the message from the top is that troops must ensure they are fit enough to deploy should the call to action come.

And with recruitment issues and Regular personnel numbers now dipping below 75,000, every soldier will count on ops.

This reality makes it all the more important for those recovering from illness or injury to bring their fitness back up to the mark if they can – but not in a way that is likely to cause further dramas.

With this mind, we asked exercise rehabilitation instructor Sgt Megan Paynter-Hetherington (RAPTC) for her tips on returning to readiness.



Engage experts

It might sound obvious, but it is important to seek help in the first instance if you find yourself injured – the unit PTI is often the best port of call. If the problem is enough to stop you completing normal daily activities or training you must report to the medical officer who can refer you for treatment.

Tailored taskings

Recovery is an individual affair – the type of exercise you will need is going to vary depending on your circumstances and the stage of rehabilitation, so you will be given advice on a plan that is right for you.

Caution pays

Generally, physical adaptation requires activity two or three times a week. But if you have not done any training for a while, your return must be gradual and graded. You will need to increase the intensity and volume of exercise over time to allow your body to get used to the demands.

Downtime directive

Ensuring you get enough rest is actually as important as the training itself. If you do not allow your body to recover

it will be difficult to see any change when you exercise. Ideally, you need to aim for seven or eight hours' sleep per night.

Fuelling fitness

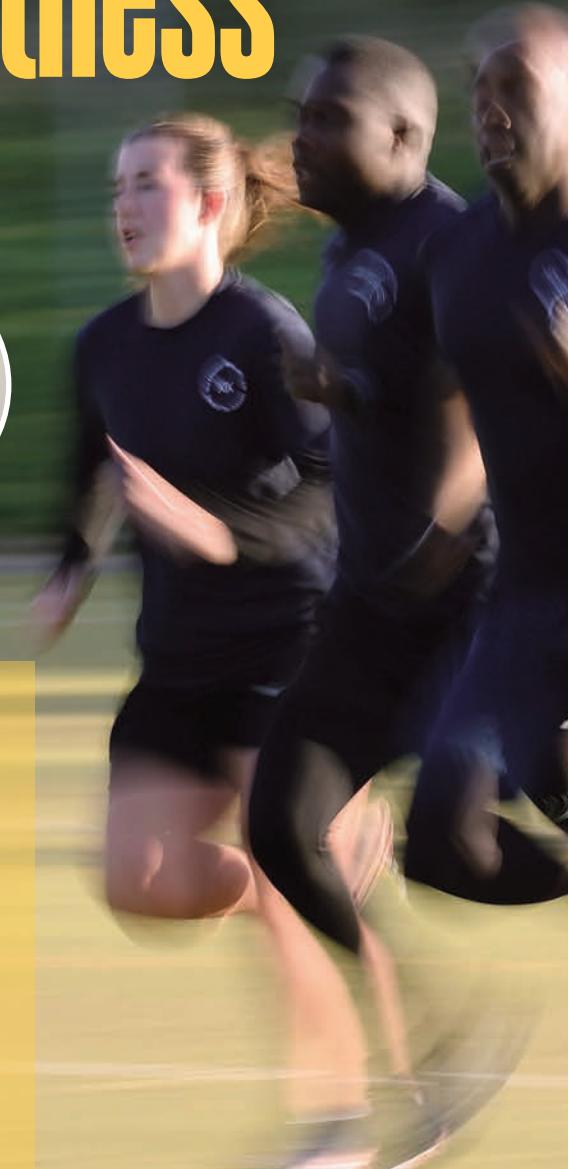
Aside from rest, nutrition is the other area where resilience can be built outside of your training. Evidence suggests a high protein breakfast is helpful. Then a good mixture of carbohydrate, fat and protein should be consumed with more complex carbs pre- and post-activity.

Body talk

Listening to your body when exercising is very important and ensuring you are not too tired is key. Look out for feeling faint, disturbed sleep and inability to concentrate as signs of over training.

Maintain momentum

You might find yourself struggling, particularly if you have a stubborn injury and you suffer setbacks. But keep focused and if you cannot manage a particular task then at least do something simple to keep active. Set yourself goals – but also break them down into smaller, more achievable steps. Finally, stay rooted in the present.



RESERVE EXIT SURVEY

THE RESERVES
EXIT SURVEY
LAUNCHES IN
APRIL 2023

What is it?

This survey is for Reserve Service personnel who have either decided to sign off from the Army Reserves or can no longer serve in the Army Reserves.

Why do we need It?

The survey aims to better understand the reasons for leaving and make Service life better for future Reservists.

How can we encourage responses:

The CoC and all those involved in assisting those who leave the Army Reserve must ensure that Reservists who have decided to leave can fill out the survey prior to leaving Service.

'Understanding the reasons for people's decision to leave service is vitally important to us, it will help guide our future decisions to improve the lived experience of our Army Reservists in a modern era. We would appreciate a moment of their valuable time to complete this survey.'

Major General P Griffiths (D Pers)

How?

Click the below link to access the survey: <https://surveys.mod.uk/index.php/256465>



Any Questions?

Contact:

Annabel Parkyn, Army Personnel Research & Consultancy
ArmyPers-Strat-APRC-Survey@mod.gov.uk



ARMY

LET LOOSE

Troops break free from the training ground to polish their skills and drills across Estonia

66

It proves the Challenger is still as potentially lethal as anything else out there

99



Words: Steve Muncey Pictures: Cpl Danny Houghton, RLC and Tpr Joe Turner, QRFH

THE goal of this year's Exercise Spring Storm in Estonia was unambiguous; to evaluate how allied forces would repel an invasion of the Baltic states by the Russians.

This chilling scenario would have been deemed the stuff of fantasy just a few years ago. But Vladimir Putin's sustained attack on Ukraine, not to mention the volatility that's become apparent inside Russia itself, mean the need to cover off all eventualities – however uncomfortable they are to contemplate – has never been more urgent.

Would-be invaders of Estonia should note, however, that the personnel defending it are more than adept with their assorted weaponry. That was proven beyond doubt recently at Exercise Iron Spear, the regular multinational tank shooting competition in Latvia (page 12). ▶

66
It was
exciting
to be
part of
that
99



» Equipped with the Challenger 2, a Queen's Royal Hussars team from the enhanced forward presence battlegroup based in Tapa beat a cutting-edge Leopard 2 main battle tank from the Spanish army, a US Abrams, an Italian Ariete and T-72-based platforms from Poland and Slovakia.

"That victory proves the Challenger is still potentially as lethal as anything out there, but more importantly just how well trained our crews are," says the QRH's regimental gunnery officer, Capt Harry Harmon.

"The competition format involved moving and firing around the range and contained both accuracy and time elements.

"Many of the opposition's tanks had auto-loaders, something the Challenger 2 doesn't have, which makes winning that much more impressive."

Maj George Trypanis, officer commanding B Squadron, believes the innate quality of the Challenger 2 was one factor, while the impressive performance of the crew was down to how well the regiment prepared for Op Cabrit.

"The road to Estonia has been a long one, with a high tempo

of packages and dynamic serials over 18 months that led up to Exercise Spring Storm," he explains.

"Importantly, our journey has included both live firing and Tes-enabled exercises.

"We deployed to Ex Arrow in Finland last May and experienced operating in a multinational battlegroup. We then travelled to Salisbury Plain to act as opfor for the Mercian battlegroup on Exercise Iron Storm, which set us up perfectly for Cabrit pre-deployment training.

"That consisted of live-firing serials at Castlemartin followed by two battlegroup-level combined arms packages on Exercise Tallinn Dawn in Germany either side of Christmas, before arriving in Estonia in March."





**EX SPRING STORM
IN NUMBERS:**
14,000
troops from
ELEVEN
Nato countries



In many respects, Exercise Spring Storm represented the final polish of skills and drills as the crews – unleashed from exercise areas – were able to rehearse defensive actions against an invading force across large swathes of northern Estonia, on actual roads, in suburbs and on farmland.

“I’ve been in the Army for 12 years and this has given me my first opportunity to operate among the civilian population and outside a formal training ground,” says vehicle commander Sgt Roy Matthews.

“I’ve been to Canada and Germany before, which both have big open spaces and wood blocks, but being on foreign soil, using public highways and junctions and trying to find the enemy over such vast and varied areas made it really interesting and more similar to a real operation.”

Personnel from all three Services were tested on varied serials with, for example, the 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team parachuting in, around 100 Royal Marines conducting a night-time beach raid from HMS Albion, and Army Air Corps Apaches and Wildcats, and Royal Air Force Typhoons, providing air support.

The scale of the exercise was huge – more than 14,000 troops from 11 Nato countries in total participated.

With 1,500 UK soldiers taking part in the package, it was the first time the British Army had been involved in a brigade-

sized deployment in the country.

“There were some large road moves that had to be planned and coordinated with both the military and civilian police forces,” says Lt Iain McGregor.

“It was quite an experience getting through built-up areas, sometimes around tight bends that were tricky to negotiate in tracked vehicles with civilian cars and trucks trying to overtake you as they went about their business.

“Then we had to conceal ourselves, sometimes using private farmland which required negotiations with local landowners.

“Some of them were very happy to let us use their property and a few weren’t.

“One of them told me she was content for us to use her wood block, with every other sentence ‘I hate Putin’ – at least we knew pretty quickly that she was onside.”

A mock invasion force consisting of The Light Dragoons battle group plus Italian and Canadian elements was brought in to test the Estonian brigade and its allied partners, including the QRH contingent. And the UK personnel enjoyed a rare opportunity to develop strategies alongside Infantry colleagues – in this instance 3rd Battalion, The Rifles.

“We have cooperated with troops mounted in Warriors before, but this was one of the few times we’ve worked with Mastiffs so we had to develop a new set of procedures as we went,” explains Lt McGregor.

“Being wheeled, they are faster on the roads than Warriors but they don’t have integral protection and can’t join the battle; the soldiers have to disembark and leave the platforms behind.

“We determined that the Infantry should dismount and establish defensive positions and we would be called forward if enemy armour tried to punch through them.

“It was exciting to be part of that. With a live force coming towards us it felt completely different to what we’ve done in the UK, when the enemy is usually notional or just a Land Rover or a Bulldog.

“My troop was expanded to include supporting elements such as air defence. We had five CVR(T) Stormers attached, a fire support team calling in fires for us and engineers laying minefields and putting in blocks on crucial routes to ensure »



» the main formation wasn't outflanked by the enemy.

"During other phases, if the Infantry made a break across a road or an exposed track, for example, we would come forwards and provide smoke, engage the enemy vehicles and provide the soldiers with a few crucial minutes of manoeuvre time.

"Once they'd dug in, we'd pull back and disappear and the infantry would pick off enemy assets if they came after us.

"It took a bit of time to figure it all out, but by the end it had become a really profitable relationship."

It wasn't just the opposition the personnel had to keep an eye on, though.

"The landscape in Estonia is completely different to the UK or Germany and really soft and boggy in places," explains vehicle commander Cpl Declan McCalmon.

"You have to take extra time to get an appreciation of the conditions as you move from place to place.

"We had a few incidents. I got bogged in on the first serial as I came off the track and literally the whole side of the Challenger just sank into the ground.

"We tried troop-level recovery but that didn't work so we had to call up the REME and they brought in a CRARRV and winch. It was an interesting three hours getting it out."

