

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY



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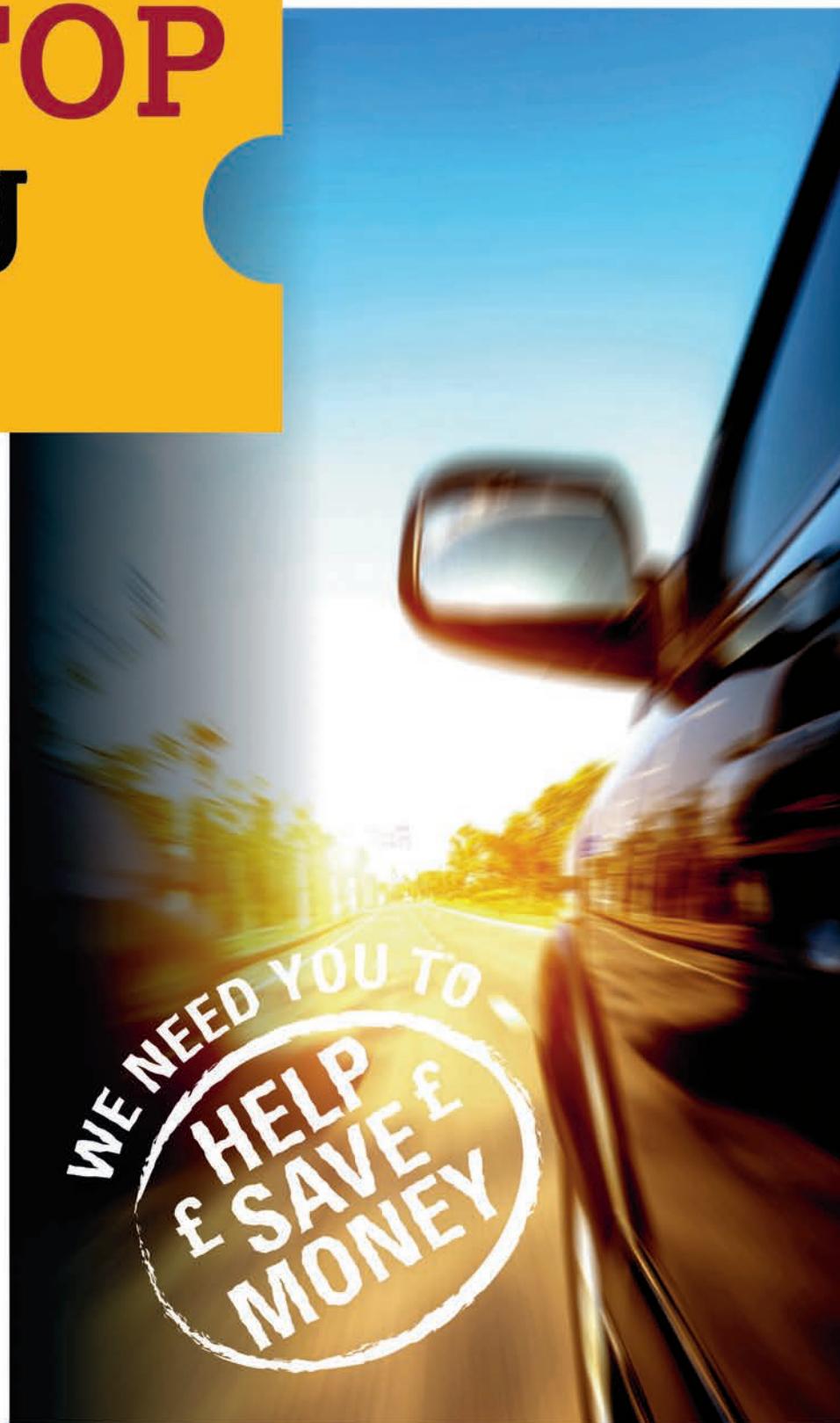
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Cover picture: Graeme Main

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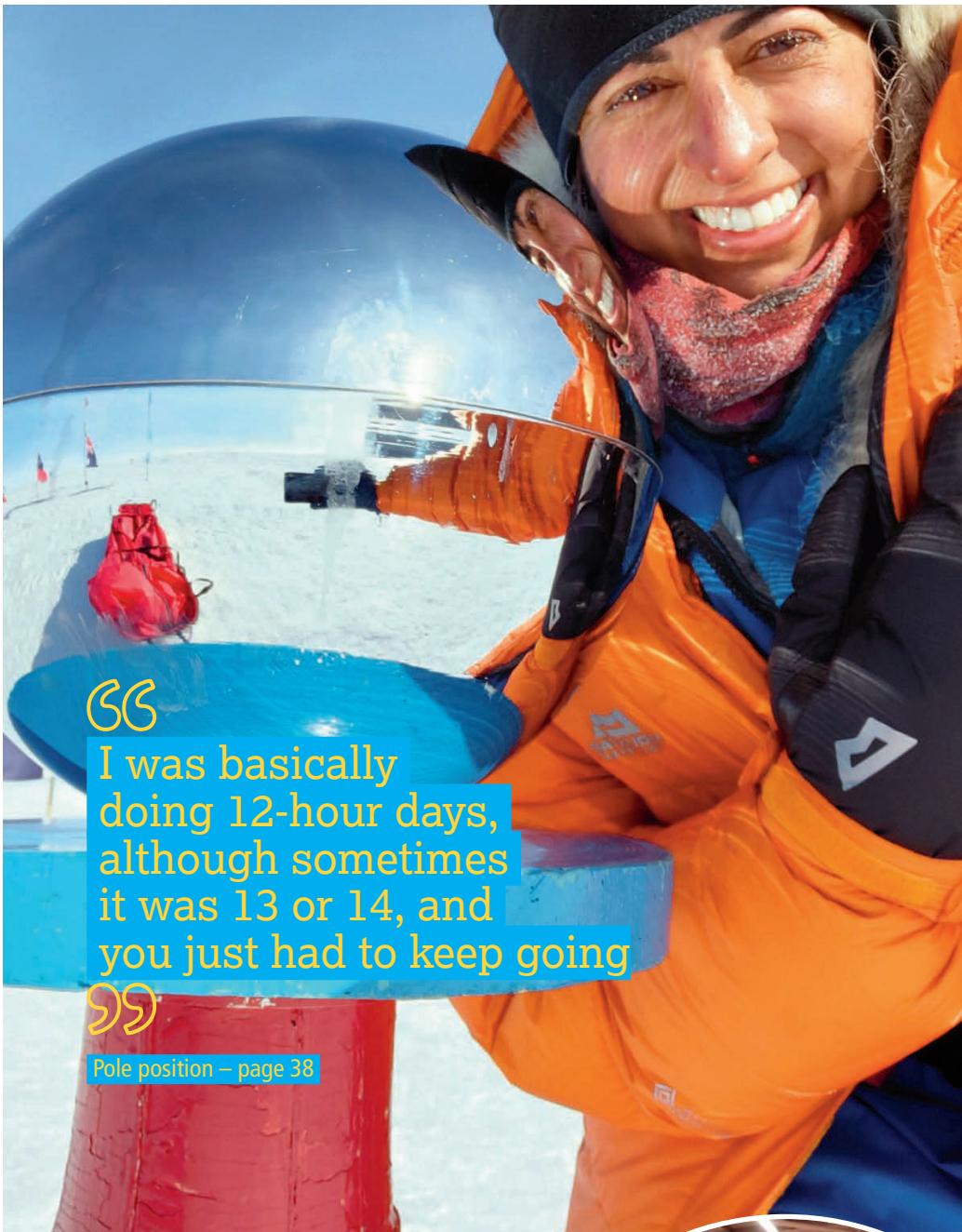
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The *Soldier* stress test



AS WITH pretty much every issue of this mag since the first one back in 1945, it is the opinions of our readers that make

the headlines this month. And there are certainly plenty of those floating about.

From the new Apache E model (page 28) to future career opportunities (pages 7, 34), medallie recognition (page 10), cold-weather operations (pages 38, 43) and living with cancer in service (page 24), this edition covers an eclectic range of topics in which your views are gospel.

Manufacturers and policy chiefs can lay it on thick when it comes to the latest kit or initiative, but until these things are given the real-world “soldiering test” we all know they are pretty near worthless.

The Army gets this. And so alongside its numerous fielding teams and trials units, we hope *Soldier* can help provide some useful detail about what is happening on the ground.

As the people who ultimately have to live with – and die by – decisions taken further up the chain, this seems only right.

Enjoy the issue. And let us know what else needs stress-testing in 2022.

Sarah Goldthorpe • Editor

Where to find *Soldier*

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THESE are distributed to every Army site at the start of each month.

► Facebook, Twitter and Instagram

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► Online

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Want to switch it up?

Pictures: Graeme Main and Peter Davies

Digital Transfer is up and running, making it easier for Service personnel to move trades

CHANGING cap badges is now more straightforward thanks to a new online system for troops.

The *Digital Transfer* tool means those wanting to switch roles can apply directly to the Army Personnel Centre (APC) instead of first submitting paperwork to their units.

Following its initial launch in November, the app is now fully up and running with some 200 candidates having already started the process.

Developed by the team leading Programme Castle – an overhaul of how the Army manages its workforce – the tool is already creating a buzz, according to a senior NCO behind it.

Sgt Adam Duncan (RA, shown below), whose role involves briefing units about the project, said troops were enthusiastic.

"People are loving it," he added. "As soon as I talk about it, the whole dynamic of the room changes and they sit forward."

"In the past, transferring wasn't an easy process. You had to rely on your regiment sending the application to Glasgow and individuals never knew what stage they were at."

"Also, units sometimes didn't want to let personnel go, but by holding on to them they risked losing them to civvy street anyway."

"Now I can log on via my phone, see what jobs are available and if there's one I've always wanted to do – such as dog handler, which

is really popular – I can type it in like I would on a civilian job site."

"It will tell me what I need to do for the role – what skills, education or driving licences for example – and as soon as I press 'apply' it goes straight to APC and I can track it."

Sgt Duncan acknowledged fears that certain units or trades could find themselves short-staffed, but pointed out that while accessing job information is now simpler, the transfer policy itself remains unchanged.

As before, personnel can only move if vacancies are available and will not be permitted to if they are set to deploy.

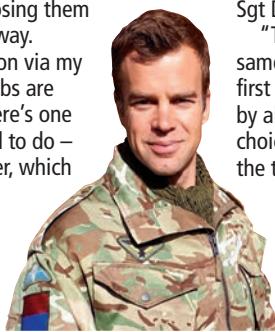
He also stressed that the new system would help support those whose units had been done away with under Future Soldier restructuring by assisting them in finding new roles.

Job specifications are uploaded on a continuous basis and there are plans to enable transfers to the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy by the end of the year.

Accessible via Defence Connect and the Defence Gateway, the tool is part of the *Career Management Portal*, which was trialled last year and is now available Army-wide.

"We are giving troops more ownership over their own careers," said Sgt Duncan of the initiatives.

"The 24-year-old soldier is not the same as the 16-year-old recruit who first joined. People's lives change and by allowing them more flexibility and choice, we will be more likely to retain the talent." ■



Land, sea, air, cyber: The various Army roles open to transferees can now be found in one place

“
It's like
using a
civilian job
site
”



Find *Digital Transfer* on the *Career Management Portal* via Defence Connect or the Defence Gateway

SOLDIER

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A taste of Army activity across the world

GLOBAL SITREP

Picture: Cpl Jamie Hart, RLC

1. BELIZE



PARAS WARMING UP

IT IS shaping up to be a busy year for The Parachute Regiment with around 150 personnel from C Company, 3rd Battalion currently in Belize for six weeks of jungle drills, which include blank and live-fire tactical training packages.

The troops are learning how to navigate, operate radios and carry out attacks, ambushes and defensive actions in dense forest. They will also master the skills needed to live relatively comfortably in the bush.

"This is one of the most challenging environments we may be expected to operate in," said Capt Jack Maughan (Para).

"The regiment's ability to do

so assures senior commanders that we are always ready to deploy anywhere in the world in the toughest of conditions."

Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion's B Company are embarking on winter camp in Estonia, which will see them practising integration with armour in arduous, cold weather conditions.

Later this month a Pathfinders short-term training team will be in Kuwait to mentor its armed forces on sniping and reconnaissance skills, while 3rd Battalion's A Company head to Louisiana in March to conduct joint drills with US airborne forces.

Then in June, troops from 3rd Battalion will travel to Jordan to work with that nation's quick reaction force.

ANTARCTICA QUEST CONCLUDES



Picture: Antarctic Quest 21

TWO serving Army personnel and a retired officer were among an eight-person team to complete a trek across Antarctica to conduct climate change research.

SSgt Richard Simpson (R Signals), Reservist Maj Alex Cross (RAMC) and former major Phil Carrotte (ex-REME) covered more than 300 kilometres of an unexplored part of the region on Antarctic Quest 21.

The team, who each pulled pulks weighing more than 100kg, put in place scientific equipment to transmit climate data and gathered more information on the

presence of microplastic, metal and nutrient content in the snow.

Maj Carrotte said: "We had an important opportunity to contribute to some of the climate change science that universities we are working with are doing."

Lt Gen Sir Richard Nugee, author of the MoD's strategy on climate change and sustainability, went with the team to see them off.

"This expedition shows we can have an enormous effect on this region and we must try and reduce that," he said.

● Polar Preet reflects – page 38



2. FALKLAND ISLANDS FORTY YEARS OF FREEDOM

PREPARATIONS are under way to commemorate four decades since the territory's liberation from Argentine occupation.

The Falkland Islands' government is planning several events under the theme "looking forward at 40" – remembering the conflict and the sacrifice made by personnel.

The Royal British Legion also confirmed there would be a National Memorial Arboretum event on June 14, coinciding with a gathering at Port Stanley. A service at St Paul's Cathedral is planned for April 5 among other activities.

Some 255 British personnel and three Falkland islanders died during the 74-day conflict in 1982.

INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

Brief the team now:



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3. ANTIGUA

ATLANTIC CHALLENGE TRIUMPH

FOUR Royal Army Physical Training Corps rowers became the fastest mixed crew in history to complete the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge.

Arriving in Antigua as this issue went to press, the Force Atlantic team posted a time of 40 days, 23 hours and seven minutes – beating the previous record for the 3,000-mile journey from the Canary Islands by nearly a day-and-a-half.

Describing her emotions on crossing the finishing line, WO1 Victoria Blackburn told the BBC: "The feeling was absolutely ecstatic for all four of us."

Some 40 hours previously, the Salty Sappers – a Royal Engineers outfit – had also docked safely at English Harbour after 39 days at sea. Meanwhile at the time of writing, Cpl Jack Jarvis (RE) was some 53 days into a Herculean solo effort to become the first person to row 4,500 miles from mainland Europe to Florida.

Read more about the soldiers' exploits in the next issue.



Picture: Atlantic Campaigns

IN NUMBERS

3,000	route in miles from La Gomera to Antigua
28	weight loss, in kg, of Force Atlantic crew
39	days, seven hours and 20 minutes: time posted by the Salty Sappers

RESERVISTS from 4th Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment are returning to the UK this month after a rewarding deployment to Kenya.

The 34 part-time Servicemen and women, who began their stint just before Christmas, "quickly adapted to the demands of serving abroad," Capt Rob Phillips told *Soldier*.

They have been working with local G4S staff at Nyati Barracks, where more than 500 Kenyan support staff are employed, as well as conducting potential JNCO training.

"The job here is very different to back home so it's been good to test my leadership skills in a fresh environment," commented 26-year-old LCpl Jovan Chaukria, who is a social care worker from Huddersfield in civilian life.

Picture: 4 York

KENYA



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5. UKRAINE EASTERN PROMISE

SERVICE personnel have begun training Ukraine's armed forces on a defensive light anti-tank missile system.

The UK is providing the weapons in response to "the increasingly threatening behaviour from Russia", according to Defence Secretary Ben Wallace.

"We have taken the decision to supply light anti-armour systems," the MP told the Commons, adding that a small number of British troops would provide training.

"This support is for short-range and clearly defensive weapon capabilities; they are not strategic weapons."



4. POLAND SAPPERS' SUPPORT

PLANT operators from 32 Engineer Regiment have been carrying out vital route upgrades along Poland's border with Belarus.

Around 130 sappers are providing infrastructure support to Polish efforts to manage the migrant crisis in the region, which the UK says is being facilitated by the Lukashenko regime.

Poor weather and increased traffic had badly damaged roads, leading military vehicles to become stuck.

The task involved filling and levelling the wheel ruts, excavating down to a base, then laying and compacting an aggregate mix.

"The ground was frozen as hard as concrete when the troops arrived," said Capt Simon Thijss (RE), operations officer for 26 Field Squadron.

"This then thawed resulting in wet, muddy conditions and presenting them with different challenges from week to week."

Operation Rockstaff – as the deployment is known – is currently scheduled to last until April.

Soldiers from the regiment are also helping to plan and assist with the construction of barriers and elevated observation posts.



A PENSION SCAMS WARNING

■ A FINANCIAL expert has repeated warnings for troops to be aware of pension scams after another case came to light of a veteran losing money.

Johnny Timpson, a consultant with insurance provider Absolute Military, said personnel must remain vigilant following news of a decision by the Pensions Ombudsman on the ex-soldier's complaint.

Identified only as Mr S, he had transferred his pot out of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme into an investment fund that later failed.

The ombudsman ruled the MoD had wrongly allowed the transfer request and should therefore reinstate his pension, however Timpson stressed the example served as a timely reminder of the risks involved.

"The most important thing for anyone thinking about switching to a different type of pension is that they take the time to find out about the implications for them, their partner and family," he said.

"People with a pension transfer value of more than £30,000 must by law get advice before moving their money, but it's always a good idea to get independent guidance before making important, irreversible decisions."

He urged people to consult the government-sponsored Pension Advisory Service for free and impartial advice. Visit moneyhelper.org.uk or call 0800 011 3797.

BOOSTER NOTE

■ ARMY chiefs are encouraging personnel to get vaccinated against Covid-19 if they haven't yet done so.

The chain of command wants soldiers to avoid any travel restrictions, as well as the reduced performance and operational effectiveness that can come from Covid-related absences.

