

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

AIMING FOR MORE TOURS?

We reveal the route to joining
The Ranger Regiment

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ADVENTUROUS
TRAINING?

HEALTHY
BREAKFAST
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None of us signed up to sit behind a desk...this is like a breath of fresh air

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Time to follow the heard?

WHILE the Army coughs-up for ads and recruitment bounties, it continues to pause adventurous training expeds.

This month's magazine looks at what that means for troops (page 36), and what's clear is that AT is a game-changing part of military life.

One Serviceman told us it means more "than rank or pay" to him; another that he would be "pushed out the door" if it stopped.

That is some potentially serious fall-out, which seems likely to undermine efforts elsewhere.

This month, soldiers will air their views during another day of Teamwork – an annual event designed to foster better workplace culture.

I wouldn't be surprised if the AT – and money – issues come up.

Let's just hope the honesty and challenge culture that other ranks are being encouraged to embrace (page 7) is used to good effect by the big decision makers.

After all, people only bother to speak out if they feel heard. And it is *Soldier's* job to help make that happen.

If you have something you would like us to highlight, get in touch.

In a world of meaningless job titles, it feels frustrating that the excitement of a life in uniform still isn't selling itself as it could. But with applications to join apparently at a six-year high right now, perhaps there's hope yet.

Sarah Goldthorpe • Editor

Where to find *Soldier*

➤ Printed copies

Sent to Army sites at the start of the month.

➤ Facebook, X and Instagram

ALONG with news and glimpses behind the scenes at *Soldier*, we publish a link to the latest magazine at facebook.com/soldiermagazine and on X (formerly known as Twitter) (@soldiermagazine).

➤ Online

DIGITAL versions of current and past editions are available on the Army website at soldiermagazine.co.uk. Just click on the "read it now" tab.

➤ Purchase

IF you're not in the Army you can buy *Soldier* from your high street magazine retailer or directly from us at subs@soldiermagazine.co.uk (£23 for 12 issues in the UK).

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Picture: Graeme Main

Learning curve:
The Army needs
to be somewhere
people feel
safe to fail, the
general says

'We're not expecting perfection'

...but senior officer is optimistic new culture plan will create improved working environment

THE Army may be cracking down more on unacceptable behaviour but it is still a place where troops can feel safe to make mistakes, the deputy chief of the general staff has told *Soldier*.

They must, however, be willing to learn from them and to call out bad stuff elsewhere when they see it, Lt Gen Dame Sharon Nesmith added.

"Often, victims don't want the perpetrator's career to suffer, they just want them to know what they did was wrong so they don't do it again," the senior officer said.

Lt Gen Nesmith was speaking ahead of the publication of the Army's culture plan – a document that details how the Service will try to improve its working environment.

It follows a string of negative reports into inappropriate behaviour, particularly towards women.

"Having a good culture means that we are doing the right things at the right time, and helping others to do the same," Lt Gen Nesmith, who is responsible for the initiative, added.

"Our values and standards are our DNA. But this isn't about creating an environment where people always get it right – we are a learning organisation after all.

"However, we need to set the conditions so people can call things out and where they also feel psychologically safe to fail.

"That can be a difficult balance to strike, but a lot of the Army's activity around Teamwork this month will focus on just that.

"And we rely on our leaders to set the conditions."

She added: "This isn't about reaching an end point where things are considered perfect.

"The Army is already an environment where more often than not we do get it very right – there is far more of the good than bad.

"But our efforts around Teamwork present the opportunity to keep the improvement going. It should be a continuous cycle." ■

DIARY DATE



February 7

Teamwork

To find out more about this year's event – which aims to get units talking together and feeling more valued in their teams – join the Teamwork group on Defence Connect.

Lt Gen Dame Sharon Nesmith

“
We rely on
our leaders
to set the
conditions
”



SOLDIER

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GLOBAL SITREP



1. BELIZE

SAPPERS STEP UP

PERSONNEL from 36 Engineer Regiment's 67 Gurkha Field Squadron completed a memorable three-and-a-half-month stint in Central America on Exercise Sailfish.

The Maidstone-based troops carried out improvements to existing infrastructure and built new facilities at Price Barracks, home of British Army Training Support Unit Belize.

Despite the heavy monsoons that struck the region, they were able



to develop and refine tradecrafts including carpentry, bricklaying, concrete work and electrics.

"The wet and humid conditions made the rendering on the QM's building a real challenge," said LCpl Santosh Sunuwar.

"Overall, I think we showed great teamwork and I was able to lead my crew to complete the task in time and to a high standard."

Their spell in-country also saw them honing jungle fighting skills alongside soldiers from 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, as well as conducting adventurous training and visiting Mexico and Guatemala.

1. BELIZE

2. NORWAY

ICE AND SLICE

CREWS from 4 Regiment, Army Air Corps are preparing for a sub-zero blast as they take on a mock enemy – and the elements – during large-scale Nato manoeuvres.

The soldiers were deploying



to Scandinavia with their Apache aircraft as part of Exercise Nordic Response with the Joint Helicopter Force as this issue went to press.

They will be tested on their ability to operate in the extreme environment and Arctic temperatures – before embarking on a multinational outing involving around 20,000 troops from 14 nations.

Wildcat and Merlin airframes from the Commando Helicopter Force are joining their colleagues on the training package, which is running until mid-March.

Picture: Cpl Jamie Hart, RLC



3. GHANA

SUPPORT FOR HOME FRONT

A GROUP of community-spirited loggies donated more than £2,100 in equipment and supplies to a psychiatric hospital in Accra.

The seven troops, all originally from Ghana, raised the cash for medical kit, toiletries and food, which they dropped off in person at the 600-bed facility, along with clothes they had collected with help from their respective units.

They also embarked on a series of tough physical challenges to raise awareness of their campaign.

Team member Cpl Gordon Amoah said they had been inspired to help during a previous visit to the hospital, which treats conditions such as schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, dementia and alcohol and substance abuse.

"We observed the deprived nature of the infrastructure and general environment, as well as the myriad issues affecting patient care and rehabilitation" he explained.

"We were also motivated by recent efforts in the British Army towards destigmatising mental illness and felt encouraged to lend a helping hand."



INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

Brief the team now:



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7. AUSTRALIA LEAPING INTO ACTION

SERVICE parachutists headed down under to take part in the Australian Defence Forces' Military Nationals Skydiving competition.

A total of 19 troops from The Royal Engineers Sports Parachute Team and the Army's formation skydiving outfit, Volt4ge, spent two weeks in Sydney, jumping with their Aussie counterparts out of Royal Australian Air Force aircraft.

The sappers medalled in two of the three categories they competed in, winning the Vertical Formation Skydiving (VFS) Open and Four-way Formation Skydiving contests. Meanwhile Maj Graham Jackson bagged bronze with a joint Australian-UK team in the intermediate VFS category.

The trip was funded by grants from the Army Sports Lottery and the Royal Engineers corps sports fund.

Turn to page 71 to find out how Volt4ge fared in the competition.



Picture: Tony Harrington

- 2. NORWAY
- 6. ESTONIA
- 5. GERMANY
- 4. CYPRUS
- 3. GHANA

4. CYPRUS TOSCA BECKONS

PARATROOPERS from 4th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment will shortly take over the lead of Op Tosca, the British contribution to UN peacekeeping efforts on the Mediterranean island.

The Reservists and specialist augmentees including medics and engineers, will be deployed until October monitoring the 180km-long buffer zone between the Turkish and Greek sectors.

Personnel have been training hard to prepare for the task (pictured) and CO, Lt Col Bob McKay, said he was proud of how the formation had pulled together.

"Our Reservists at all ranks have put their civilian careers on hold so they can develop as soldiers and wear the blue beret," he added.



Picture: Sgt Murray Kerr, RA



5. GERMANY CHANGE OF WATCH

A HANOVER ceremony in Muenster saw the UK's Allied Rapid Reaction Corps assume leadership of Nato's Land Component Command.

The transfer of responsibilities from 1st German Netherlands Corps was symbolised by the exchange of the Nato Response Force flag.

It means thousands of British soldiers are now on standby to deploy within days in the event of threats against allies, with 7th Light Mechanised Brigade Combat Team spearheading the land element of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (page 12).

The handover came as some 20,000 UK troops geared up for Exercise Steadfast Defender, which runs across Europe from this month until June, and is one of Nato's largest manoeuvres since the end of the Cold War.

6. ESTONIA CULTURE CLUB

A UK-LED Unesco course took place in Tallinn focusing on safeguarding culturally significant items during war.

Lt Col Tim Purbrick (RL), head of the tri-Service Cultural Property Protection Unit, originally designed the package for Ukrainian troops last year due to the numerous crimes committed by Russian forces.

Supported by colleagues Cdr Roger Curtis (RN) and Capt Suzanna Joy (GSC), he delivered the three-day workshop aimed at equipping forces with sufficient legal knowledge in this specialist area.

It was attended by 30 personnel from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

"Offences committed against cultural property during conflict and occupation may be war crimes," Lt Col Purbrick said.

"It is important that personnel understand their obligations and that they train and prepare for its protection (page 51)."



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lives after
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Picture: Shutterstock

'This app can save lives'

A RESERVIST who performed CPR on a pensioner who collapsed in the street is urging fellow personnel to sign up to the same potentially lifesaving app that directed his skills to the medical emergency.

Pte Charlie Weir (RAMC, pictured), a 22-year-old law student at the University of Dundee, was studying in the campus library when he received a notification on his phone that a man in his late 70s had been taken ill nearby and was not breathing.

He grabbed the building's defibrillator and raced to the scene, where he performed CPR while waiting for paramedics.

Tragically, the patient involved, Dimitrios Kouletakis, was later confirmed dead.

Pte Weir – who serves with 215 (Scottish) Multirole Medical Regiment – was guided by the *GoodSAM Responder* app, which alerts users trained in



CPR that a cardiac arrest has occurred close to their location.

He was trained in the skill through the Service and given the fact thousands of others are too, he told *Soldier* it makes sense for them to join the scheme.

"The Army is massive," he said. "We could potentially add tens of thousands of people to this."

"As soldiers we are already protecting the UK population and we can do that even further by delivering vital medical intervention."

"It is free to sign up to and is a great way of helping the community."

"The outcome on this occasion is obviously sad, but CPR has been proven to have a positive effect on survival rates."

"It only takes a few minutes for parts of the brain to die or become vegetative, so the quicker people respond the better." ■

“It’s a great way of helping the community”

”

BOUNTY SCHEME PAYS OUT

■ THE recruitment bounty scheme has so far paid four soldiers £500 for putting forward someone they know to join the Army.

But those numbers are set to climb rapidly in the weeks ahead.

At the time of writing, around 200 personnel were in line to be paid the sum after their proposed candidates successfully applied to join the Service and started basic training.

Due to the number of checks, tests and medicals that are required, it takes 156 days on average for a candidate to progress from initial sign-on to starting basic training.

The scheme, which has been running since last summer, should see further gains in the weeks ahead, however, as more than 2,000 Regular and Reserve troops have registered and nominated individuals to date.

Once put forward, the candidate has 30 days to complete the application otherwise the process must start over.

"This is one of the many initiatives to boost our inflow," said Commander Home Command, Lt Gen Charlie Collins (pictured above).

"The take-up so far in the number of soldiers, Regular and Reserve, making use of the scheme has been positive."

"Of course, we would like everyone to participate. As well as boosting their incomes it will help inspire more people to join the British Army and enjoy fulfilling careers."



D-DAY VISITOR CENTRE

■ WORK on a new visitors' centre to commemorate the D-Day landings in northern France was getting under way as this issue went to press.

The Winston Churchill Centre for Learning and Education is being built close to the British Normandy Memorial (above) and is opening later this year to mark the 80th anniversary of Op Overlord.

Former chief of the general staff, Gen Lord Richard Dannatt, who chairs the project's board of trustees, said the Allied invasion of June 6, 1944 had "opened the door to western freedoms" and it was important to preserve the memory of those who fought for future generations.



- + Download free app *GoodSAM Responder*
- + It is used by most UK ambulance services as a cardiac arrest alert system that someone needs help close to their location
- + When a person collapses and their heart stops beating, their chance of survival reduces by approximately **10%** for every minute that goes by without CPR
- + *GoodSAM* allows someone correctly trained to give vital chest compressions while they are waiting for an ambulance

- + Military personnel who can do CPR can apply for registration regardless of rank or medical experience
- + Once downloaded, the app runs in the background of the user's phone until they are alerted
- + There is no obligation to respond should they be unavailable
- + Scan the QR code to sign up. When registering select your local ambulance service as the verifying organisation

BROKEN SAFETY ALARM LED TO OFFICER'S DEATH

■ THE death of a junior Rifles officer who was killed as he exited a Warrior could have been prevented if a faulty rear door alarm had been working, a probe has found.

Investigators concluded the flaw led to the tragic loss of 2Lt Max George (Rifles, pictured), who was run over by the vehicle when it reversed at speed on Salisbury Plain Training Area during Exercise Combat Spirit in 2022.

It is believed the officer, who was assisting on the training package for armoured vehicle crews, had been trying to retrieve his personal weapon when he was struck. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

A service inquiry flagged that the fault on the Warrior involved had been identified in 2018 but had not been addressed. The report concluded

it was "almost certain" that the tragic incident could have been prevented had the safety equipment been functioning.

The Warrior crew had not been aware 2Lt George was behind them.

Investigators said the vehicles should not be deployed if the alarms were not serviceable.

Having concluded a year-long probe, they also flagged several other contributing factors to the fatality with 48 recommendations for improvements.

A promising soldier, 2Lt George had been a Reservist before becoming a Regular with 5th Battalion, The Rifles.

Passing out of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in December 2021, the officer received the Queen's Medal for best cadet.

His CO, Lt Col Jim Hadfield, described him as "a natural commander" who "exuded fierce determination matched by a selfless compassion".



Picture: DSTL

“
We will look to accelerate the next phase
”

New laser weapon blasts drones

IT MIGHT sound like the stuff of *Star Wars* movies – but boffins have confirmed that they have blasted a mock target using a laser weapon for the first time.

They said that the advanced system – known as DragonFire – had successfully engaged drones during tests on a range in the Outer Hebrides, Scotland.

Now the MoD is pressing ahead with further tests on the kit, which is being considered by the Army in a multi-million pound programme between defence and industry.

Laser weapons work by using a high-energy beam which is fired at the speed of light and can dismantle enemy vehicles.

The kit boasts impressive range and is far cheaper than using missiles – with defence chiefs claiming it costs as little as £10 per shot.

Sponsored by the Defence Science and Technology Lab (DSTL), the latest firing is part of a series of tests and involved several other organisations

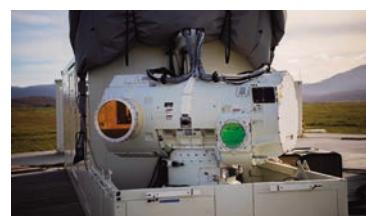
from across government.

Paul Hollinshead, chief exec of DSTL, was delighted with the progress.

He said: "These trials have seen us take a huge step forward in realising the potential opportunities and understanding the threats posed by directed energy weapons."