However, hazards to allied tanks present the same threat to enemy ones, something the Estonians use in their own tactics and have been passing on to their British comrades.

"Their strategy is really interesting because they are not focused on grabbing large areas of terrain, which is something we practise on Salisbury Plain," explains Sgt Matthews.

"The Estonians also look at securing junctions, specific routes and tracks which the invading enemy may want to use because of the boggy ground."



Passing on insider knowledge like this might be valuable even to some experienced operators, but it's gold dust for junior crew members still in the process of learning their craft, says Tpr Joe Seatherton.

"Apart from our training package for this tour in Germany, this was my first proper exercise abroad since I joined up three years ago, so it's been hugely beneficial to work with other nations and see how they operate," he adds.

"I've learnt loads about getting to know the lie of the land and how important it is to stick to the tracks in certain areas where there are hidden marshes and bogs.

"This package has also shown us that we are capable of developing our tactics and procedures so we can work with other nations as a joint force and as a result we're well prepared to act if anything does happen.

"You definitely feel there is an added purpose to the training here and that gives you real pride in the job you're doing."

If Exercise Spring Storm proved anything, it's that well drilled British personnel equipped with lethal weaponry will be more than a match for any force that dares cross the border into a Nato member's sovereign territory.

The QRH's B Squadron is a prime example, drawing praise from the Estonian brigade commander for the "speed and decisiveness" of its counter-attacks.

"We have demonstrated that, as part of a British battlegroup, we can operate effectively in a multinational division," comments Maj Trypanis.

"Now it's over I'm really pleased we had the opportunity to prove we could meet the challenges that were set for us and can be depended upon to achieve our mission objectives." ■



66
The first tank took a few goes at getting onto the craft but once we'd worked out the power settings the second got on first go
99

Battle tanks make a splash

DURING Exercise Spring Storm a separate serial was conducted on Estonia's north coast to practise loading QRH Challenger 2s on to the Royal Navy's amphibious assault ship, HMS Albion.

"The ability to manoeuvre tanks around littoral areas is important in order to move heavy armour into crucial regions of any conflict," says Maj George Trypanis, officer commanding of the QRH's B Squadron, whose armour was involved in the drills.

"This exercise showed the flexibility we have for deploying these platforms, but this took incredible skill and care as the tanks were

up-armoured, which meant they were a little wider than usual. There's a lot more at stake colliding with the side of a ship than there is with a tree on Salisbury Plain."

Two Challenger 2s were each loaded on to their own landing craft and both rendezvoused with HMS Albion around a kilometre out into the bay. Then one tank was transferred on and off the ship to establish procedures, before both landing craft returned to shore and deposited the Challenger 2s back on land.

"Our Royal Marine landing craft commander said he'd been in for 20 years and had only had tanks on board twice before," says Lt Iain McGregor.

"It's good training for them as well because they don't normally transport anything as heavy as a Challenger."

"They had to be very careful about how close they could bring the landing craft into shore without beaching them – we wanted them closer so we didn't have such a big drive through the water, but they obviously wanted to stay out to not ground their vessel, so there was a bit of negotiation there."

"The first tank took a few goes at getting on the craft but once we'd worked out the power settings required the second tank got on first go."

"On the return, French marine frogmen swam in and simulated securing our

landing sites.

"We came off in one go, pushing inland to practise securing the beachhead."

Vehicle commander Cpl Declan McCalmon adds: "I've never seen this in my whole time in the Army."

"Royal Marine specialists guided us onboard so we wouldn't damage the landing craft as the transfers were pretty tricky."

"When we returned to the harbour Apaches and Typhoons passed overhead to provide cover, simulating how they'd run us into shore."

"It was quite something to be with your Challenger out in the ocean and watching all these aircraft roaring past."



WHEN your weapon strikes its target at a whisker over Mach 2.5, the term “fast-moving” is a subjective one. However, no one in the Service’s rocketeer community can deny that 2023 is shaping up as one of the most dynamic periods in their history.

Just over three months ago, the Regular Army’s long-range precision fires capacity was doubled at a stroke when 3 Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery retired their 105mm guns and joined 26 Regiment, Royal Artillery as operators of the M270 multiple launch rocket system (MLRS).

This autumn, another landmark will be reached when both these units, as well as personnel from 101 Regiment, Royal Artillery – the sole Reservist element to operate the platform – travel to Salisbury Plain to take part in Exercise Scorpion Cyclone, the first physical roll-out of the 1st Deep Recce Strike Brigade Combat Team.

In addition, a hugely significant training package for the British Army’s MLRS capability has just taken place in Finland, one that has sparked a major re-evaluation of the way it trains these specialist personnel.

Lightning Strike was the first multinational exercise the Finnish armed forces staged after the country was accepted into Nato – and the UK was one of just three member countries invited to take part.

But more importantly, this was the first time MLRS crews – in this case those from 26 Regt – had a taste of live-firing their long-range M31 rockets during a kinetic exercise featuring tactical manoeuvres.

“I can’t stress how vital the opportunity has been for us,” says Maj Stephanie Manning-Degobertiere (pictured below), the regiment’s second-in-command.

“Not only did we establish a great working relationship with a new Nato member but, apart from on ops many years ago, this is the first time we’ve conducted live firing with the full bore M31 projectile outside of the White Sands missile range in the United States.

“I had to write up a detailed safety plan because we literally didn’t have one for this situation and then it had to be signed off with the Royal School of Artillery. ■



Words: Steve Muncey Pictures: Samuli Haapala

QUICK

Gunners learn lessons fast in Finland after country is accepted into Nato

“

Being on foreign soil made it really interesting and similar to a real operation

”

AS LIGHTNING





“With M31 rockets, which have around an 80-kilometre range, the safety aspect is considerable. You have to take into account what's in scope if, say, a fin locks out and the rocket goes rogue. And you must consider burst distance and air space as during our fires they went up to 60,000 feet.

“But it was worth all the effort because, with our launchers bursting out of their hides and moving several hundred metres to their firing positions, this exercise provided very realistic scenarios which were of immense training value.

“We were the only nation to live fire the M31s, and that was important for our crews' readiness qualifications – that's why we normally go to White Sands.

“But developing our troops in Finland is superb because we are a high readiness unit and we're operating in the type of environment where we could be fighting for real, and alongside nations we'll probably be fighting with.”

Tactical advantage

With M270s from the US, Finland and the UK working closely together on the exercise, plus troops from Norway and Sweden, coordinated strikes and manoeuvres against an “invading force” took place across huge, densely-forested swathes of the Rovajarvi training area, around 120km from the host's border with Russia.

Around 30 personnel and three platforms were sent from 26 Regt and the impact it had on the British contingent was huge.

“You gain so much more in a tactical setting – our junior personnel probably learned as much from their two weeks in Finland as they might in two or three years at home,” says Bdr Olivia Leather, an M270 detachment commander.

“Doing the tactical move from the hide to the firing point, and launching the M31 in a set time, was just the sort of challenge we need to be doing a lot more of.

“All your work has to be absolutely spot on and it feels different, very real.

“White Sands is great for developing firing drills but it's static stuff only, and the crews simply jump in, do the live firing, and jump out.”

The British MLRS teams regularly practise tactical moves in the UK but can only fire practice rounds – which they also did an extensive amount of in Finland – due to space restrictions, explains SSgt David Grice.

“On Salisbury Plain we receive the mission from the command post and drive out to a designated

IN NUMBERS

8,000

Number of troops on Ex Lightning Strike

1,100

Personnel from the US, UK, Sweden and Norway took part

84

Official maximum range, in kilometres, of the M31 rocket

41

Length, in kilometres, of the main training range used

3,100

Speed, in kilometres per hour, of the M31



firing point but we cannot live fire the M31 – and our practice rounds always have to be aimed at the same designated impact area so it never feels quite as realistic as it could,” the NCO adds.

“In Finland, however, the training quality was extremely high and the exercise area was so large the Finns could create different ranges within it.

“The command posts and launchers were in hides, and we established points to reload from, so it was up to each detachment to move the live ammunition themselves, with safety teams looking on.

“In my 19 years on these systems I've never conducted live firing of the M31 rocket in a tactical scenario like that.

“Apart from White Sands, I've only ever fired them in Afghanistan but that was from fixed locations in bases.”



Bdr Olivia Leather, RA



Winter warmer

The package in Finland also gave some of the regiment's support personnel, such as REME technicians and ammunition specialists, the opportunity to see the long-range precision weapons in full flow.

"These troops never get chance to go to America to see live firing normally, so it was brilliant they could do their job and see the end result for once – they all loved that," adds SSgt Grice.

"We'll definitely be looking to make more of this exercise in the future if we can, build in some R&R or AT perhaps, especially if we come out on both editions as there's another Lightning Strike package staged in the winter."

Another reason to return to Finland is the heavily forested terrain, which closely resembles Estonia.

26 Regt have had an enduring commitment on Op Cabrit and 3 RHA are scheduled to deploy for the first time with MLRS this autumn – and the teams managed to pick up some valuable tips on camouflage and concealment from their Finnish counterparts.

"They had better cam nets for that environment," explains SSgt Grice. "Theirs had a built-in thermal sheet, while ours is separate and takes longer to set up. Their version is also reversible, with white on the other side for use in winter, as well as having a closer mesh so it doesn't catch on sharp angles and can be pulled over vehicles quicker."

"We've already completed a procurement request for similarly designed nets so hopefully we'll get those soon."

Real threat

Another unexpected bonus of participating in the exercise was the presence of two intelligence-gathering aircraft of unconfirmed origin (you can guess the suspected nation) flying along the border, attempting to photograph the manoeuvres and monitor communications between the various formations taking part.

"This definitely provided us with a huge training opportunity," says Maj Manning-Degobertiere.

"On a standard exercise on Salisbury Plain we might be told



SSgt David Grice, RA

an enemy drone is in the area but it doesn't always change the way people behave.

"However, when we were alerted to these aerial assets' presence, the troops worked out ways of preventing an M270 launcher that was being repaired – and therefore not cammed up – from being identified from above.

They generated great solutions themselves, thinking on their feet.

"We'd already changed our signals posture as a result of our location but this incident created a much greater buzz around camp and the chats among the crews were fascinating to overhear, revolving around what it was we wanted to show, if anything, how we should hide and how it altered how we were operating."

"That level of thinking is just what we're after and it was great to see the situation generating a proper combat response from everyone."

Lightning Strike twice

The personnel of 26 Regt, and no doubt of 3 RHA and 101 Regt as well, will be hoping all the preparations and positive feedback from Finland will not be consigned to history but will lead to regular participation in the package.

"It's been so successful we've put a case in through the 1st Deep Recce Strike Brigade Combat Team to go to Finland every year and have also asked whether our two nations can sign a framework agreement permitting us to go there twice a year to train on both iterations," says Maj Manning-Degobertiere.

Moreover, the exercise has had a major impact on the way the MLRS teams want to train their personnel.