For more information search "get boosted" online and follow the instructions on how to book.



Members of the UK Armed Forces helped evacuate around 15,000 individuals from Kabul

Pictures: LPhot Ben Shread, RN

“
The operation will go down in history
”



OP PITTING MEDAL

Formal recognition of tough op is 'great news'

TOOPS who took part in the action to evacuate Afghan civilians from Kabul last summer have welcomed news of a campaign decoration.

They said issue of the Op Pitting medal fittingly recognised the courage of those who helped extract 15,000 people during the capital city's fall.

Defence chiefs confirmed that Armed Forces personnel who took part in the action last August would receive the existing Afghanistan Operational Service Medal plus a clasp denoting what was the UK military's largest humanitarian aid effort for 70 years.

Members of all three Services who were in Kabul for five consecutive days or more will be eligible, plus aircrew flying three sorties.

Colchester-based 16 Air Assault Brigade fronted the deployment with some 600 soldiers from various cap badges involved.

The operation was meticulously coordinated by planners from Joint Forces Headquarters in Northwood, both on home soil and in theatre.

Those on the ground faced harrowing scenes as desperate crowds made for Hamid Karzai airport. Personnel were later praised for their professionalism and compassion.

Capt Jack Maughan, who deployed with 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, said it was "great news" that efforts were being formally recognised.

He told *Soldier*. "There are so many people who worked incredibly hard across defence during Pitting and a number of lives were saved as a result.

"I'm particularly pleased for our

young troops – the presentation of a medal allows them to stand toe-to-toe with more experienced colleagues.

"Personnel on this operation worked to make every hour count – it is not often you have the opportunity to make this kind of difference."

Maj Laurence Wilson (RA), who was involved with drawing up and executing plans for Op Pitting with Joint Force Headquarters, shared the sentiment.

"It is fantastic those involved are receiving this recognition," he added.

Announcing the approval of the award by the Queen, Prime Minister Boris Johnson described the action as a huge achievement for British personnel.

He added: "Operation Pitting will go down in history as one of the great accomplishments for our Armed Services and their civilian counterparts in the post-war era.

"I am delighted that Her Majesty, The Queen has given permission for a special medal. The country can be immensely proud of their tireless work to bring men, women and children to safety – they represent the best of us."

■ Qualifying criteria for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal has been released. Regulars serving on February 6, 2022 who have completed five years in the Army will qualify. This service may be aggregated, but unpaid or broken stints will not count. Reservists with sufficient service on their record can also be eligible for the award. Read 2022DIN09-001 via Defence Connect for more details.



The availability of adventurous training after the coronavirus disruption is seen as a major positive

Picture Graeme Main

Soldiers' views make a splash

LACK of reliable Wi-Fi in single living accommodation is still one of the biggest concerns facing British soldiers, according to recent research presented to the top brass.

Interviews carried out by the Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team highlighted that Servicemen and women were continuing to find the absence of cheap and easy online access a frustration in some places.

There was also unease about the prospect of forthcoming change in the Army – particularly with the onset of far-reaching reforms in the Future Soldier initiative.

But personnel said they were happier about a number of other issues – notably the better availability of sport and adventurous training following the coronavirus disruption.

And they were largely upbeat with

the job offer provided by the Army.

Lt Col Lucy Butler (RLC), who works with the team, said several units had been visited for the latest report and some familiar issues had been raised.

She stressed that action had been under way to address Wi-Fi availability, pointing out that improving internet access was firmly on the radar of defence chiefs.

The officer also noted that there had been a number of questions about the prospect of change as Future Soldier was implemented.

She added: "Personnel generally wanted to know more – particularly how they were going to be personally affected by the reorganisation.

"The prospect of change coming along the road can always be a bit daunting – although it equally represents potential opportunity."

“
The
prospect
of
change
can
be
daunting
”



Surprise promotion

■ A SENIOR US officer has found himself in an unusual position – receiving his promotion from a British colleague.

Maj Chester Boyles – an exchange officer with 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team – received his new lieutenant colonel slides from formation commander Brig Nick Cowley.

During the ceremony at Merville Barracks, the member of the 82nd Airborne Division thanked British colleagues and said he'd learnt a great deal during his UK tenure.

In turn, Brig Cowley told his newly promoted colleague: "Your presence here represents the best of the relationship between the US and British armies."

The exchange programme has proved hugely beneficial to both nations. A trio of UK officers – a brigadier and two captains – serve as exchange officers with the 82nd Airborne Division, based at Fort Bragg in North Carolina.

Picture: Cpl Danny Houghton, RLC



TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK

■ THE Army sergeant major has issued a call to arms for troops to focus on diversity and inclusion as the Service stops all non-essential business for a day this month.

WO1 Paul Carney said the "circuit breaker" initiative on February 8 would be a time to reflect on future direction under the strapline "no institution is beyond reform".

The event will see senior officers – including Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Mark Carleton-Smith – set out the challenges ahead. Standards of behaviour as well as culture and leadership will be among the issues discussed.

While the chain of command accepts that the Army has made progress in improving in these areas, it has been stressed that the Service must make more changes to continue along this pathway.

Urging troops to take part, WO1 Carney said they would hear more about Op Teamwork and what it means on the day.

The senior soldier added: "Come February 8, the Army will be conducting a complete stop of all its non-essential and non-operational activity.

"This will be a time to consider and reflect on our current culture and approach to inclusion, as well as how we will improve under Op Teamwork.

"I ask that everyone gets involved, gets engaged and makes our team the best."

● Ground View, page 15

FEARLESS FUNDRAISING

Picture: ITV/Shutterstock



An ace chaser

A FALKLANDS War veteran proved a devastating quizzer after outwitting a parade of TV brainboxes to scoop a massive cash haul for charity.

Former Welsh Guardsman Simon Weston – who was severely burned in the 1982 conflict – took the jackpot in ITV's prime time show *Beat the Chasers*. The celeb bested six professional quizzers to take the prize while fellow players Carol Vorderman, Joel Dommett and Samia Longchambon failed to secure the big win.

Weston, who has dedicated his life to charity work since being injured, said he was thrilled to win the money. The cash is going to a cause that helps people affected by skin disorder epidermolysis bullosa.



NEW YEAR HONOURS

THE achievements of troops across all ranks have been rewarded with royal recognition as nearly 70 soldiers and officers were named in the New Year Honours list.

Commended personnel range from those who supported the authorities in the wake of Covid-19 to others promoting soldier welfare.

The line-up includes CSgt Roger Coates (Coldm Gds), who receives the MBE for his work over the course of 37 years of service – during which time he assisted in the recovery of wounded colleagues.

Other recipients include Maj Jamie Carrahar (AGC (ETS)), recognised for driving equality, and Lt Col Lucinda Butler (RLC) for her work in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

“I know the problems it can cause”



Picture: Graeme Main

Gambling call to arms

Ex-Serviceman reaches out to the “loads” struggling with addiction

A FORMER soldier and recovering gambler has launched a campaign to help other Service personnel beat their addiction and raise money for military good causes in the process.

Drew Crainie (ex-Scots) is urging followers to “Fold in February”, by pledging not to gamble for a month and instead to donate their cash to The Veterans Charity.

Having placed his last bet in September 2018, the 32-year-old began speaking out about his struggles with compulsive gambling on social media.

He now visits Army units to spread awareness among the military community.

“It’s a well known mental

health issue and having suffered myself I know first-hand the problems it can cause in daily life,” he told *Soldier*.

“Giving up for any length of time brings you so many benefits – including saving money and spending more time with family – and it could possibly drive you to stop for good.

“I have had loads of messages from lads who are struggling and feel they can’t come forward.

“I hope that sharing my story helps to put them and others at ease.”

To get involved in the campaign log on to [justgiving.com/fundraising/drew-crainie](https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/drew-crainie)

Follow Crainie’s story on Twitter at @ARecoverer





Pictures: Graeme Main

Support to NHS lingers on

High infection rates mean soldiers have been helping ambulance trusts

TROOPS have once again been thrust into the front line of the latest Covid outbreak – this time plugging gaps left by NHS staff off sick or self-isolating.

Soldiers around the country have been training to support hospitals and ambulance trusts as several services reported high public infection rates.

Some 40 members of the Armed Forces were pressed into action in Yorkshire as this issue hit the shelves, while a 60-strong contingent was assisting in the East Midlands.

All were bolstering regional ambulance teams.

A 150-strong cohort had also begun preparations to staff North West ambulances, while another 200 were mobilised in London hospitals.

And Army personnel formed half of a 240-strong force helping medical efforts in Wales.

A further 70 soldiers were assisting vaccinations and dozens more had been earmarked for duty.

Hundreds were helping with ambulances and jabs in Scotland.

Meanwhile, members of the military co-responders initiative were on a fourth full-time deployment with South Central Ambulance Service.

Maj Emma Allen (R Signals), who oversees the team with her Gunner officer husband James, said 15



personnel were assisting, most of them from the Army.

The initiative sees 150 members of the Armed Forces giving up their spare time to support ambulance crews.

All have medical training and some receive blue light driving instruction.

But Maj Allen said the handful of volunteers were now working full-time again like in the spring of 2020 and the onset of Op Rescript.

Since then, small teams have been on standby to reassert the role around-the-clock whenever spikes in the virus have emerged.

“They’ve been doing really well”



SOLDIERSPORT



“There is no reason why we cannot go out and medal”

Bobsleigh ace LCpl Nick Gleeson (Para) braced for Winter Olympics test – page 72



When did the request for military assistance come in?

We actually had the call on New Year's Eve and have been working from January 10. We're due to be helping until March.

Which cap badges are the troops drawn from?

They come from all over the British Army, including the Royal Artillery and REME.

Where are they based?

Largely in Milton Keynes, a large station shared with the fire service, and Oxford.

What sort of work are they doing?

They are involved with driving ambulances as well as providing medical care to patients.

How are they performing?

They have been doing really well. This time a young Army Air Corps officer, Lt Corydon Morrell, is leading the team.



IN NUMBERS

1,000



Armed Forces personnel ready to help with Covid jabs as this issue went to press



BUBBLE, BUBBLE...

■ BOFFINS at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory are investigating whether armoured vehicles could in future be protected by an electronic "bubble" of different sensors and counter-measures.

Called a modular integrated protection system, and illustrated above, it would bring together hardware and software to help save lives on the front line.

Programme Manager Richard Hooper said the research would provide "agility and flexibility in active protection system capability" and help Nato partners face evolving threats.

GET HELP WITH GOALS

■ STRESSED about facing your 2022 goals? An anonymous online community that supports soldiers is offering help.

Visit togetherall.com for assistance setting achievable targets. The organisation says this can be a great step towards better mental health.



Picture: Graeme Main

WHEELIE GOOD NEWS FOR WELFARE PROJECTS...

■ GRANTS are available for welfare projects across the Army.

The Naafi Fund, launched in 2020, will open its third round of applications this April.

And the cash windfalls – from £5,000 to £50,000 – can be used to support any project that improves quality of life for Armed Forces personnel.

To date, 162 grants worth almost £2m have been given out by the initiative.

They have been awarded for a wide range of uses, including mountain bike purchases, building facelifts and new games pitches.

For more information visit naafi.co.uk/giving-back



Above: Some of the 72 portraits completed so far and, inset, Wills with his picture of Maj Sean Birchall (WG)

I felt compelled to produce something permanent

VETERAN and amateur artist Kevin Wills is using digital painting to create stunning tributes to every British soldier killed in Afghanistan.

The former loggie, who served in Kosovo and Northern Ireland during the 1990s, also frames and delivers his images to the fallen Service person's relatives.

"I felt compelled to produce something permanent for those who died for their country," he told *Soldier*.

The Yorkshireman has completed 72 pictures so far, using special software that recreates watercolour or oil paint effects on screen.

"I'm working through each year and I estimate it will take me around two-and-a-half years," he said.

A major inspiration for the project was a portrait he had previously produced of the late Capt Sir Tom Moore.

"I did it to raise awareness of his achievements," he added. "His picture went viral and his family loved it so I sent it to them."



"I was creating portraits of other Second World War veterans when I read about a fallen marine in Afghanistan, so I got in touch with his family and asked if they would let me paint their son.

"A lot people then asked me if I could produce one of their child or partner, and that's when I came up with the idea of painting them all."

"Initially I was funding the framing and shipping myself but I realised I couldn't afford to do them all. That's when another veteran got in touch and we set up a crowdfunding page."

Wills has received numerous messages of thanks and support from military families and other veterans.

"Every single portrait gives me a sense of happiness because these families know someone is still thinking of their loved ones and trying to keep their memories alive," he said.

Visit kevwillis.co.uk and crowdfunder.co.uk/the-fallen-of-afghanistan for more.



Ground view

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

DEALING with the media – and learning a little about how it works – has been a new experience for me after taking up this post six months ago.

Over the Christmas leave period a few of my comments from a *Soldier* interview were picked up by the national press.

I was struck by how well journalists know that Army stories are popular, and this often works in our favour.

You only have to cast your mind back to early January, and Capt Preet Chandi's solo trek across Antarctica (page 38).

Her safe arrival at the South Pole made the front pages and television news.

And the efforts of those assisting NHS colleagues in the Covid battle are never out of sight for long.

I'm very proud to be part of an Army that has a huge public following and a status envied the world over.

But this also means we are under constant scrutiny: remember, bad conduct will make the news too.

The fact is that society expects more from soldiers – we are seen differently because we are asked to always uphold the highest values and standards.

We can expect not only those letting us

down to feature in the media but also the cap badge they represent – the stories perhaps referring to them as a member of “a regiment that guards the Queen” or “an elite unit”.

We have a hard-won reputation for excellence – both at home and on the international stage – but it does not take much for this to be tarnished by a few bad apples.

And this is even before we start talking about the dreadful effects that unacceptable behaviours have on individual well-being, wider morale across the Service and the likes of recruitment and retention.

Having previously said that dealing with this issue is a priority for the coming year, I would like to make it clear that nothing has changed on this front.

In the very near future I will be calling on our young NCOs to step up and assist me as role models as we look further into these sorts of issues.

But ultimately, we all have our part to play in ensuring the Army becomes a better place and for everyone serving, regardless of background

Make no mistake, I am personally committed to seeing this happen.

Soldiers are seen differently

“ ”



UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Q Anyone in Service life who has been a role model for you?

A Ex-sapper Maj Andy Sanger (pictured above) – a former Army rugby coach – was inspirational



Fighting back to fitness

UNITS would do well to familiarise themselves with the work of The Royal British Legion's Battleback Centre, which is continuing to support our soldiers who are wounded, injured or sick, as well as the veteran community.

The venue – in Lilleshall, Shropshire – has a proud history, originally helping those

who were injured during the years of ops in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

But as my recent visit testified, it continues to play a life-changing role for personnel in a less intensive operational time – offering a raft of different outdoor activities (pictured above).

Make sure this impressive facility is on your radar.



Virus vanguard

THE latest Covid wave has seen soldiers once again at the forefront of protecting the public – helping to assist while NHS colleagues are sick or self-isolating.

I have recently had the opportunity to meet some of those involved. From driving ambulances to working in hospitals, the efforts of troops from many different cap badges has been remarkable. A particular highlight for me was seeing a section commander lead a team carrying out vaccinations.

As well as playing an important role in keeping the public safe, they have also been taking the Army into remote areas, where Service personnel are less often seen.

Thank you, and keep up the great work.

WIN

a 2-night stay in
North Wales!



LAST month's spine line clues would have been cracked by anyone who read about the expanding deep fires unit, 26 Regiment, Royal Artillery.

LBdr Ed Darby, LBdr Liam Jaggard, Sgt Lee Morley and Lt Col Chris Wild were all quoted in our article about the MLRS operators and the growth of their role under the Future Soldier programme.

This month, we have teamed up with Rws Holiday Lodges (rwsholidaylodges.co.uk/) to offer one lucky reader a two-night stay for two adults at their beautiful four-star park in North Wales – just five minutes' drive from Betws y Coed, in the heart of the Conwy Valley and closely located to a host of adrenalin-fuelled outdoor activities.

The prize, worth up to £429, can be redeemed any time in 2022 (excluding July 8 to September 5) and is subject to availability at the time of booking.

To be in with a chance of winning this prize, tell us what links the words on the spine of this issue. Answers, including phone number, to the usual address or comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by February 28.



SPINE LINE COMPETITION

RWST
HOLIDAY LODGES



“The worst that will happen is you don’t win”

Time to get scrolling

The Army wants your pictures of Service life – no pricey kit required

WHETHER you are a professional photographer or a reluctant amateur who wonders if your videos could go viral – the British Army wants to hear from you.

Entries are still open for the 2021 Army Film and Photographic Competition. The deadline is close of play on February 10.

According to Master Photographer WO1 Rupert Frere (RLC), the top prize could be scooped by just about anyone.

"My favourite part of this contest is looking through the amateur entries," he told *Soldier*.

"I expect our Army photographers to do a good job, but I am really looking forward to seeing what others, such as our cadets, have to offer."

"Prizes this year will include photographic kit or vouchers."

Categories are split into amateur and professional sections. They include portrait shots, videos (short and long) and images showing soldiering, teamwork (including civvies) and cadets.

The application form – available to download from the Army website – takes just ten minutes to fill in.

WO1 Frere urged anyone interested to have a go.

"People often think their iPhone images won't be good enough, but the best camera is the one you have on you," he said. "And the worst thing that will happen is that you don't win."

"But on the other hand, soldiers could walk away with brand new camera kit, some vouchers and their pictures in the national press."

Turn to page 24 for WO1 Frere's top photography tips.



■ SOLDIERS have little time left to tell the Army what life is like for those at the sharp end. The 2022 Armed Forces continuous attitude survey closes on February 7.

The study's findings are used to shape policies and better tailor support to personnel.

However, just a quarter of those from the Army who were asked to take part had done so at the time this magazine went to press.

Those who were not selected, but who still wish to have their say, can respond to a shorter set of questions instead.

Visit tools.mod.uk/survey-front-end to make your views heard.

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THE BIG PICTURE

Moray Firth, Scotland

Aurora artistry

■ SAPPER Ross Gourlay (RE) took this stunning shot of the Northern Lights during a recent peak in geomagnetic activity.