"With our decades of knowledge, skills and operational experience, DSTL's expertise is critical to helping the Forces prepare for the future."

Shimon Fhima, director of strategic programmes for the MoD, agreed, adding: "In a world of evolving threats, we will look to accelerate the next phase of activity."



Rats at the ready

THE Desert Rats now form the tip of Nato's spear after taking the reins of its rapid reaction force.

The 7th Light Mechanised Brigade Combat Team is the lead element in a formation of 6,000 troops – with nearly 4,200 from the UK – and more than 600 armoured and protected mobility vehicles from nine Nato countries.

Brig Guy Foden, commander of the Desert Rats, told *Soldier*: "It is a great privilege to lead the land component of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force and we are now set for any missions that Nato have for us."

The formation was created as part of the Nato Response Force, which also includes air, maritime and

special operations forces, after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Designed to be deployed within days of any crisis erupting, the leadership role is rotated annually among the alliance's members, with the UK taking over from Germany in January.

Desert Rats combat units that have been stood up include the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, 4th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland and 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment (pictured left).

They are being supported by a range of the brigade's own combat support and service support outfits with more specialist capabilities supplied by 55 other units across the Field Army and Royal Air Force.



HORSING AROUND



EQUINE members of the Household Cavalry Regiment and King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery have been settling back into their military duties after enjoying a well-earned break into the new year.

The 150-or-more animals headed for a three-week stay at the Defence Animal Training Regiment, Melton Mowbray, where they received a health once-over before being able to gallop and relax freely away from the London bustle.

There she goes...

Pictures: Capt Preet Chandi, RAMC

Polar Preet adds fastest female title to her record line-up

ADVENTURER Capt Preet Chandi (RAMC) has claimed another Antarctic record by becoming the fastest woman to complete a solo unsupported ski expedition to the South Pole.

Having set off from Hercules Inlet, the officer covered 1,130km of ice to reach her destination in 31 days, 13 hours and 19 minutes – beating the previous best, set by Canadian Caroline Cote, by one day, 14 hours and 34 minutes.

On average, Capt Chandi was skiing for 12-13 hours per day, pulling a 75kg sled that contained everything she needed to survive in the unforgiving environment.

Her latest success came a year after she set a new record for the longest solo, unsupported and unassisted polar expedition by a female. Before that she became the first woman of colour to complete a solo quest to the Antarctic.

"I pushed myself to my limits on my last expedition, but a speed attempt is completely different," Capt Chandi explained. "After my previous attempt, I knew I could cope well on the ice and that gave me the confidence to tackle this head-on."

"It was definitely not a sprint, but I had to constantly weigh up my effort and how long I would ski for each day. Too long or too fast and I was going to burn out."

"Antarctica is amazing, but it is not a place any person can conquer – you have to treat it with respect and hope it allows you safe passage. I'm so glad it allowed me that."

"I couldn't control the conditions – the blistering sun, the whiteouts, the temperatures of -30 degrees Celsius

– but I could control how I dealt with them by just taking things one step at a time."

A return to the South Pole had not been on the cards for the latest season, but the explorer's mission to push boundaries fuelled another quest.

She added: "After my last expedition, I thought there is no way I would do another in the next year.

"But it wasn't long before I was dreaming up this challenge.

"It is not only about pushing myself, but about inspiring others to break their barriers. It's in those tough moments when you find out what you're made of."

In other expedition news, former Royal Marine Sam Cox was forced to abandon his attempt at the longest solo unsupported crossing of Antarctica after 32 days on the ice.

The ex-Serviceman had covered more than 600 kilometres but was forced to withdraw with a suspected kidney infection.

"I wanted to continue, but in the end the decision was taken out of my hands," he said.

"It's difficult to put the disappointment into words – this has been three-and-a-half years of planning and preparation." ■



...again

You have
to treat
Antarctica
with respect

”



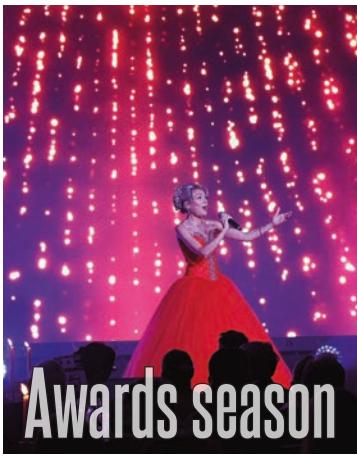
BATTLE SCHOOL'S SPORTING BOOST

A NEW multi-use games area has been opened at the Infantry Battle School's Dering Lines in Brecon.

The £850,000 facility includes a football pitch, six-lane running track and physical training area.

The all-weather asset will provide space for formal PT-led drills as well as recreational activities for staff, students and their families.





Awards season

■ NOMINATIONS for this year's Soldiering On Awards have opened, with a new category added for individuals who support the military community with civy careers.

The "employee champion" prize will also recognise those who promote the skills of Service leavers, veterans and their families.

Now in its fourteenth year, the awards spotlight exceptional achievements across 12 categories, including family values, animal partnership, defence inclusivity, business and more. To submit a nomination visit soldieringon.org by midnight on April 2.

GOT THE WRITE STUFF?

■ BUDDING scribes, get your quills quivering and neurons firing – this year's Essay Prize Competition is live.

Organised by the Centre for Army Leadership (CAL) and National Army Museum, it is open to military and civilian personnel. Entries should be themed around "unsung Army heroes" – leaders overlooked or misunderstood.

Articles must be submitted by March 22 and winning essays for the two age categories (16-21 and over 22) will be announced on June 13.

For more details visit the CAL page on the British Army website.



“
She
exemplifies
the very best
qualities
”

'Tireless' troops rewarded

A PTI with a passion for helping less confident troops get back to fitness was among those receiving royal recognition in the 2024 New Year Honours list.

SSgt Charlotte Spence (RAPTC, pictured below left) received the MBE.

She was one of 66 Regulars and Reservists rewarded for service on the home front and overseas operations by King Charles.

The senior NCO and elite Crossfit athlete was marked out for her tireless work on course design for the Army School of Physical Training.

She was described as a driving force in developing the fitness of a



generation of troops, while being a key advocate of recruitment.

"SSgt Spence has actively promoted positive mindsets to soldiers and officers for more than ten years, sacrificing her personal time to attend numerous events," the citation highlighted.

"Her guidance has helped those suffering from low confidence to grow and regenerate their prospects.

Selfless, committed and inspirational, she exemplifies the very best qualities of the British Army and the Royal Army Physical Training Corps."

Other recipients of awards included Col Lucy Giles (above) – whose 32-year career has included serving as the first female college commander at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. She was handed a CBE for her "profound effect" on defence.

Gurkha signaller Maj Kamal Gurung (QGS) received the MBE for playing a key liaison role between Nepal and the UK during the Covid crisis.

The officer's citation explained that his "diligent" efforts enabled continuing care of Gurkha Welfare Trust veterans and the processing of 14,000 potential recruits to the Brigade of Gurkhas.

And Lt Col Tracy-Louise Appleyard (RAMC) received the OBE for her impact on women's healthcare as Defence and Army consultant adviser in obstetrics and gynaecology. ■

ANYONE YOU KNOW? NEW YEAR HONOURS 2024

Dame Commander: Lt Gen Sharon Nesmith.

Companion of the Order of the Bath: Maj Gen Kevin Copsey; Maj Gen John Mead.

CBE: Brig Vivienne Buck; Maj Gen Julian Buczacki; Brig Matthew Cansadale; Maj Gen Darren Crook; Col Lucy Giles; Col Michael Smith.

OBE: Lt Col Nicholas Andrew (RA); Lt Col Tracy-Louise Appleyard (RAMC); Col Edward Carter; Col Nigel Crewe-Read; Lt Col Ewan Harris (R Welsh); Lt Col Timothy Holmes (REME); Col Matthew Lewis; Lt Col John Lyons (R Signals); Lt Col Craig Pope (RAMC); Col Thomas Woolley; Col Nicholas Yardley.

MBE: Maj John Baileff (RA); Maj Allan Beard (Int Corps); Lt Col John Bradbury (REME); Maj Keith Brooks (RA); Capt Barry Byron (GSC); Capt Giles Clarke (RLC); Maj Lisa Clarke (AGC (SPS)); Maj James Dott (Para); Maj Brian Dupree (RAPTC); Maj Robert Fellows (Rifles); Maj Toby Foster (Rifles); Lt Col Christopher Garrard (RE); Maj Alex Glynn

(RA); Maj Jason Groves (R Welsh); Maj Kamal Gurung (QGS); Maj Alexander Hamilton (RE); Maj Peter Harrison (RLC); Maj Steven Maguire (R Irish); Bdr Alicia Martin (RA); Maj Neil McClelland (SG); Maj Christopher Murphy (RHD); Cpl Tonderai Ndelela (AGC (SPS)); Lt Col Christopher Newton (RA); Pte Ernest Okenyi (RLC); Capt Pierre Ozanne (PWRR); Sgt Daniel Powderham-Bissell (Int Corps); SSgt Matthew Robinson (RE); Maj Charles Singleton (PWRR); SSgt Charlotte Spence (RAPTC); Maj Jonathan Studwell (Int Corps); Maj Thomas Sweeney (AAC); Sgt Edward Swindell (RE); Lt Col Andrew Teeton (RE); Maj James Viney (RE); Capt David Williams (REME); Maj Stacy Oliver (RAMC); Lt Col Daniel Proctor (REME); Maj Francesca Sykes (RA).

Ordinary Associate of the Royal Red Cross, Second Class: SSgt Natalie Davies (QARANC); Maj Adam Hughes (QARANC); Maj Jennifer Jackson (QARANC).

King's Volunteer Reserves Medal: Capt Carl Goymer (General List); Maj Adrian Hunt (REME); WO1 Shane Marriott (AAC); WO2 Denis McKee (R Irish); Maj Dawn Saunders (R Signals).





■ **THE Welsh Guards** will return home from the Falkland Islands in the coming days after their tour as the Roulement Infantry Company. Some 100 personnel from The Prince of Wales and Support Companies headed south for the three-month deployment, which featured the usual mix of military drills, live firing on Onion Ranges and community engagement. A platoon also joined Royal Navy colleagues on board HMS Forth for a journey to South Georgia, where they conducted patrols. Elsewhere, troops completed an 18-mile march from Onion Ranges to Mount Pleasant and battlefield tours, while Capt Rob Cross had the honour of winning the 440-yard dash at the annual Boxing Day horse races in Stanley. Pictures: Sgt Chris Morgan, WG

ROAD TO THE FUTURE

A NUMBER of important milestones for the Army's equipment modernisation drive will be reached in 2024.

The first **Challenger 3** prototypes are due to arrive for trials this month, while the remainder of the 50 AH-64E Apaches on order should be delivered to the Army Air Corps by the summer.

An initial batch of **Archer** mobile guns have arrived in the UK and training is taking place in Sweden, with more platforms due to be shipped in the next couple of months.

The fully automated system can hit targets 50km away – double that of the AS90 – using extended-range ammunition.

It remains on schedule to reach full operating capability by the end of this year.

Elsewhere, the delivery of two **Boxer** vehicles in recent weeks is good news for the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers who have begun trials with the asset.

The first 117 platforms are being built in Germany, but they will soon be supplemented by UK manufactured versions from factories in Telford and Stockport that will assemble the remaining 506 units.

Also, **Ajax** trials (shown above)



Picture: Graeme Main

continue to run smoothly and the Service is expecting the first deliveries to reach the Field Army in this calendar year. ■

● MEANWHILE, a rapid procurement process will result in 500 new support vehicles being delivered by Rheinmetall next month.

The multipurpose trucks will allow personnel to load flatracks, which can carry essential logistics such as ammunition, food, water, and support materiel to operational locations.

The vehicles will be from the manufacturer's HX family, which are equipped with multiple protection capabilities and offer high mobility and reliability on challenging terrain.

They boast several capability improvements compared to those already in service, including an increased payload, reduced turning circle and more efficient engine.

“The trial boxes were well received”



SPICE UP YOUR LOVE LIFE

■ ARMY couples are being encouraged to snuggle up for an evening in as Valentine's Day looms – by setting a hot date with a board game.

In a leftfield move to help rekindle relationships, padres are offering troops the chance to try *Date Night in a Box* – billed as a fun way to help lovers learn about each other.

The idea was hatched by the Colchester chaplaincy team, who have so far handed out two dozen games free-of-charge.

The initiative is being run in conjunction with charity Care for the Family, which makes the product.

Military Provost Service padre Anthony Williamson said: "We raised funds to hand deliver 25 trial boxes, which were well received, with our long-term aim to deliver one to every Service couple in the garrison."

NEW DIGS UP NORTH

■ CATTERICK'S Marne Barracks is set for a £54m upgrade to pave the way for an influx of sappers.

The site is currently home to 5 Regiment, Royal Artillery and 32 Regiment, Royal Engineers but needs additional facilities ahead of 21 Engineer Regiment's planned relocation from Ripon in 2027.

These will include single living accommodation, sports pitches, storage areas and a gym.

Construction will start in mid-2025.



Flashback:
The *Soldier* letters page of February 2000 after the ban was overturned

INDIGNITY MUST BE COMPENSATED, SAYS RBL

■ CONCERN is mounting that a £50 million limit on payouts to veterans affected by the former ban on LGBT personnel may not be enough to make amends.

The Royal British Legion pointed out that it was not known how many people had been affected by the disqualification on service – which ended in January 2000 – and feared that some could miss out on a settlement.

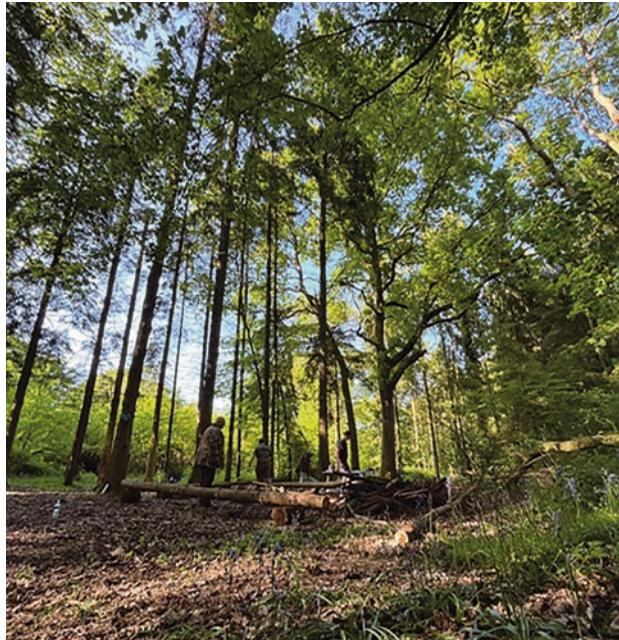
As well as humiliation, many soldiers lost both earnings and pensions as they were discharged and some even faced criminalisation for their sexuality.

Urging ministers to scrap the cap, RBL Director General Antony Baines said: "The anniversary of the lifting of the cruel ban is a timely reminder of indignities suffered by LGBT personnel."

"We owe it to them to recognise the struggles they face through no fault of their own and compensate them properly for the harms that they endure."