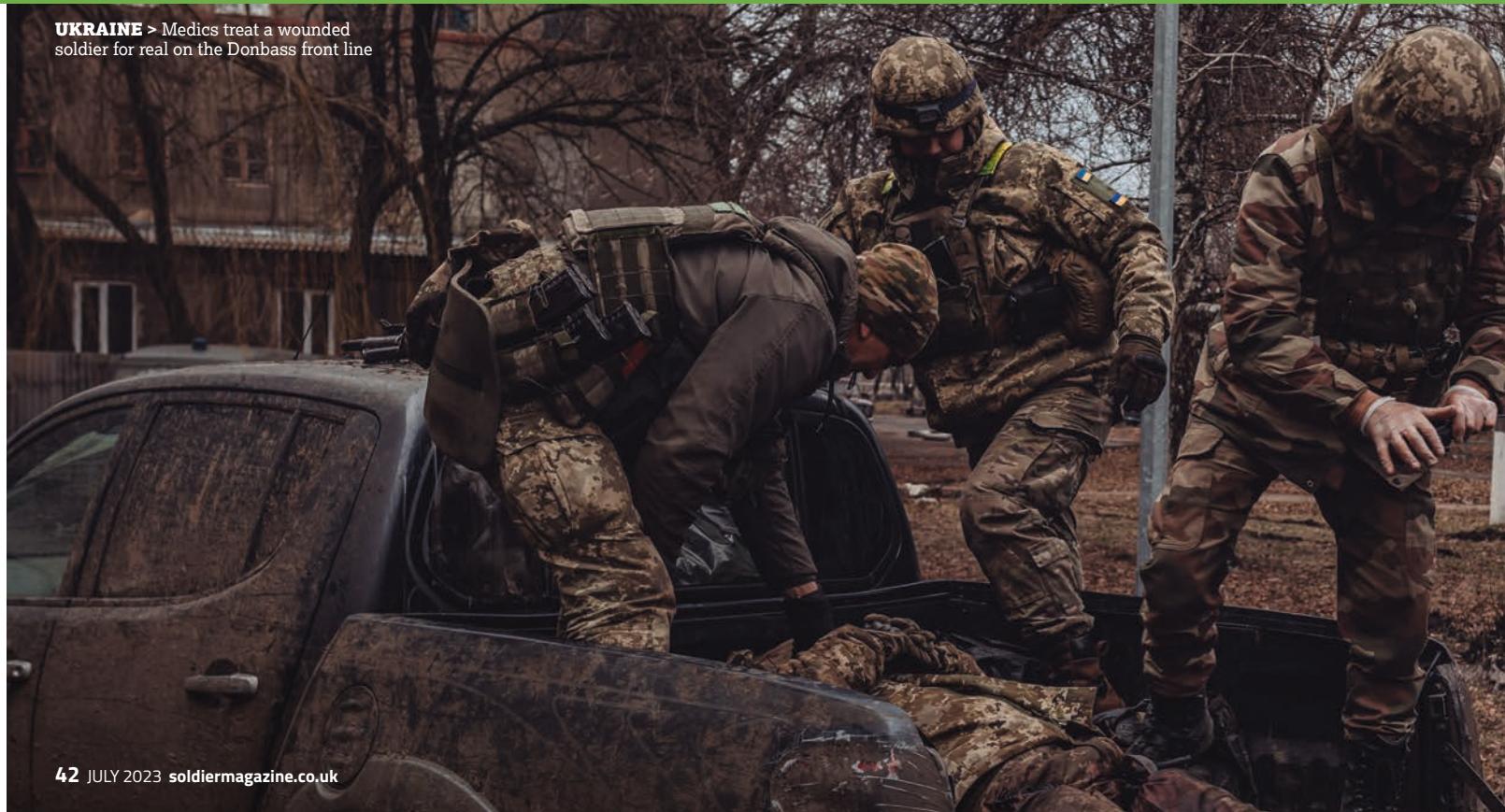
"It has already triggered a rewrite of our training plan to include a Lightning Strike-type of exercise" adds the officer. "It provides our personnel with highly valuable experience and they gain their competency certifications in a combat setting – which is something we've long aspired to do."

"With two Regular regiments now operating the M270 system, the value of such a move would be colossal." ■



UK > Reservists help Ukrainian troops hone their battlefield casualty drills

SCHOoled



UKRAINE > Medics treat a wounded soldier for real on the Donbass front line



Reservists impart lifesaving knowledge on battle-hardened Ukrainians

to SURVIVE



SERGEANT David Dickinson-Wood (Mercian) admits to feeling a little apprehensive.

He may be a Reservist of 24 years, a veteran of Iraq and a university lecturer in civvy life. But not even this level of life experience can shield him from the weighty responsibility of delivering what is likely to be his most important lesson yet – a four-week infantry training package for Ukrainian soldiers destined for the front lines of a bloody war.

And it will be a familiar

feeling to anyone who has been involved in Op Interflex to date, helping to mentor and support the embattled country's armed forces.

"You wonder if you're going to stack up to the expectations of these troops," the 41-year-old says after completing his first intro exercise with the overseas visitors.

"They have been saying this training is going to help them survive, and I've been surprised by how receptive and welcoming they are to the lessons we're trying to teach them.

"But then you have that moment of realisation when you think, Christ, these

guys are going to be using these skills for real in just a couple of weeks. We cannot afford to short-change them."

The senior NCO is part of Trident Company – the first ever Reserve cohort to be tasked with delivering the infantry lessons.

Named after the emblem on the Ukrainian flag, the sub-unit has brought together some 80 volunteers from across eight different cap badges.

They range in rank from private to major, with an assortment of military experience – from ex-Regulars and veterans of Northern Ireland and »

► Afghanistan, to those with more recent tours of Estonia and Mali under their belts.

With many mobilised back in March to prepare for the role, it is a relief to finally be out on the training area (the name of which cannot be given for security reasons) and cracking on with things.

And they have a fair amount to pack in – with lessons for the 200 foreigners covering basic weapon handling, fieldcraft, skill at arms, urban and trench warfare, battlefield casualty drills and marksmanship.

OC Maj Deepe Rawji (Mercian) explains how “lethality” and “survivability” are the central pillars to everything being taught.

And for team medic Pte Dean Mitchell (Scots), the latter has focused heavily on mass bleeding, including the correct use of tourniquets.

“If that’s the one thing they walk away with, I will be happy,” he tells *Soldier*.



“When I speak to the Ukrainians, hear their stories about mass casualty situations out there and they are showing these videos, that’s when it hits home – Jesus, these guys need help.”

With around 80 per cent of these overseas visitors – many also volunteers – having seen significant combat already, the lessons are working both ways too.

“It’s been good to hear them asking questions out there,” Sgt Dickinson-Wood continues. “That gives us confidence in our training.

“We were doing a casevac, and they demonstrated some of the techniques they have been using.

“That was really interesting and made it all very 3D; very visceral.”

For Reservists with no

combat experience at all, such as LCpl Cameron Robertson-Godfrey (R Welsh), the sharing of these battlefield encounters has been humbling.

"We were listening to some of their stories last night," he explains.

"It's sobering. They have been through so much, but they are still taking away lots from this.

"Part of you feels like 'why aren't you teaching us', but a lot of them have never had the degree of training we receive to get the basics done right.

"And basics done right is what will improve their survivability.

"This training is a force multiplier. One person can help ten people improve – the difference you are making is massive."

Fus Dylan Collard (R Welsh) adds that it has been valuable getting to know their counterparts for real and not just "what you see on the internet".

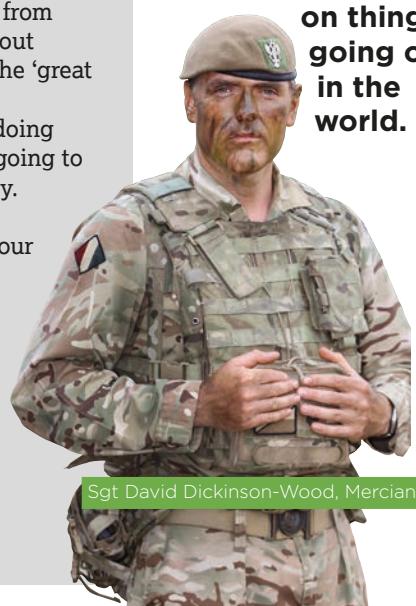
"It feels like this is where I should be, doing my part to help," he continues. "It has also been good to have the opportunity to show that we might be Reservists, but we can easily meet the requirements of an infantry training task; to show we can handle the weight of that responsibility.

"There's a saying from the eve of D-Day about troops going on to the 'great adventure'.

"These guys are doing just that – they are going to liberate their country.

"Lethality and survivability, that's our ultimate goal.

"We want to give them everything they need to survive this."



Sgt David Dickinson-Wood, Mercian



UP TO THE JOB?

We asked Reservists how they had fared on the Interflex tasking...

“This is an opportunity to help change the course of this conflict. And it is why we volunteered. The more news of this kind of tasking can get out to the wider world, too, the more it will encourage recruitment into the Army Reserve. This is what people want to do – they want to have an impact on things going on in the world.”

“This is the best thing I have done in the Army Reserve. I have Ukrainians and my own training team to look after, plus a civilian linguist, but we work hard for them and they work hard for us. I think this is exactly the sort of task the Reserve is designed for. All of us have gained qualifications and extra training, and when we leave we will go back to unit and train better there as a result. There's a lot to be gained.”



Lt Oscar Jones, R Welsh

“It's not easy speaking to your boss and telling them you're leaving the day job for nine months, but Interflex shows that Reserves will step up for tasks they think are worthwhile. We all volunteered and are here for the right reason and the Ukrainians know that – I think that's a good ice-breaker. And I think it impacts on the quality of the training too. We have all gelled well and our platoons contain lots of different experience. I hope we have a valuable impact.”

Pte Dean Mitchell, Scots



REALITY CHECK

Top officer explains what the future holds for the Army Reserve and its personnel



INTERFLEX serves as a potent reminder of how quickly Reservists can find themselves going from the nine-to-five to the forefront of military ops.

But for this to happen more seamlessly in future – and for volunteers to be as ready to fight as Regulars – change was required.

Deputy Commander Field Army, Maj Gen Aidan Smyth (shown), told *Soldier* this had meant rethinking the original plan for Reserve personnel under Future Soldier.

MORE WAR FIGHTING

“Everything fundamentally changed with Ukraine, and

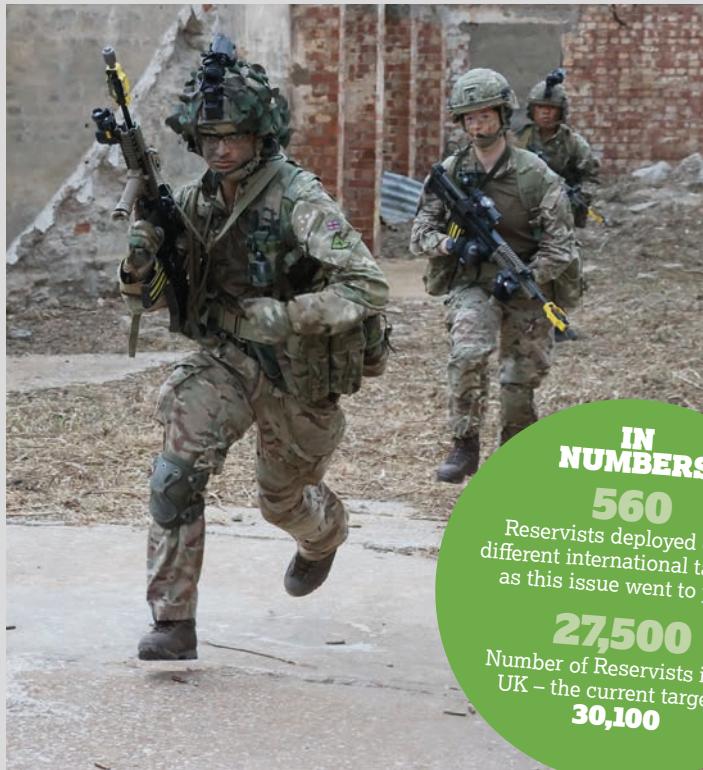
particularly with the chief of the general staff’s decision to instigate Op Mobilise,” he explained.