The Kinloss-based soldier raced to Findhorn Beach with his camera and tripod to snap the celestial display after a year of failed attempts.

"You need clear and dark skies as any cloud coverage or light pollution will scupper your chances," he told *Soldier*.

"But this time the stars aligned, so to speak, and I managed to capture one of the seven natural wonders of the world."

To see more of Spr Gourlay's work search for **@rogotography** on Instagram.

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





NEED TO KNOW



Mental MUSCLE

How sharpening your mind can turbocharge your military skills

► A HOST of brain training apps have sprung up in the last few years, promising to boost everything from memory and cognitive function to general well-being.

But are they all they cracked up to be? According to neuroscientists Dr Michael Merzenich and Dr Henry Mahncke, the answer is a firm “yes”.

What's more, the experts think militaries around the world should tap into the concept to maximise troops' performance and mental health.

Their platform, *Brain HQ*, is already used in routine training by American special forces and Italian Army recruiters.

Participants complete a series of exercises targeting core skills such as attention, processing speed and navigation, with the difficulty level adapting automatically to their progress.

Explaining why seemingly random online games should be beneficial to the mind, Dr Merzenich elaborates: “When you train a brain like this it uses it for every operation – it generalises.

“So if I improve the quality of information being shipped around to do with vision, for example, everything in vision is empowered by it.”

And in ever better news, he says it's

never too late to start boosting your grey matter – in other words, you can teach an old dog new tricks.

“The brain is plastic,” continues Dr Merzenich. “It's continuously alterable – we are all works in progress.

“And the military is increasingly interested in this, not just in terms of getting the most out of their people but they're also concerned that especially the Chinese are investing heavily in this science and trying to apply it to the training of their armed forces.”

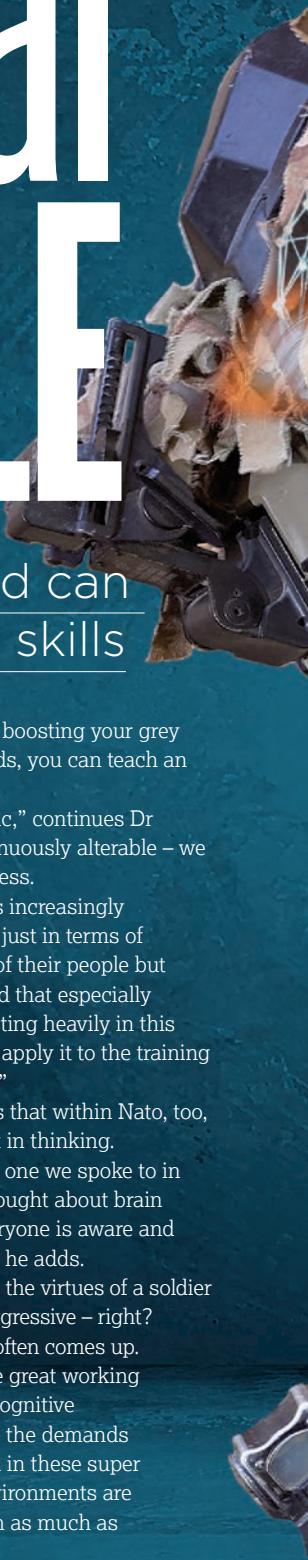
Dr Mahncke agrees that within Nato, too, there has been a shift in thinking.

“Five years ago, no one we spoke to in defence had really thought about brain training, but now everyone is aware and they're reaching out,” he adds.

“What do you want the virtues of a soldier to be? Strong, fast, aggressive – right? Lethal is a word that often comes up.

“They need to have great working memory and strong cognitive performance because the demands we're making of them in these super high-tech combat environments are demands on the brain as much as the body.”

If the duo sound evangelical





about the possibilities, it's because they are. Brain health can be compromised by factors such as childhood abuse and malnutrition, but

their work in British schools has shown neurological training can help those given a poor start in life – something they also believe could apply to military recruits from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Likewise, trials conducted with veterans in the US indicate that brain training can improve cognitive function in individuals who have suffered head injuries.

Dr Mahncke continues: "Imagine a world in which when you join the military you undergo a cognitive assessment, just as you would a physical exam, and instead of getting thrown out because you

have a history of brain problems, you are given training that helps your mind sharpen up in all the ways you want it to.

"And then imagine across your career you're trained to help optimise your brain for your speciality – whether it's driving a truck or being a sniper.

"And then after you've served your country and been whacked on the head a few times because you were near an IED explosion, the Army has an obligation to take care of your brain, as well as your body – so that when you go back into civilian life you have all the experience you've learned and a brain that lets you put it to work.

"Science shows this is possible and I think it's a wonderfully optimistic view to have about human potential."

Real-world benefits

Research into brain training has shown startling results across various walks of life, including:

- **Sports.** Athletes put through computer-based decision making exercises unrelated to their sport demonstrated improved on-field performance

- **Health and safety.** A study of electric power-line installers in America measured significantly higher levels of

The boffins

Dr Michael Merzenich

is the chief scientific officer of Posit Science, the company behind *Brain HQ*. Having pioneered brain plasticity research for nearly 50 years, he has received numerous international awards for his work in the field. He is also the coinventor of the cochlear implant



Dr Henry Mahncke

is the CEO of Posit Science. With a PhD in neuroscience, he was previously a consultant for McKinsey and a science and technology adviser to the British government



» focus following cognitive training. Inattentiveness had previously been identified as a cause for accidents in the industry

● **Policing.** Trials among US law enforcement personnel suggested individuals given just 20 hours of brain training subsequently performed markedly better in so-called "shoot, no-shoot" tests – simulations requiring them to rapidly decide whether they should fire at a target or not. In addition, there was a measurable reduction in complaints from members of the public in the precincts concerned and officers were also less likely to respond to situations with violence



Dr Mahncke's take-away for troops...

"Look at the burden that law enforcement officers or soldiers have to suffer. The rules of engagement are relatively complex.

It's easy to figure out the right thing to do when you're in a conference room with the rulebook in front of you, but the reality is they're out there making these split-second decisions.

Often what happens is you have this automatic response around your personal safety and what we're looking for is to build brains that are operating quickly and accurately enough that the auto-response can be suppressed for a fraction of a second to stop the rules of engagement being violated.

Or imagine you're on patrol and your commander has told you to make sure your 'head is on swivel' – you're looking around at your environment.

Your eyes are moving from place to place and when they land on a target you want your brain to rapidly extract the detail about what it is.

It's a little like physical exercise – if you want to be better at a skill you don't just do that one skill over and over again, you go to the gym and strengthen your arms and legs and do endurance sessions.

In the same way, brain training gives you the underlying cognitive skills to do these real-world operations quickly and accurately."

For more information or to subscribe to Brain HQ visit brainhq.com

Prostitutes, policy

Director Personnel Maj Gen

Paul Griffiths has some tricky topics to tackle in his mission to overhaul Army culture. Soldier asked more...



CGS has talked about culture change, but what does that mean exactly?

It's about ensuring the British Army's values and standards dictate the way we live. It's about teamwork – good leadership, behaviours, safety and security.



So what needs to go, and what stays?

We must keep to our values and standards; that's the basis of everything. And we need to rid the Army of behaviours that don't support teamworking such as racism, sexism and intolerance of others.



If sexism is a concern, why aren't senior officers talking about the use of prostitutes by deployed troops? Don't longstanding behaviours like this need to be discussed now?

This is certainly a values and standards issue, and about respect for others – and not just within the Army or the UK. It may be legal in some countries, but that doesn't make it acceptable. Indeed, in Kenya it is forbidden in standing orders for our personnel to use sex workers. Prostitution is exploitative and we want people across the Army to understand this and for that to be reflected in their behaviour. Don't do it.

and personal responsibility



4

Do you have the systems in place to start changing things?

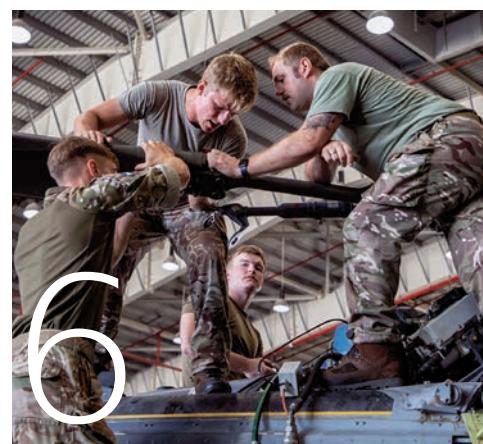
That's what we have been working on over recent years. We have listened to what the Wigston, Gray and, most recently, the House of Commons defence committee reports have said, and are developing the levers so we can go after areas that require change. One initiative, our climate assessment study, is proving extremely valuable. Since it started three years ago, around 70,000 personnel and 660 units have participated and we are close to producing a summary of all that research, to help us see where change is needed. We are launching our "Teamwork" campaign to drive the change (page 11). Things are being finalised and I will say more on that soon.



5

So what would positive change look like at unit level?

Everyone showing mutual respect. For a soldier, that will also mean feeling confident enough to speak up and challenge things appropriately, and for a junior NCO it will mean approaching their sub-unit commander or commanding officer if they feel that things aren't right.



6

But challenging superiors isn't easy, is it?

It can be a hurdle, but we are developing our standard education programmes to show people how and when to do it appropriately. It will form a core element of the training at the junior NCO academy we are establishing this year. I think focusing on our junior NCOs and giving them more leadership skills in this area is crucial. Last year we also distributed a command standing order called the Army organisational cultural framework. Among many things, it sets out the role that challenge plays.



7

What is the Army doing to address other areas of concern?

A raft of things. To name a few, we are ensuring those convicted of sexual offences – particularly those involving abuse of power – are dismissed from the Service, and considering similar sorts of administrative action for other unacceptable sexual behaviour. An extra £1m per year will be put into the investigation of bullying, harassment and discrimination cases, and a similar amount into initiatives that enhance diversity. Some £13.7m will be spent addressing PPE shortfalls for our Service women. Other actions will also be announced soon.

'It hit me like an RPG'

Cancer diagnoses
laid bare...

► **ONE in two people in the UK will be diagnosed with cancer during their lifetime.**

To mark World Cancer Day on February 4, Service personnel share their experiences of life with the disease, the important signs to look out for and how you can help colleagues in their fight.

“ I am a doctor and in May 2021 found a 4.5cm mass in my right breast. Within 72 hours I had been prodded, scanned and biopsied. I started chemotherapy two weeks later. Cancer takes up an awful lot of your free time – chemo can take up to six hours. But my role as a Reservist has been my mental lifeline. I have been able to work on my laptop, complete e-learning and attend virtual events, which has kept me distracted, entertained and given me a sense of purpose. I do feel it is harsh that I lost my hair just as new regulations came in for Servicewomen. Sometimes I forget and reach for my bun net. When you have cancer, it is all anyone wants to talk to you about and they feel they cannot discuss their own issues. They can and should. Patients know life is going on for others, and we need to know it will carry on for us afterwards. So please, tell us about your overflowing inbox, how terrible the range stew was and who got the timings wrong and missed the bus. Cancer patients are often hidden away from the world to avoid infection, so we are always desperate for gossip. ”

Lt Col Abi Hoyle, RAMC



“ I was deployed in Afghanistan when I first felt unwell. The medics called it “Helmand fever” – vomiting, cramps, loss of appetite and lethargy, basically a normal day in the ‘Gan’. On my return home, things still weren’t right. I was being sick randomly, the cramps never went away, and I soon found out I had stage three bowel cancer. It hit me like an RPG – it was an out-of-body experience and I could do nothing. I had no fight, just shock and fear. Thankfully, there were people there to fight for me – the nurses, surgeons, oncologists, and support staff. They saved me. My regiment supported me throughout. Nine months after my surgery and chemotherapy, I returned to work and told anyone who would listen about the importance of catching cancer early. Check yourself – and don’t be afraid to seek help. The unsung heroes in all of this are the fundraisers, who quietly do the hard work that enables research, support, and education around cancer. Even now, ten years on, it doesn’t seem real. It is like a memory from a film, or a story I heard. ”

SSgt Christopher Warwick, RA



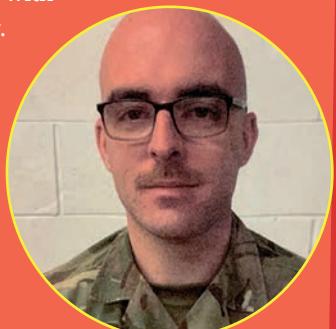
“ Living with a loved one who has cancer leaves you powerless, needing to grab your kit and soldier on but wanting to stay home – all while trying not to burden your unit. It's a rough old game of compromise and you become the rock in the family that cannot break. They look up to you and you must be that person exuding confidence, even though inside you are ready to snap. That's been my journey. I don't talk about it much, I crack on as we try to live her life fully. But don't be me – talk to someone, it really is okay to not be okay. ”

Sgt Dominic Antcliffe, AGC (MPGS)

“ I came back from deployment on Covid testing in January last year. I was sat in my room, and it felt like I had been kicked in the testicles. This went on for about half-an-hour so I contacted 111, who said I should arrange an appointment with a doctor. I attended the Catterick medical centre and on February 12, 2021 went to hospital, where I was diagnosed with testicular cancer. Luckily, it was caught quickly – two weeks later I had an operation to remove the left testicle and they took 100 per cent of the cancer with it.

During the hospital transition my mental health started to go downhill. Fortunately, I contacted Macmillan and they got me counselling sessions. I returned to work in August and continue to build my fitness back up. ”

LCpl Daniel Crosby, RLC



How to spot cancer early



Army medical officer and cancer patient Maj Kate Page (RAMC) talks warning signs, and when to pay a visit to the doc...

On ops we are taught to be vigilant for the absence of normal. The same principle applies when thinking about cancer. **If you notice something change from normal, then talk to your doctor as soon as possible.** Sometimes problems are linked to certain types of cancers. Common ones include...

Breast: a new lump or changes in the size, shape or feel of a breast, nipple inversion, skin changes, or discharge

Testicular: lumps or pain in the testicle, or blood in the semen

Skin: a new or changing mole – look out for an irregular shape, a change in colour or increase in diameter

Bowel: blood in your poo, or a change in how often you go to the loo

Lung: a cough that lasts for more than three weeks (which is not Covid-related) or unexplained shortness of breath

Prostate: difficulty peeing or going more often (getting up frequently in the night) or changes in sexual function

Other potential signs to discuss with the doc include **heartburn that keeps coming back, bleeding when you pee, bleeding between periods, unexplained tiredness and weight loss, lumps that do not go away** after a few weeks in your neck, armpit or groin, **appetite loss or a constant feeling of being bloated.**

Some cancers run in families, and you should be especially vigilant if you have an immediate member, or two or more distant relatives (such as a cousin or grandparent) with cancer.

Useful contacts

● **Macmillan Cancer Support** can provide information, help with finances or someone to talk to. Visit macmillan.org.uk

● **CanDID** connects personnel who share similar circumstances and experiences of illness and disability. Email afnetworks-candid-Omailbox@mod.gov.uk

● **Military vs Cancer** brings all three Services together to benefit those affected by cancer. Visit militaryvscancer.com

Speak to your medical officer

Often military life gets too busy to feel like you have time to go to the doctors, especially around deployments. But **getting any concerns seen to before you go is especially important.** Worrying that you may have cancer can be extremely stressful. A good tip is to write down changes you have noticed and take this to your MO, so you remember everything

► SKILLS & DRILLS



Cold snaps

... and other photography tips for tough environments

LEARNING to take a good picture or video may not be as tricky as you think – even in the most arduous of conditions. Award-winning Master Photographer WO1 Rupert Frere (RLC) has the following tips for any Service personnel trying their hand at photography in the field...

Before you go

Don't get hung up on kit.

The best camera is the one you have on you – whether that's an iPhone or an old camera you don't mind being knocked about

In the cold

Keep your batteries

somewhere warm to help them last longer

In the jungle

Keep all your kit in dry bags

when not being used to protect them from humidity

In the desert

Use cameras without moving parts such as zooming lenses – sand particles can break them

On the move

Apply your marksmanship principles to the camera to help you keep it as still as possible. Control your breathing and hold it steady



● Turn to page 16 for details of how to enter this year's Army Film and Photographic Competition

Lightning reactions

How this fast jet is backing up land forces on operations

► IT IS a piece of kit that ground troops will only see for a short time as it streaks overhead at one-and-a-half times the speed of sound – but rest assured when they do, the Lightning jet is helping them deliver the goods.

Flown by a joint force of Royal Air Force and Royal Navy crews, the F-35B can deliver a hammer blow to its adversaries, all the while maintaining a low profile during sorties thanks to some advanced stealth technology.

Costing a cool £88.8 million each, and fitted with an array of sensors matched with a short take-off and vertical landing capability, the aircraft can also receive info feeds from around the battlespace.

In practical terms, this means the likes of helicopter crews can exchange data on potential targets.

And last year's Exercise Kanjar Oman in the Gulf saw Wildcat aviators from 1 Regiment, Army Air Corps effectively acting as forward air controllers as they partnered with their fast-jet colleagues for the first time in this way.

Here is a breakdown of the capabilities backing British soldiers up on operations...





Mission profiles

According to manufacturer Lockheed Martin, the versatile Lightning can carry out a variety of mission types either close to home or deep in enemy territory. They include...