The compensation scheme was set up in the light of an independent review carried out last year by Lord Etherton, who made more than 40 other recommendations.

A range of "non-financial restorative" measures are also available to veterans, including a letter of apology and replacement beret. For more information search "restorative measures" at gov.uk



“
My old
regiment
has been
magnificent
”

Bushcraft, banter and Regimental funding bolsters a scheme that uses

A PROJECT to help mentally ill veterans get back on their feet with fresh air, camping and bushcraft is receiving plaudits for its work.

Operation Jackdaw was set up by former infantryman Paul Shilling (ex-PWRR, shown) last year to help Service leavers rediscover camaraderie and get vital support while enjoying the Kent countryside.

And in the space of just nine events, the initiative has been getting pleasing feedback from those who attended.

Shilling said he was now being "inundated" with requests from others who are keen to join the



fold – especially after seeing more about the activities on YouTube.

"We have entertained a varied bunch of veterans from individuals with mental health issues and alcohol problems to those who are homeless or just want a break from everyday pressures," he told *Soldier*. "We want everyone to leave with a small sense of pride and achievement as many haven't been back in the field since they left service."

"We initially set this up with no outside help until I contacted my old regiment, and they have been magnificent with funding and kit from the battalions."

"This has reduced a lot of pressure for us and helped get

**FEARLESS
FUNDRAISING**



CALL TO ARMS FROM CHARITY LEGEND

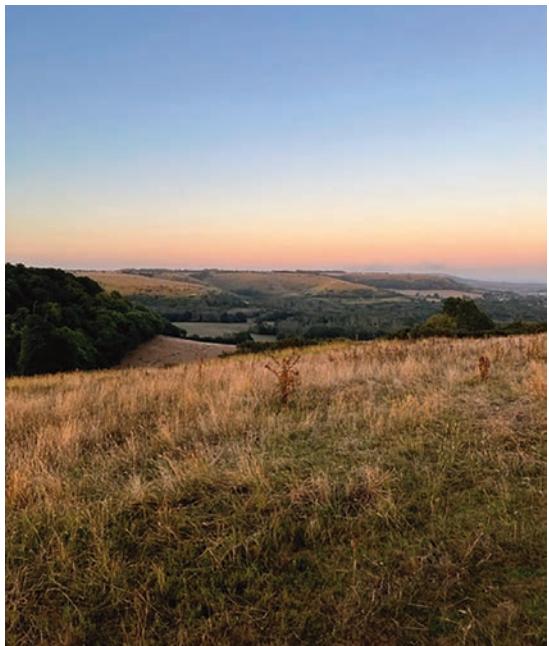
A BIG-HEARTED ex-soldier who is preparing to cross the length of the UK in his electric wheelchair has put out a call to arms for volunteers to crew his support teams.

Richard Toole is hoping to roll more than 800 miles from Land's End to

John O'Groats, raising thousands of pounds for the Army Benevolent Fund. But the serial charity champion, who served 11 years in The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, needs current or former personnel to help.

The journey starts in mid-April. Email richardtaiks.art@hotmail.com





Pictures: Kai Downham

nights under the stars

the great outdoors to support ex-Service personnel

more veterans along."

Paul Senter, deputy regimental secretary of The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, which provided the grant, said: "I attended one of the camps myself and it was heartening to see veterans coming together, sharing experiences and of course the obligatory banter.

"One person explained to me how going along had helped settle them mentally and given them a real focus.

"The nights in the woods are a great way for veterans to come together in an environment they will all find familiar."

After running the camps from a large patch of woodland donated by a local landowner, Shilling's

father has now bought the initiative its own site just outside Dover.

It is hoped this will help the scheme flourish throughout 2024 and beyond.

To contact Op Jackdaw email paulandrew.shilling@me.com ■



MILITARY charity bosses have welcomed news that a mental health scheme for veterans is being overhauled – but insist more needs to be done.

Latest revisions to the **NHS Op Courage** initiative have seen a new push for ex-troops to self-refer.

Addiction support services are also being beefed up while a publicity campaign featuring ex-Royal Marine and elite athlete JJ Chalmers is aiming to raise awareness.

But The Royal British Legion has said more resources are needed for services – and that access to help varies.

Angela Kitching, the charity's campaigns, policy and research director, added: "The inconsistent patchwork of

care across the country must be addressed.

"The Royal British Legion will continue to work with the NHS and partners across government to ensure veterans and their families receive the mental health and substance support that they vitally need."

Op Courage was launched in 2017 and assists Service leavers and the wider veteran community and their families. It provides access to specialist support and is staffed by experts who understand military life.

They work closely with Defence Medical Services and signpost individuals to help for wider issues such as housing as well as plugging them into treatment

'LIFE SKILLS NEED WORK'

■ MORE needs to be done to help personnel struggling with bread-and-butter life skills – who could find themselves less able to cope when they leave military life – research has found.

Analysis carried out by Qinetiq and the Cranfield School of Management found that while many troops were well equipped for the move to civvy street, a small number still had issues in areas such as applying for jobs, IT and managing personal learning.

Now researchers have called on defence chiefs to pinpoint the most vulnerable and tailor support to help them.

While the study found that eight-in-ten personnel believed their life skills were good, others were less confident.

The most vulnerable were found to be those who signed up at a young age, did not have a trade to fall back on or had decided to hang up their boots at a junior rank.

The researchers recommended that life skills should be incorporated into formal military guidance.

View from the GROUND

"Teaching life skills to soldiers needs to be a continuous process throughout their career – it shouldn't be left to

resettlement time. Being in uniform provides a structure, with the regimental family around you. This is an important

Army asset, and the most successful soldiers tend to be those with good leaders to assist them. Just as any school pupil benefits from a parent helping with homework, personnel will develop if commanders take an interest and assist them in the same way. A soldier must also take control of their own destiny."



Maj Dec Lynn, AGC (ETS)
Former OC, Army School of Education

“Nights in the woods are a great way for veterans to come together”

Courage to improve

programmes. More than 30,000 referrals have been made so far.

The overhaul follows a poll of 3,000 former personnel which found that half had experienced mental health issues, and a similar number physical conditions.

Dr Jonathan Leach, associate medical director of Armed Forces and veterans health at NHS England, assured those coming forward they would receive expert help.

"Our staff are not only highly trained clinical professionals, they are also ex-military or they know the military culture first-hand," he said.

Search "Op Courage" online.

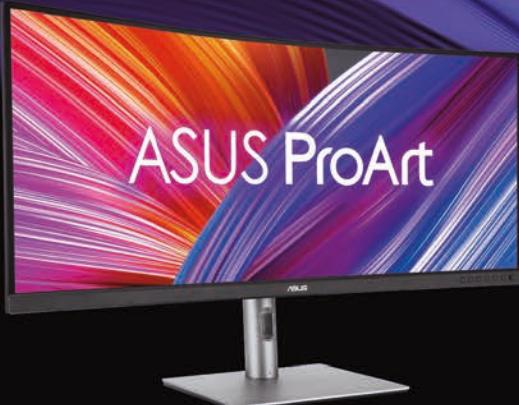
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Ground view

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

TWO years ago this month Russian forces crossed the border into Ukraine – starting the first major conflict on European soil for decades.

Since then, thousands have died – civilians as well as soldiers – while others have been displaced.

As I write, troops who Op Interflex has trained in the UK are putting their lives on the line defending their homeland.

The world has become an even more dangerous place.

There is now a crisis in the Middle East.

And British forces have been involved with action to stop Yemen-based Houthi rebels attacking international shipping in the Red Sea.

When I joined the Army as a sapper 27 years ago, I could never have foreseen how busy the Service of that era would become – firstly in the Balkans then Iraq and Afghanistan.

But I cannot remember anything comparable to the situation that we are now seeing – where the threats are truly global.

Amid this ongoing state of flux, I'd like to take the opportunity to call on all of you as soldiers to make sure you maintain a professional curiosity about everything

happening around the world – stay abreast of current affairs.

Think of this as part of maintaining your readiness to deploy.

While the situation is complex and events may appear distant and disconnected, they do have the potential to affect us.

The situation in the Middle East is one case in point.

But in Europe we have also seen the defence secretary confirm the UK will soon be part of the largest Nato exercise for decades.

Talk the global picture through with others too – it is worth having discussions about events and their potential implications.

And if you are out on operations – deployed with other elements of the Army and multinational partners – take the time to find out how different roles fit together.

I have already said that – as part of Op Mobilise – we must be prepared to move in short order.

This means being fully fit with everything ready for deployment – and ensuring that our families understand the implications too.

Being informed about the bigger picture will help with your preparations.

Knowledge, as they say, is power.

“Talk the global picture through with others”

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Q Beards are big news – ever grown one?

A On leave yes, but it always gets shaved off



TEAM RINDER

MY training has started for the Marathon Des Sables across the Sahara Desert – and I've been steadily building up the miles in preparation for the race in April.

I'm approaching the task with a heady mixture of excitement and trepidation.

My team will be raising money for the Army Benevolent Fund.

It is named after one of the more famous members – TV personality and lawyer Rob Rinder (pictured above).

The line-up of Rinder's Runners also includes MC recipient Col Mark Nooney, Olympian Maj Heather Stanning (RA) and Cpl Natalya Platonova (QARANC).

The latter was a winner of Channel 4's reality TV show *The Circle* who has just transferred from the RMP to train as a mental health nurse.

I'm looking forward to meeting the team, and I'd appreciate any unit PT sessions when I am out on visits. Your support is key.

A trip to theatre

IT was great to be out and about on Op Cabrit recently, seeing soldiers serving with the First Fusiliers Battlegroup in Estonia and Poland. Winter conditions there are harsh, but the troops have used the opportunity to take part in winter training with the Royal Marines.

This deployment, protecting Nato's eastern flank, is crucial, and our personnel are doing a great job ensuring security and stability are maintained. Thanks for all you do.

THE BIG PICTURE

Stowe Gardens,
Buckinghamshire

Outlines of invasion

AN ARTIST who forges haunting silhouettes of British soldiers is bringing a legion of his creations to the Normandy landing sites.

Dan Barton, of charity Standing with Giants, is placing 1,500 of his figures, some of which are pictured here during a recent UK exhibition, close to the beaches for the 80th anniversary of the invasion in June.

He is appealing for volunteers to help cut hundreds more of the outlines – which represent British casualties – from recycled metal at his workshop near RAF Brize Norton in time for the display.

Visit standingwithgiants.co.uk for more information.

Photo: Jules and Bean Photography





WEED TO WIN

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Early doors

Why manual assault
breaches are all in the prep

► ACCORDING to Special Operations Brigade manoeuvre support adviser Maj Graham Jackson (RE), 80 per cent of good door breaching comes from the preparation. Here, he offers *Soldier* some top tips on getting up to speed with this important urban skill...





“Do the assault pioneer course”

It provides all the skills required to develop a strong assault breaching culture in your unit. It is short, information-focused and offers a route to promotion, too. This is also currently the only way for non-Royal Engineer units to qualify personnel to safely use explosives as well as the tools required for this method.



“Fight skill fade”

Breaching is just another aspect of close combat. So always integrate it, and time on the tools, into dismounted close combat exercises. Be resourceful when planning demolitions or manual breaching training. For example, local window firms will always be more than willing to provide you with old uPVC doors to use as targets. And invite combat engineers, Royal Marines assault engineers or other assault pioneers.



“Recce and plan”

Prior to deployment, during the build-up to an op and during execution, constantly seek to understand how the structures in your area of operation are built – and from what. This depth of knowledge will allow you to quickly plan and select an appropriate breaching method. Always consider compromise, conditions of the breach, casualties and failed breaches during planning.



“Take the hard route”

Peer adversaries and insurgents have the freedom to use IEDs, mines and booby traps. If you think something is a suitable entry point, it is likely that your enemy is channelling you into a kill zone. Entering through walls, roofs and non-obvious aspects will reduce the risk of compromise and casualties in the breach point.

● **Ranger routes – p32**

Relationship red flags

The subtle signs of coercive control and why it's dangerous

► **ABUSE** can take many forms, not only outright violence. But some kinds can fly under the radar.

Claire Riches from Wiltshire-based domestic abuse support service Fear Free, says coercive control is particularly hard to spot – and extremely damaging.

“It’s not always obvious because it’s not just one thing – it’s an array of behaviours that gradually creep in over time,” she warns.

“And often they are disguised as being caring, so the person concerned may not even recognise that they are in a controlling relationship.”

Here, Riches explains what to look out for and what to do if it rings alarm bells.

1 Monitoring whereabouts. Asking who their partner has been with or where they’re going, often dressing it up as concern for their safety so that the person on the receiving end thinks they’re just being kind. Sometimes they will misuse tech such as pet cams and personal trackers to keep tabs.



2 Restricting contact with friends. Bad-mouthing someone’s mates and implying they’re the wrong people to be hanging out with, but suggested in a “I just want what’s best for you” kind of way.

3 Commenting on what a person is eating or wearing. Using phrases like “you’re not going to eat that as well as you?” or “isn’t that dress a bit tight?”. It seems minimal, but eventually the victim will start to doubt their own judgement and believe their partner knows best.

7 Name calling and humiliation. This is designed to chip away at the person’s self-esteem.

6 Controlling finances. Especially if the perpetrator is bringing in the salary and dictating everything that happens in the house and what gets spent on what.

5 Monitoring personal devices and social media. A big warning flag is insisting on joint social media accounts and sharing passwords.

4 Preventing access to mental health support. Saying “you don’t need that, I’ll look after you, you can talk to me”.

Pay it forward

Save more than £600 by the end of 2024 with this clever trick

► IF you spent last month paying off your Christmas costs, February could be a great time to get up on Money Saving Expert Martin Lewis's handy tip for saving £671.61 by the end of the year.

It goes like this: you save 1p on the first day of January, 2p on the second, 3p on the third and so on, building up to the final daily amount of £3.66 on December 31.

Those playing catch-up just need to whack £4.96 in a fund and then chip in 32p on February 1, 33p on February 2...

It's a pretty painless way to amass an impressive sum – and you'll thank yourself for the extra spending money come the end of the year.



How to watch the dough grow

1 **With a jar.** Put your loose change into a piggybank or sealed pot each day. However, people use coins far less now, so this may be less convenient.

2 Electronically. Transfer the cash into a savings account via online banking

(check if your bank accepts small transactions first). Transferring the money on a monthly basis will be less laborious – or, even easier, you could split the £671.61 into 12 equal instalments of £55.97. As that's a rounded-up figure, you'll end up with 3p more.



Bonus brass

In a normal year, the total saved over 365 days would be £667.95, but as 2024 is a leap year, there's an extra day, boosting the final amount by £3.66

- To download the 1p Savings Challenge tracker visit moneysavingexpert.com via this QR code:



What to do

Don't underestimate the impact of coercive control

– the perpetrator may never have laid a finger on you, but the effect of this form of abuse is very sinister. We have clients coming to us who have had everything in their lives controlled for so long that they no longer know who they are. Sometimes we are dealing with the shell of a person.

Recognise you deserve more. If someone calls you a name once, that's too much. They might be on their best behaviour for a time, but they will regress back to their normal ways and the cycle begins again.