“Like the Regular Army, the Reserve has now returned to the primary purpose of war fighting.

“So we have removed our first priority under Future Soldier – resilience. That is no longer our chief focus.”

With that in mind, the top brass had to move fast to work out how volunteers could meet that demand. And it brought home a few uncomfortable truths – not least the dwindling recruitment levels being experienced by militaries across the world right now.

“We have been asking too



IN NUMBERS

560

Reservists deployed on 16 different international taskings as this issue went to press

27,500

Number of Reservists in the UK – the current target is **30,100**

much of our Reservists,” the general admitted.

“Our longstanding policy to deliver Reserve training on an equivalent level to Regulars, when we only have 27 days with them versus 365 days, is impossible.

“And when we place more and more demands on our Reservists, we shouldn’t then be surprised if they leave.

“The move away from equivalence has now been formalised by Army HQ and this gives us much more flexibility in the way we deliver our training.

“We can now make Reserve service more compatible with a demanding civilian job.”

MORE REALISTIC TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

To that end, a review of basic and trade training – and the individual training requirement – is under way to ensure spare-time

troops can realistically do everything in the little time they have.

“We also need to make our procedures slicker to get them to attestation faster,” the general continued.

The result of all this, he said, will be more time in the field and less in the classroom – something he hopes will retain personnel for longer.

“It may mean in most cases there’s a Reserve standard and a Regular standard,” Maj Gen Smyth added. “But we will know what that gap is before any tasking, and can fill that with pre-deployment training.”

MORE COLLECTIVE TRAINING

Another significant change will see more trade training taking place during collective exercises.

Two pilot studies in the UK this summer will see Royal Artillery and light

cavalry troops working with trade schools to gain their competences out in the field.

"There's something about delivering training to people during a live exercise that our soldiers find attractive," Maj Gen Smyth continued.

"It is also our intention that annual deployment exercises should include a large collective training element in future."

To this end, Exercise Baltic Fist will see around 300 Reservists deploy to Estonia at the start of this month alongside the 20th Armoured Brigade Combat Team.

MORE TRAVEL

A happy result of all this change should be more opportunities to get out and see the world.

"One of the reasons people sign up is to deploy on operations and travel," the general reflected.

"And they will be able to do that. We have taskings going on right now in Cyprus, Estonia and others – as well as on Interflex – and overall, we are working really hard to identify more operational opportunities.

"Over the last five years we have also quadrupled the mobilisation budget, which now stands at £40 million per year.

"We want soldiers to know the opportunities are there for them.

"But for people who would prefer not to deploy regularly, they don't necessarily have to. It's very much on an individual basis."

MORE SOLDIERS?

With recruitment worryingly slow in both the Regulars and Reserves, anything that makes the military way of life much more attractive to today's guys and girls cannot

come soon enough.

"There is something about a post-Covid generation that's just less inclined to serve in the Armed Forces," Maj Gen Smyth added.

"I think that's a worldwide phenomenon. But we need to get on with increasing inflow – and we need to innovate to do that.

"We are re-engaging our local efforts, encouraging units and brigades to get far more involved in recruiting, especially on social media.

"Our headcount currently stands at around 27,500 against a target of 30,100.

"But some trades are recruiting very well – our infantry and light cavalry, for example.

"Other capabilities to a lesser extent, such as the Royal Artillery, Royal Logistic Corps and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

"So I am now looking closely at the lived experience of those units.

"I am also very conscious we need to assist regiments with expertise and funding to help drive local recruiting initiatives.

"With this in mind we will shortly announce funding of £5,000 per unit to drive their social media and local recruiting efforts.

"In addition, a member of my team will be solely focused on visiting units to help them utilise social media and improve their attract strategy."

Overall, Maj Gen Smyth concludes that it is a great time to be in the Reserves.

This cohort now has a clearly defined purpose in war fighting, and as a result the opportunities to contribute to routine operational tasks have never been better.



Q&A

ALL EARS with the VOLUNTEERS

Troops with 4th Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment tell us about life as Reservists and how they would turn poor recruitment around...

Name: Musn Chloe Barker

Role: Singer and flautist in the Band of The Royal Yorkshire Regiment

Age: 29

Years in: 9

Civvy life: Indie coffee shop worker and trainee police officer



Standout military moment: Performing at the Lorelei and Frankfurt military tattoos in Germany.

What's good about Reserve life? The opportunities! I have been skiing a few times, which I hope to continue and become an instructor. I'm not someone who aspires to have lots of money, so I never thought I'd be in a position to do something like that.

What does your nut? The lack of understanding you get from Regulars sometimes about what it means to be a Reservist – the commitment and how we have to balance that with other work. Sometimes they can be stand-offish. ▶

» What do you think could help boost recruitment in the Reserves? More education about the Army Reserve, and the military in general, inside our schools.

Name: LCpl Nick Liddle

Role: Section commander

Age: 51

Years in: 7

Civvy life: Painter and decorator

Standout military moment: Deploying on Op Pitting in 2021

What's good about Reserve life? There's so much to do if you want to keep busy. I'm booked in for loads of courses at the moment, and some of the lads went to Oman recently. I really enjoy it.

What does your nut? Not much. When I first joined up the training was a bit scattered, with nothing much happening when we went along on Tuesday nights. These days training is far more organised.

What do you think could help boost recruitment into the Reserve? Keeping the training interesting – mix it up and don't just hammer people with the same stuff. I also think there are misunderstandings with employers. When I deployed on Op Toral my company didn't think they could let me go – they hadn't realised their costs would be covered. Also, many civvies only get four weeks' leave a year, so they are reluctant to give up their summer holiday for a two-week course. Maybe something to address that.

Name: Cpl Paul Barrett

Role: Section commander

Age: 36

Years in: 1 (12 as a Regular previously)

Civvy life: Firefighter

Standout military moment: Spending two weeks surfing and scuba diving in Bali on an AT package after returning from Op Herrick 16

What's good about Reserve life? The way it fits round your civvy life. If you have more time you can do more, but if not you work around the job and home life.

What does your nut? Bouncing straight in from work, having 30 minutes, and then coming in to work again. Regular colleagues don't always understand the constraints of civvy life either – and I definitely used to be one of those.

What do you think could help boost recruitment into the Reserve?

Investing more time in bringing in ex-Regulars who are fully trained already. Not everyone leaves the Army on good terms, but perhaps Reserve workshops could be run when people sign off, or as part of their transition, to try and remove a bit of the stigma.



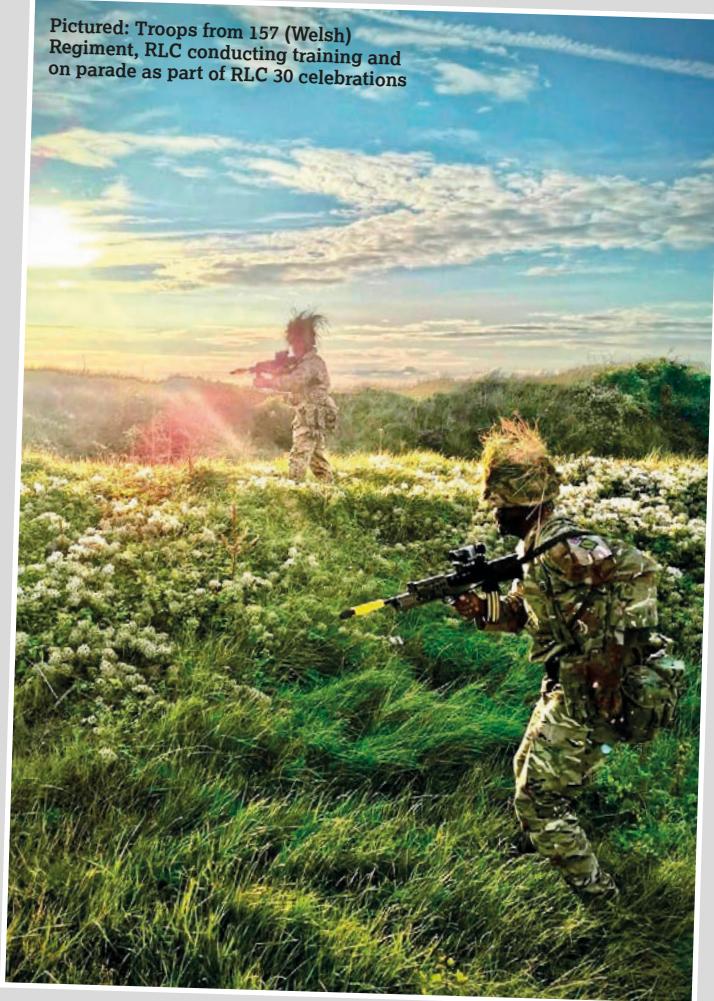
‘ONCE WE GET THEM IN, WE CAN GET THEM HOOKED’

Reserve unit reflects on the task of getting more recruits through the door





Pictured: Troops from 157 (Welsh) Regiment, RLC conducting training and on parade as part of RLC 30 celebrations



157 (WELSH) REGIMENT, ROYAL LOGISTIC CORPS is one of just two units to have bagged “silver” status in the Field Army’s empowerment programme – a scheme that helps formations ditch frustrating red tape and improve their working culture.

This is, Field Army bosses say, an acknowledgement that the regiment has created an environment where everyone feels comfortable challenging the stuff they don’t like, and where training is better as a result.

With the operational role of transporting equipment and materiel to troops in all environments, this is certainly good news for the wider Service.

But not even the best working practices can shelter Reserve formations from the reality that recruitment is tricky right now.

Outgoing executive officer, Maj Matt Winchester (RLC, pictured right), told *Soldier* it was without doubt “the challenge of the day”

for his unit.

“The demographic here is such that we will soon lose many of our long-term members as soldiers reach the age of 55 and officers 60,” he explained.

“And getting new people in is an issue, so we are looking at how we can raise our game with attracting new recruits.

“I think much of it is about getting into that online space.

“However, it’s those instantaneous expectations from today’s ‘Amazon generation’ versus the slow process of actually bringing people in.

“When you apply to the Reserve there is a whole series of checks that need to happen.

“And even some of the people here have sons and daughters who tried to apply, but lost interest after three or four months when the process didn’t move on.

“It’s hard to get that

interest back.

“Once we can get them in, though, we can get them hooked.

“When people have done their trade training and feel competent and part of the unit ethos, that’s what they’re here for.”

Capability demos and giving Reservists more hands-on time with military kit could help, Maj Winchester added.

“What attracts the Reservist is curiosity,” he continued.

“But often the experience is just coming in on a Friday night and building friendships.