■ Close air support

Crews could be called to back up soldiers engaging hostile forces on the ground – troops were frequently assisted in this way on Op Herrick in Afghanistan. Taskings would see pilots guided by forward air controllers – designating the targets to engage in the battlespace – as they prepare to deliver their payload from the sky

■ Ground attack

With its stealth capabilities plus sensors and cameras mounted around the airframe to provide an array of information about potential threats, pilots can penetrate deep into the battlespace. Potent enemy capabilities – such as missile launchers or other tough-to-crack assets – could be pinpointed, attacked and taken out of circulation before they are able to wreak havoc

■ Air superiority

As campaigns from the Second World War to the Gulf conflicts proved, mastery of the skies can ultimately mean the difference between success and defeat. In 1940, Adolf Hitler's intention to invade the UK was robustly blocked by Allied pilots, who denied his aircraft the freedom to attack. More recently, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein saw his military hammered at will after his air force was all but destroyed on the ground during Operation Desert Storm. The versatile Lightning can be deployed to take on enemy aircraft, with the ability to carry a potent array of air-to-air ordnance into battle

LOCKHEED MARTIN F-35B LIGHTNING

Length: 15.6m (51ft 2in)

Height: 4.36m (14ft 3in)

Ceiling: 50,000ft

Wingspan: 10.70m (35ft)

Operated by: 617 and 207 Squadrons at RAF Marham, Norfolk; 809 Naval Air Squadron due to come online in 2023



Combat radius: 500 miles

Armament: Typical load of two air-to-air missiles and two bombs carried internally plus optional 25mm gun pod and 15,000lb of armaments on underwing pylons

Crew: One. Aviators can work from both land and sea bases. Lightning pilots operated from aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth during the recent tri-Service Gulf manoeuvres

REACHING NEW HEIGHTS



The next-generation Apache is using a raft of technologies to up its already impressive game

IF THERE'S one obvious difference troops on the ground will notice about the latest version of the Apache helicopter it's the sound – or lack of it.

The distant thrum of the 2,000 shaft horsepower engine – a reassuring sign, especially in Afghanistan, that close air support was on its way – will be heard less often in future campaigns.

"The Apache AH-64E will, of course, still be on hand to provide close assistance," Maj Tom Anstey, officer commanding 662 Squadron, 3 Regiment, Army Air Corps, tells *Soldier*. "But one crucial capability this version has is the capacity to operate much further in the deep than the Mk 1, way forward of the Infantry, deleting threats before troops even know they are there."

"So one important message for ground units is: just because you can't see or hear the Apache doesn't mean it's not supporting you."

The new version of this helicopter, which has started flying at Wattisham with 662 Sqn, looks almost identical to the old variant on the outside. But its innards have been given a radical overhaul and, as a result, it enjoys a significant leap in battlefield prowess.

The incorporation of new avionics, sensors and communications systems will allow crews to accomplish their missions while benefitting from greater interoperability with a wider range of assets.

Director Programmes at Army Headquarters, Maj Gen Simon Hamilton, explains to *Soldier* that it is the beginning of a step change for the Service.

"From warfighting to supporting non-combatant evacuations and hostage rescue missions, the AH-64E strongly outperforms the already highly capable Mk 1," he says.

"Through increased platform digitisation, improved weapons and avionics, and latest technology spiral upgrades it can be seen as a first and powerful step towards the British Army's 'Future Soldier' vision."

By the time the 1st Aviation Brigade Combat Team reaches full operating capability in April 2023, the E-model will be ready to team with intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms. »



“
It's like going
from a Nokia
3310 to an
iPhone 13
”

» These include remotely piloted air systems such as Puma, through to the Wildcat helicopter and down to the recce soldier on the ground, providing the potential for joined-up aviation manoeuvres that commanders have been dreaming of for years.

The new aircraft will be easier to maintain and more reliable too, increasing its availability for supporting land forces. This is in part down to an internal monitoring system that can track component fatigue.

“One big advantage of the E is that it’s more reliable in the way modern technology always is, but it also has more efficient maintenance procedures that will make a big difference,” says Cpl Brad Ryder (REME), an Apache technician at Wattisham.

“The Mk 1 had many components that needed replacing after a set number of hours, but the E’s systems allow us to monitor how items are wearing, so in a lot of cases we are not replacing bits of kit that we would have before.”

Further cost savings will arise from the MoD’s ability to access a global supply chain of parts and new composite rotors that reduce vibration and increase blade lifespan.

Purchasing this latest version of Apache off the shelf also means that as the US Army develops new software, hardware and weapons upgrades, they can be easily and cheaply installed on the British Army’s assets.

However, it’s the digital systems and what they bring to lethality and survivability that will really make those on the front line sit up and take notice.

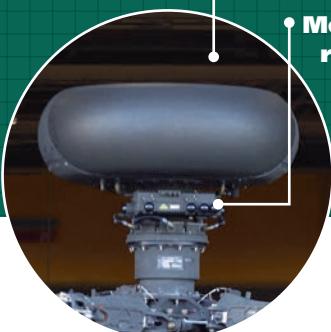
The AH-64E has a so-called cognitive decision aiding system to assist the crew in processing information gathered by multiple sensors, including full motion video.

The Longbow fire control radar that sits above the main rotor has been upgraded and is now able to detect targets further away than the Mk 1. This enhances the survivability of the platform and its ability to protect ground forces.

“In terms of operating on the battlefield it’s another world to the Mk 1,” says Army Air Corps test pilot Maj Neil O’Brien. “In terms of actually flying both platforms there is very little difference, but when it comes to their systems you could say it’s like going from a Nokia 3310 to an iPhone 13.” »

TECH DETAILS

Where the E has upped the ante...



Improved sensors...

- **Fire control radar** detection range has been doubled to 16km allowing classification of up to 256 potential targets and prioritisation of top 16 targets within seconds

- **Modernised radar frequency interferometer** – this allows the passive detection and geolocation

SAC Charlotte Hopkins, RAF

“Those on the front line will sit up and take notice”

of radar emitting threats, meaning the aircraft can identify targets from a stand-off distance without giving away its own position – crucial for survivability

- **Modernised target acquisition and designation sight** – a range of enhancements include colour TV, blended image intensification and infrared sights for use in low-light conditions plus a picture-in-picture zoom function to enable much longer range



identification of targets

Tactical and eye-safe infrared laser pointers and designators provide tactical ranging near ground troops and training in various environments



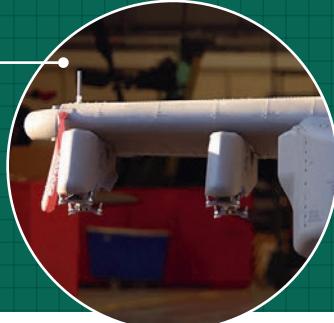
Enhanced communications...

Secure TacSat – enables the rapid transfer of information from deep battlespace, increasing the autonomy of Apache to operate over greater distances

• **Link-16** – a tactical data link that provides crews with the ability to share mission data with other air assets to provide near real-time threat picture

Frequency-hopping radios reduce susceptibility to jamming measures

Cognitive decision aiding system – this



simplifies data feeds into the aircraft to reduce cockpit workload and presents the crew with routing options based on threat data

Increased lethality...

• **New 30mm ammunition**, Hydra-70 rocket, Hellfire Romeo and Joint Air Ground Missile means UK's AH-64E will be more effective against a range of battlefield targets and be fully interoperable with US counterparts



New radar mode optimised to detect maritime threats

Laser designation range extended from 10km to 32km means that surprise can be achieved

»

» "The cockpit looks the same superficially, but every button press now produces a different result."

"The software behind all the processes has changed and it allows the crew to not only absorb far more information but manage it in an easier and more efficient way."

WO2 Simon Otter (AAC), a pilot with 662 Sqn, believes the platform's systems will allow the crews to fight the fight far more effectively.

"It has so much more capability in terms of radio comms, access to networks and satellite comms that we didn't have on the Mk 1," he adds.

"But the most important upgrade in my opinion is the enhanced interoperability through Link 16 (see "Tech Details"). We used to have to install add-ons to operate with different international partners but this version won't require that."

"Its downlink capability also means we can share our feeds and pull feed in from drones to see what is happening before we even get to the battle – and that means we'll be better prepared for it and able to get straight in there."

However, such radical changes present a huge challenge for the personnel using them.

"It's an exciting time to be part of Army aviation but we know the training will take months rather than weeks," comments Maj Anstey. "For example, I'm starting my conversion training in April and don't expect to be operational until the year end."

"I don't need to learn to fly the Apache again but it's getting up to speed with its systems that takes time."

"As the first squadron equipped with this type, we will be the first to bump into all the hurdles and pave the way for others to follow, but we've enjoyed loads of support from US Army training teams based here and from our attack helicopters transition team – a set of Army Air Corps pilots and technicians who were stood up a couple of years ago and went over to the US to familiarise themselves with this version."

"The squadron's ground crews and engineers have already converted to AH-64E and by the summer we expect to be a fully formed unit honing tactics, techniques and procedures in preparation for reaching initial operating capability." ■

against the target, increasing the platform's survivability.

Targeting symbology
– will reduce pilot workload

and increase the speed and accuracy of engagements in operational environments.

Greater reach...

Manned, unmanned teaming – extends threat detection range and creates link with Apache, drones, Wildcat and ground units

Improved defensive

aid suite – protects the aircraft from the most advanced surface-to-air threats allowing it to survive in the deep battle

Health usage monitoring system –

maintenance crews get a continuous feed of data to aid the diagnosis and repair of faults, reducing downtime and increasing availability

Commonality with US assets – will improve integration, including shared use of forward arming and refuelling points





"Apache E is on the button"



**Lt Col Simon Wilsey,
commanding officer of 3
Regiment, Army Air Corps,
explains why the AH-64E will
have a greater effect on the
battlefield...**

"The E won't necessarily alter how we fight but it will fundamentally change our impact on it."



Everything on the aircraft is designed to allow us to fight our way to the target, deal with the enemy and get out again. And its ability to process and share so much data makes it more likely each Apache can penetrate and survive in a high-threat battle area.

Its systems give us greater situational awareness, which provide significant gains in a wide variety of environments – including very complex ones such as urban. They also enhance our decision-making in a way the Mk 1 couldn't.

For example, if an enemy threat appears, the aircraft's computers will help us choose the optimum route to approach and neutralise that target. Aviators use the terrain in the same way



infantry and cavalry do – we look for dead ground to close in on the enemy. But we now have software that at a push of a button shows us the dead ground, not just in the immediate vicinity but beyond, giving us different options.

So if we had two squadrons of Apaches in the air, we could send each one on a different route to prosecute the same target at the same time. And we can share that information with each other, as well as fast jets and land forces, so everyone knows exactly where we are.

Before, all this had to be communicated verbally so you can appreciate the difference the E makes."



Did you know?

The benefits of becoming an Army pilot are considerable. Personnel have the privilege of wearing their Army Wings and operating the world's most advanced helicopters – namely the AH-64E and Wildcat, which is currently deployed worldwide



Did you know?

Army pilots in training hold the rank of local sergeant and are paid as acting corporals. When they finish they hold the rank of sergeant and, after a qualifying period, receive recruitment and retention pay



Did you know?

Newly qualified pilots relocate to front-line AAC units from where they will take part in worldwide deployments, including desert flying in Oman, flying off Royal Navy aircraft carriers and Arctic operations in Norway



READY FOR LIFT OFF



Apply now

Details on how to apply, eligibility criteria and the selection process can be found by searching AGAI 43 Part 4 on Modnet or 'Army pilots selection' on Defence Connect. From here an online application form can be completed and the process will then be handled by HQ AAC.

- Scan the QR code for the pilot recruiting page on Defence Connect



AAC Pilot Selection

Army Air Corps plots pilot push with introduction of new eligibility criteria

IT HAS been billed as one of the biggest upheavals in the way the Army Air Corps recruits, selects and employs its soldier pilots since its formation almost 65 years ago.

From this month, it will lower the rank eligibility for those wishing to start the pilots' course to private – with the only criteria for applicants of all cap badges being a recommendation for promotion to lance corporal.

Designed to create a more agile aviation cohort, the move comes at an exciting time for those seeking to take advantage of the policy shift as they may ultimately find themselves flying one of the world's most advanced attack helicopters – the AH-64E (see page 28-33).

And the creation of an Aviation Brigade Combat Team under Future Soldier will provide further opportunities as the Service's Wildcat and Apache aircraft form key reconnaissance and attack assets for a new-look Global Response Force.

The change in rank criteria has been one of the core elements of Project Morden, which has been examining how the Army Air Corps attracts, develops, and retains its personnel.

"The opportunity to employ someone in the cockpit for a longer part of their career is really good for us," Maj Ben Brown (AAC), part of the project team, tells *Soldier* as he explains the thinking behind the move.

"The average age of a soldier who is looking to become a pilot is currently 28, with six to eight years of service to their name.

"But if we can recruit them earlier, we can really develop their skills on aviation platforms because they will spend more of their military career flying."

Online applications go live this month, with initial submissions being made via Modnet before Headquarters Army Air Corps takes over to guide personnel.

It is hoped a simplified »

“
This is all about getting the right people to have these opportunities
”

■ approach will empower junior soldiers and there is an ambition to include the process on Defence Connect, meaning they will be able to apply from home.

"A private can apply when they have that recommendation for promotion," Maj Brown continues, while stressing they must also have level-two qualifications in literacy and numeracy.

"HQ AAC will come back with a date for aptitude tests at RAF Cranwell. Success at this stage is followed by the potential pilot leadership assessment board.

A report is generated and successful completion of a medical allows them to start Army flying grading, with 13 hours on a fixed wing aircraft at Middle Wallop.

A pilot selection board follows, and personnel are then loaded onto pilot courses, initially flying rotary wing Juno helicopters before moving onto Apache or Wildcat.

"The entire process from start to finish takes between three to four years and by the end they will be fully qualified front-line Service pilots.

"This is all about getting the right people to have these opportunities as early as possible."

And with a decade of flying experience to his name, the officer is perfectly placed to sing the virtues of a new career in

Army aviation.

"For many people, flying helicopters is a dream and we are hoping that many others can now achieve that dream," he says.

"In the past, personnel may have left the Service long before they had the opportunity to fly – this will hopefully prevent that from happening.

"I think it will make the Army an even more attractive employer. A young soldier can join, spend some time understanding what is happening on the ground and then start the application process.

"We have never struggled to attract people, but this is about recruiting the very best pilots.

"If we give more personnel the opportunity, we will be able to tap into talent that may be considering leaving the military, or who would just remain in their cap badge as that's where they see their career lying.

"I have spoken to more than 200 soldiers as part of the research process and every time I have mentioned this it has been very much welcomed – it has genuinely excited people.

"We want to sell this as an opportunity for soldiers across the Army and empower them to make their career choices a little bit earlier." ■

Words of wisdom

THOSE thinking of applying have been assured that while the process has challenging elements, it is ultimately achievable.

"If you pass the aptitude tests and grading, you have the potential to pass the courses that follow," a staff sergeant Apache pilot, who does not want to be named for security reasons, tells *Soldier* during a break from flying on Exercise Clockwork in Norway.

"There are long days, but there are also frustrating days when the weather does not play ball.

"It's not impossible, although it can look that way when you first start out. The best thing is to not look too far ahead and take it one or two flights at a time."

Since qualifying in late 2020, the pilot – who served for six-and-a-half years in the Royal Marines before transferring – has deployed to Norway on Arctic survival and flying packages, taken part in Exercise Joint Warrior, and featured in the multinational tactical training test, Exercise Cobra Warrior.

He has flown from HMS Prince of Wales at sea and spent a total of four weeks on exercise in the deserts of Oman, before returning to Norway.

"Most aircrew prefer to be busy, and you earn your pay," he continues. "We are always sought after to support exercises and we are held at global readiness as well, so there is quite a lot going on."

"I have definitely progressed over the past year – you always want to fly more, and the more you do the better you become."

"I've left one gleaming career for another and coming here has allowed my childhood dream to come true."





Potential pilots

NEWS of the policy change was well received by those with ambitions of taking to the skies.

Air Tpr Jaleel Syers (pictured right), a ground crew specialist with 664 Squadron at Wattisham-based 4 Regiment, Army Air Corps, joined the Service with the aim of becoming a pilot.

Just a year into his military career, he would have faced the prospect of a four-year wait before starting his application under the previous system, which required personnel to hold the rank of lance corporal, with a recommendation for promotion to corporal.

"This will definitely open doors," he tells *Soldier*. "I know people who are thinking about leaving the Army and are coming to that decision point.

"Perhaps they are not enjoying it anymore or believe that it's too late to do something like this, but this policy change will give them another chance.

"For me, being a pilot was always my first career choice – having your office in the sky, with the views, would be amazing."

"It is so expensive to train on civvy street but when I realised you could be a pilot in the Army I thought 'why not?'. I had an interest in the military as well, so this is a chance to combine the two.

"My goal is just to get in the air. In 2022 I hope to show the chain of command I'm putting in the hard work and dedication needed for promotion. I'm trying to learn as much as I can so I can take that next step."

Air Tpr Mangsahang Limbu (pictured right) has set his focus on



applying as soon as possible and spoke with delight at how the change in direction will allow him to pursue his dream.

"There are currently no Nepalese Apache pilots and I want to make history and become the first," the soldier, who serves as a signaller with 653 Squadron at 1st Aviation Brigade, adds.

"I've been in the Army for two years now and, hopefully, by 2023 I will have gained that all-important recommendation for promotion.

"When I was a kid, I used to see a helicopter flying round and I'd run towards it as it landed – but I never thought I could become a pilot as you are required to have a lot of learning and education.

"But when I joined the Army Air Corps, I started to think it was possible."

And he has wasted no time in terms of preparing for what is to come.

"I'm also a member of the gliding team on camp," Air Tpr Limbu continues.

"We have a few Apache pilots involved who have been very helpful in sharing their experiences."



"I've heard the hardest part is the aptitude test, so I'm working on that. Now it's all about being as best prepared as I can be."

“

I would put the cooker on, have some hot food and suddenly it wasn't so bad

”



Pole position

Capt Preet Chandi (RAMC) has become the first woman of colour to complete a solo expedition to the Antarctic. Here, she gives *Soldier* the inside story on her epic 700-mile quest...

“

After 40 days of excruciating effort on the snow you finally reached the South Pole. Describe your thoughts and emotions on completing the challenge

I thought I had done the right thing in pushing my boundaries and felt good for not listening to those who said 'no, you shouldn't do this'. I think I have shown that sometimes it is not a bad thing to go against what you have been told. When I first started planning this so many people were saying it is not the right time due to Covid. It is good to look back at that now, and just because it is not right for someone else doesn't mean it is not right for you. It was such a graft getting to the start line and I'm so grateful for all the support and funding I have received. I was still paying things off before I left and I struggled to make my last mortgage payment, but all of that is worth it now – I'm so glad I didn't listen to everyone who said 'no'.