Speak out. Talk to a friend or your family, but be aware they may find your partner extremely charming because they haven't seen the other side of them, so might dismiss your worries. So you could also speak to a trusted colleague or contact a support service like ours – get online and find help in your local area.

Remember, it's possible to lead a happy life again.

It can be hard to look to the future, but I've never spoken to anyone who left the perpetrator and regretted it.

Did you know?

Coercive control has been a crime in the UK since 2015 and carries a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment. Perpetrators can be partners, ex-partners or family members, regardless of whether they live with the victim.

- For more on coercive control and sources of support visit fearfree.org.uk/coercive-control

Bite-sized BOOSTERS

Chef-approved healthy
snacks to make in the block

► FITNESS enthusiast and regimental catering warrant officer for 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, WO2 Sam Coote (RLC), has a host of nutritious, easy-to-make recipes up his sleeve to stave off hunger while keeping health goals on track.

Here, he shares his favourite protein-packed option for in between sessions – all you need is a blender.



Coconut and chocolate energy balls

Ingredients

150g whole nuts
80g desiccated coconut
4 tbsp nut butter
2 tbsp cacao powder
1 tbsp coconut oil
80g dates (with pits removed)

Method

- 1 Add the nuts and 60g of the desiccated coconut to a blender/food processor and blitz for a minute or two until a flour starts to form
- 2 Add in the nut butter, cacao powder and coconut oil then blend for another minute until combined
- 3 Add the dates in one by one while the food processor is still on
- 4 Keep blending until everything combines together to form a sticky dough
- 5 Using your hands, roll out the mixture into about 20 balls
- 6 Spread the remaining desiccated coconut out on a plate and roll the balls in it until covered
- 7 Enjoy! Tip: you can keep these in the fridge for up to three weeks, or in the freezer for months — just defrost fully before eating

3 more of WO2 Coote's grab-and-go favourites...

Humus and veggie snack jars

Half a tub of ready-made hummus (100g) plus a cup of veg of your choice (cucumber, carrots, peppers or celery). This packs a 4g protein boost for under 200 calories a serving.

Travel snack pack

Keep this in an airtight container at your desk or for on the move: 63g sweet and savoury beef jerky, 33g dried apricot halves and 21g of raw almonds. At 34g carbs, 30g protein and 14g fat it takes care of all your macro for 259kcals.

Apples with peanut butter dip

This will make four portions of dip. Mix 100ml low fat vanilla yoghurt, five heaped tsp peanut butter, five tsp of honey, a pinch of ground cinnamon. Eat one serving with two sliced apples (189kcal in total).

How to nail your LinkedIn profile

Tips to stand out from the crowd

► RESEARCH suggests that jobseekers with a presence on LinkedIn have a 71 per cent higher chance of securing an interview. Try the following advice for grabbing recruiters' attention from online resettlement resource Vets Hub (vetshub.co.uk).

Customise your URL

The default link to your profile will be some numbers like this: linkedin.com/in/123456789/

Update it to show your name, for example, linkedin.com/in/john-smith/

It looks better and is easier to search on Google.

Use a high-quality profile picture

Whether you want to appear in uniform, in civvies or on top of a mountain is down to personal choice. **What matters is giving a good first impression.**

General rules include using a high-resolution image and making sure your face is central and easily identifiable. Also, smile! Or at least look natural – no 1,000-yard stares.

Choose your headline carefully

This will determine if recruiters keep reading your profile, and whether they find you in the first place. **If you're targeting a specific sector, use keywords that relate (read a few job**

Want to know more?

For more in-depth how-tos, plus further advice on how to fully exploit LinkedIn's sections, visit Vets Hub via this QR code:



descriptions and look out for frequently repeated terms).

Say what you do upfront – for example, your job title or the effect you have.

Sell yourself in the "About" section

Highlight what you do, your achievements and what you could offer employers. Don't just make this a summary of your career – that can be seen under job experience. **Pack in keywords and close with one or two memorable lines. This can be personal or more professional.** Explain what might excite you or where you're looking to add value.

Translate your job title into civvy speak

Military roles mean nothing to most civilians. **Instead of "section commander" or "commanding officer" use "team leader", including the Army description in brackets** so that people with a Forces background still understand it.

Fine tune your "Experience" section

This is like the corresponding part of a CV, but don't make it boring. **As well as a brief**

description of each job, talk about what you achieved

– how did you make the organisation better or create a positive effect? Use figures to make it more tangible – did you save money or manage a budget? How many people did you lead?

Keep your basic info up to date

This includes location preferences, job types, target roles and your status – when can you start? **Leave recruiters a short note – what's your situation, what do you want?** All of this makes sure time isn't wasted on the wrong roles.

Final word to the wise...

If you're still serving make sure you're up to speed on the Army's social media rules. Don't "like" or comment on anything controversial – it will be seen and may put people off. Also, make sure the function "Share key profile updates" is switched off. Constant notifications will annoy observers for a start, but it may tip your boss off that you're thinking of changing jobs before you're ready.

Gym buddy

What you might not know about the smartphone tool helping troops stay on top of phys

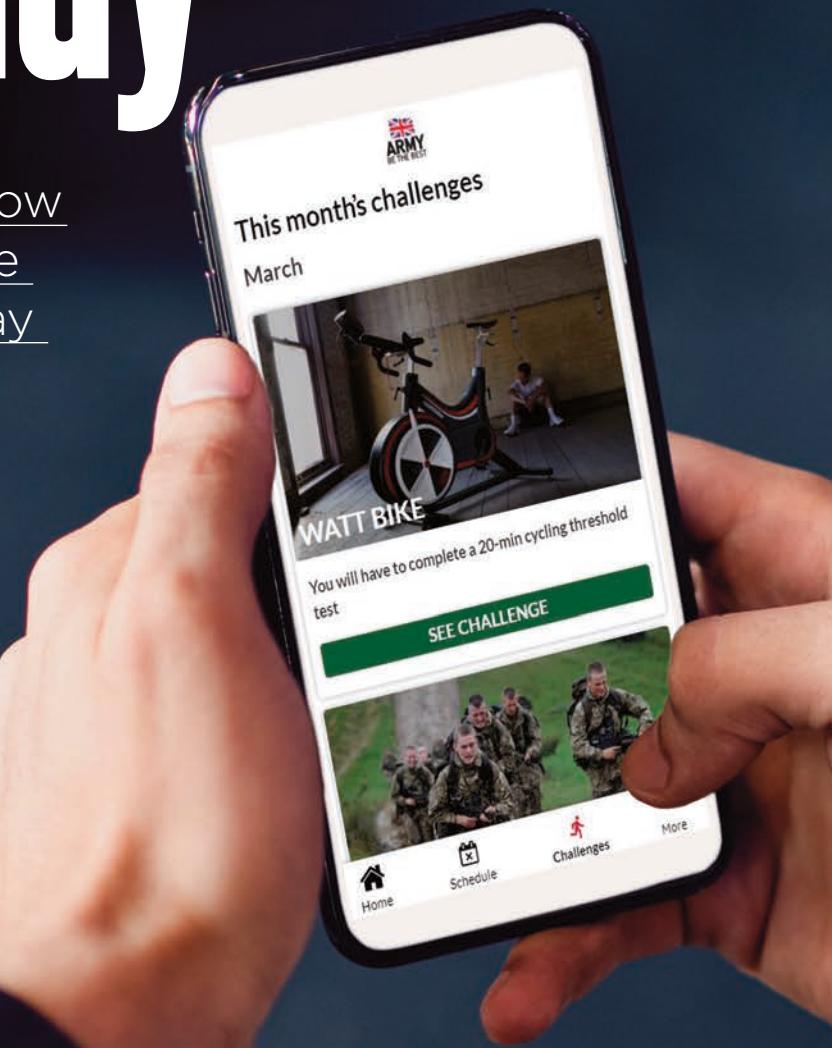
► LOTS of health and wellbeing tools are available for download these days, but the *My Army Fitness App* is one of the few tailored to the needs of troops.

Whether on leave or ops, soldiers have a duty to stay in shape. And this is where the Service's smartphone solution comes into its own – providing a range of expert-approved exercises.

It has certainly been proving an invaluable addition to the kitbag since its launch last year, according to Army training analyst Sgt Ryan Clelland (RAPTC).

"The app can really help in situations where you have limited ability for phys," he said. "You might, for example, be on a course for a few weeks or deployed in a place where conditions are difficult – it can help whatever you're doing."

Here are five things you might not know about the Defence Gateway tool...



1 It's tailor made

The app looks at a soldier as an individual and will build a programme of three or four sessions a week to meet your specific needs. You can input physical limitations if you've been injured too.

2 It's mindful of location

Personnel can specify the type of training equipment available to them – or just opt for bodyweight training – and the app will generate a schedule accordingly. "Whether you have a gym or just a Bergan, it will come up with a solution," Sgt Clelland points out.

3 You can watch and learn

Exercises are broken down into easy instructions – with guidance on how to perform them. There are videos to walk you through as well.

4 Top cover is available

Troops can have the oversight of real-world instructors. "There is a feature that allows PTIs to keep tabs on a soldier's programme," says Sgt Clelland. "And those exercising can leave comments for them to look at."

5 It's perfectly portable

This tool only takes up as much space and weight as your smartphone. "Keep it to hand and you'll maintain the training rhythm," Sgt Clelland advises.

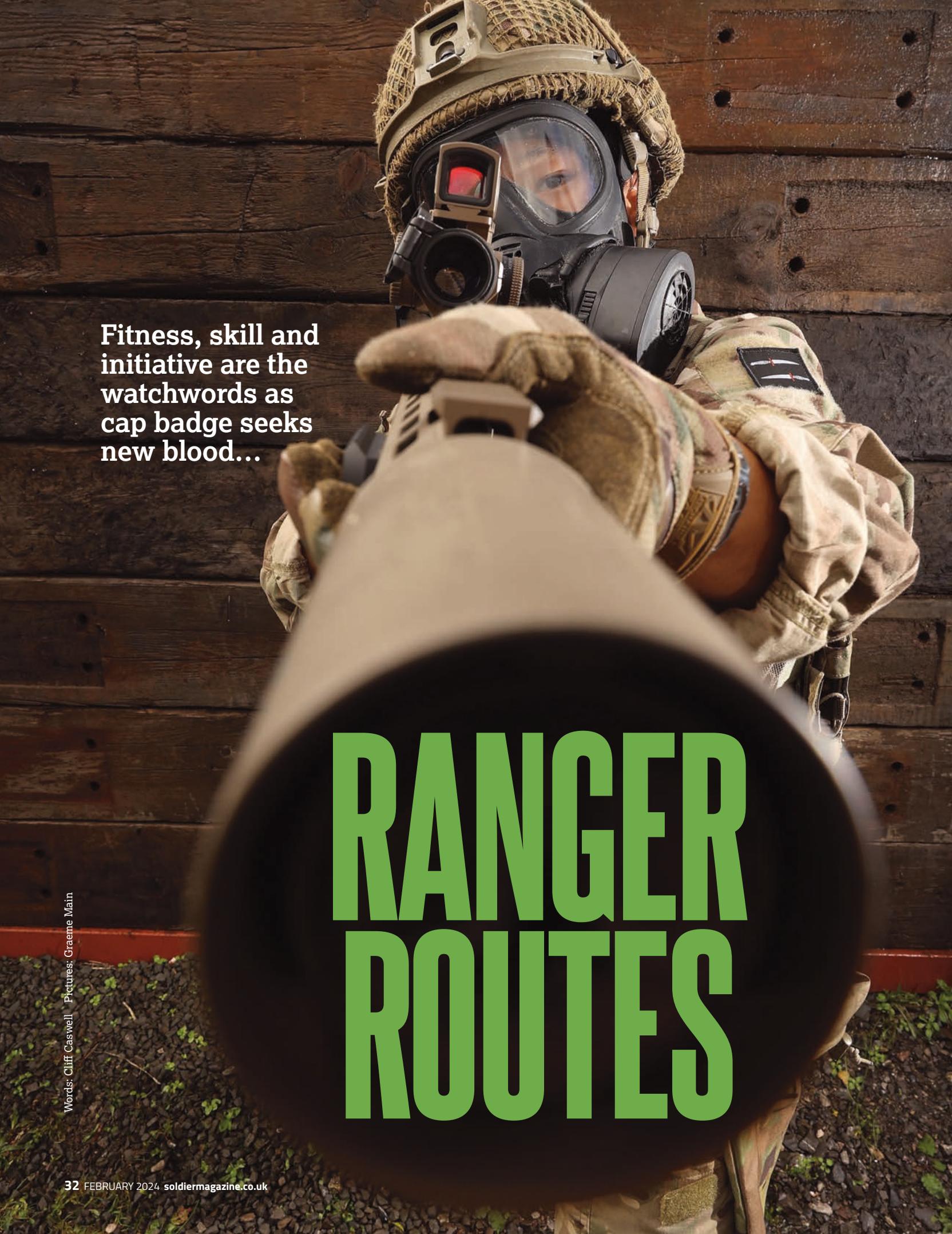


● Find the *My Army Fitness* App on the Defence Gateway now

L403A1 - AIW







Fitness, skill and initiative are the watchwords as cap badge seeks new blood...

RANGER ROUTES

Words: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Graeme Main



OVERSEAS operations were once a given for new soldiers – personnel handing in their paperwork in the mid-2000s could be assured they would find themselves rapidly on a deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan.

Fast-forward two decades, however, and the situation has changed completely.

While a smaller Army remains heavily committed around the world – and outings to Eastern Europe still critical to Western defence – operations in far-flung countries are now fewer and further between.

But The Ranger Regiment is proving a game-changer for tour-hungry troops.

With a remit that includes everything from training other nations to reconnaissance and conducting actions on the ground themselves, those signing up are guaranteed frequent and fulfilling deployments.

And as the unit's second birthday coincides with an announcement that its four battalions will work more closely with Nato from now on, the future certainly looks interesting for this cap badge.

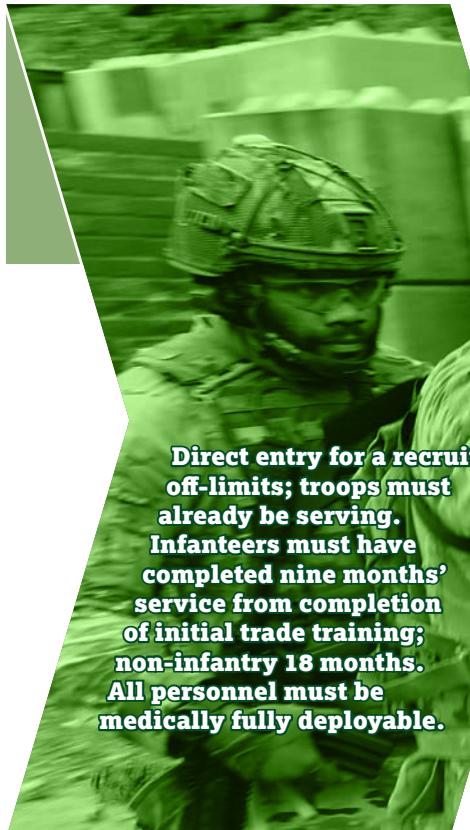
Once tasked, rangers can find themselves in some pretty remote places where key responsibilities are pushed down to the junior levels.