“We need to show our Service personnel more of the other units as well as the wider organisation.

“It’s about explaining that there’s lots of different technical challenges in the Army, and different corps to be found.”

But perhaps one of the trickiest hurdles is trying to bring in more people in the 18-30 age bracket.

“In my experience the people most likely to stay on in the Reserve are those who have spent a few years thinking about it,” Maj Winchester continued.

“If people join young, and then find a partner and settle down and have children, many will drop out with that new lifestyle coming in.

“But the older ones will stay in for longer.

“Of course, it’s a different story for everyone. And we have some married couples here as well.

“I don’t think there’s one easy answer.” ■





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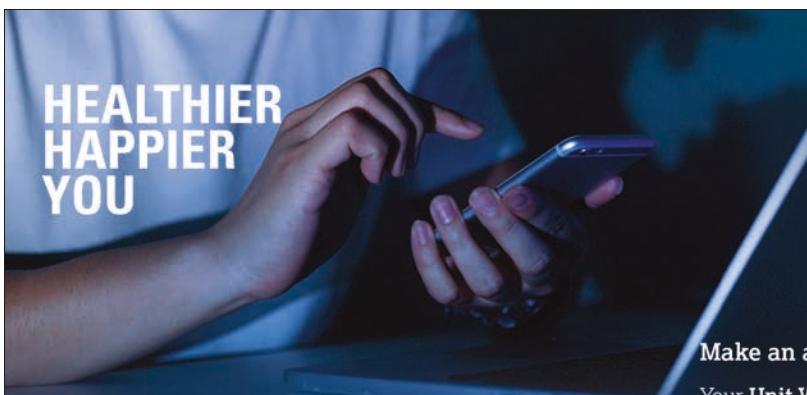
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shout 85258

If you need help SHOUT
Shout 85258 is a free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope.

Make an appointment with your GP

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

All Service Personnel can contact the **Army Welfare Service** directly

Email: RC-AWS-IAT-0Mailbox@mod.gov.uk
Tel: 01904 882051/2053

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

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

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

ARMY



'Leave the ranks alone'

I WAS surprised to read online the Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Patrick Sanders' comments from a podcast about potentially changing the naming conventions of ranks in order to make them gender neutral.

Gen Sanders suggested that women who say they want to keep the traditional rank names such as rifleman may be in favour of altering them but fear being singled out if they speak up.

As a serving female with years of experience in a cap badge that would be affected, I can honestly say I don't care if my rank contains a masculine tag.

Breaking hundreds of years of convention in an attempt to make regiments more inclusive is pointless in my opinion. To alter behaviours you need to change the culture – which the Army is working hard at doing – not labels.

We are an organisation rooted in traditions, so to ditch them when we don't need to seems wrong.

Modifying ranks to include the term "person" instead of "man", which is one possibility I assume, is just wokery and I don't believe it would actually change a thing for women in the Army. – **Name and address supplied**

IS IT TIME TO MAKE MEDALS MORE VISIBLE AGAIN?

● CAN someone please comment on the recent suggestion on a military-themed online forum that it's about time medal ribbon bars are again worn with jackets when out and about? This is something seen with the police, fire service and corps of commissioners.

I believe it used to be okay for Army personnel back in the 1950s and 60s.

You never know, it might help with the recruiting situation. Then again, I wonder what the Instagram and TikTok generation would make of it?

Will they understand what they represent and what their owners had to go through on their behalf? I doubt it. – **Name and address supplied**

Lt Col (Retd) Kestrel Simson, Ceremonial Policy and Plans, Home Command, replies: Serving officers and soldiers only wear medal ribbons with parade orders of dress – Service and number one dress, for example, for non-ceremonial events.

At ceremonial events the medals themselves are worn. Unlike some other nations, British Army officers and soldiers do not wear ribbons on shirts when barrack dress is worn in the summer.

There are occasions when they are worn with civilian attire by both serving and retired officers and soldiers – Remembrance Sunday being an example.

There is no precedent for wearing ribbon bars with civilian dress for those currently serving, but veterans may wish to do so.

“
It won't change a thing for women
”

GOT A GRIPE?

GET IT OFF YOUR CHEST

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or you can WhatsApp a message to us on **07973 614782**

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YOUR letters provide valuable insight but please be brief. Emails must include your name and location (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 in, you should first try to get an answer via your chain of command.

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BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know

COMPETITIONS

MAY 2023

HOAY (Recon headphones)

winners: Ian Williams, Lancs, and Ganesh Ale, Aldershot. **Dredge game winner:** Jason Turner, Brecon.

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

SEARCHLINE

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

WELFARE

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

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

Army HIVE

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

army.mod.uk/hives

Forcesline

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

ssafa.org.uk/get-help/forcesline

Army Welfare Service

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

ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

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

Drinkline

A free, confidential helpline 0300 123 1110

NHS support

nhs.uk/livewell

BULLYING/HARASSMENT/DISCRIMINATION

Army Mediation Service

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

Army Speak Out Helpline

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

Defence BHD Helpline

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

CHILDCARE/CARING/FAMILIES

Army Families Federation

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

Flexible working has been

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

DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

Forces Pension Society

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

Joining Forces Credit Union

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

Money Helper

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

National Debtline

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

StepChange Debt Charity

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

GAMBLING

National Gambling Helpline

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

GRIEF

Cruse Bereavement Support

0808 808 1677

SSAFA support groups

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

HOUSING

Joint Service Housing

Advice Office

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

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

Veterans Gateway

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

INJURY/SICKNESS

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

LONELINESS

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs A network of clubs to enjoy breakfast and banter, while combating social isolation afvbc.net

Samaritans

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

The Royal British Legion

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

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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

Combat Stress 24/7 Helpline
0800 138 1619

Headspace

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

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

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

Op Courage
A specialist NHS service for Armed Forces leavers, Reservists, veterans and their families. Search for "Op Courage" 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



REUNIONS

Royal Hampshire Territorials and Hampshire Companies, The Wessex Regiment 76th post-war reunion lunch will be held on Saturday, September 23 at The Winchester Royal Hotel in Hampshire. For more information – or to attend the event – contact Jim Cooper on 0239 2816 165 or email RHWSXTAR@yahoo.com

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TEN details have been changed in this picture from last month's Trooping the Colour ceremony in London (page 15).

Circle all the differences on the left image and send the panel to HOAY 974, Soldier, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU along with your contact details – including email address – by July 31. A photocopy is acceptable but only one entry per person may be submitted.

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

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The winners' names will appear in the September issue and all the usual competition rules apply (see opposite page).

Good luck!



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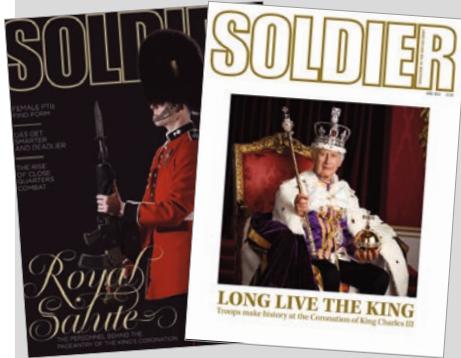
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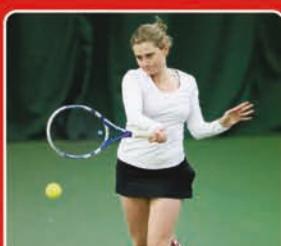


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Military Support Force/Retired Officers/Retired Other Ranks who are ex-Army, whether working or retired, are eligible. Payment is annual in advance via the Worldpay gateway on the ASL website.

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ARMY

REVIEWS

PICK OF THE MONTH

Hell Let Loose

Brits arrive in theatre for updated PC and console actioner...

➤ THIS legendary title has become something of a gold standard where squad-based shooters are concerned – and its appeal certainly shows no sign of waning yet.

Already a hit with members of the Army e-sports team, who praised the game when *Soldier* featured it after its release a few years ago, the offering has continued to garner a significant fanbase for its virtual Second World War battlespace.

Now it looks set to attract further fighters to the fold following another major upgrade this month.

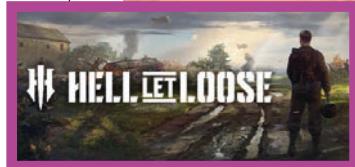
A number of enhancements mean players have the opportunity to fight as British forces for the first time and across two new theatres in the North African desert and Dutch countryside.

The UK troops join playable American, German and Soviet factions in a gaming world that encompasses key flashpoints on both the Western and Eastern Fronts of the war's European campaign, from the Normandy coast to Stalingrad.

The Tommies come armed with a wealth of authentic equipment in a period arsenal that includes the Lanchester MK1 submachine gun as well as fearsome infantry-mounted flamethrowers for the closest combat situations.



GAMES



>>> Battle dress of the era has also been accurately rendered, while an extensive vehicle fleet features the iconic Bedford transport and supply trucks.

The new operational areas create some interesting potential for warfare. Inspired by the British Eighth Army's 1942 clash with the German Afrika Corps at El Alamein, the Egyptian desert offers vast open spaces with little cover. The Dutch map of Driel, meanwhile, replicates the farmland of the Low Countries, a hallmark of the 1944 Market Garden campaign at Arnhem.

Hell Let Loose has consistently impressed with its attention to detail and empathy for the conflict – and the latest incarnation continues to offer plenty to veterans and newcomers alike.

With an emphasis on teamwork, players can assume a variety of roles – from infantry to tankie – before taking part in online encounters involving scores of players.

Communication and coordination between team members, as much as speed to the trigger, are critical if objectives are to be secured.

Soldier sampled the PS5 version and can confirm that it offers both a realistic and immersive battlefield experience throughout, underscoring its position as one of the most captivating multiplayer romps going.

From the eerie ambience of fighting in woods and forests to urban room clearance, each map captures the realities of combat across different environments.

The realism is such that the game actually presents a decent opportunity to sharpen six-section battle drills.

As well as the addition of the British personnel and environments, a gameplay overhaul has seen the introduction of a new comms tool.



An on-screen radial wheel enables players to issue commands and update their sitreps via their controller rather than a microphone. This enables calls to comrades when real-life issues, such as sleeping partners, render the spoken word off limits.

Overall, this is an offering that is hard to fault. *Hell Let Loose* serves up a first-person experience few other games replicate. ■

VERDICT:

The cream of squad-based shooters
★★★★★

REVIEW: SGT ROBERT WEIDEMAN, RLC
AND CLIFF CASWELL, SOLDIER

FIGHT TO WIN

SOLDIER has teamed up with publisher Team 17 to offer five lucky readers the opportunity to bag a copy of *Hell Let Loose* – and join the fray for themselves.

The online codes – worth up to £39.99 apiece – give access to the base game while opening up a wealth of downloadable content.

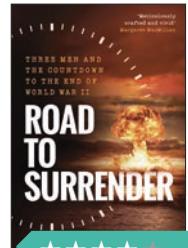
To stand a chance of winning, just tell us which famous senior officer commanded the British Eighth Army at El Alamein. Send your answer to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by July 31. Specify whether you'd like PC, Xbox or PlayStation formats.

All the usual rules apply.

BOOK RELEASES

Road to Surrender

by Evan Thomas



WITH big budget biopic *Oppenheimer* out later this month, now is an ideal time to swat up on the decision to use atomic weapons against Japan at the end of the Second World War.