Tell us about the early stages of the trek and how you operated on a day-to-day basis

It was an uphill start, and 24-hour daylight. I began at 1600 on the first day and did six hours on the skis – I got into it quite quickly. I was told the first degree would be the toughest as I would be pulling a heavy pulk while going uphill, so I thought 'let's get on with it'. I was basically doing 12-hour days, although sometimes it was 13 or 14, and you just have to keep going. I was ahead of time at the halfway point, which was a good place to be in case there were bad days to come. I would ski for 90 minutes and then have a ten-minute break, sometimes I would stop in between to take a layer off or put an extra one on – it does not take long for cold injuries to take hold.

How did you cope with the mental side of the expedition? Being on your own in such an austere environment must have been a challenge

I always focused on the degree I was in and when it got difficult, I just looked at what I had to achieve on that day. On occasions it was a case of simply thinking about one step, and then the next. I kept falling into sastrugi – wind-sculpted snow features – and some of them were very big. I would go down with my skis on,

but luckily the pulk did not follow. However, it was a short break from the relentless wind. I would stay down thinking 'this is so hard' but after a minute I would get back up and go again. In the evenings I would put my tent up and everything would feel better. I could hear the noise outside, but I was sheltered. I would get the cooker on, have some hot food and suddenly it wasn't so bad. It was over, and I could focus on the next day.

The weather was always going to be a factor, with temperatures dipping as low as -50 degrees Celsius and wind speeds hitting 60mph. How were the conditions?

The final degree of the route proved to be the coldest. The temperature was around -30 degrees Celsius, but with the wind chill it was close to -50. On some days it was very cold, which meant I didn't stop as long on my breaks. The cold days, without wind, were okay but when the winds came it was so bitter – which made everything that much harder. The whiteouts really slowed me down and I couldn't see anything in front of me. It can also cause motion sickness as you are constantly staring down at your compass. I remember there were two days of amazing weather; the sun was out, there was no wind, it was incredible. I thought this must be the calm before the storm.

At the start line your pulk weighed in at 87kg. Describe the physical exertion of pulling this more than 700 miles

It was very heavy at the beginning and obviously got lighter as I went along, although it didn't feel that way. My body was getting more and more tired the further I went, and I'd lost 10kg in weight by the end. As it got colder the expedition became tougher, but I've always liked endurance challenges. I had the physical determination that was needed and there were times that I really pushed hard thinking it would help me finish earlier.

You set a target of completing the route in 45 days but did it in 40. How did that feel?

By the end I was going quite slowly. I'd had a few days where I'd not really slept and wasn't feeling great. I then stopped and had a seven-hour sleep, which was a big boost. My main aim was to do this in a competent manner; coming in at the end in a bad state would not show that competency. I was really happy

» with what I achieved. I was very tired but stayed up for four-and-a-half hours chatting to staff when I got back to the station.

What comms did you have with the outside world?

I didn't really have any. I would check in with the company staging the trip every day – they wanted to hear my voice and find out how I was. I'd also have a quick check-in with my partner, just to say I was okay. However, if I wasn't feeling that great it might take a few minutes longer. But after a long day on the snow, you just want to get in your tent, take care of your admin and focus your mind on getting some sleep.

You received considerable support and sponsorship for this expedition. How important was that?

When I first had this idea two-and-a-half years ago it was just me. I spent everything I had on a trip to Greenland in preparation for this – I was still paying that off four days before leaving for the Antarctic. My first sponsor came on board in January last year and I'm so grateful that others followed. I definitely underestimated the costs of doing something like this and I've come back home with money still on my credit card.

Your efforts attracted a huge following online. Did you have any idea of what was happening?

I didn't realise what it was like until I had finished. I think I had 6,000 followers before I left but at the end it was 30,000. I have to thank my partner and sister-in-law for that. I would record a voicemail and they would type it up as a blog for the website and

update the social media accounts. This was while my partner was working full time and my sister-in-law was pregnant. She gave birth on January 5.

As the first woman of colour to complete a solo trek to the South Pole, do you hope people from similar backgrounds can be inspired by your efforts?

That was one of my main driving forces and I have received messages from people saying how amazing this has been and that I have inspired them to push boundaries of their own. I've been surprised about how much press attention I've been getting. I've been on the front page of *The Times*, have featured in *The Telegraph* and on *Woman's Hour*, and will be doing a live interview on *Good Morning Britain*. I have lots of emails with other requests as well. It all feels a bit surreal, but it means I can keep getting that message out there. It's all about showing people what can be achieved.

Finally, as someone who is constantly plotting new adventures, can you tell us what's next?

I'm hoping to do a full crossing of Antarctica. This has been phase one, and that will be phase two. Reaching the South Pole was a huge expedition and it has been a big stepping stone for what I want to achieve next. If I can get the funding in place I will try and do it in November. It will take around 70 days, which means everything will be heavier and slower.

“





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OUT

Troops on Cabrit reveal how to survive and thrive in the Estonian winter

THE human body is not designed for extreme cold. Almost immediately upon exposure to sub-zero temperatures a spectrum of unpleasant physiological effects kicks in – from shivering and numb digits through to frostbite, hypothermia and eventually death. Fun times.

But some of the more insidious symptoms are neurological. Poor coordination, slurred speech, muddled thinking and slow decision making are among the signs that brain function is being compromised – all of which is bad news if you are a soldier on a winter tour of the Baltic.

Every autumn, a new batch of British troops arrive in Estonia to begin their six-month stint heading up Nato's enhanced forward presence there.

Ahead lies a series of gruelling cold-weather exercises in the country's frozen forests – ideally after some time to acclimatise while the mercury gradually sinks.

But Mother Nature had other plans for this year's incumbents, dishing up some harsh lessons early on for the Royal Tank Regiment-led battlegroup.

"When we turned up the weather was not too different to the UK, but it quickly turned," explained Capt Hugo Catmur (RTR), the officer commanding of the formation's recce troop.

"Within a week, temperatures dropped to around -30 degrees Celsius. It was a bit of a learning curve, but the cold weather operators' course helps you prepare."

Delivered by subject matter experts from the Royal Marines, the package equips personnel not only to survive but to soldier effectively in the winter.

Following a theory phase, participants venture into the field where they turn their hands to building shelters, lighting fires and preparing food, before moving onto military skills including navigation and contact drills.

Finally, they tackle the infamous ice dip – a controlled dunk in a freezing lake to simulate a fall through ice.

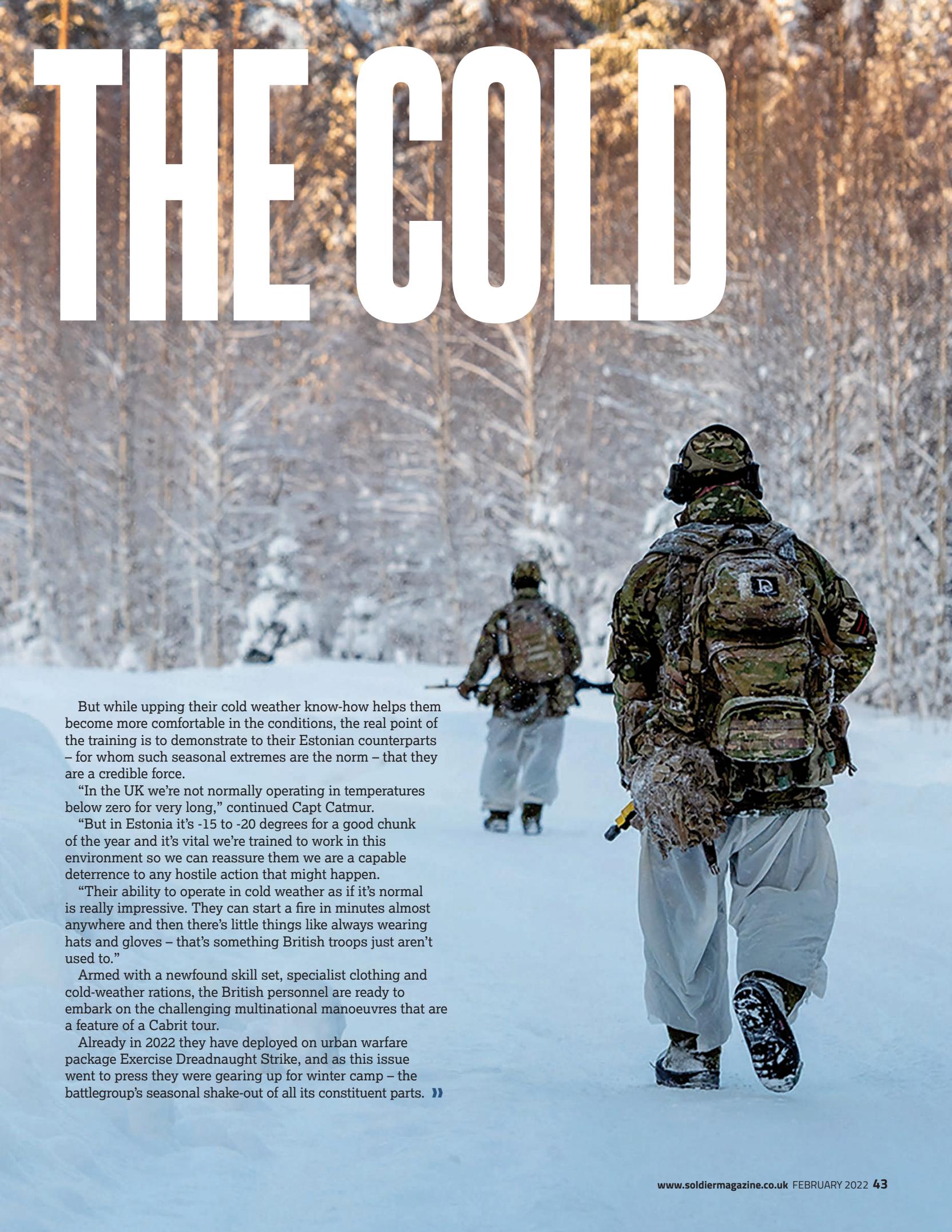
As Royal Marine instructor CSgt Ross Adams explained, the experience helps soldiers understand what to expect in terms of the body's physiological response.

"It is quite stressful, so initially the individual will naturally gasp for air," he said.

"After that, they'll start to hyperventilate and potentially lose control of their limbs through cold incapacitation."

"The serial ensures that troops are fully prepared for that shock and that they can get out and change into dry clothing as quickly as possible."

THE COLD



But while upping their cold weather know-how helps them become more comfortable in the conditions, the real point of the training is to demonstrate to their Estonian counterparts – for whom such seasonal extremes are the norm – that they are a credible force.

“In the UK we’re not normally operating in temperatures below zero for very long,” continued Capt Catmur.

“But in Estonia it’s -15 to -20 degrees for a good chunk of the year and it’s vital we’re trained to work in this environment so we can reassure them we are a capable deterrence to any hostile action that might happen.

“Their ability to operate in cold weather as if it’s normal is really impressive. They can start a fire in minutes almost anywhere and then there’s little things like always wearing hats and gloves – that’s something British troops just aren’t used to.”

Armed with a newfound skill set, specialist clothing and cold-weather rations, the British personnel are ready to embark on the challenging multinational manoeuvres that are a feature of a Cabrit tour.

Already in 2022 they have deployed on urban warfare package Exercise Dreadnaught Strike, and as this issue went to press they were gearing up for winter camp – the battlegroup’s seasonal shake-out of all its constituent parts. ▶



With armour, infantry, logistics, artillery and engineers involved – as well as the formation's Estonian and French elements – it provides a stern test of interoperability in the harshest of conditions.

Conducting such complex training while battling the cold is challenging, admitted Capt Catmur. But the officer believes he and his colleagues will return from the tour wiser for it.

"There are things we've had to overcome but we've learnt a lot that we can take forward and apply in more temperate environments like the UK," he concluded.

"There have been so many exercises at home where you've felt cold and your body was exerting more energy than it needed to – therefore you will have been operating slightly worse, whether that's decision making or the length of time you can function for.

"Looking back after the cold weather course, though, I can see no reason why I should have felt so uncomfortable and drained. If you can survive in -30, there's no reason you can't thrive at zero." ■



Winning the fight with the elements

Capt Hugo Catmur and Tpr Sebastian Davis-Smith (both RTR) discuss the highs and lows of cold weather living

Sleep

When you're in your shelter you take turns with fire stag throughout the night to make sure it doesn't go out. Most of us stayed up quite late talking around the fire, but I slept like a king for about six hours. It was a good experience.

Tpr Davis-Smith



The ice dip

It's a massive adrenalin rush – as soon as you're under the water, the cold hits you. I tried to speak and words wouldn't come out. But once you've controlled your breathing it's not as bad as everyone thinks it's going to be. Then once you've dragged yourself out with your poles, rolled in the snow and got back to your dry kit you instantly warm up. Your whole body is radiating heat. It's definitely outside your comfort zone but doing the skills and drills reassures you you can handle yourself in there.

Tpr Davis-Smith



Food and drink

One of the biggest things is to sustain yourself – normal jerrycans of water freeze so instead you have a Thermos flask that you top up with snow throughout the day. Warm drinks also offer a little respite from the cold. It's about packing on the calories as well – you get cold weather rations instead of normal ones and they take you up to about 5,000 calories a day, including a lot of dried food and nuts. It's almost a bit of a mission to get them down you but it's important because you're expending a lot of energy.

Capt Catmur

Getting about

One of the things people struggle with most is moving around. The biggest issue is being able to carry all the extra kit, which is about 40kg before you add on things like ammo and specialist equipment. And you have to factor in trudging through the snow, which definitely requires more effort. It makes it pretty difficult to avoid overheating because you can go from doing nothing in your harbour area to going on patrol or getting contacted and suddenly your body temperature goes up dramatically. But that's why you wear layers – so you can take some off if necessary.

Capt Catmur

Terrain

You're working in very tight dense forests, in about a foot-and-a-half of snow – maybe more – with small tracks leading through it. It's hard to operate in initially but once you find your footing and your path you can pretty much direct yourself anywhere, especially once you've had some experience and adapted to the environment.

Tpr Davis-Smith



COLD FEET

The survival expert's handy mnemonic for staying ahead in the snow...

Clean clothes – dirty garments lose their insulation properties

Overheating – avoid it so that you don't sweat

Loose layers – these trap heat

Dry – your body loses warmth more quickly when wet

Fit clothing correctly – tight clothing restricts blood circulation

Exercise extremities – move your hands and feet to generate warmth

Eat and drink plenty – your body needs food and fluid to function

Tight boots are terrible – they cut off your blood supply



Tpr Sebastian Davis-Smith, RTR



Capt Hugo Catmur, RTR



INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH

How senior civvy street execs are proving a powerful military asset



We were able to get corporate colleagues to help on the basis of a handshake

Staff Corps personnel have found themselves involved in the full spectrum of military operations over the years, from the emergency repair effort at Toddbrook dam in 2019 (left and above) to involvement in major combat operations and helping set up Nightingale hospitals during the pandemic



COLONEL Gary Sullivan vividly remembers the exhausting days and nights he spent with his team helping to bring the Nightingale hospitals online.

As the Covid crisis raged in spring 2020, the Army Reservist and senior civvy businessman found himself at the forefront of the multi-agency response.

His principal asset – a contacts book of experts representing industries ranging from construction to logistics – had been in constant demand.

“I was working 16 hours a day at the Excel Centre in London then coming home and making calls into the night to my officers, many of them involved in building other temporary hospitals,” the commander of the Staff Corps – until recently known as the Engineering and Logistic Staff Corps – recalled of the unfolding pandemic.

“In Docklands we had all been working round the clock to prepare for anticipated coronavirus patients – it was a huge undertaking and I was averaging 40,000 steps a day just walking around the place.”

The Covid virus may have been an unprecedented event for the UK authorities, but it was not the first crisis in which Col Sullivan’s corps had been involved.

With a group of volunteers hand-picked from the cream of civvy street industry, the outfit has long represented a huge knowledge bank into which the Army can tap if needed.

And despite maintaining a low profile, it has served the military on the home front and internationally for two centuries.

Created in 1865 – when wars with Napoleon Bonaparte were still a fresh memory – the then Engineering and Railway Staff Corps was set up to harness the elite technical minds behind the country’s new locomotive transport system, plus senior train firm bosses.

In practice, this unusual arrangement gave the military an immediate route to gain priority use of the tracks in the event of a national emergency, allowing commanders to rapidly move personnel around the country.

But the corps, which fell under the remit of the Royal Engineers, continued to evolve over the years, serving the country in conflicts from the Second World War to the Gulf and Afghanistan.

As well as the technical and commercial trades on which it was founded, it soon branched out to encompass a raft of others, from communications to legal disciplines.

A recent expansion saw the outfit double in size to around 100 volunteers, with specialist medical personnel the latest to join the comprehensive professional line-up. ■

» Despite its modest size, the Staff Corps, which is divided into six groups focused on specialist areas, packs a powerful punch.

Members – who are still cap badged as sappers – have unique skill sets but also preside over large networks of contacts to leverage further knowledge if needed.

Uniquely, joining is by invitation and at officer level only – with all candidates agreeing to forego Army pay as a means of preserving their independence. Carefully vetted, members – most of whom have no previous military experience – are also exempt from the formal Service training and fitness regime and can self-certify their own health standards. A medical is only required if a volunteer is sent overseas.

Col Sullivan (pictured below), who joined the corps 13 years ago and is a founder of civvy security and logistics firm Wilson James, said that while new arrivals typically began at major level, uniform and rank slides are rarely worn.

Respect is engendered from the expertise the Reservists provide. And as well as offering specialist advice, they can deploy if needed, while also being a critical friend to individuals or groups.

“With the Nightingale Hospital at Excel, for example, niche experience was needed in a number of areas,” the 62-year-old added. “These included building a main oxygen supply – a very specialist discipline – and we had the relevant contacts to point the military in the right direction.”

The volunteers also helped to resolve several supply-chain issues with the project.

“Business had pretty much closed down with the onset of the pandemic and materials were required for building,” Col Sullivan continued.