A lance corporal, for example, could be working without close supervision with another state's military force.

For this reason, transferees to the regiment must be able to think on their feet.

However, the path to joining is not easy. ▶

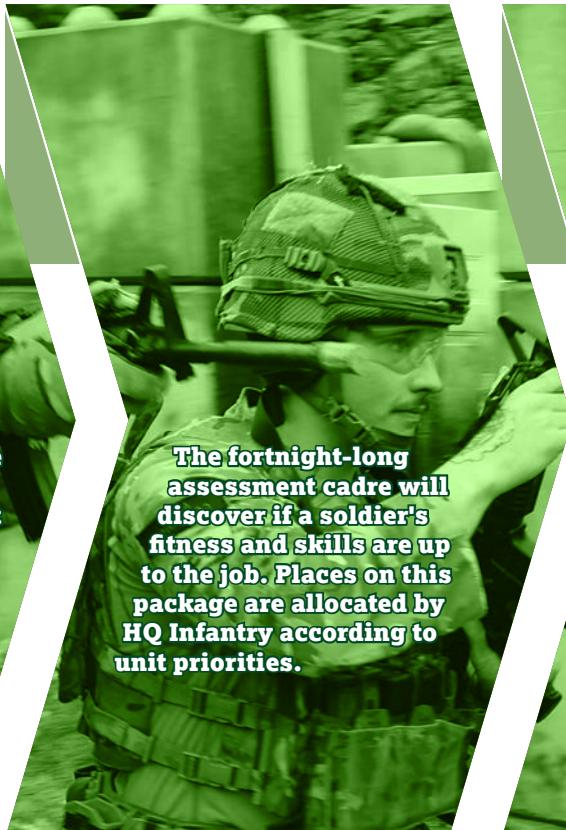
RANGERS: THE WAY IN



Direct entry for a recruit is off-limits; troops must already be serving. Infantry must have completed nine months' service from completion of initial trade training; non-infantry 18 months. All personnel must be medically fully deployable.



Before deciding if the role is right for them, troops can attend a ranger insight day delivered by the Army Special Operations Brigade (see Defence Connect). These give more info on the regiment and prep them for assessment.



The fortnight-long assessment cadre will discover if a soldier's fitness and skills are up to the job. Places on this package are allocated by HQ Infantry according to unit priorities.

» Each of the four battalions has a broad responsibility for a different part of the world.

The 1st and 2nd are aligned respectively to West and East Africa. Meanwhile, the 3rd is focused on Europe – including the Balkans – and the 4th on the Middle East.

New joiners find themselves placed in a system called the operational readiness mechanism, which is essentially an ongoing cycle of training and deployment.

In this way, they are likely to find their way out on operations

pretty quickly.

And the training is varied. Most recently, troops learned more about the demolitions trade as they exercised in a disused quarry in Westbury under expert sapper guidance (read page 22 for more on these skills).

As the images in this article reflect, such a varied footprint of responsibilities means that commanders are looking for quality of mind as well as fitness.

Robust soldiers who are confident working in austere conditions, while carrying a fair bit of equipment over a lot of ground, are required.

But the nature of the job also means they must be able to think and act for themselves, particularly as they have the UK's reputation to look after.

Ranger Regiment bosses told *Soldier* there has been an uptick in people coming forward to attend its insight days recently.

But with world events remaining as unpredictable as ever, and plenty of travel opportunities on offer, more individuals are required.

For further information on the unit and application process visit The Ranger Regiment page on Defence Connect. ■





ADVENTURES

FROZEN

Report: Becky Clark Pictures: Graeme Main and Lukasz Warzecha

Exps are still on ice,
but courses continue
amid spending cuts



“

I think it would push
me out the door if
I couldn't do AT

”



TRAINING OUT?



ADVENTUROUS training has always been as much a part of Army life as combat drills and marching – a welcome break from the frequently tough job of soldiering.

So when the Service announced last autumn that such pursuits would be curtailed to save money, there was widespread dismay.

Expeditions that did not already have funding in place were called off and word spread that AT had been stopped across the board.

But as Commander Adventurous Training Group (Army), Col Neil Wilson, was keen to point out, that wasn't the whole story.

"There are two parts to AT – courses and expeditions," he explained.

"Some loose language has been used so people have said both are cancelled, but that's factually incorrect.

"Courses have not ceased, and personnel should continue to try and book places because there is so much on offer throughout the winter and spring."

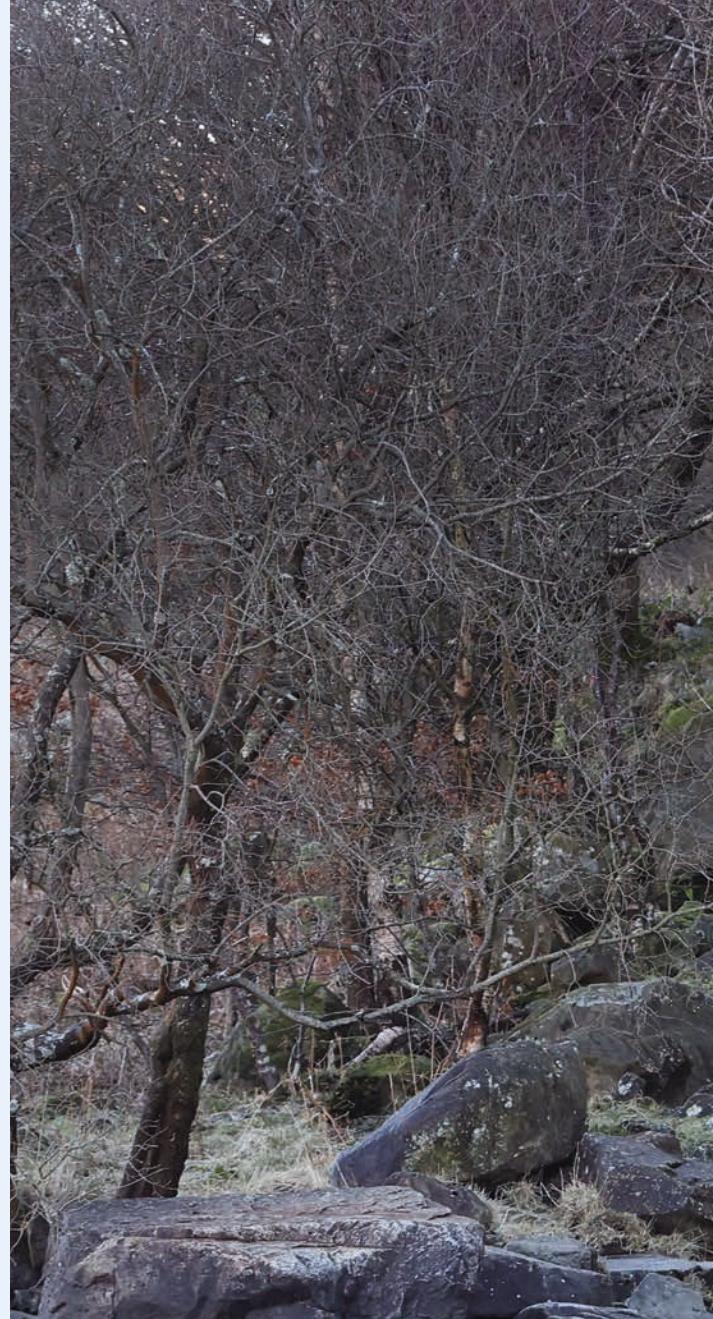
For AT centres across the UK and further afield it may be business as usual, but the officer admitted the loss of expeds – for example, offshore sailing trips to the Mediterranean and Canary Islands for 400 troops – had been a bitter blow.

"It's hugely disappointing, both to those who have put a lot of work into organising and planning trips, and the individuals who won't be deploying," he continued.

"The impact could be quite catastrophic in terms of personal development, which is the fundamental reason why we do adventurous training.

"The leadership and resilience benefits will be lost to hundreds if not thousands of individuals – and that, in turn, has an impact on recruitment and retention."

It is a sentiment shared by personnel in the wider AT community, including a group of eight soldiers currently attending courses at the Joint Service Mountain »



“
The impact
could be quite
catastrophic
in terms of
personal
development
”



» Training Centre in Anglesey.

The three-month “zero-to-hero” packages that *Soldier* dropped in on qualify students to be able to teach foundation-level mountain biking or canoeing and kayaking to others.

Among them was Pte Joshua Ogilvie (Para) who, along with five colleagues from 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, will lead courses in Cyprus for Reservists from sister unit, the 4th Battalion, when they deploy on UN peacekeeping duties later this year.

The 32-year-old was unequivocal on the importance of such activities for Servicemen and women.

“AT is a huge part of the culture,” he said. “It’s why I joined. I still remember the adverts about ‘be like Frank’. He was off skiing, kite surfing, walking along the beach with a girl.

“Especially in the Infantry, none of us signed up to sit behind a desk. Coming away and doing something like this is a breath of fresh air – it resets you and you go back to your role keen and happy.”

Further north in Scotland, there is a similarly packed programme in place, with courses at military centres booked to capacity until March.

Capt Will Brant (RAPTC), officer commanding of the Joint Service Mountain Training Wing in Ballachulish, conceded the savings measures had led to frustration among his peers, but stressed that staff were working hard to make the best of things.

As well as a recent winter mountaineering development package for instructors from the Royal Army Physical Training Corps, additional courses are being laid on to enable as many troops as possible to get a taste of the sport despite the reduction in other opportunities.

“We’re open for business – if you can spare someone, we will train them,” he said.

“Normally we run two or three foundation courses per week. Now we’re doing four – and we’re bringing in additional instructors and kit to try and facilitate that lowest level.”

While slots are fully booked in the short-term, he urged units and individuals to apply all the same because operational demands often lead to last minute cancellations. And his message to commanders questioning the point of freeing up people to learn skills for expeds that may not happen was three-fold; not only is it vital to maintain the throughput of qualified personnel for such time that the financial situation eases, but this may be the only taste soldiers get of AT for the time being – and above all, those who do attend will return to their day jobs as more effective soldiers.

“Units get back a better human being,” he added.

“And that can just be because they’ve had a release valve for a week, or because they’ve upskilled themselves and are now better at navigation or looking after themselves in the field.

“The list is endless. It doesn’t matter if you’re a senior officer sat in a headquarters or a junior tom, you’ll have been exposed to risk and conditions you haven’t”

GROUND VIEW

We asked troops how much the availability of AT affects their plans to stay in the Army...

“

If AT wasn’t available, it wouldn’t change my mind about serving in the Reserves – I would stay because I love the job that I do. But I can see some people signing off if the cutbacks continue. It’s about keeping the work-fun ratio.

Sgt Colin McDougall, RAPTC

”

“

I think it would push me out of the door if I couldn’t do AT. It’s all well and good doing straight up soldiering, but if you can’t step back from it, you haven’t got the chance to recover from the demands of your role in unit.

Pte Michael Cummins, Para

”





“

It's game-changing – more than rank or pay. The experience is something the Army can provide that other jobs can't. You can make a lot of money working in an office, but one thing you can't do is get paid to go kayaking or mountain biking.

Pte Joshua Ogilvie, Para

”

“

Having that option to get away from your role is a must for retention. It keeps people fresh and working to the best of their ability. I was debating whether to leave, but knowing I was coming kayaking and would be learning skills I'd wanted to do for a long time – while being paid to do it – fuels me wanting to stay in the Army.

Pte Lewis Cotterell, Para

”



» regularly seen before, and you'll come away a more motivated individual."

As for expeditions, aside for a handful given the go-ahead prior to the announcement of cutbacks, Col Wilson acknowledged that the forecast remained uncertain, with restrictions on activity expected to continue into the next financial year.

Regardless, he appealed to units to carry on planning so that they can "submit business cases as soon as the brakes come off".

In particular, he said organisers should think creatively, while also making use of military facilities around the UK and in Germany or Cyprus.

"It's going to be much cheaper if people use existing resources," he continued.

"Our lodges in Bavaria, for example, are set aside purely for unit activity – all they have to do is get themselves there and bring their own instructors. Everything else is provided for them."

"Skiing expeds to the Alps are always going to be expensive, however there are others you can do for peanuts. Troops can go and stay in a bothy in Scotland and do winter mountaineering – the cost is next-to-nothing, but the benefits are enormous."

The leadership skills and increased resilience personnel gain from pushing themselves in a forum other than soldiering are undeniable – therefore the axing of much, albeit not all, of the adventurous training offer has certainly been a bitter pill to swallow.

But it's clear those charged with its delivery are working overtime to ensure as many troops as possible get to test their limits in the great outdoors.

And it's equally clear that all eyes will be on the purse-holders, willing normal service to resume so that many more don't miss out. Watch this space. ■



“
Units get
back a better
human being
”





AT Plan B

What can units do in the interim?

- Carry on planning so that business cases can be submitted when restrictions lift
- Consider cheaper options such as Service facilities around the UK, Germany and Cyprus
- Explore alternate sources of capital, including sponsorship and regimental or other non-public funds
- Load personnel onto AT courses – visit the ATG(A) page of Defence Connect and click on the online booking system



READY READY FOR WAR

Personnel strive for winning strategy as momentum builds in Army's Warhammer community





IT IS a freezing morning in Warminster and talk among the assembled personnel is focused on how to deploy armoured vehicles, fire support teams and elite units, among other assets.

However, these are not the final orders for a dawn attack on the neighbouring Salisbury Plain but the preamble to Exercise Rhino Hammer, in which more than 120 soldiers from across the Army will use miniature figures and character models to fight for supremacy on a battlefield of the distant future.

Representatives from the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and US Air Force have also answered the call to arms in what is one of the military's largest *Warhammer 40,000* events to date.

First staged in 2021, the competition attracted just 25 players from four units, but has rapidly expanded since.

A year later the number rose to 120 and the latest incarnation – won by the team from 3 Regiment, Army Air Corps at FactoruM's warehouse-turned-gaming centre – easily matched that level.

With *Warhammer 40,000* being the most popular miniature wargame in the world these figures are not surprising and those charged with staging events in the Service realm are now working on plans for their biggest contest yet. ▶





What is Warhammer 40,000?

The most popular miniature wargame in the world, produced by board game company Games Workshop

Set in the 41st millennium, the premise features warring factions from ancient civilisations and upstart enemies who fight battles across innumerable worlds

It is a tabletop strategy game in which

players enact battles using miniature models or warriors and fighting vehicles. The playing area is a model battlefield comprising buildings, hills, trees and other terrain features

Each player takes turns moving their model warriors around the battlefield to fight their opponent. The outcome is determined using dice and a process of simple arithmetic



In Numbers

£5,600

Amount raised for military mental health charities – including Models for Heroes – at Ex Rhino Hammer events to date



» Thanks to support from the Army's lived experience innovation fund, they have been able to purchase 100 terrain sets and 100 mats that will allow them to host 200 players at a venue in Catterick at the back end of this year.

It is an ambitious, yet achievable, goal. But given the stigma surrounding the Warhammer community personnel have not always been quick to nail their colours to the mast. However, now word of its presence in Army circles is out, the scene is quickly growing.