This very readable book by journalist and editor Evan Thomas, focuses not on the nuclear physicist himself, but the moral dilemma facing key figures as they weighed up whether and how to deploy his world-changing creation.

The author, whose father was among the US troops bracing for an all-out assault on the Japanese mainland in 1945, also explores how the end game was played out among the enemy high command – offering a fascinating insight into the complex cultural norms around honour that delayed their surrender.

Another disturbing take-away is how the course of human history ultimately rests on the whims of flawed individuals.

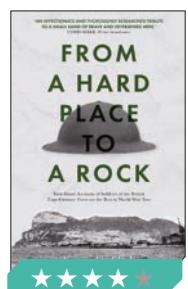
With the threat of nuclear conflict once again a worrying possibility – using technology thousands of times more powerful than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – this account paints a compelling, if troubling, picture of fingers hovering over buttons that would open Pandora's Box.

It is impossible to read it without thinking of the "what-ifs" of 79 years ago and how they – unfortunately – still resonate today.

Becky Clark, Soldier

From a Hard Place to a Rock

by Timandra Slade



IN May 1940 the British Expeditionary Force withdrew from France and the 51st (Highland) Division was captured at Le Havre. This book is about some of the men who escaped and

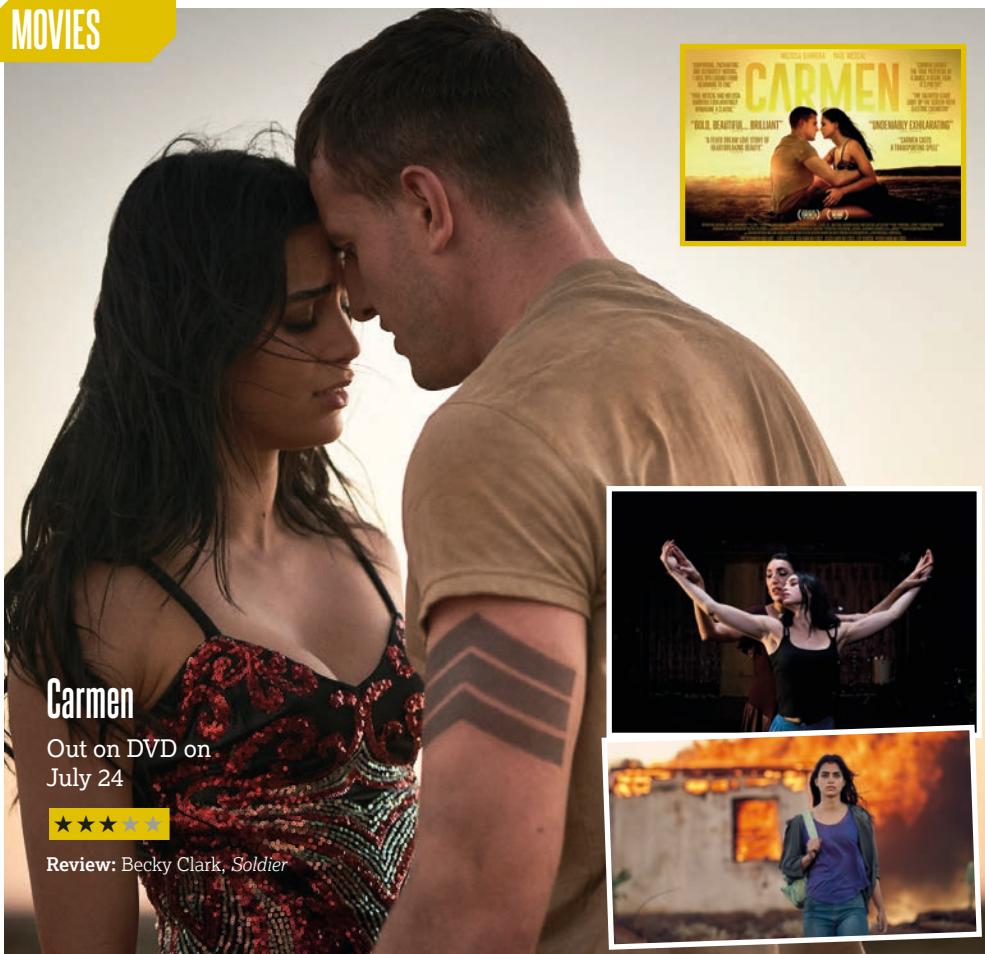
travelled through occupied France and fascist Spain to reach Gibraltar and return to the Army.

The author's father and uncle were among the escapees and using her dad's wartime manuscript, family documents and her own research she has compiled an excellent account of life on the run in war-torn Europe. Not only does she describe the trials and tribulations facing her relatives, but also includes stories of others in similarly dire straits, including Maj (later Maj Gen) Tom Rennie. A fascinating tale.

Andy Kay, ex-RS

MORE TOP PICKS

MOVIES



Carmen

Out on DVD on July 24



Review: Becky Clark, *Soldier*



► HOME from Afghanistan and suffering from PTSD, US marine Aiden reluctantly joins an ad-hoc border patrol on the hunt for migrants crossing illegally into America from Mexico. When he shoots his trigger-happy partner to protect a beautiful young woman – the titular Carmen – the two end up on the run together. But what promises to be a tense escape and evasion actioner instead becomes a surprising montage of dance and musical numbers. This seems less leftfield when you realise the film is based loosely on the opera of the same name by Georges Bizet – a fact that had passed entirely over this reviewer's decidedly low brow. While its striking cinematography casts a sultry glow on its two talented leads – Paul Mescal (*Normal People*) and Melissa Barrera (*Scream*) – on the whole, this is an underwhelming affair. ■

PODCASTS



The Archbishop Interviews

► THIS extraordinary series of informal discussions between personalities of interest and head of the Anglican Communion Justin Welby is currently being repeated on Radio 4 – with one of the slots featuring a probe into the life of former CDS Gen Sir Nick Carter. Also available in the BBC Sounds online archive, the interview paints a revealing picture of the ex-senior officer's perspectives on spirituality and faith in the context of his many operational commands. More generally, the series is well worth a listen, offering unique perspectives on several public figures. ■



Review: Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*

GAMES

Train Sim World 3

► DOVETAIL Games has been continuing to cement its reputation for rail realism with a plethora of downloadable content for the acclaimed *Train Sim World 3*.

Notable additions to the title include a *Midland Mainline* offering that gives virtual drivers the chance to try their hand at the 125 high-speed trains plus domestic services on a route encompassing Derby and Leicester.

Meanwhile, a Scottish outing is also now on sale in the shape of the *Glasgow-Edinburgh* line, which comes complete with modern diesel rolling stock.

Both offer exceptional levels of realism and are surprisingly playable on consoles, as testified by the PS5 versions *Soldier* sampled. The game's library of add-ons offer good value for money and great simulation, although a military railway would be a welcome addition. ■



Review: Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*





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ARMY

SOLDIER SPORT



CALL TO COURT

THE Army Tennis Championships welcomed a full men's draw for the first time in recent years, with Pte Marco Wright (Para) contesting both the singles and doubles finals. Read more about the event, which is a key stepping stone to the Inter-Services, on page 66...



PLAYERS WANTED: CONTACT THE SET-UP VIA @ARMYICEHOCKEY ON TWITTER OR THE ARMY ICE HOCKEY ASSOCIATION FACEBOOK PAGE



BLADES BLUNT RIVALS

ATTACK AND DEFENCE TO THE FORE AS ARMY RETAIN SERVICES TITLE

THE Army Blades mounted an impressive defence of their Inter-Services ice hockey crown as back-to-back victories over their rivals ensured they claimed the military sport's top prize.

Free-flowing attacking play saw the soldiers crush the Royal Air Force 7-0 in their opening fixture as double strikes from Sig Leon Shaw (R Signals) and Cpl Timo Lindgren (REME), along with goals from Cpl Rory Ashmore (R Yorks), Maj Ross Walker (Ranger) and Cfn Josh Nertney (REME), allowed them to triumph in style.

The Blades' defensive nous was at the fore a day later as they faced a well-drilled Royal Navy outfit that had just returned from a two-week training camp in the USA. A tight contest was eventually settled by a solitary Ashmore goal in the closing stages.

"Our goalie played exceptionally well and perhaps the luck was on our side as we got the goal that they could not," player-manager Sgt David Potter (REME) told *SoldierSport* as he reflected on the win against the Senior Service.

"It was very different to our game with the RAF. We knew what we would be up against there – they defend well for long periods while keeping the score relatively low. They have a lot of potential and with another couple of players they will be more competitive."

"We had a number of people who were in their last competition for the Army and that will make a difference moving forward – next year might be a different story."

Potter praised the efforts of the versatile Lindgren, who

adopted a defensive role in the clash with the Navy after excelling in attack against the RAF, and was particularly impressed with goaltender LCpl Josh Milton (QRH).

"He had a busy week and played out of his skin," he said. "It was refreshing to see."

"Quite a few of the squad are getting older now. Josh has played once before but did not get much time on the ice, whereas here he started and finished both games. That bodes well for the future."

The week-long test at Ice Sheffield also featured the Tri-Service Championships, with eight corps sides facing the challenge of their Navy and RAF equivalents.

The Infantry lost 3-1 to the Royal Navy Kings in the tournament's final, with the Royal Logistic Corps' A team beating the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers' A side 6-1 in the third/fourth-place playoff match.

Success on the rink is a reflection of the effort made to keep driving the sport forward post-Covid, with around 300 personnel currently on the Army's books.

"That was a challenge, and a lot of hard work went into getting us back on the ice," said Maj Chris Pfleiderer (RLC), secretary of the Army Ice Hockey Association.

"To get eight teams at the Tri-Service Championships reflects the commitment of the players and the support they get from their units."

"While we are a little lighter than usual due to people being aligned elsewhere, we still have plenty of new faces involved – young and old."



"WE GOT THE GOAL THAT THEY COULD NOT"

"Those older personnel are the ones who are driving this – they have been here as players and are now delivering in roles such as coaches, managers and secretaries."

"There are a number of new faces on the Army team, with lots of junior ranks coming through, and that points to an exciting future."

While the short term looks secure Pfleiderer admitted a new approach may be needed down the line due to the scaling down of activity at Batus.

The Canadian outpost formed the perfect setting for those wanting to sample ice hockey and develop their skills, with players then filtering into the Service system on their return to the UK.

"We have to think about what we are going to do to provide that platform for people to play hockey and then continue the sport at corps level," he said.

"We'll also have to get the kit needed for them to try the game, and then store it. We really need to look at how we are going to attract personnel over the next five years."

"Corps ice hockey is aimed at the grassroots level, and the likes of the REME and RLC have generated a lot of interest through commitments at Batus. We are missing the capacity to run those camps."

"However, the Army All Stars (for personnel who don't have their own corps teams) have managed to identify several players and from that they want to start a Royal Artillery squad. They don't have any particular links to Batus, which shows it can be done."

"If someone is willing to take it on, we'll get the interest." ■

SPORT SHORTS



Wright leads the way

A HAT-TRICK from Army ace Capt Kristina Wright (pictured) fired the Adjutant General's Corps to victory in the Edwards Cup final.