“But from my day job, I had a network of people that could assist – as a team we were able to get corporate colleagues to help us on the basis of a handshake because we already knew them from working in the private sector.”

This level of professional trust has served the corps well around the world.

In the summer of 2020, technical experts from the maritime sector were quickly on hand to assist in Lebanon when a huge explosion tore through the Port of Beirut.

Elsewhere, communication gurus helped with the hurricane-hit Caribbean while, closer to home in 2019, a specialist team assembled when the Toddbrook Reservoir dam in Derbyshire began to collapse after a rain deluge.



STAFF REPORTS...

Name: Lt Col Fran Collins

Age: 45

Professional experience: Several roles – including senior positions – during 28-year Merchant Navy career. Now the chief executive of Red Funnel Ferries

“ I was invited to join the Staff Corps two years ago – since then I have learned a great deal about Army life. There are a couple of long-term projects with which I have been assisting the military – although these are under wraps – and I have also been acting as a mentor on commercial issues for one of the Army’s senior officers. I joined the Merchant Navy as a teenager, so it has also been great to be introduced to members of 17 Port and Maritime Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps, based locally to me in Marchwood. As well as imparting my own knowledge to the Army, I have been able to bring back military experience to my civilian life. ”



Name: Lt Col Andy MacLeod

Age: 64

Professional experience: Communications sector; senior positions at companies including Cable & Wireless and Vodafone

“ Unusually for the Staff Corps I do have bit of a green background – a long time ago working in communications as a member of the Territorial Army. Although I am now largely retired from corporate life, my background is in telecoms. Principally I am a technologist, having trained as a solid-state physicist and started out in poles, wires and pipes. But I worked my way through different roles in my industry, including marketing and sales, before finishing up as a ground network director for Vodafone Group. I still work in an advisory role across the industry – including as a non-executive director on boards – and the Staff Corps is a satisfying part of the work. I lead the advisory group dealing with information, data and digital issues – that work has included assisting in the Caribbean during hurricane events. ”





Technical experts from the **Staff Corps** were on hand to assist in the aftermath of the Port of Beirut explosion in 2020 (left). Its team is shown at work, below, and supporting troops during the Toddbrook dam emergency and on Stanta Training Area



AT A GLANCE

Staff Corps

Founded: 1865

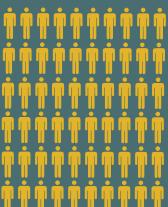
Current commander:
Col Gary Sullivan

Full strength:
120 officers

Structure: based on six advisory groups focused on disciplines including engineering, IT, medical and legal

IN NUMBERS

Staff Corps on Op Rescript



900
Days of Reserve
service provided by the corps

45
Million pounds
saving to the UK

"In this case the Royal Engineers were already on site – but we were also able to assist as one of our officers had specialist construction knowledge," said Col Sullivan. "He was chairing a company board meeting when the call came, handed over to his deputy and headed off to join the troops."

"We also called on a geologist colleague – his team mashed together a whole load of calculations, checked the best aggregate to reinforce the structure and helped Royal Air Force Chinook crews drop their heavy loads off in the right places."

"As well as pumping out the reservoir, we also looked at alternative ways of solving the problems, such as diverting water flowing in," Col Sullivan continued, adding that the collapse of the structure – and catastrophe – was averted.

As with most ops in which it has been involved, the Staff Corps remained in the shadows at Toddbrook, its officers quietly assisting behind the scenes. While its work occasionally surfaces into public view – as in the Covid crisis when it was picked up by the media – the organisation soon fell below the radar again. Discretion, it seems, is among the outfit's prized attributes.

But its work is likely to become increasingly important in a future where the threat spectrum is growing in scope and complexity all the time.

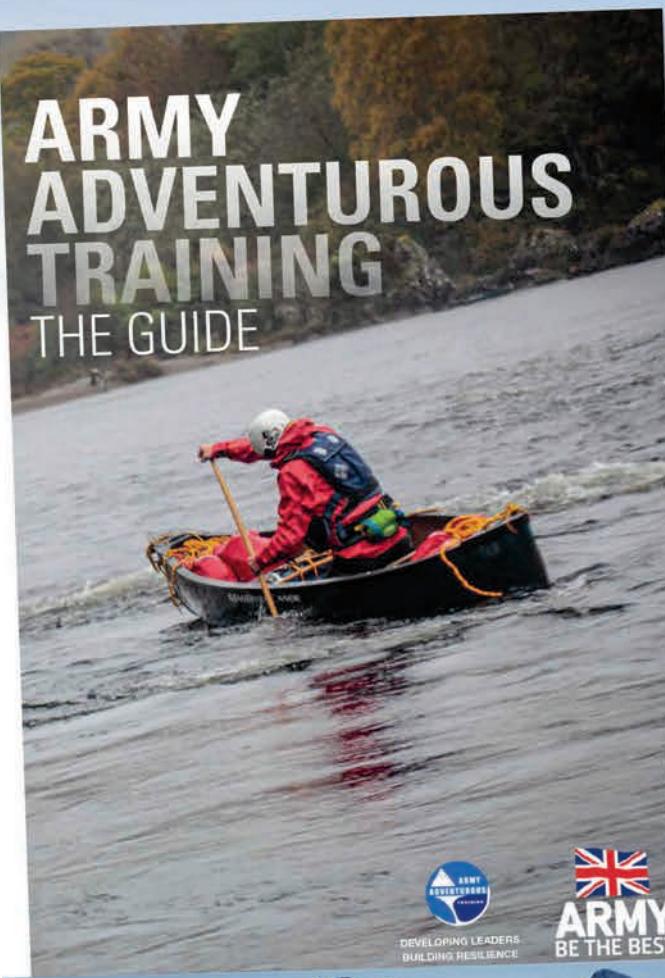
The unique arrangement of the formation allows the Army to hold onto the talent it requires to help deal with would-be adversaries.

"As British Army officers we are 'inside the wire', so to speak, appropriately vetted and have an understanding of the issues facing the military," Col Sullivan concluded.

"Having a network with such comprehensive expertise available can only help in the future defence realm." ■

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OH NO! WE'VE HAD A VISIT FROM THE COMMANDING OFFICER!



'Why are we still selling ciggies?'

AS THE commanding officer of a regiment and head of establishment I've been busy implementing the smoke-free campaign.

As part of this I asked for the shop on camp to stop selling cigarettes but was told the contract does not allow it.

If the Army is truly trying to go smoke-free why are we continuing to sell cigarettes on camp? — **Lt Col Jonathan Buxton, RA**

Dr Nicola Sides, Senior Health Psychologist, Army Headquarters, replies: You raise an interesting point. The secretary of state has directed that defence will become smoke-free by the end of 2022.

While we do not have a right to smoke at work, we do have a

right to a private life. Therefore, smoking in a designated area near your accommodation, if you live in single living or Service family accommodation, is permissible.

If personnel cannot purchase cigarettes outside camp due to restrictions on their movement then it's reasonable that they are allowed to buy them on site.

Similarly, we cannot stop sales of food with high fat or sugar content.

We want to influence behaviours through education so that our people make healthier choices.

The policy on sales on our sites is clear in **Army Command Order 2021-06** which states: "The policy does not preclude the selling of tobacco products by on-site retail facilities".

“
It's something I hoped was long gone
”

UNIFORM POLICY DOES NOT FLOAT NAVY OFFICER'S BOAT

● I HAVE some feedback from the Royal Navy and, I'm sure, an unwelcome bomb from the sidelines.

Firstly, thank you for continuing to send our defence section copies of your magazine; I really value the insight it provides into the Army each month.

Secondly, the thrust of the December issue was how the Service must change and challenge orthodoxy, so it was sad to read the reply to a letter on page 49 about dress uniform. It concluded by saying, "it's a matter to raise with your commanding officer".

The individual in question had made a valid point about being obliged to buy his blues because his regiment required it, but Army policy didn't.

I can only imagine the challenge for a young officer, in his first assignment, to take his CO to task on the policy of his regiment.

His final comment about such practices exacerbating class divide in the Army was a painful reminder of something I hoped was long gone. I have a friend who actually left his Army regiment because his private income didn't cover his mess responsibilities – something Navy officers couldn't comprehend.

I know the Armed Forces have changed a lot in the last 20 years but, as your chief has said, we still have much to do – which makes passing the buck to a junior officer on this matter even more of a disappointment. — **Cdr Jason White, British Embassy, Algiers**

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

✉ mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk
{@soldiermagazine}



Female Volunteers Needed

for a Human Performance Study

What are we investigating?

The effect of energy and calcium intake during load carriage on bone health.

Who can take part in the study?

- Women
- Both civilian and military
- Aged 18-36 years
- Women not currently using the implant, injection, or taking the 'mini pill'

Where?

Army Health & Physical Performance Laboratory,
Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, Camberley

Contact:

Dr Tom O'Leary (Thomas.OLeary100@mod.gov.uk) or
Dr Charlotte Coombs (Charlotte.Coombs102@mod.gov.uk)
01264 886795

What do I need to do?

- Follow a diet for 3 weeks (all food will be provided for you)
- 8 laboratory visits including 6 sessions of load carriage exercise
- Blood samples will be taken during laboratory visits
- You will be compensated for your time

JUBILEE MEDAL OVERSIGHT?

● I WOULD like to ask, on behalf of some of our Commonwealth soldiers, why all troops around the world who serve Her Majesty are not eligible for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal?

I run a social media group which contains a lot of colleagues who come from Commonwealth nations and it has become a hot topic among them. But they've said they don't know how to broach this subject with the chain of command.

Also, when you speak to soldiers from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Bermuda or the Cayman Islands, and see them on parade, you realise how proud they are to serve the Queen – and in my opinion they are thoroughly deserving of such an award.

I recently spoke to a Canadian soldier who was over here on ceremonial duties and he said it was the absolute highlight of his career.

We all swear our allegiance to Her Majesty so is there anything that can be done to change this rule? – **Lcpl Peter King, AGC (MPGS)**

Col Leigh Drummond, Assistant Head, Personnel Services, Army Headquarters, responds: Thank you for your letter. I'm afraid the awarding of this decoration to the forces of Commonwealth countries is a decision only for the government of the nations in question and Her Majesty, so this query should be directed to each country's military chains of command.

For awareness, UK Armed Forces are required to be in effective paid service on February 6, 2022 and should have completed five full years of service. See [page 10](#) for more information.

GOT A GRIPE?

THEN WHY NOT GET IT OFF YOUR CHEST?

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{@} [soldiermagazine](https://www.twitter.com/soldiermag)



‘Laptop supply is still lacking’

THE delay in the Modnet laptop rollout is persistently causing issues for Service personnel.

After the problems at the start of the pandemic in 2020 I would have thought getting these devices out would have been a priority.

My job involves using a number of defence-specific systems that I do not have access to while working from home.

During the first two lockdowns it was almost impossible to be effective in my job only using Defence Gateway.

Now almost two years on we are in the situation where, at the time of writing, government and military guidance is to work from home but many of us are unable to do so due to not being given the proper equipment. – **Name and address supplied**

Lt Col Catherine Russell, Information Directorate, Army Headquarters, responds: Your letter raises an important matter.

At the start of the pandemic defence was not configured for

remote working but immediately began to take steps to enable it.

Users were prioritised and available kit was issued as quickly as possible. While difficult, it was for organisations and units to prioritise the distribution of these assets.

The Army was allocated Modnet loan laptops and iPads to connect more users working from home, but there were not enough for all.

The My MoD Laptop (MML) programme has been impacted by worldwide supply problems due to chip shortages, but remains a priority.

The Army is working hard to ensure devices get to end users as quickly as possible, but it remains a unit responsibility to ensure laptops are issued first to those who need them the most.

The Service has now received approximately half its expected MML allocation. Users should contact their unit to find out if and when they will be allocated a laptop if they don't already have one.

LOCAL EDUCATION CENTRE IS ‘NOT UP TO SPEED’

● WE are told how standard learning credits (SLC) can benefit both us and the military. I am a Reservist and recently made my first ever application for them to attend the driver certificate of professional competence course.

I was turned down by my local education centre, who said the credits may be used to obtain a first driving licence but cannot fund additional categories or advanced driver training unless the soldier is within their resettlement phase.

I'd like to know why this is so when it could benefit both the individual and Service? – **Name and address supplied**

Maj Clare Sapwell, Individual Development, Personnel Directorate, Army Headquarters replies: Standard learning credits may, in fact, be used towards this qualification and clarification has recently been sent out to Army education centres. The course represents an excellent opportunity to conduct continued professional development for drivers so please reapply and your application should be accepted.

BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know



CAREERS

The Recruit for Spouses Career Academy has joined forces with Virgin Red to offer a free mentoring programme to military spouses. Mentors from the company will include employees from areas such as business development and portfolio management. For more information about the initiative visit recruitforspouses.co.uk/spouses-career-academy

Veterans into Logistics CIC is a not-for-profit organisation based in Greater Manchester dedicated to training and supporting ex-military personnel for new careers within the transport and logistics industry. Visit veteransintologistics.org.uk

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



COMPETITIONS

December 2021 HOAY winner:
Jason Tuner, Brecon

December 2021 Spinelines winner: Patrick Lockyer, Didcot



DIARY

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

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

March 23: IWM Institute Annual Lecture 2022. *War: How Conflict Shaped Us* will see Prof Margaret

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

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

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



DIRECTORY

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

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

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

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

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

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

Army LGBT Forum:
armylgbt.org.uk

Army Libraries:
01252 340094

Army Ornithological Society:
armybirding.org.uk

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

Big White Wall, now **Togetherall**:
togetherall.com

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

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

Care After Combat:
careaftercombat.org

Career Transition Partnership:
020 7469 6661

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

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

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

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

Erskine:
0141 814 4569;
erskine.org.uk

Family Escort Service:
020 7463 9249

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

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

Forces Pension Society:
020 7820 9988
forcespensionsociety.org

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

Heroes Welcome:
heroeswelcome.co.uk

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

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

Joint Service Housing Advice Office:
01252 787574

Medal Office:
94561 3600 or
0141 224 3600

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

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

PoppyScotland:
0131 557 2782;
poppyScotland.org.uk

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

Remount:
01451 850 341;
remount.net

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

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

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

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

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

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

SSAFA:
0845 1300 975;
ssafa.org.uk

Stoll: 020 7385 2110; stoll.org.uk

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

The Poppy Factory:
020 8940 3305;
poppyfactory.org

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

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

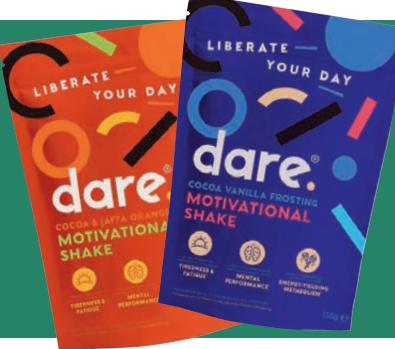
Troop Aid:
0121 711 7215 or 07734 384260;
troopaid@icloud.com; troopaid.info

uk4u Thanks!:
01798 812081;
uk4u.org

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

WVRS: 02920 232 668

JUST HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU? No. 958



TEN details have been changed in this picture of two Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers soldiers conducting engineering checks on the Apache AH-64E – the Service's new-look attack helicopter, which will provide more lethality and agility over future battlefields.

Circle all the differences on the left image and send the panel to HOAY 958, *Soldier*, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU with your full contact details, including email address, by no later than February 28.

A photocopy is acceptable but only one entry per person may be submitted. Alternatively, email a photograph of the image highlighting the differences to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk



REUNIONS

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



ROADSHOWS

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

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

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

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

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



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www.armysportlottery.com

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4th Prize	£3000
5th Prize	£2000
6th Prize	£1000
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15 x	£200
10 x	£100

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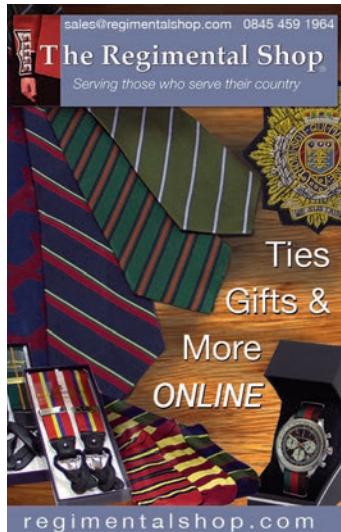
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REVIEWS

PICK OF THE MONTH:

CRYYSIS REMASTERED

Alien menace and covert ops return in rework of the FPS classic

► IT IS a moment still remembered by some longer-in-the-tooth staff at *Soldier* – the arrival of a well-known first-person shooter in the mag's mailbag.

Having acquired a then state-of-the-art Xbox 360 at the Aldershot office, the delivery of *Far Cry Instincts* remains a conversation point for two reasons. Firstly, it is still one of the best games of its genre we've seen. Secondly, it lives in infamy as the only title ever to raise talk of divorce proceedings against a reviewer.

Tracking the story of a seasoned veteran who ends up in a fight for survival on a tropical island, the



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MOVIES

GAMES



● Out now on
PC, Xbox One,
PS4 and Switch

outstanding visuals, fast-paced story, fearsome AI and intense firefights were a landmark in the mid-2000s video gaming era.

Unfortunately – back in the real world – the hours invested in checking out the offering extended far beyond the working day, colliding with the *Hollyoaks Omnibus*, *Strictly* and other wife-bagged weekend television slots. With the art of conversation suffering too – and household admin tasks being postponed or cancelled – compromise was soon needed.

When these memories resurfaced with the arrival of a reissued *Crysis Trilogy* – which was created by the same team as *Far Cry* – a lively discussion around play parameters ensued in a new marriage.

Fortunately, with the handheld options of the Nintendo Switch and flexibility of Sky Plus, there was not a repeat performance of times past.

The advances in technology are fortunate though because, like its precursor, this bundle of remixed and remastered games will happily hoover up hours of time.

While sharing similar influences with the early *Far Cry* outings – notably the beautifully rendered wilderness environments – *Crysis* is a far more developed offering.

Cast as a soldier in a US black ops unit equipped with a piece of kit called a nanosuit – which provides wearers with body armour plus enhanced strength and stealth capabilities

– players initially find themselves on an island occupied by North Korean troops.