"In 2014 I was one of a bunch of guys from 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers who were playing in a garage," Cpl Matthew Cuckson (RLC), organiser of Exercise Rhino Hammer and one of the founders of the Tri-Service Wargames Association, told *Soldier* during a break in play.

"I then transferred to the Royal Logistic Corps and started a unit club.

"I heard The Rifles also had something going on in the background and we then started to think about how we could bring people together.

"I had played as a kid but stopped when I joined the Army. When I went to 1 RRF and found them playing I thought it was really cool. It has since gone from eight people to having 27 units here, all with five on a team.

"There is a bit of a stigma attached to this, especially if you are from the Infantry, and it is something that not everyone gets. I have done boxing and rugby and was more than happy to stand in front of my regiment and ask 'does anyone else play'?

"The strategy side of the game transfers to the day job and helps soldiers understand the planning phase of operations and what officers go through. And there are



“
The most important thing is to create a community
”

real benefits in terms of mental health; you are with people in a like-minded community and having the time to switch off and just focus on painting a model has so many advantages.”

Warhammer 40,000 is just one pursuit in a wider wargaming scene that includes the likes of *Bolt Action*, the *Napoleonic Wars* and *Age of Sigmar*.

The pursuit has received welcome backing from Army Sergeant Major, WO1 Paul Carney, and last year a 30-strong cohort from the US military crossed the pond to lock horns with their UK counterparts and were soundly defeated.

Cpl Cuckson believes this is a taste of things to come and is hopeful of a return trip in the near future, before branching further afield.

“We are looking to host our first Army inter-unit competition and have been in touch with other armed forces around the world,” he continued. “The ultimate aim is to go to the Las Vegas Open.

“However, the most important thing is to create a community. I want to help others; if someone wants to run an event at their unit, we can offer advice with things like admin instructions.

“The Coldstream Guards have just got their own kit, as have 16 Medical Regiment. The crucial part now is that we all keep in contact.”

SSgt Kris Owen (RDG) is another to have immersed himself in the world of Warhammer but unlike most he is a relative newcomer to the game. That said, he has made swift progress and is now part of the Vanguard Tactics team that streams coaching sessions to more than 57,000 subscribers on its YouTube channel.

“I started during Covid, out of boredom more than anything,” he explained. “I had moved to Warminster, found out about FactoruM and began playing. »





“The strategy side of the game transfers to the day job”

» “I had been an avid Xbox player but wanted something to engage with the people around me. With this I can sit and paint models and it is something I can take on tour.

“Warhammer in the Army is almost like Fight Club – the first rule of Warhammer is that you don’t talk about Warhammer. But we are fighting against that stigma; when people at units find out about it there is normally zero response to start with, but they gradually come out of the woodwork.

“In my regiment we now have more than 20 players and when we deploy to Estonia later this year, we will have our personal area for the game. It has allowed me to bring something for the junior ranks and when you are living on top of each other it offers a release and a break for an hour or so.

“There were those who would not talk about it through fear of being stereotyped and it has been great to break those barriers down – it is good to see the lads having fun and enjoying themselves.

“People don’t care anymore. If, five to ten years ago, a soldier said to me they play Warhammer I’d tell them to get out on the tank park instead. But it’s now part of pop culture and with the likes of Henry Cavill revealing they play, it is almost cool to be a nerd.”

Mental boost

The Army’s Warhammer community has forged close ties with charitable organisation Models for Heroes.

Founder Malcolm Childs was among the interested spectators at FactoruM and spoke to *Soldier* about the benefits the art of model making offers to serving personnel and veterans.

“It is a communal setting, where people can get together and not have to talk about work or military stuff,” he explained. “Research has shown it can benefit mental health, particularly in sufferers of PTSD.

“We provide the kits and resources for them to do this. Those who have been discharged can find themselves with nothing to do and may not have a hobby, so why not build something and be part of a community?

“They already have an insight into working with vehicles and in scale modelling it is those little details that are so important.”

Childs started the initiative six years ago after volunteering with Help for Heroes’ rolling recovery programme at Tedworth House, where he noticed the positive impact model making sessions was having.

Models for Heroes are reliant on donations that are then sent to those who want to try their hand in anything from railway layouts to Spitfires.

“We run sessions every other Wednesday here at FactoruM, and have 50 others around the UK, where people can come and make models,” he continued. “In 2023 we sent out more than 50 boxes of models and it is beautiful to see personnel and veterans spending time together and having fun.”

For more details visit modelsforheroes.org.uk



JOIN THE FOLD
Visit the Tri-Service Wargames Association
pages on Facebook, Instagram
or Defence Connect



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BETTER CHOICES

Do you know the real value of your Armed Forces pension?

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Many of those serving have little idea of the real value of their Armed Forces pension, or how much they would need to pay into a private pension to gain a similar income. As an example, an annual pension of £15,000 would cost around £300,000 at 2024 values. What's more, your service pension rises in line with inflation. And of course, the longer you serve, the greater your pension value.

That's why we caution anyone thinking of leaving, to find out the facts before they decide. Staying for the optimum period and choosing the right point in time to leave can make a great difference to your future income.

Many of our growing number of Members (now more than 66,000) ask our Forces Pensions Consultants for periodic updates on their pension value and guidance about how to make decisions that enhance its value. For example, now that everyone is serving on AFPS15, pension top-ups are available and are well worth considering.

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VETERANS'
GATEWAY



“As a people focused organisation, our people are vital to our success”

We run a number of initiatives to support our colleagues and offer new opportunities for Service Leavers too.

Apprenticeships

Our team members are the greatest asset we have in our business. We want to grow and retain the best possible Side by Side team that we can by maximising the skills of our existing colleagues. One of the ways we can do this is by offering a range of apprenticeships. A number of our team members are already involved in apprenticeship schemes covering areas such as Business Improvement Techniques, Business and Administration, Hospitality Management, Support Cleaning Services and Supervisory Skills.

Mentoring programme

We have a network of nine Aramark Armed Forces Employee Community volunteer mentors who are employees as well as veterans and spouses. They've received exclusive mentor training to; support Aramark's new work experience programme for service leavers and the wider Aramark Armed Forces community where possible. Aramark have created an 8-12-week work experience programme to benefit service leavers in their resettlement period.



Work Experience

Aramark have created a work experience placement programme to offer Armed Forces service leavers the opportunity to undertake 8 -12 weeks of work placement within Aramark UK. This is known as a Civilian Work Attachment (CWA) to a service leaver.

The aims of the programme are:

- To provide the service leaver with sector specific (catering and facilities services) work experience, offering insight into our roles and our industry.
- To help the service leaver to identify if their skills and experience are suited to the chosen position
- To support the service leaver to develop an understanding of the civilian work environment
- To support the service leaver to understand the culture of our organisation and whether they will be a good fit.

For more information head over to our website

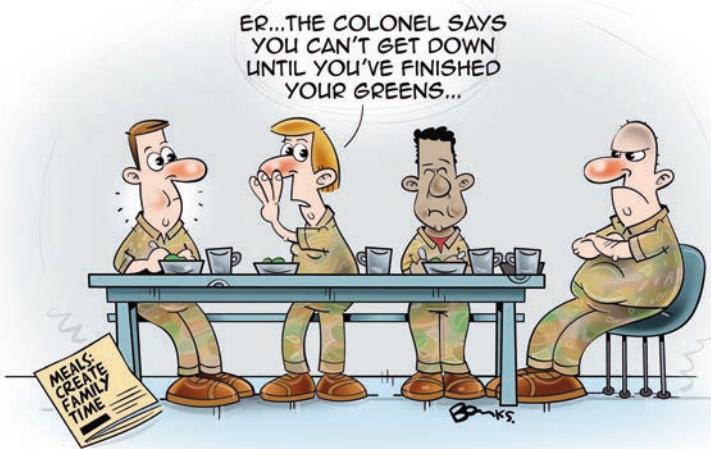


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We Move Together As One



'The way we dine needs to change'

ONE way we could improve team communication and mental health in the Army is to make changes to the way we dine.

I don't think our soldiers eat together enough and our cookhouses are not being used as a means of creating social cohesion.

Teams that take meals together communicate more openly and perform better, just like a happy family.

I get to visit a number of camps in my job and it always disappoints me to see how few soldiers eat in groups, especially in the evenings.

I always ask myself whether I'd want my daughter or son to eat there and, unfortunately, the answer is often "no" due to the unwelcoming atmosphere.

We should improve the design of cookhouses and introduce comfortable breakout areas so that troops are encouraged to get together for meals

or even for a brew. These can be minor changes and don't need a new budget.

They should also provide an identifiable team table, at least section size, that can easily be reserved.

And at lunchtime all ranks should be allowed to dine in the cookhouse, with officers and senior NCOs permitted to eat in this area at least once a week.

They should be able to request that the master chef make a communal dish just for the group reserving the space.

This will need chain of command support and proactive junior NCOs to lead the way.

I'm sure these measures would make a positive difference and if you need an example of a cracking cookhouse that's already introduced some of these features visit Kendrew Barracks in Cottesmore.

– Maj James Moloney, RE

“
Teams that take meals together perform better
”

Why destroying cultural treasures is a matter for the law

● IT IS not just medical facilities that are being illegally targeted by Russian forces in Ukraine (*Soldier*, December 2023).

According to Unesco, more than 330 Ukrainian cultural property sites have been damaged and looted since February 2022. Both of these types of unlawful actions are war crimes.

The law should deter, but it cannot prevent those intent on executing criminal acts from committing them.

However, the law can hold perpetrators and commanders accountable for their actions at war crimes trials and tribunals.

If evidence can be gathered, preserved and presented to court then accountability – albeit after the fact – can be achieved.

All armed forces would benefit from increased awareness, training and exercising of their legal obligations towards cultural property during armed



A church in Donetsk hit by Russian artillery

Picture: Shutterstock

conflict and occupation – and in the practical implications of these obligations.

We fight to protect and preserve our freedoms, our way of life and our culture.

The manifestation of the latter is the nation's movable, immovable and intangible cultural heritage which, in part, makes us who we are.

– Lt Col Tim Purbrick (RL), British Cultural Property Protection Unit CO

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

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BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know



COMPETITIONS

DECEMBER 2023

HOAY winner (Majority Bluetooth party speaker): Max C, Chelmsford, Essex

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



SEARCHLINE

Applications are open for the SSAFA short break scheme.

The free trips are available to serving (including Reservist) families with a child who has an additional need or disability, be it developmental, emotional, behavioural or physical. The outings in the Lake District and Exmoor allow Forces families to undertake activities including kayaking, rock climbing, horse riding and archery together. For more details visit ssafa.org.uk and click on "get help" and "military families".



WELFARE

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

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Army HIVE

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

army.mod.uk/hives

Forcesline

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

0800 731 4880

ssafa.org.uk/get-help/forcesline

Army Welfare Service

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

ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

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

Drinkline

A free, confidential helpline 0300 123 1110

NHS support

nhs.uk/livewell

BULLYING/HARASSMENT/ DISCRIMINATION

Army Mediation Service

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

Army Speak Out Helpline

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

Defence BHD Helpline

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

CHILDCARE/CARING/FAMILIES

Army Families Federation

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

Flexible working has been introduced by the Army to help personnel tailor their work-life balance. This includes arrangements such as remote working, variable

finish times and restricted separation. Read more in the *Flexible Working and You* guide on Modnet. Regulars can find out how this impacts pay and benefits at discovermybenefits.mod.gov.uk

DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

Forces Pension Society

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

forcespensionsociety.org

Joining Forces Credit Union

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

Money Helper

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

National Debtline

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

nationaldebtline.org

StepChange Debt Charity

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

0800 138 1111

stepchange.org.uk

GAMBLING

National Gambling Helpline

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

0808 8020 133

GRIEF

Cruse Bereavement Support

0808 808 1677

SSAFA support groups

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

HOUSING

Joint Service Housing Advice Office

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

07814 612120
rc-pers-jshao-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services
01748 833797
spaces.org.uk
Veterans Gateway
A first point of contact for veterans seeking support
veteransgateway.org.uk

INJURY/SICKNESS
Personnel Recovery Centres
These centres can be found across the United Kingdom. To find out more

about your local service, speak to your unit welfare team, search for Army Recovery Capability on Defence Connect or send an email to rc-pers-arc-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk

LONELINESS

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

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

Samaritans

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

116 123 samaritans.org

The Royal British Legion

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

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

There's always someone you can talk to. Speak to your friends or family, boss or padre, unit welfare staff (details above), medical officer or GP. There are a number of charities and other organisations that can also provide support and they include:

Combat Stress 24/7 Helpline
0800 138 1619

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

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

> *continued overleaf*

HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU?

No. 981



TEN details have been changed in this picture of the honorary colonel of the new 215 (Scottish) Multirole Medical Regiment, Dame Katherine Grainger, inspecting the unit at its formation parade at Edinburgh Castle.

Circle all the differences on the left image and send the panel to HOAY 981, *Soldier*, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU along with your contact details – including email address – by February 29.

A photocopy is also 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

The first correct entry drawn

after the closing date will win a G2X Tactical flashlight, courtesy of Edgar Brothers (edgarbrothers.com).

This bit of kit excels at the single most critical task of any tactical light by providing a brilliant, penetrating 600-lumen beam with a touch of its press/click tailcap.

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It is equipped with a robust LED precision reflector that creates a smooth, optimised beam with plenty of reach and surround light.

The winner's name will appear in the April 2024 issue and all the usual competition rules apply (see details on the opposite page).



BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know

> continued from page 53

NHS

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

Op Courage

A specialist NHS service for Armed Forces leavers, Reservists, veterans and their families. Search for "Op Courage" on nhs.uk to find your local team.

Samaritans

116 123 samaritans.org

The Ripple Pond

A self-help support network for relatives of physically or psychologically injured troops and veterans
0333 900 1028 theripplepond.org

Togetherall

A safe, online community where people support each other anonymously
togetherall.com

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN/ABUSE

Aurora New Dawn

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

ManKind

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

Relate

Relationship support relate.org.uk

RESETTLEMENT

Last year the **Career Transition Partnership (CTP)** supported more than 310,000 Service leavers in its 25 years as the official provider of Armed Forces resettlement. Regardless of service, time served or reason for leaving, all members of the Armed Forces can benefit from CTP support. Here are **six top tips** to ensure you make a smooth transition to civy street:

1. Prepare yourself and get engaged early. Too often the CTP hears from workshop attendees who wished they'd started sooner. Remember, regardless of your reason for leaving, you're entitled to CTP support – embrace it.

2. Make a plan. Confirm your timelines, set yourself "smart" goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based), and identify what path you want to pursue. CTP career consultants can help you on a one-to-one basis to ensure you find the right option.

3. Avoid making snap decisions. Instead, research the sector you want to work in and people to talk to. The CTP team can support you by introducing you to a wide range of employers and providing detailed guides on various sectors as well as an ongoing supply of vacancies.

4. Identify what skills gaps you

might have and give yourself time to mitigate against these through some vocational training or a civilian work attachment. The CTP can advise and offer a wide range of qualifications and experience for you to add to your already considerable bank of transferable skills.