The veteran's efforts helped her side to a 4-2 victory over the Royal Logistic Corps in Cirencester as they claimed the Inter-Corps honours for a third successive season.

However, the Loggies celebrated success in the men's competition – the Woolwich Cup – as a 4-1 defeat of the Royal Signals saw them lift the silverware for 2023.



McBean remembered

FOOTBALLERS from the Royal Signals served up a fitting tribute to late colleague Maj Tony McBean as 2 and 30 Signal Regiments battled it out to be crowned the corps' champion unit.

The officer and goalkeeper is seen as a footballing legend in the corps and the competition – the McBean Trophy – was renamed in his honour after he passed away six years ago.

This year's showpiece finished 1-1 after 120 minutes, with 30 Sig Regt prevailing in the penalty shootout.

"Tony would have been proud of the result and the 'cat' in the nets who received the person of the match award, making two vital saves during the game and saving the final spot kick," said the outfit's CO Lt Col Simon Smith.

PLAN YIELDS EARLY RESULTS



THE drive to expand Infantry cycling has stepped up a gear this season with a growing cohort of riders excelling on several fronts.

Defending champions in the Army Cycling Road Race Series, the team currently sits top of the 2023 standings and were in action at the full Army Championships as this issue went to press. Eight members will go on to compete at the UCI Gran Fondo World Series event in Glasgow next month.

The set-up also staged its inaugural Infantry Championships in April, when around 50 athletes took to the saddle at the Milton Keynes Bowl in a race won by Army rider Cpl Sean Dodsworth (Lancs).

"We are trying to build on the surprising amount of success we had last season," Maj Matt Selby (RRF), secretary of Infantry cycling, told *SoldierSport*.

"We want to get more grassroots participation and move away from the idea that this is an elite sport to involving more soldiers and junior ranks. The interest is there and we are riding the momentum."

The effort was boosted by a pre-season training camp in Cyprus, which formed part of the organisation's three-year plan to drive the sport forward.

"The aim for 2022 was to improve participation and identify talent with the hope of having a stab at winning the Army road race series in 2023," Selby continued.

"However, we won that last season and are defending champions. We now have two performance coaches and are running an under-23s development squad.

"Some very capable soldiers have come out of the woodwork – the plan is delivering." ■

**"TONY
WOULD
HAVE
BEEN
PROUD"**



ARMY American football players took to the field under the UK Armed Forces banner for a series of shortened games against the US Visiting Forces at RAF Lakenheath. After tasting defeat in their opening two matches, the UK team secured a 13-6 victory in the final tie of the night. NFL outfit the New York Jets provided custom jerseys for the event.



RINK LINK: FOR MORE DETAILS ON THE LEARN TO PLAY EVENTS EMAIL BERNADENE.VARTY100@MOD.GOV.UK

» ICE HOCKEY

MONTH IN SPORT

July's key dates...



WHAT: Army Sprint and Marathon Kayak Championships
WHEN: July 5 to 7
WHERE: Abingdon
NEED TO KNOW: This

three-day event features races ranging from 200m to 20km in distance. The top performers will go on to represent the Army at September's Inter-Services



WHAT: Women's Inter-Services 40-over Cricket Championships
WHEN: July 11 to 13
WHERE: RAF Vine Lane, Uxbridge
NEED TO KNOW: The Army head into this competition as overwhelming favourites having already won the Twenty20 title (see page 68). Can one of their rivals upset the odds?



WHAT: Inter-Services Athletics Championships
WHEN: July 12
WHERE: Aldershot
NEED TO KNOW: Army athletes posted two new competition

records as they overcame a rejuvenated Royal Air Force outfit to win the men's and women's titles in 2022. Is a repeat performance on the cards this year?



GB ACE SPRULES BLAZES BLADES TRAIL



"I AM EXCITED TO DO MY THING"

LEFT wing Sig Jess Sprules (R Signals) made history at the Inter-Services Ice Hockey Championships by becoming the first outfield female player to represent the Army Blades.

The 21-year-old has an impressive pedigree in the sport having spent two years at the Okanagan Hockey Academy, where she represented Great Britain at various youth levels.

She is currently part of the women's full national squad and stars for the Bristol Huskies in the civvy game.

Sprules progressed to the Royal Signals set-up (above) on completion of phase two training and was subsequently invited to an Army camp before making her debut in Sheffield.

"There is a bit of pressure on me, but I'm excited to go out there and do my thing," she told *SoldierSport* ahead of the Blades' 7-0 win over the Royal Air Force (pictured left).

"It is a bit intimidating, but I've been through worse."

"I want to try to put my name out there for the females

and get the ball rolling from that side of things."

The soldier also hopes to continue to impress at the regular training camps and tournaments she attends with the British team.

"We normally train once or twice a month," she continued. "It is not full contact but there are so many skilful players and I'm happy to be part of it."

Sprules is flying the flag for the women's game and the Army is hosting its first female learn to play events – for novice and experienced skaters – in Chelmsford and Romford on August 9, and Cambridge on August 10.

"The RAF have had a women's team for eight or nine years and Army personnel have played with them in the past," said Lt Col Laura Ellis (REME), chair of the Army Ice Hockey Association.

"We had 16 personnel at their learn to play event earlier this year, with another 20 odd showing an interest."

"Jess joined the Army as an ice hockey player and I'm sure there are others out there." ■



PLANS TAKE SHAPE

A FULL men's draw took to the court in Aldershot for the annual Army Tennis Championships.

It was the first time in recent seasons that the event was fully subscribed, and a familiar name was added to the trophy as Capt Ben Rogers (RA, pictured below) defeated Pte Marco Wright (Para) in the final.

Cpl Chloe Pike (Int Corps, pictured above) triumphed in the women's showpiece.

The competition marked the start of preparations for this season's Inter-Services campaign, with the top performers heading to week-long grass court training camps later this month.

"This is part of our selection process and we will be using civilian performance coaches at those camps," said Lt Col (Retd) Ian Haigs (ex-Int Corps), secretary of the Army Tennis Association.

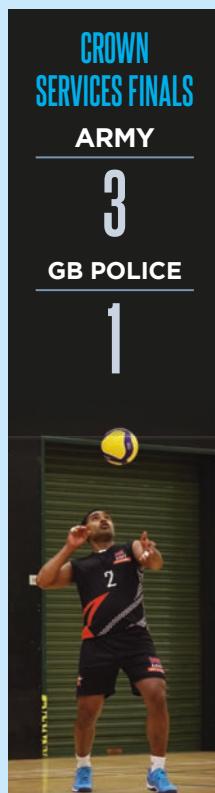
"We will take eight to ten players on each before a final decision is made.

"The Royal Air Force have been training with Dominic Inglot, who was a world class doubles player, and it looks as though they have reasonable strength in depth, but we will go there with confidence."

The Inter-Services will be held at Wimbledon on August 1 and 2.



POLICE PUNISHED AS CROWNS CLAIMED



ARMY
3
GB POLICE
1

ARMY volleyball players celebrated double success at the Crown Services as the men's and women's teams claimed the tournament's top prizes.

Both sides recorded 3-1 victories over the British Police in their respective finals, but the soldiers missed out on a clean sweep of the silverware as their mixed squad lost to the same opponent.

Victory for the women formed the perfect farewell for head coach WO2 Nikki White (AGC (SPS)), who stepped down after a 23-year association with the Army set up as player and coach.

"To finish with an Inter-Services and Crown Services double is the perfect way to go," White, who will now focus on her role as UK Armed Forces head coach, said.

"The match with the police was far from comfortable. We lost 2-0 to them in the pool stages but used that as a gauge to see where we were at, and it paid off.

"We started well and then found the momentum to exploit them more than they could us. It was nerve-wracking for me, but a great

watch for the spectators."

White praised the efforts of Maj Karen Tait (RAMC) and Maj Cathy Oosterveen (AGC (ETS)) in her final outing and looked back at her time in charge with immense pride.

"When I began as coach there was no silverware in the cabinet," she said. "We started the collection with our first Inter-Services title in 2012.

"To now step away with so many trophies secured is nice. We have changed history; after being mocked as the worst team in the military we are now the dominant force."

Having been without key players during the Inter-Services, the men's team were at near full strength and the returning personnel helped make the difference on court.

The Army beat the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy on their way to the final and ended the campaign unbeaten.

"Most of those key players came back but there were still three who could not be with us," head coach WO2 Alex Menya (AGC (SPS)) said.

"Our depth was the real success story – we were so good we made an event like the Crowns look easy." ■



CORPS EMBRACE FRESH FORMAT IN COURT CLASH

THE Army Basketball Association is hoping a new-look Inter-Corps Championships will boost its bid to attract fresh talent to the court.

Instead of cramming games into a one-week window, the tournament is now being spread across a number of months, with men's and women's teams playing regular pool fixtures ahead of a finals day in January.

The opening round was held in Aldershot, where organiser WO1 Craig Douglass (AAC) spoke to *SoldierSport* about the thinking behind the move.

"In the past, teams would be playing two or three times a day," he explained. "They would also want to prepare for a week beforehand, so players were asking to be released for ten days.

"We wanted to look at how we could make the competition better with full-length regulation games, while also reducing the risk of injury.

"We ended up going with a central venue format in Aldershot, where people can come and

play their games and then go – meaning they only need to be released for two or three days.

"In general, the players have been in favour of it. Our biggest aim is to provide more opportunities to play throughout the year. This competition will run from June to November, with finals in January, and we then go into the Inter-Units, followed by the Inter-Services."

Douglass said the revised format is initially being run as a trial, but the intent is to move forward with the model.

And while Aldershot is staging this year's fixtures there is scope to move the event to other dual court venues, such as Catterick, in the future.

A total of 12 corps teams are represented in the men's draw, with efforts also being made to maximise the opportunities for female personnel.

"We have allowed a combined women's team with players from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Royal Army Physical Training Corps



**"WE
WANTED
TO MAKE
THE
EVENT
BETTER"**

and Intelligence Corps all coming together," Douglass continued.

"In the past they have struggled to form their own squads. By doing this hopefully their numbers will grow to the point where they can eventually field full teams."

Men's defending champions the Royal Logistic Corps were pushed all the way in their opening round clash with the Royal Signals (main picture), before eventually winning 71-66.

Skipper Sgt Ferris Murray was originally against the new-look event but has since come round, saying it will create opportunities for more players while reducing the risk of injury.

"It is an ideal start," he added, as he reflected on the result. "We've been away from each other for so long and have a lot of new players, so it was a chance for them to gel.

"It also helped them understand that a game is not won in the first three quarters – we kept together and did what we had to do." ■



HISTORY REPEATS AS REDS CANTER TO EASY WIN

IT WAS a familiar story at the Women's Inter-Services Twenty20 Cricket Championships as the Army again steamrolled their opponents to claim another title with ease.

The gulf in quality between the teams has become increasingly evident in recent years and it was a case of history repeating itself in Arundel as near identical performances paved the way for more silverware.

Fielding first in both matches, the Army's bowlers restricted their rivals to sub-standard totals that were chased down at a canter and the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy look set for further punishment when battle resumes in the 40-over format this month.

After winning the toss and electing to bat, the RAF saw just three players reach double figures as they closed their innings on a paltry 77-8.

Cfn Shema Wright (REME)

was the pick of the bowlers with figures of 2-14, while the soldiers boosted their cause by forcing three run outs.