Tasked with locating and extracting a team of archaeologists examining a strange phenomenon, they soon find that there is far more to the mission than meets the eye. With a hostile extra-terrestrial presence reminiscent of the 1980s science fiction flick *Predator* seemingly at work, the near-peer communist forces – while still lethal foes – soon become the least of the worries.

The story is well progressed in the

subsequent, standalone sequels, with the second instalment taking the action to New York.

Meanwhile, the third is set against the backdrop of a world steadily being colonised by alien aggressors.

Having already received acclaim when they were originally released a few years ago, the *Crysis* titles have seen a raft of refinements in this reworking.

Graphics and sound are first-rate while the titles retain plenty of open world gameplay, giving virtual soldiers near-free reign in prosecuting missions. In addition, the AI controlling the abundant aggressors remains highly developed.

The port of the title to Switch, however, is perhaps the crowning glory of this remixed series. The developers have clearly pushed the capabilities of the system and the results are exceptional – we sampled the games in handheld mode on the console's new OLED version and were suitably impressed.

The package also offers decent value for money if bought as a trilogy – while each of the titles are available individually so buyers can try before they fully commit.

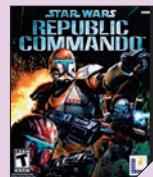
This all adds up to a worthy purchase for fans of classic first-person shooter action. Well-paced, immersive and unfailingly addictive – we're just thankful for a more mature marriage and the advent of on-demand television. ■

VERDICT:
An outstanding remaster
★★★★★

REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, SOLDIER

Enjoyed the remix of *Crysis*? Try this Switch duo...

Star Wars: Republic Commando



THIS gem was remastered for the Switch last year – and with plenty of squad-based action set in a galaxy far, far away, it does not disappoint in the slightest. Set during the saga's *Clone Wars* era, players are effectively placed in the armour of a section commander charged with executing missions against the droid-based armies of the Trade Federation. Action is fast-paced and plenty of on-the-spot tactical thinking is required for success.

Sniper Elite 4



Well-suited to patient players who thrive on accuracy rather than all-out assault, the Switch reworking of this classic title is one of the finest shooters we've seen. Assuming the role of US marksman Karl Fairburn, players face a string of missions against German and Italian opposition in the Mediterranean – all set amongst beautifully rendered environments. A raft of downloadable content, providing serious longevity, is the icing on the cake.



● Brig (Retd) Ben Barry is the senior fellow for land warfare at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. His book *Blood, Metal and Dust* is published on February 3 by Osprey, priced £15.99



PICK OF THE MONTH:

Blood, Metal and Dust

Learning the hard way in Iraq and Afghanistan

THE scenes of Afghanistan descending into chaos last August caused shock around the world, particularly for military personnel who had toiled to bring about change in the country for 20 years.

But to many analysts, the only surprise was the speed at which events unfolded. Retired brigadier Ben Barry is one of them.

In his 2020 book *Blood, Metal and Dust*, he outlined the strategic failings of the Nato campaign – along with the operation in Iraq – and predicted that a resurgent Taliban would once again triumph.

Some 14 months on, a paperback version of the title, which was shortlisted for the 2021

Army Book of the Year Award, is set to be published with a new preface and updated chapters on the West's exit from Afghanistan.

Soldier caught up with the ex-infanteer to get his take on where it all went wrong for the US-led alliance.

Q&A – Ben Barry

How did you feel watching the withdrawal from Kabul?

It was a bitter disappointment, to put it mildly and I couldn't help but feel very sorry for the Afghan people, particularly those who had bought into the West's project there. Among other things it created a democracy of sorts, a vibrant market economy, a free media and a degree of emancipation for women. The Taliban's victory is one of a different set of values. And what we now see is a real economic crisis. It's a tragedy.

What surprised you about it?

How quickly it happened. Like many others, I didn't realise just how hollowed-out the Afghan security

forces were. It looks to me like in London and Washington they assumed the Taliban wouldn't start attacking until the last Service person left. I wrote in the foreword to the first edition that there was a chance it could go wrong and it gives me no satisfaction that it did.

What did the Taliban get right?

They combined three things very successfully – a war on the ground, bearing in mind they didn't have any air power; their negotiations with government forces, often assisted with the exchange of suitcases full of cash; and thirdly a very modern propaganda operation using traditional and social media. There are military lessons to learn from that.

What does it mean for foreign policy in the future?

The British government has made it quite clear that they wouldn't want to do something like Iraq or Afghanistan again. I don't see that changing in the short term unless there's a clear threat or a terror attack within the UK with the impact of 9/11.





Picture: Cpl Paul Janis RLC

Do you think the Future Soldier initiative incorporates lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan properly?

To be fair, the security force assistance and special operations brigades are certainly institutionalising hard lessons and between them would be able to generate the capabilities of the transition teams or the operational mentoring and liaison teams. So that's positive, as is the deep strike reconnaissance brigade and expenditure on much needed updating of armoured vehicles. But my concern is the Regular Service is half the size of the one I joined and is much more dependent on Reserves. I'm not sure the British people or the media realise just how small the Army is.

How did the invasion of Iraq affect the Afghanistan campaign?

It was the single factor that made it much more difficult to succeed in Afghanistan. It had the same effect that Napoleon's decision to attack Russia had on his efforts to dominate Europe, or Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. Also, the increasing unpopularity of the Iraq war – including things like Abu Ghraib, extraordinary rendition and Guantanamo Bay – made it more difficult for nations to wholeheartedly support the international effort in Afghanistan and it reduced the legitimacy of that campaign among Muslims.

Are there any positives to take from either campaign?

Improvements in military capability. For example, one thing I talk about in the new edition is the

revolution in battlefield medicine – there's good evidence that many more wounded soldiers survived thanks to measures such as bandages that promote coagulation, rapid replacement of lost fluid and quick medical evacuation. You could call it a silver lining.

What would you like senior leaders to take from the book?

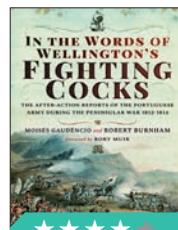
That they should be very clear-eyed and honest with themselves when they formulate strategy and do it in a much more coherent way than the governments of Blair and Brown did.

How about readers lower down the chain of command?

I hope it gives them a broader picture than the short tour they were on – and for British readers shows them more of the war that the US and Canada fought. I also hope they learn something about the bad guys. The perspective from both sides reminds us of the importance of small unit leadership. I take my hat off to the American and UK troops who fought in desperate circumstances. But we shouldn't forget that morale and leadership also applied to the insurgency. They came forward bravely in great numbers and were fought off with much higher casualties. ■

INTERVIEW: BECKY CLARK, SOLDIER

BOOK RELEASES



★★★★★

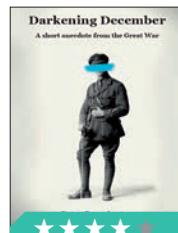
In the Words of Wellington's Fighting Cocks

by Moises Gaucencio and Robert Burnham

PENINSULAR War enthusiasts will be aware of the Portuguese contribution

to Wellington's victories. From 1810 onwards, these soldiers made up roughly one-third of the Iron Duke's armies. This book gives ample detail. Most of it comprises some 273 often-frank reports from officers from both countries describing 37 engagements – including seven major battles. They cover Salamanca, Vitoria, the Pyrenees and bloody sieges such as Burgos and San Sebastian. Illustrations are good but there are no maps. This is a sound, workmanlike and interesting volume – and essential reading for those interested in the conflict.

Rodney Atwood, military historian



★★★★★

Darkening December

by Peter Branchastre

THIS "short anecdote from the Great War" follows six friends as they join a Pals Battalion at the start of the conflict, deploying in time for the Somme offensive of 1916.

The author writes in an unsentimental and occasionally unpolished manner to present a crystal-clear eyed view of life as a young soldier as momentum gathers towards battle – and then the complete confusing awfulness of the combat itself. The chapters describing how these men fought through the first day of the Somme are the crux of the novel and impossible to put down. Horrible, terrifying and yet encouraging all at the same time, this is a thought provoking read which should be the first in a series.

Lt Col Simon Soskin, Gren Gds

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PICK OF THE MONTH:

The Catcher Was a Spy

A curious case of espionage uncovered

► A MAJOR league baseball player – even a relatively obscure one – seems an unlikely candidate for clandestine operations behind enemy lines. But sometimes the truth really is stranger than fiction, as this new film from **Ben Lewin** reveals.

Based on the book of the same name, *The Catcher Was a Spy* tells the bizarre story of **Moe Berg** – erstwhile member of the Boston Red Sox among other teams, linguistic savant and US intelligence operative.

Recruited during the Second World War into the Office of Strategic Services (the precursor of the CIA), he was sent to occupied Italy and later Zurich to track down German physicist Werner Heisenberg, find out how close the Nazis were to making an atom bomb and, if necessary, kill him.

Stepping up to fill Berg's onscreen cleats is **Paul Rudd** (*Knocked Up*, *Anchorman*, *Ant Man*) – always a welcome sight – but at first his portrayal has an opaque, inscrutable quality to it. Whether this is actually intentional is not immediately clear.

Questions abound – like why is an intellectual, multilingual genius languishing in an average baseball career?

Why doesn't he seem to have any close relationships, apart from a girlfriend (**Sienna**

Miller – *American Sniper*, *21 Bridges*), who might be a convenient smokescreen for his same-sex interests?

And in one of several weird scenes, why – during a pre-war all-star baseball publicity trip to Japan – does he take it upon himself to go up to the hotel roof dressed in a Kimono and film the Tokyo skyline?

It's all a bit random. However, a spot of Google research reveals that Berg really was something of an oddball, with much of his story shrouded in mystery to this day.

His exact date of birth and even his full name are disputed, and chunks of his life remain unaccounted for – just some of the numerous strange details it might spoil the plot to mention.

In any case, Rudd captures the necessary amount of mystique, as well as largely pulling off the lines he is expected to deliver in French, Italian and German – a potentially cringy moment for any actor.

However, in yet another surprise, co-star **Mark Strong** (1917, *Kingsman*, *The Imitation Game*) – playing the elusive Heisenberg – reveals himself to be a fluent German speaker. Cue more Googling to establish his heritage – Italian and Austrian, as those more familiar with his work are probably already aware.

The pair are ably supported by some more famous faces – **Jeff Daniels**, **Guy Pearce** and **Paul Giamatti** to name a few.

Inevitably, the writers have had to take some artistic licence to join up the dots of Berg's life, but they do so apparently without straying a million miles from true events.

While the gaps in his story – and in turn, the plot – prove frustrating, the film's biggest achievement will no doubt be to pique viewers'



curiosity about a largely forgotten and intriguing wartime figure.

On that account, there are far worse ways to while away an evening than streaming this offering – with a smartphone to hand for those "did that really happen?" moments. ■

● *The Catcher Was a Spy* is available to watch now on Amazon Prime

VERDICT:

A strange film about an even stranger man – you couldn't make it up

★★★★★

REVIEW: BECKY CLARK, SOLDIER

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◀ PRIMED AND READY

AFTER a sensational season on the World Cup circuit, Team GB bobsleigh star LCpl Nick Gleeson (Para) is targeting medal success at this month's Winter Olympics in Beijing. Read more on the challenge to come, as well as the crew's performances to date, on page 72...



CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION AS JUDO STARS RETURN

T PROVED to be a week of firsts at the Army Judo Championships as athletes and officials made their long-awaited return to the mat.

The event was the first Service-level tournament to be staged in two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions, while the build-up also saw the organisation host its first skills and coaching courses since early 2020.

The sport's initial return was focused on the elite international level, meaning personnel were largely restricted to the online realm before the competition was finally given the go-ahead – making it one of the first area open events in the country to be authorised by the British Judo Association post-lockdown.

“The atmosphere was fantastic, and it felt like a celebration of all things judo,” Maj Jim Crompton (AGC (ETS)), secretary of the Army Judo Association, told

SoldierSport as he reflected on the success of the week.

“It has been a frustrating couple of years. We managed to keep people together online, with regular updates and virtual sessions, and they were able to stay relatively fit.

“But there is nothing like mat fitness. That is one of the reasons why we ran the skills course – it was a chance for athletes to improve their conditioning before the competition.

“There were some bruises and minor niggles after the first couple of days, but by the time the championships came round they were raring to go.”

Given the close-contact nature of the discipline, regular Covid testing was conducted throughout the week, which culminated in hard-fought contests in a raft of individual and team categories.

The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Royal



**"IT
FEELS
LIKE
WE ARE
BACK"**

Engineers and Infantry all squared off in the battle for collective honours, and it was the former who topped the standings in the intermediate category.

The sappers then pipped the infantry to the honours in the men's closed team draw. There were also individual prizes in a variety of weight divisions in the novice, intermediate, closed and masters' fields.

One of those to shine was Cpl Chris Coley (RE), who was players' player of the tournament.

“He won every match,” Crompton said. “He was exceptionally strong and technically very competent, but he treated all opponents with complete respect.

“It was a busy day. He competed in the closed championships, as well two team competitions, and gained enough points to earn his black belt. He has been waiting two years for that opportunity.”

The officer also saluted the efforts of Cfn Vladimir Oleinic (REME), champion in the men's closed under-90kg and masters' middleweight ranks.

"He provided the first upset of the day when he defeated Capt Alex Paske (RE), who is a former Team GB member," Crompton continued. "He is part of the British masters' squad and has shown that, even if you are over 35, there are still opportunities at the highest level of the sport."

Recognition was also given to Service stalwart Maj (Retd) Jim Mackenzie, who was presented with a prestigious Sixth Dan to become one of the UK's most senior judo experts.

Looking ahead, the organisation will be represented on the mat at this summer's Commonwealth Games by Cpl Sarah Hawkes (AGC (RMP)), while Spr Anthony Devoy (RE) and Cpl Nicola Cairncross (QARANC) will serve as referees.

And the Inter-Services Championships will also return this year, having last been staged in 2019.

"There is quite a lot going on," Crompton said.

"It has been a long wait for the Inter-Services and we also have new clubs being set up around the Army in Tidworth, Catterick and London District.

"It feels like we are back." ■



JUDO IN NUMBERS

PERSONNEL
TAKING
PART IN THE
SKILLS AND
COACHING
COURSES

48

ATHLETES IN
ACTION ON
THE MAT AT
THE ARMY
SHOWDOWN

52

ROYAL
GIBRALTAR
REGIMENT
SOLDIERS
WHO
TRAVELED
TO COMPETE

2

DATE, IN
JUNE, OF
THE INTER-
SERVICES
- THE FIRST
SINCE 2019

1

YEARS'
SERVICE TO
ARMY JUDO
BY MAJ
(RETD) JIM
MACKENZIE

60



Picture: Cpl Nicholas Egan, RAF

SKIERS MAKE MERIBEL MOVE

A SUCCESSION of Army level competitions may have slipped by the wayside due to Covid-related travel restrictions, but its leading lights were due to take to the slopes at the Inter-Services Snow Sports Championships as this issue went to press.

Staged at Meribel, in France, the competition will have a different feel in 2022 with an adjusted programme to reflect the relative inactivity in the Alpine, Telemark and snowboard disciplines.

Team members attended a training camp in the build-up to the showdown last month and Lt Col (Retd) Steve Davis, secretary of the Army Winter Sports Association, told *SoldierSport* personnel were relishing the prospect of the event returning after it was cancelled in 2021.

"The levels of competition are not really the priority," he added. "It is about retaining muscle memory and having

a championship that may not look the same as it has before.

"We will have to adjust the programme and courses to make sure it is safe for the standard of skiers we have."

"But they are glad to be out doing something they love."

Exercise Rucksack, which features Nordic skiing and biathlon, was among the Service competitions to be cancelled due to the spread of the Omicron variant, as was the novice ice sports camp – Exercise Raging Ice I.

However, a host of corps events were staged before Christmas, meaning positives can be taken from the season.

"The amount of time we've had on the snow has been quite good compared to the other Services," Davis said.

"We have been able to identify new athletes and bring them together for different training camps."

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RUGBY LEAGUE



Pictures: Peter Smith Photography

COMEBACK VICTORY TEES UP NAVAL CHALLENGE

THE Army men's rugby league team were locked in a battle with their Royal Navy rivals as this issue went to press after a stunning comeback victory saw them progress to the Challenge Cup's second round.

Tries from Sgt Dec Baines (R Signals), LCpl Kieron Roche (RAMC) and LCpl Kev Brown (RE) saw the Reds fight back from 10-0 down with ten minutes remaining to defeat Orrell St James 18-10 and set up an all-military clash in Aldershot.

Head coach WO2 Mike Thompson (RE) was delighted to see his side triumph in such style in a match that was broadcast live on the BBC and told *SoldierSport* the result was based on a simple game plan of executing the basics well.

"When you go up to Wigan to face any team you expect a tough time and an arm wrestle," he added. "We had to be ready and knew they would come out of the blocks strongly.

"The game plan worked, but we couldn't get the breakthrough. So we decided to change our dimensions and the way we were doing things.

"I decided to take our captain off which 99 per cent of the time is something you wouldn't do.

"But we needed another half back on the pitch to play more expansive rugby.

"We were defending well, but at that point we had to score tries."

The move paid off as Baines stretched for the line in the 70th minute to open the Army's account before some quick footwork saw Roche dance through the Orrell defence for a second score in the 77th minute.

Brown then completed the comeback charge with a third try at the death.

"The determination and grit to win that match, in front of a big crowd and the BBC cameras, shows what a great squad we have," Thompson continued.

"We played uphill in the first

half, and it was such hard work – the lads said it was like running in sand. We banked on our fitness coming to the fore during the last 20 minutes, and that's what happened."

With the Navy beating Bridgend Blue 60-0 in their first-round clash, Thompson was predicting a tough test for the Reds, with home advantage potentially being vital.

"We haven't faced them for a couple of years, but we know how they play so we will focus on that," he added.

"They have some new recruits and young players coming through, and you don't beat a team 60-0 unless you are doing something right. We cannot take them lightly."