5. Explore and promote your brand. Who are you beyond the uniform? How are you going to let the world know you exist? The CTP will work with you to develop and hone your CV and LinkedIn profile to ensure you make a good first impression.

6. Perform well in interviews by practising with friends, family, your network and online digital tools. Let the CTP support you so you land the right outcome at the right time.

Where to start with resettlement

- Speak with your local unit resettlement information staff, who can offer advice on your entitlement.
- Contact your Service resettlement adviser (SRA) to discuss your resettlement package and available funding. You can find their details on ctp.org.uk/contact-us/sra-contact
- Register with the CTP via JPA and one of the team will contact you to book your first appointment.

CTP TRAINING COURSES 2023/24

- LCL L3 Certificate in Refrigeration, Air Conditioning & Heat Pump Systems
- Domestic Electrical Installation Full Scope
- 18th Edition Wiring Regulations
- C&G 2391-52 Level 3 Award in Inspection and Testing
- C&G 2391-52 Inspection & Testing Resit
- EAL L3 Certificate in Traction and Rolling Stock Systems
- EAL L3 Award in Programmable Logic Controllers
- IMI L3 Certificate in Cycle Maintenance
- Hard Landscaping and Bricklaying
- Plastering
- Plumbing
- Property Maintenance
- Cisco Certified Network Associate

- CompTIA A+
- CompTIA Network+ and Security+
- CompTIA Cyber Security Analyst
- Strategic Finance for Non-Financial Managers
- Executive Mini MBA
- Director Development Programme
- QMS ISO 9001:2015 Lead Auditor Level 3
- Level 5 Certificate in Service Improvement (Lean Six Sigma – Green Belt)
- APMG Change Management
- Management of Risk
- IWFM L4 Certificate in Facilities Management
- CIPD Level 5 Associate Diploma in People Management
- First Aid at Work Level 3 Award
- Managing Safely (IOSH)
- NEBOSH National General Certificate (SQA Level 6)
- NEBOSH Certificate in Fire Safety
- NEBOSH Health & Safety Management for Construction

Information about all training courses can be found on ctp.org.uk and troops can attend any of the below employment fairs in 2024 across the UK. Book via ctpevents@ctp.org.uk



CTP provides support for up to two years post-discharge, during which time troops can access its full suite of support. After two years, you have life-long employment support through the Forces Employment Charity (forcesemployment.org.uk).

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REVIEWS

PICK OF THE MONTH

Liberation

Themes of compassion and collaboration collide in 1940s occupation

Out in digital format

THE SECOND World War has been covered in a plethora of films focused on virtually every imaginable military aspect of the conflict – but stories of life under Axis occupation have been far fewer and further between.

Yet the Nazis, by all accounts, annexed states or set up puppet governments in vast swathes of Europe during the 1930s and 40s. In addition to well-documented atrocities against the Jews and other groups, their rule also spawned massive social upheaval and huge divisions in numerous communities.

Collaboration was one such situation that frequently arose – those accused of aiding and abetting Hitler's regime were often singled out and summarily dealt with by resistance groups. But while some were undoubtedly guilty of exploiting the war for personal gain, others found themselves facing accusations for the likes of going to the aid of injured enemy soldiers or similar moral dilemmas. And it is this type of situation that the characters in Danish drama *Liberation* find themselves embroiled.

Set in the Scandinavian state in the latter stages of the conflict, the plot focuses on folk high school headteacher Jakob – played by *Game of Thrones* actor Pilou Asbaek – who finds himself placed in a near-impossible moral position.

Told by the local Nazi authorities that he

must accommodate some 500 German refugees fleeing the relentless Soviet advance, he finds himself trapped between his compassionate instincts and an urge to avoid offering help to the foe.

As he struggles to put up the scores of men, women and children in the school gym, an already dire state of affairs becomes aggravated by an outbreak of the infectious respiratory illness diphtheria. The condition soon kills several of the new arrivals while threatening to spread more widely.

Negotiating with Danish doctors reluctant to give lifesaving drugs and ambivalent Nazi commanders focused on self-preservation, Jakob is faced with a devastating decision. Either do nothing – and watch innocent people die – or take matters into his own hands and be branded a collaborator.

In weighing up his position, the teacher must also consider the fate of wife Lis (Katrine Greis-Rosenthal) and son Soren (Lasse Peter Larsen) – both of whom will be affected – as well the professional responsibility for pupils in his care.

Unsurprisingly, the struggle soon takes its toll both physically and mentally as Jakob becomes completely consumed by his own, personal war.

Ironically, it is after the conflict where his nightmare is most keenly felt – and he is caught up in a demand for retribution by his long-occupied countrymen.

Liberation is a gem of a movie that explores a side of war rarely encountered on celluloid. Soundly directed by Anders Walter against the backdrop of a frigid Danish countryside in stark winter gloom, the film is underpinned by a series of strong performances with Asbaek solid as the lead.

Larsen also delivers a sensitive showing as a child caught up in a ghastly drama – torn between his sense of moral responsibility and national duty.

Particularly poignant is his friendship with German girl Gisela (Liv Vilde Christensen), which will ultimately shape and define the direction of his journey.

Meanwhile Morten Hee Andersen excels as Birk, a hot-headed resistance member pushed





to the limits by the deaths of those close to him and bent on rallying others to the cause of taking up arms against the Nazi occupiers.

Liberation is apparently based on true events – some 250,000 German refugees found their way to Denmark in the fighting of the Second World War. The nationalism and conceited ambitions of a few in high places ultimately led to suffering on an unimaginable scale among innocents of all sides.

Yet at its core this film tells an uplifting story of prevailing humanity – and it leaves lingering “what would I have done” questions long after the closing credits. ■



VERDICT:

A less-explored wartime story, solidly directed and acted



REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, *SOLDIER*

Napoleon

Out in digital format

Having prompted some lively discussions among journalists and historians when it appeared in cinemas just before Christmas, Ridley Scott's biopic on the notorious French dictator has now been released for home consumption.

The digital edition via Apple TV features a host of extras – including interviews with the cast and crew – providing some added value for the small screen.

While the film's historical accuracy has been a subject for wider debate, this reviewer's limited knowledge of 1800s geopolitics meant *Soldier* was largely reduced to watching this offering on entertainment value alone.

And it did not disappoint on this front – of note are the battle scenes overseen by military adviser and former Para Paul Biddiss, which are as harrowing as they are impressive.



Review: Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*



MORE TOP PICKS



GAMES



Outer Wilds

Out now
for Switch

► WITH huge gaming conglomerates pumping millions into polished – if

predictable – titles, many of their smaller, independent counterparts are, instead, pursuing a more interesting innovation route.

Step forward Annapurna Interactive. Having already delivered the likes of *Twelve Minutes* – a violent mystery story set in a bizarre recurring time loop – *Outer Wilds* explores a similar theme in a grander, off-world setting.

This time players take on the role of an astronaut charged with exploring a far-flung solar system and have a frame just shy of 30 minutes to crack an alien mystery before a cataclysmic event occurs.

You are issued with a capsule, spacesuit and a few facts to start but must unravel the rest through exploration and mastery of the basic Newtonian physics to fly in space.

It's a tough ask and patience is required in abundance. But the beautiful presentation makes this atmospheric offering extremely challenging to put down.



Review: Cliff Caswell, Soldier

War Hospital

Out now for PC and consoles

► WAR GAMES were once solely focused on the action of conflict – from storming Nazi strongholds to taking on the Soviets in hypothetical European conflicts, victory tended to depend on weapons, guts and dexterity.

But the scene has taken a different turn in recent years. With titles such as *Warsaw* – set amid the 1944 uprising in the Polish capital – the theme, tone and playing experience of some offerings is altogether more downbeat.

This is certainly the case with *War Hospital*, a real-

time strategy outing set in a front-line First World War medical facility. Would-be managers have to deal with limited resources, staff at breaking point and a stream of incoming wounded.

Hard-decisions have to be made at triage stage, surgery can be a hit-and-miss affair and all the while the whole place is under constant threat of attack.

If all this sounds pretty depressing, it is. And it is meant to be, but it has its own merit, is slickly delivered and as much of a learning experience as a management game.



Review: Cliff Caswell, Soldier



Forza Motorsport 8

Out now for PC and Xbox

► A RACING game that sets a high standard for the genre, the latest in this series features its usual run of challenges – all

focused on allowing drivers to strap in and push the latest high-performance vehicles to their limits.

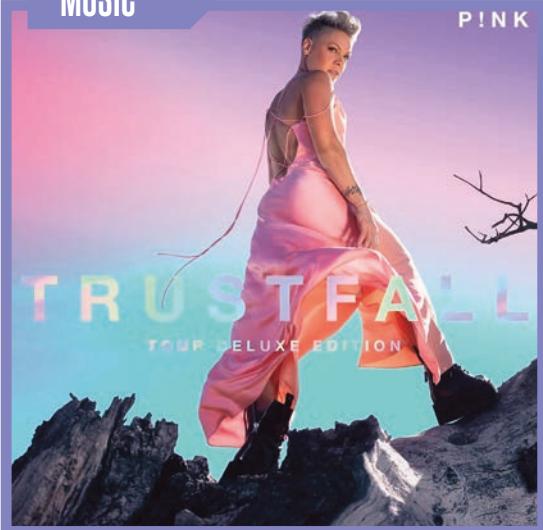
Newcomers are welcomed into the affluent, tyre-screching lifestyle with a guiding hand before being let loose on the track. The game then switches fun for professionalism – with the opportunity to fine tune each car for excellence. Success means delivery of the next petrolhead's dream.

Unlike its sister series *Forza Horizon*, which regularly delivers new metal, this offering makes you earn each new drive. It feels much more rewarding as a result, as if you're fully deserving of each and every beautiful ride. Top marques!



Review: David McDougall, civvy

MUSIC



Trustfall Tour Deluxe Edition

Pink

► FOLLOWING the huge success of *Trustfall*, Pink has released this expanded version of the album, including new songs as well as live versions of previously released material.

It is full of memorable tunes and sensitive hits delivered in the artist's powerful yet emotionally vulnerable voice. She includes a live version of the opening track *When I Get There*, a tribute to her father, which will touch the heart of any listener.

Another highlight is *Dreaming*, sampling the melody from *Fields of Gold* featuring vocals from **Sting** and produced by **Marshmello** – a mix of nostalgia meets dancefloor banger.

All in all, this expanded album will satisfy the artist's fans while also appealing to those who have not yet heard much of her music.



Review: CSgt Liam Compson, RCAM



One to try...

Masters of the Air

PRODUCED by the same Steven Spielberg-led team behind the Second World War dramas *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, a new mini series about US bomber crews based in the UK during the Second World War was due to screen as this issue went to press.

Masters of the Air – based on Donald Miller's outstanding book of the same name – is being screened by Apple TV and looks as if it is definitely one to tune into from the early publicity seen by the staff at *Soldier*.

American crews flying high-altitude daylight missions into occupied Europe suffered an appalling attrition rate as they faced Luftwaffe fighters and flak. If the series is anything as good as Miller's seminal history work, it should be a powerful outing.

Trustfall Tour Deluxe Edition

Pink

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Review: CSgt Liam Compson, RCAM

PODCASTS

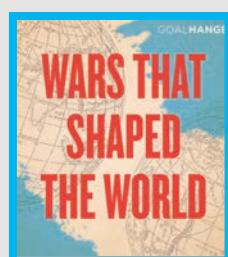


Things Fell Apart

► RETURNING for his second Radio 4 series, journalist and podcaster Jon Ronson continues his deep dive into culture wars and the sometimes unlikely origins of conspiracy theories. This time around, topics include Black Lives Matter, Antifa, the anti-vaccine movement and transgender rights, with Ronson drawing out stories from both sides of each debate (and hearing out the more radical interviewees with commendable restraint). It makes for absorbing, bingeable content – but be warned; it's hard not to come away despairing for the future of humanity.



Review: WO1 Mike Owens, RE



Wars That Shaped the World

► ANOTHER addition to the ever-expanding catalogue of Goalhanger productions – the

team behind *Empire* and *The Rest Is* series – this podcast takes a look at pivotal conflicts, including D-Day, the Gulf War and Korea. But listeners expecting the format to reflect the outfit's other titles – in which the likes of Rory Stewart and Alistair Campbell talk shop like a well-informed pair of mates – will be disappointed. Instead, the episodes are narrated and lean heavily on sound-effects, giving the feel of an audio documentary. Not bad, but also not this reviewer's particular cup of tea.



Review: Becky Clark, *Soldier*

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SOLDIER SPORT



« NOVICE TEST

THE Army Grassroots League staged the opening round of its new season at Larkhill. Run by the Army Equitation Association, it is designed to give novice riders a first taste of competitive action. Read more about the organisation's mission to develop fresh talent on pages 66-67...



CONTEST OFFERS PERFECT START TO EXCITING YEAR

WHILE numbers were slightly down, the standard on the mat was as high as ever at the latest staging of the Army Judo Championships in Aldershot.

The competition formed a positive conclusion to an intensive week-long skills course, where a host of novice players sampled the sport for the first time. It also marked the start of a busy year that will see the soldiers host the UK Armed Forces Championships in the summer ahead of a potential overseas tour to Australia.

SSgt Nathan Lockey (RAPTC), Army team manager and competition organiser, told *SoldierSport* he was delighted with the talent on show – with a number of personnel pressing claims for inclusion in the challenges that lay ahead.

“This is a good build-up for what is to come and is a chance to identify talent for our training

camp ahead of the UKAF Championships,” he explained.

“It is very much aimed at the grassroots; that is massively important in our effort to bring judo to the attention of the Field Army once more. There are people here who started on Monday, and this is their very first competition – they have picked it up very well.

“Numbers are lower than normal. However, that is a general trend in sport at the moment. We have some key players missing through injury, but we’ve still had a good turnout.

“We run two skills courses a year and it’s now about what they do in between; if they’ve enjoyed it hopefully they’ll join a civvy club and continue.”

Lockey also reported a strong crossover from Brazilian jiu-jitsu, with athletes using judo as a way of improving the elements that are crucial in their discipline.

One of those was LCpl Billy



**“I PLAN
TO KEEP
THE
ARMY
DOOR
OPEN”**

Kell (RLC).

He has been competing in the former for four years but won a silver medal in the men’s under-90kg novice ranks in his first judo competition.

“I saw this as a way of shoring up my jiu-jitsu game,” he explained. “It is important to learn how to get in good positions to take advantage of your opponent and then go for that submission.

“After a week here I’ve really got the bug for judo, so moving forward I may have to split my time between the two.

“I enjoy the physicality; it is a tough sport to keep going in, but there’s also a psychological side with a lot of thinking involved.

“My background has helped, especially with things like grips and body positions, and the judo has polished things. When I go back I will have a whole new bag of toys to play with.

“It has been a fast-paced week

but there is plenty of time to learn and cover the things you do not fully understand.

"I was delighted with the silver medal; I was super nervous ahead of my first fight and then lost, which was probably a blessing as all those nerves disappeared. I felt so much more fluid in my next two contests."

Other notable results included a first men's senior title at under-81kg for Cpl Tom Abdilla (PWRR), while the Infantry claimed their first team crown.

Team GB athlete OCdt Roxy Proctor (Bath UOTC, pictured below left) secured the female honours, adding to the silver medal she won at the British Championships in December.