Opener Lt Georgina Dean (REME) signalled the Army's intent with the bat by smashing her first delivery for four and when she departed moments later SSgt Amanda Potgieter (REME) continued the assault.

The veteran (pictured top left) cracked five fours and a six on her way to an unbeaten 44 from 27 deliveries – an effort that secured an eight-wicket victory with 11 overs to spare.

Wright claimed another scalp as the Navy proved stubborn with the bat but lacked the tempo to post a meaningful target – finishing on 74-3.

In reply, LCpl Georgie Cant (Int Corps) went on the attack before being bowled for 18 from seven balls, leaving Dean and Potgieter to complete the job – the former finishing 32 not out as the soldiers sealed the win in just the sixth over.

Speaking afterwards, Army skipper Lt Connie Cant (RA) admitted her side are seeking greater challenges outside the Forces arena as they look to improve further.

They played a double-header with top-tier outfit South East Stars ahead of their win in Arundel and face Hampshire under-18s this month. A large Reds contingent is also expected in the UKAF squad that takes on the Southern Vipers later in the season.

"We are starting to look outside the Inter-Services, but it's also important we continue to help the RAF and Navy to develop," Cant told *SoldierSport* at the close of play.

"Yes, these were comfortable wins, but they are improving. We had a lot of new players coming in and they performed well. Our development team has taken off this year and a training camp is already planned for next season to bring more people in." ■

WOMEN'S IS T20 FINAL
NAVY
74-3
ARMY
75-1





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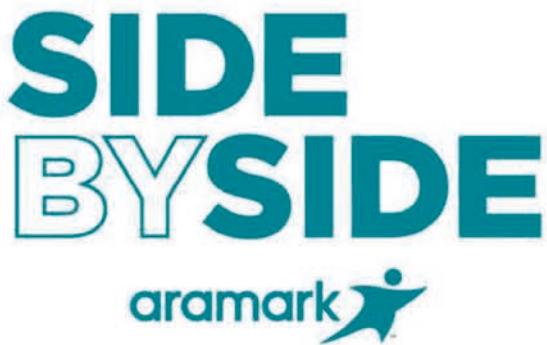
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GAMES GET GOING

MORE than 170 Army athletes were beginning their quest for glory at the European Masters Games in Finland as this issue went to press.

Representatives from archery, athletics, badminton, cycling, football, golf, karate, orienteering, squash, swimming and table tennis have travelled to Tampere for the event, which features 29 disciplines in total and runs until July 9.

The Army enjoyed a successful outing at the last competition in Turin in 2019 and are hoping for more of the same this time round.

Lt Col (Retd) Paul Leighton (ex-RAMC), chief of staff at Army Sport, said: "It is a great opportunity for individuals who are slightly older to continue their participation.

"We had some great results in Turin, and it should be very competitive."

See next month's issue for a report from the Games.



CAMPAIGN CLOSES AT OPEN CLASH



**"ALL
BOXERS
HEARD
THE
FINAL
BELL"**

A SUCCESSFUL season in the ring drew to a close as almost 100 fighters put their skills to the test at the Army Open Boxing Championships.

The high level of entries created 20 categories that resulted in 69 bouts being staged across four days. Pre-quarter finals were also required for the first time in more than a decade.

"The standard this year was exceptionally high and really competitive, with very few stoppages throughout the event," said Nathan Pearce, secretary of the Army Boxing Association.

"Every one of the 20 finals saw all 40 boxers hear the final bell. The officials were asked to pick a best fighter and had the unenviable task of selecting a most gallant boxer too, as this could have gone to any of the silver medallists."

After deliberation, Pte Dylan Swales (RLC) was named best

boxer following his victory in the Class A 63.5kg final, while LCpl Phoebe Mercer (R Anglian) took the most gallant prize for her efforts in the women's 63kg final.

Fighters from 1st Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment beat their rivals from 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment by just a single point to be crowned inter-unit champions.

The Royal Engineers and Infantry topped the standings in the inter-corps competition with 35 points, but the Sappers were handed the title due to the fact they had two champions compared to their rivals' one.

All finalists, and selected others, have been offered a trial with the Army development team with a view to competing at the Inter-Services in September, which also forms the first round of the England Boxing Development Championships. ■

- THE Army rugby union under-23s team is looking for a fresh intake of players ahead of the new season starting in September.

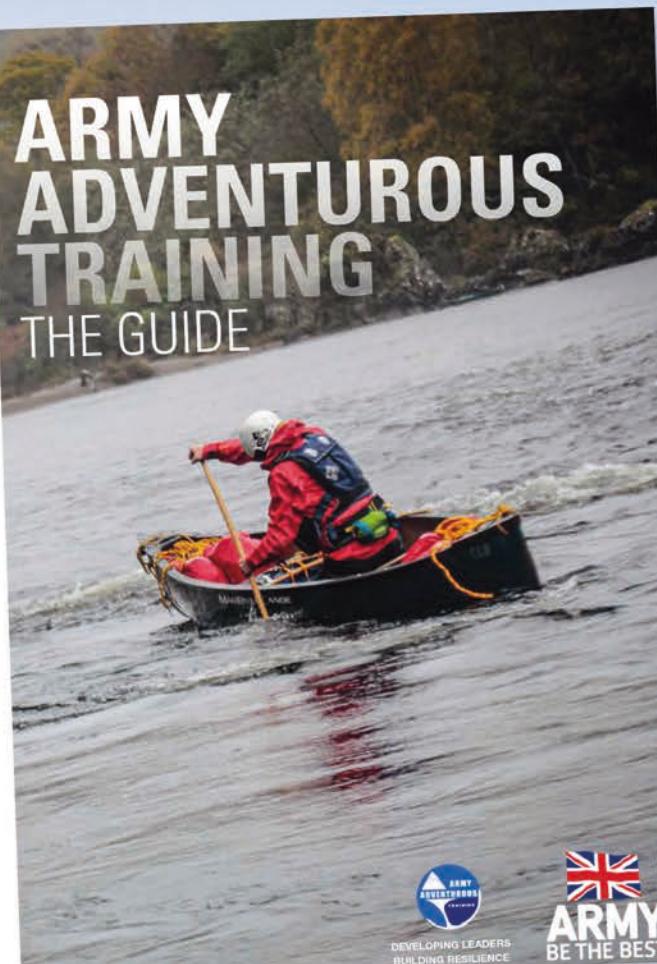
Plans for squad trials are now being made and interested parties under the age of 23 on September 1 with aspirations of getting involved should scan the QR code right for a link to the registration form.

Anyone with queries should contact head coach Capt Gareth Slade-Jones (RAPTC) via gareth.slade-jones586@mod.gov.uk



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DIGITAL REVOLUTION

ARMY Sport is looking at how it can modernise the way it is delivered across the Service in order to maximise participation.

Project Harington will embrace the digital realm, allowing easier access to fixtures, infrastructure and points of contact, while also automating registration at events, providing associated data and improving the way the organisation connects and engages with its athletes.

"It is still in the early days," Lt Col (Retd) Paul Leighton, chief of staff at Army Sport, explained. "As an example, one of the initial things we are looking at is an app that will allow young recruits at Pirbright, or any other training regiment, to see what sport and infrastructure are available locally, along with a point of contact for the event organiser.

"If they then move to Catterick, for example, they can click on the app again and have immediate access to what activities are going on, thereby making sport more accessible to our soldiers.

"We hope to have an initial web-based app up and running by April next year, with more capabilities to follow."



REBRANDING PLAN GOES LIVE

THE regulatory body for sport played at all levels has been rebranded as Army Sport.

Formerly known as the Army Sport Control Board (ASCB), the organisation made the move last month to coincide with the release of the new Army Sport Plan.

The document is designed to better align athletic endeavour with the Service's current and future priorities, viewing personnel as a capability to actively attract, recruit, invest in and improve.

It also stresses the role sport plays in the Army "offer", why it matters, its importance in terms of recruitment and retention, and underlines the effort to maximise participation.

"While we have a board of trustees, we are not a board," Lt Col (Retd) Paul Leighton (ex-RAMC), chief of staff at Army Sport, said. "We support them, so we have removed the incorrect terminology.

"We also thought is 'control' the right word nowadays as we are constantly looking to empower staff? We are here to support and enable the 44 recognised disciplines in the Army, not control them.

"We have moved away from the ASCB to Army Sport, but this rebrand will not impact on the current superb delivery."

The plan serves as a reminder as to how sport prepares personnel for operations by enhancing physical and mental fitness, resilience, leadership and teamwork, and highlights the part it can play in overseas defence engagement.

And while its value is clear, Leighton said the biggest barrier to participation in today's Service is time.

"Commanding officers remain under huge pressure to release soldiers for various activities and that is why aligning to the Army's current and future priorities makes better sense and greater highlights the importance of sport," he added.

For more visit britisharmysport.com ■



**"WE ARE
HERE TO
ENABLE"**



ARMY boxers celebrated success on finals day at the GB Elite Three Nations competition. Scotland's Cpl Meg Reid (RLC) defeated teammate LCpl Terri-Leigh Stuart (REME, pictured) of England to seal the honours in the female under-63kg division. Pte Jerry-Lee Palmer (RLC), also of England, was victorious at under-75kg. Gdsm Joe Wright (WG) and Sig Lucy Kisielewska (R Signals) both won bronze medals.



Hearing stories about the war. One of the Ukrainian commanders was talking about leadership. At one point his soldiers had been refusing to advance, so the officer went in, picked up a rifle and led from the front. And the troops followed. It was that leading by example piece that struck me.

Lt Oscar Jones, R Welsh



How keen the troops have been, despite what's going on back in their home country. And the fact they seem relatively happy to be here. It's not nice what they're having to return to.

Pte Dean Mitchell, Scots



How interested the Ukrainians are in everything we have to say, despite their level of combat experience. They have shown real humility.

Maj Deepe Rawji, Mercian

Pictures: Graeme Main

Interviews: Sarah Goldthorpe



The fact the Ukrainians are just like us. They have the same squaddie humour, they don't like being messed about and their timings are always changing.

LCpl Cameron Robertson-Godfrey, R Welsh



The similarities between us and the way we operate. We are brothers in arms. Military personnel are cut from the same cloth.

Fus Dylan Collard, R Welsh

I served in Iraq, and it's been interesting to hear how relatable that experience is. The war in Ukraine might be different, but there are some universal truths to conflict.

Sgt David Dickinson-Wood, Mercian



Brothers in arms

We asked Reservists training Ukrainian soldiers (page 42) what had stood out about the experience...

Their robustness. They are up for it and continually want to learn more.

WO2 Lee Penrice, Scots





LEVEL PEAKS

CLOTHING

UAS & COUNTER UAS

SOLDIER SYSTEMS

BREACHING

FIREPOWER

UNCREWED GROUND SYSTEMS



ARMED FORCES
COVENANT

EMPLOYER
RECOGNITION
SCHEME

GOLD AWARD



WE SUPPORT ELDERLY VETERANS

Army veteran George was injured in an ambush during the Korean War.

He was medically discharged and now lives independently with his wife Anne in Sir Oswald Mansions, operated by Stoll, our partner charity, which we are proud to fund.

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR WORK VISIT
SOLDIERSCHARITY.ORG

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