"For rugby league the Challenge Cup means the same as the FA Cup in football and we want to go as far as we can. It is a massive competition, and we are humbled to have the opportunity to be part of it." ■

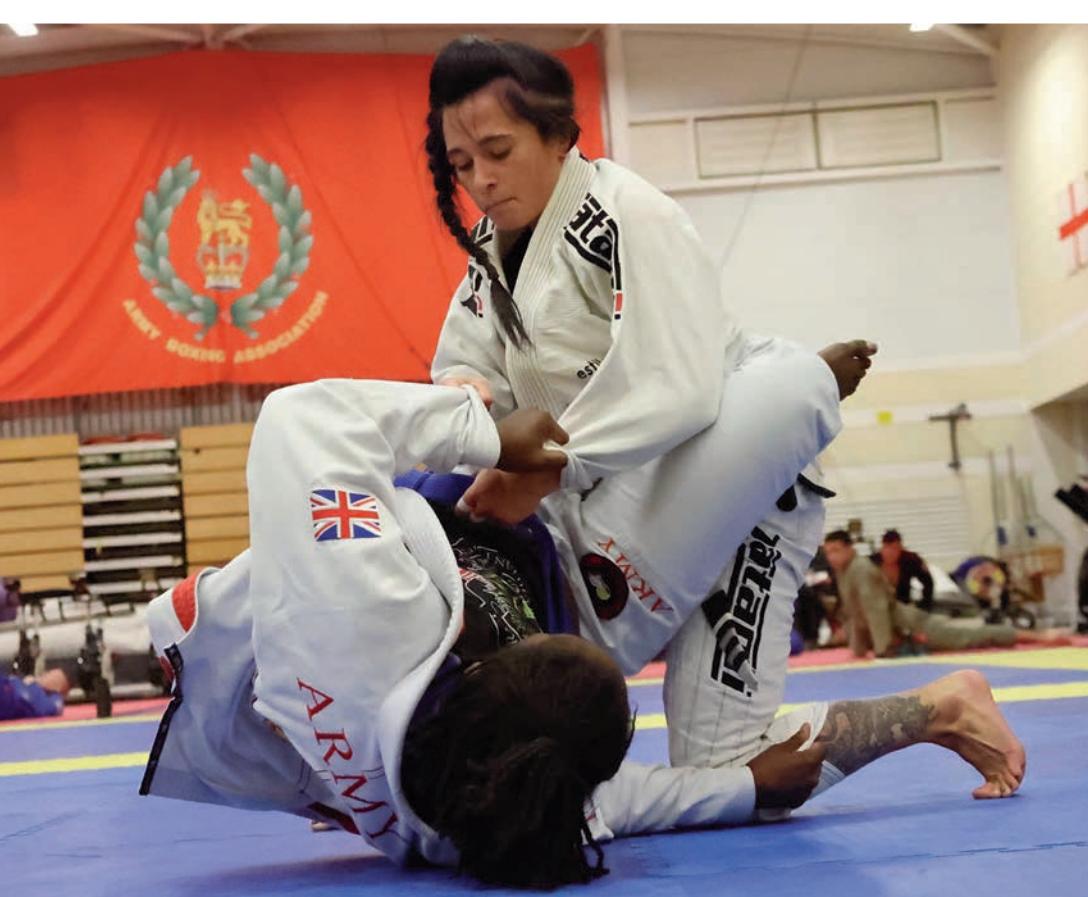
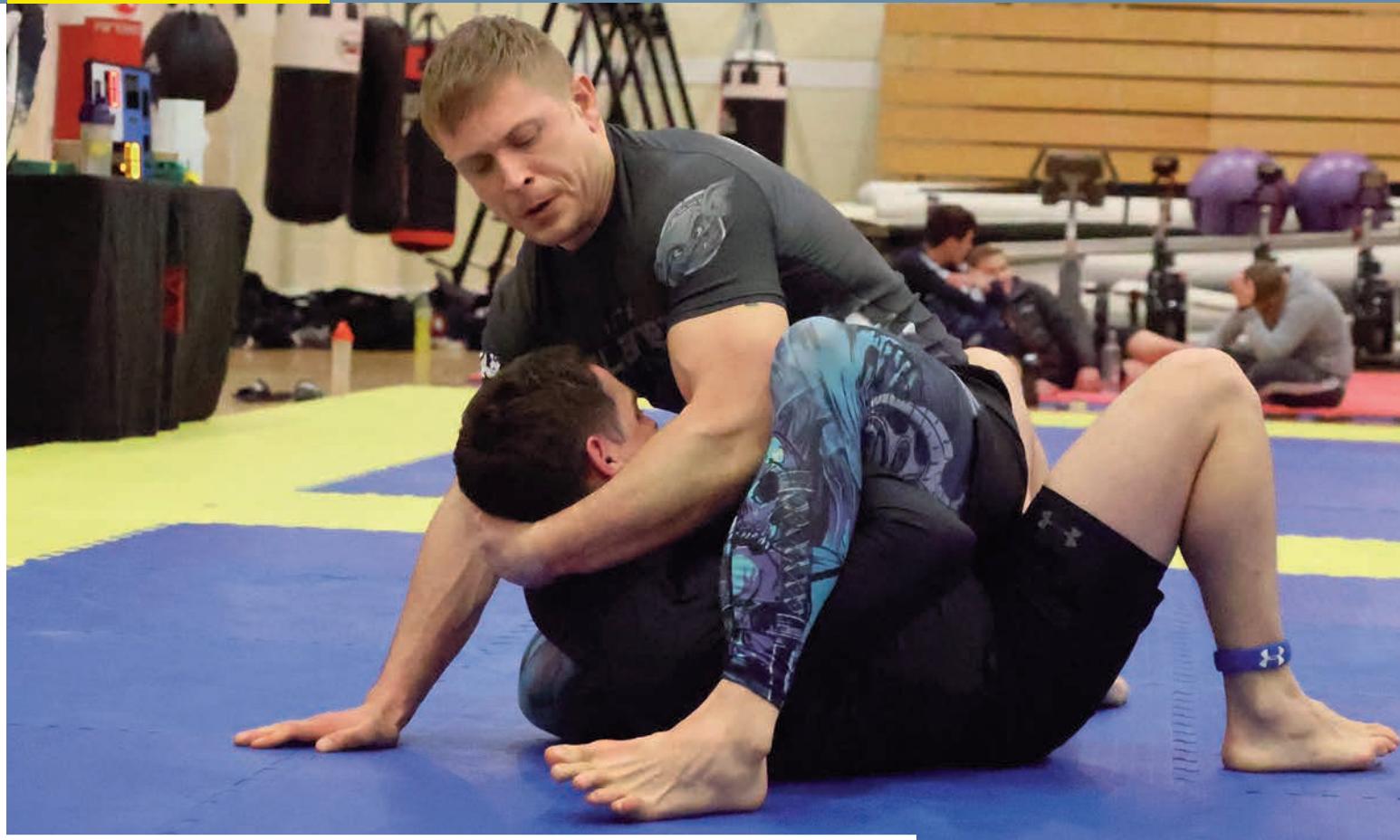
CHALLENGE CUP
FIRST ROUND
ORRELL
ST
JAMES

10

ARMY

18







PICKING UP THE TEMPO

MARTIAL ARTS SET-UP BRACED FOR SIGNIFICANT TESTS FOLLOWING SUCCESSFUL RETURN AT ARMY SHOWDOWN

THE Army's Brazilian jiu-jitsu players are looking to build on the returning momentum in their sport with two major competitions looming on the horizon this month.

Personnel will compete at the European Championships in Rome before returning to home soil in Aldershot for the Armed Forces, Veterans and Emergency Services Championships to conclude a hectic two-week run.

The tournaments come on the back of the first Service showdown to be staged since 2019, when more than 70 athletes took to the mat for their first major test following the easing of Covid restrictions.

Lt Col Shamus Kelly (RRF), OIC of the British Army Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Association, told *SoldierSport* the safe delivery of the event proved to be a "huge relief" to organisers, who feared the spread of the Omicron variant at the turn of year may lead to its postponement.

"To have so many people involved in a martial arts competition is massive," the officer added.

"We would usually have 25 to 50 more but with the backdrop of Covid, and the fact this has come so early in the year, we understand why the number is a little lower.

"It is great to see the level they are at – the standard has been exceptional. Their strength and conditioning is through the roof and that has acted as a bridge to what they may have lost technically by being away for so long.

"This event will be used to select the team we take to the European Championships.

"There is a lot of hard work ahead as we have seen some outstanding performances – bringing the number down to a final squad of 16 is going to be a big challenge."

Brazilian jiu-jitsu is one of the newest sports in the Army fold, but within the space of seven years it has become the most popular martial arts discipline in the military.

Last month's championships served to highlight such rapid growth as it was the first competition to feature action in the black belt ranks.

SSgt Barry Mairs (RAPTC) was among the contenders.

"To have three people in that field from an Army standpoint is brilliant," he said.

"Having black belts now coming through puts us in a strong position.

"When jiu-jitsu first started out there were ten to 15 of us – now we have progressed to this level. If we had not had Covid I'd say we would have around 200 soldiers here today.

"Mixed martial arts have become so popular. I think personnel have seen the ground component of that, which is alien to a lot of people in this country, and that has spiked significant interest."

As well as accommodating those at the upper echelons, the association has a firm fix on the grass-roots level.

The white and blue belt categories were well represented at the championships, with Kelly stating their involvement is crucial for the future development of the sport.

Sgt Ollie Denton-Powell (RE) only started training a month ago but managed to claim a silver medal in the white belt



**"THERE
ARE
ALWAYS
THINGS
WE CAN
LEARN"**

lightweight no-gi category.

"I've been training at a civilian club with a few people from my unit – 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment – and we are now looking to start our own club on camp," he said.

"We've been training three times a week and also go through our drills on sports afternoons. I didn't realise how technical the sport is and you are always learning.

"It was quite nerve-racking coming here as I didn't really know what to expect, but once I was on the mat I felt great.

"The aim now is to get the club up and running so I can progress further."

One of the strongest unit representations came from 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment, who saw LCpl Jordan Eccott presented with the Crystal Palace Cup as the most impressive performer on the day.

The team started with just four members in 2015 and has grown to the point where it now has 28 personnel on the books.

"This is the fastest growing sport in the Army and the more competitions we have done, the more funding has become available to us," said coach Sgt Steve Sharman.

"We are one of the only units to have two black belts.

"We have come here with 11 athletes and two coaches and are expecting to do well. We have trained very hard and even if we don't come away with any medals, there are always things we can learn." ■

SPORT SHORTS



Trinity trial success

» SUPER League outfit Wakefield Trinity have signed LCpl John Davetanivalu (R Signals) on a one-year contract following a successful trial.

He follows Pte Ratu Naulago (Yorks) and Gnr Mitieli Vulikijapani (RA) in making the move to rugby league's elite domestic competition and will be looking to make an impression ahead of his side's opening fixture on February 13.

"The boys and coaching staff have been very welcoming and we have a real tight-knit team here so I'm looking forward to the start of the season and hopefully getting some good results," Davetanivalu, who has represented the Army at rugby union, said.



Gold Cups go ahead

» MILITARY horse racing returns to Sandown Park this month as it stages the Royal Artillery Gold Cup Day on February 17.

The feature race dates back to 1878 and is one of the oldest to be held at the venue. Sandown Park will also host the Grand Military Gold Cup Day on March 8. Further details can be found at thejockeyclub.co.uk/sandown

The season concludes with the McCreery Military Hurdle at Wincanton on April 10.



Pictures: Viesturs Lacis/Records and Andy Ryan

MEDAL BID THE FOCUS AFTER CUP RUN



"THE OTHER NATIONS KNOW WE'RE A THREAT"

BOBSLEIGH ace LCpl Nick Gleeson (Para) heads to this month's Winter Olympics with hopes of medalling following a stunning season on the World Cup circuit.

The soldier helped the team fronted by pilot Brad Hall pick up six medals over the course of the competition as they finished fourth in the four-man rankings and fifth in the two-man.

It was Great Britain's most successful men's season since the 1990s.

"We are confident we can go to Beijing and bring back a medal," Gleeson told *SoldierSport* on the eve of departure.

"Over the last couple of seasons we've had athletes go down with injuries and that was a huge hurdle to overcome.

"But we have not had such bad luck this year, which has led to our success.

"I knew we could do well, but I never thought we'd walk away with six medals – that has given us a huge boost."

Gleeson said a punishing summer training programme laid the foundations for their results, while an investment in new kit

has also helped the cause.

"Our rivals are always pushing the boundaries and we have to keep up," he continued.

"At the 2018 Games we were using sleds that were older than I was. We now have new equipment that we have been constantly testing to get better.

"The four-man discipline is where we have had most of our success, so there is no reason why we cannot go out and medal – the other nations on the circuit know we are a threat."

The athletes experienced the Olympic venue during a test event at the start of the campaign and Gleeson believes the circuit could play to their strengths.

He said: "It is so smooth to go down, it is almost like a water slide. As a driver, Brad is so adaptable – he loves learning and picks things up so quickly.

"Everyone will be going there with the same amount of runs to their name. If we were to start the competition now it would be a level playing field."

Team GB's other crew – led by LSgt Lamin Deen (Gren Gds) – missed out after falling short of the qualifying mark. ■

MONTH IN SPORT

February's key fixtures...



WHAT: Army vs Royal Navy Inter-Services U23 football
WHEN: February 9
WHERE: Military Stadium, Aldershot
NEED TO KNOW: The

Reds' young guns have had a lengthy build-up and begin their campaign on home turf, before travelling to Oxford to face the Royal Air Force two weeks later



WHAT: Army vs Oxford University rugby union
WHEN: February 11
WHERE: Army Rugby Stadium, Aldershot

NEED TO KNOW: Preparations for this season's Inter-Services start in earnest as the soldiers play the first of two student fixtures, with Cambridge University to follow on February 23



WHAT: Army Table Tennis Championships
WHEN: February 15 to 18
WHERE: Aldershot Garrison Sports Centre
NEED TO KNOW: Coaching will

be held ahead of the main event, which features men's, women's, doubles and mixed doubles draws. There will also be an inter-unit contest for the first time

UNION IN NUMBERS

TRIES SCORED BY THE ARMY WOMEN IN THEIR VICTORY OVER WASPS AMATEURS

12

CONVERSIONS FROM THE BOOT OF FLY HALF LCPL MILLIE WILLIAMS (AGC (RMP))

3

DATE, IN MARCH, OF THE REDS' INTER-SERVICES CLASH WITH THE ROYAL AIR FORCE IN GLOUCESTER

26

PLAYERS NAMED IN THE LATEST WALES TRAINING SQUAD - INCLUDING CAPT GEMMA ROWLAND (RA)

42



REDS RACK UP THE POINTS

THE Army women's rugby union team continued their build-up to this season's Inter-Services with a convincing win over the Wasps amateur side.

Welsh international Bdr Beth Dainton (RA) was again among the standout performers and crossed for four tries as the Reds triumphed 66-0.

Premier 15s outfit Exeter Chiefs will be among the future opponents as the soldiers ramp up preparations for their opening clash with defending champions the Royal Air Force – who ended the Army's dominance of the competition last time out.

"I think it is all to play for this year," explained

head coach Maj Gemma Stonebridge-Smith (AGC (ETS)), as she looked ahead to the Forces showdown.

"We have a point to prove against the RAF and are really excited to be facing the Royal Navy at Twickenham for the first time.

"Nobody likes losing the Inter-Services but we now have a new group of girls who have helped us to rebuild with the style of rugby we want to play moving forward."

This year's men's and women's Army-Navy matches will be played at Twickenham on April 30.

General sale tickets will be available to purchase at armynavymatch.org.uk from February 17. ■

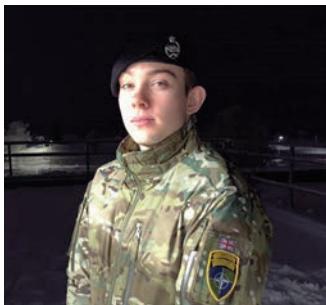
● AFTER its success last year, the Army Mountain Bike Cross Country Series returns with its opening leg next month.

Held at Sherwood Pines in Nottinghamshire on March 30, the event forms the first of six stages to be held at venues across the country in 2022 and entries are now being encouraged from Regular and Reserve personnel.

The competition is designed for athletes of all experience.

For more details search "Army cycling" on Defence Connect, visit the Army Cycling Facebook page or follow @britarmycycling on Instagram.





Recently I took part in Exercise Dreadnaught Strike, which was about operating in built-up areas, and I also completed the cold weather operators' course. All of these skills will be put to use in winter camp this month.

Tpr Alex Walby, RTR



We have just returned from a week-long exercise where instructors from The Royal Welsh helped us develop our skills to fight and clear through buildings using simmunition. I don't think we did too badly – for Tankies.

Tpr Ben Bolton, RTR



This time of year makes it a challenging backdrop and the upcoming winter camp will test our engineering skills in harsh weather conditions. It has been good learning from the Estonians to see how they work and operate in this environment.

Spr Collin Reid, RE

Picture: MoD



We are preparing to deploy on Exercises Bold Dragoon and Bold Fury in Latvia soon, where we will test our ability to conduct mounted and dismounted combat drills at short notice. The training is tough but rewarding – especially in the snow.

Fus Daniel Richards, R Welsh



Serving on Operation Cabrit with 3rd Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery has given me the honour of being the first Honourable Artillery Company soldier to deploy with the guns since my battery reformed. Getting the chance to train in challenging winter conditions and work alongside the Estonians will broaden my soldiering skill set.

Dmr Jack Evans, HAC

I really enjoyed the recent cold weather operators' course. It was a great challenge and I think it has better prepared me to work in the snow. Those skills will be put to the test during winter camp, where all elements of the battlegroup will work and train alongside one another in sub-zero temperatures.

LCpl Liam Stock, RE



Picking up the pace

2022 got off to a flying start for troops in Estonia – we asked them for a sitrep

Cabrit is my first operational deployment and it's going quick. Being out here in the winter has been a really good opportunity to test our soldiering skills alongside Nato allies in a challenging environment. I'm looking forward to the field phase of the cold weather operators' course and breaking through the ice.

Fus Avtar Singh, R Welsh





LEVEL PEAKS

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MOBILITY





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