Despite training as a full-time athlete with Team Bath, the 20-year-old has benefitted from the Army structure, notably gaining coaching qualifications through the Service last year.

"Having the Army set-up as an option has been really beneficial," she said.

"It is so professional, and things are run in a relaxed way. The course is well put together with a high standard of coaching.

"It's a shame there aren't more females here, but you can only work with what you have.

"Over the next few years I want to compete in more European competitions and build my ranking points but I plan to keep the Army door open, as long as they're happy to have me." ■



JUDO IN NUMBERS

SERVICE PERSONNEL ENROLLED ON THE LATEST ARMY JUDO SKILLS COURSE IN ALDERSHOT

52

THE NUMBER THAT COMPETED IN THE ARMY JUDO CHAMPS, WITH MEDALS AWARDED IN A HOST OF WEIGHT CATEGORIES

56

TEAM TITLES WON BY THE ARMY - INCLUDING OVERALL WINNERS - AT LAST SEASON'S UKAF JUDO CHAMPS

4

YEARS OF RESERVE SERVICE FOR SPR ROTIMI

2



ROTIMI MAKES MAT RETURN

FORMER Nigerian international Spr Oluwaseun Rotimi (RE) used the Army Judo Championships and skills course as an opportunity to get back into the sport after an absence of four years.

Having competed for more than three decades at events such as the African Invitational Championships and Commonwealth Judo Championships, the Reservist forms an impressive addition to the fold and is looking to put his experience to the test within the military set-up.

"I need to get back on track and with this being an Army team I thought the people training here would be fit and of a certain level," the 48-year-old explained.

"It has been excellent. We've had technical input from the coaches and the athletes are very enthusiastic and switched on. They come from a variety of grades and I have taken a

number of things from them.

"I definitely felt a bit rusty to start with, but the course has been delivered at a good pace.

"There are a number of jiu-jitsu guys here and they have brought a different perspective, especially in terms of groundwork.

"I have been impressed."

Rotimi, who was competing in the under-90kg masters category, is planning on becoming a regular fixture on the Army scene and is already looking ahead to this year's possible tour to Australia.

He is also a level two coach with the British Judo Association and, in time, would like to pass on some of that wisdom to his fellow Service personnel.

"Hopefully I can start out with the Royal Engineers and I'm already in contact with the people in charge there," the soldier added.

"If possible, I'd like to move on to Army level as well." ■



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GRASSROOTS GROWTH

NOVICE COMPETITION OFFERS PLATFORM FOR EQUESTRIAN'S EMERGING TALENT

THE Army Equitation Association (AEA) kicked off what promises to be a busy 2024 campaign by welcoming almost 30 riders to the opening leg of the latest Army Grassroots League.

Now in its seventh year, the event is designed to give novice athletes a first taste of competitive action in dressage and combined training (a merging of the former with showjumping) over three rounds, with points accrued across the series ahead of champions being crowned in each field.

It is hosted at Larkhill's Royal Artillery Saddle Club – which provides the horses and surfaces needed to perform – and the only requirement for soldiers, Regular or Reserve, is to be able to walk, trot and canter safely in the saddle. Aspiring showjumpers must also have the ability to jump.

"They are not complete beginners," Army Grassroots League officer Maj Georgie Mawbey (RLC) told *SoldierSport*. "This is about introducing them to competitions."

"The idea is to prepare them over one, two or three seasons so they are safe and competent to go on to the main circuits."

"Some people will do dressage and then move on to combined training, others will just stick with dressage. As soon as they are ready to graduate, we will look to move them on."

"Every year we have more than 40 personnel registering an interest. Quite a lot come from a horse background; many have ridden as a child, but not seriously. Generally, they are

new to the sport.

"I also run the Royal Logistic Corps team and my focus there is on the development pathway – taking complete beginners and getting them ready for the Grassroots League. A lot of the other corps do that as well."

"There was nothing like this six years ago – the AEA did not have people competing at the lower levels."

"Things have now changed and we have gone from just concentrating on the elite stage to creating a clear pathway, which is great."

"Standards have improved over the seasons. When we first began, we did not know what we would be looking at but now we hold assessments before they start to ensure the riders are at the correct standard."

"There is a chance to go from zero to hero; they have to thrash themselves and have at least a couple of lessons every week, but the change can be absolutely amazing."

"I just love seeing people progress. When I started out the corps teams kept themselves separate, but this has brought everyone together and when we go on to compete on the main circuit we have those friendly rivalries in place."

Capt Tom Coverdale (AGC (RMP), pictured right) was among those sampling the Grassroots League for the first time, focusing on the dressage element for his debut campaign.

He grew up in an equestrian environment, with his mother competing professionally, and having recently taken up riding lessons with his wife, wanted to get involved to make the most of the Army's sporting offer.

"I've been riding properly



**"WE
HAVE
BEEN
THROWN
IN AT
THE
DEEP
END"**

again for six months and decided to do dressage as I'm not yet confident enough to do jumping," he explained.

"The great thing about this is the fact you can progress – hopefully I will come back next year and continue."

"I've never really had the time to get involved in Army sport before, but I was determined to make it happen."

"There are so many great opportunities; it is part of the offer and it is important we take advantage of that."

"We have been thrown in at the deep end and while this is a competition, we are all helping each other out. My aim is to build my experience, get involved in more events and hopefully go on to represent the Adjutant General's Corps."

SSgt Eddy Yorke (AGC (SPS)) returned to action in the combined training having last taken part in the league in 2017.

A combination of work commitments and Covid restrictions have limited his involvement since, and while there had been an initial skill fade he said he soon got back into the swing of things.

"It is almost like riding a bicycle and after ten to 15 minutes my confidence was there again," he explained.

"I was so scared the first time I got on a horse – it was that bad I couldn't listen to what I was being told and I got thrown off a couple of times."

"But the instruction is great and the competition is so progressive. Depending on how well I do I'm hoping to move on to other series and get to the highest level possible. If it was not for the Army I would never have done this."



Pictures: John Shirras



UNDERSTRENGTH REDS FAIL FIRST-ROUND CHALLENGE

ARMY rugby league head coach Sgt Karl O'Doherty (REME) told *SoldierSport* his side's lack of experience proved costly as they exited the Challenge Cup in the first round.

The Reds suffered a 13-10 defeat on the road to Fryston Warriors, when a number of first-team players were unavailable due to injury, work commitments and other factors.

A converted try from Kgn Pita Tamani (Lancs) handed the soldiers a 6-4 lead at the break, but two second-half scores from their rivals – along with a drop goal – saw them surge ahead before an effort from Gdsm Aporosa Bainikoro (Coldm Gds) reduced the arrears with ten minutes remaining.

However, further points failed to follow, and it was the hosts who booked a second-round clash with Hunslet ARLFC.

"It was very tight all the way through and was a game we could have nicked at the end," O'Doherty said.

"There were some uncharacteristic mistakes on our behalf, and we didn't get out of second gear.

"We had lads in the team who should probably be playing with the development squad and with a stronger line-up we would have beaten them.

"I thought those who came in could do a job and I'm not blaming them in any way. Training went well in the build-up and morale was high, we just lacked experience in certain areas. There were not enough leaders on the pitch.

"If you look at our right-hand edge, they are all good athletes with technical skills. But they don't know the game well enough yet. Ideally, you would have an experienced player either side to create something for them. That whole edge had talent and potential, but we needed some know-how."

O'Doherty also conceded the fixture came at the wrong time for his team, with the Army

season not starting until April.

"This is renowned as being a tough game for us," he added. "With Christmas leave and work-related issues everything is last minute, and you are waiting to see if the players you want turn up.

"Fryston won their summer competition and then rolled into a winter league, which was a big help to them in terms of team spirit. We looked like a scratch side."

Attention now turns to the Inter-Services later in the season and the Reds will be going all out to win in what is the 30th anniversary of Army Rugby League. The set-up also hopes to go on tour to Australia and Papua New Guinea.

"It is a big year," O'Doherty said. "We want to win both Inter-Services games. We won the second half against the Royal Navy and then beat the Royal Air Force last season, so it is only a 40-minute period we need to improve on." ■

RUGBY LEAGUE CHALLENGE CUP

FRYSTON

13

ARMY

10





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SWedes too hot for evolving Reds

INTERNATIONAL rivals Sweden proved too strong for an experimental Army women's team as they continued building towards this season's Inter-Services campaign.

With established players still to come into the fold, head coach WO2 Sarah Mitchelson (RLC) used the fixture as an opportunity to blood those who impressed in pre-season trials – some of whom were pulling on the red shirt for the first time.

The 27-0 defeat highlighted areas the team needs to work on, but the coach said there were also signs of encouragement in the display.

"The girls are disappointed with the result, and know they can play better than that," Mitchelson told *SoldierSport*.

"We didn't get some of the basics right, especially at the breakdown and carrying the ball into contact. That slowed us down. But at times we showed a nice shape and we could see some things we had worked at on the training pitch coming off.

"We looked really good in the last 20 minutes and gained some

momentum. We were competing at the breakdown and carried the ball better, but we ran out of time and could not capitalise on that."

Mitchelson singled out the performance of Sgt Heidi Silcox (RAMC, pictured above) as another positive, with the experienced forward taking on a new position.

Others will have a further chance to impress in another friendly match later this month before the final Inter-Services squad is named.

"Heidi played at number eight for the first time and did a great job looking after the pack," the coach added.

"She was influential in both defence and attack.

"We still have people who have not played yet this season and it will be nice to build on what we did in this game and see some improvement. We have a good starting point.

"The trials were probably at the highest standard we have seen. They all put their hands up but, unfortunately, we can only take so many with us for the second part of the season." ■

WOMEN'S
RUGBY UNION
ARMY

0
SWEDEN
27



TOUGH TESTS AHEAD

THE Army women's squad will embark on a week-long training camp next month ahead of three challenging fixtures in the build-up to what they hope will be a successful defence of their Inter-Services crown.

After taking on the British Police, the Reds face both the England and Wales under-20s sides in what should be a stern test of their credentials ahead of the Forces clash.

"That is something we missed last season," said head coach WO2 Sarah Mitchelson (RLC), while reflecting on the standard of opposition to come.

"The England girls are now all professional players, which means it will be a different squad to what we have faced before. It will be a tough challenge and a good test in terms of whether we can score points and hold them out."

The men's and women's Army-Navy games will be played at Twickenham on Saturday, May 4.

Tickets can be purchased at eticketing.co.uk/rfu

The Inter-Services campaign then concludes a week later, when the soldiers face the Royal Air Force in a double-header at Gloucester's Kingsholm Stadium. Visit gloucesterrugby.co.uk for ticket details.



SPORT SHORTS



Picture: Lee Crabb/Align Photography

Masters miss out

THE Army masters rugby union team suffered their first loss of the campaign as they were defeated 47-28 by the English Fire Brigade.

Freezing temperatures saw the match switched from Aldershot to Tidworth and it was the visitors who warmed to the surroundings quicker as they crossed for six tries in the first half.

The Reds were much improved in the second period but were unable to overturn the damage done early on.

They return to action against Torbay Sharks on February 9.



Webb's World Cup bow

BIATHLON star Capt Marcus Bolin Webb (RA) started the year in style with impressive performances on the international stage.

Flawless shooting helped the officer to a top-60 finish in the ten-kilometre sprint at the IBU Cup event in Italy. Days later he made his World Cup debut in the same discipline, finishing 103rd.

Webb is on a mission to become the first male to represent Team GB in biathlon at the Winter Olympics since 2014 and is targeting a place at the 2026 Games in Milan.



LEAGUE LEADERS' WINNING FORMATION



**"WE
WON
EVERY
EVENT
WE
TOOK
PART IN"**

THE British Army Volt4ge formation skydiving team have been celebrating their most successful year to date in which notable four-way victories were claimed at home and overseas.

The highlight was the squad's triumph in the UK Skydiving League's AAA competition – the highest level of formation skydiving – in which rounds are staged at various parachute centres across the country.

They also claimed the AAA title in the Army Championships at Netheravon and added further silverware at the Australian military national championships, again in the AAA division.

Formed in 2017, the squad – which is comprised of coach Maj Anna Hicks (RAMC), Capt Amii Calway (RLC), SSgt Sei Hughes (REME), Sgt Jason Webster (Para), Sgt Stacey Briggs (AGC (SPS)) and Cpl William Forbes (PWRR) – has enjoyed a rapid rise through the ranks which began with their win in the A

category at the Armed Forces Championships a year later.

In 2019, Volt4ge won every military and civilian competition entered, a feat repeated in 2021 as they progressed to the AA standard and eventually became national champions.

And the move to AAA has yielded further success.

"This is the senior category at national and world level," Hughes told *SoldierSport*.

"We won every event we took part in, apart from the national championships.

"Because we won three competitions on the civilian circuit, we were crowned UK Skydiving League champions.

"We have done very well as a team and there are always things you can improve, as individuals and collectively.

"The time and effort we have all put in is amazing, but we always have expectations to do even better."

The team returns to action with wind tunnel training this month ahead of their first competition in May. ■

SPORT SHORTS



Picture: John Shirras

Donnelly's dream move

FORWARD Lt Ella Donnelly (RAMC) has become the latest Army rugby league star to sign with Women's Super League outfit Leeds Rhinos.

The officer follows the likes of Bdr Beth Dainton (RA) and Pte Jenna Greening (RLC) in joining the Yorkshire outfit and made the move after impressing in pre-season trials.

"I'm very excited," she said.

"They came so close in all competitions last year and I know they have a goal to win next season – I'm looking forward to being part of that."



Saints pass Cyprus test

SUPER League outfit St Helens stepped up preparations for the new campaign at a training camp alongside personnel from 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment in Cyprus.

The trip allowed the players to build their fitness and perfect on-pitch skills ahead of their opening-round clash with London Broncos on February 16. They were also tested in a series of military command tasks before concluding with a joint training session.

"It has been challenging, but a refreshing change, and will give the lads a boost before we start the season," said coach James Roby.

LOGGIES SECURE GRID GAINS

TRACK talent was at the fore as the Royal Logistic Corps karting team hosted pre-season trials at Thruxton Circuit.

Aspiring drivers were put through their paces in two days of action, with the challenges getting progressively more difficult as the management sought to identify those who could help them to glory in 2024.

"We started by looking at things like race craft, speed and how they handle the karts – the characteristics they need in a competitive environment," team principal WO1 Symon Ablitt (RLC) told *SoldierSport*.

"On the second day we ramped things up and started examining their lap times, while seeing how they handled the pressure of having one of our karts behind them."

With the assessments complete, six drivers from the 20 who signed up for the trials were selected for the upcoming campaign – which will see the Loggies competing over seven rounds in the Armed Forces Karting Championships.

Last season was the team's debut, and they achieved an impressive sixth-place finish, while also coming third in the Army-level competition, the Steve Long Memorial Cup.

"This is a very competitive sport," Ablitt continued. "Our aim is to better what we achieved in our first year."

Anyone interested in sponsoring the set-up, or following their progress throughout the campaign, should visit the RLC karting team Facebook page. ■



Picture: Cpl Becky Brown, RLC

**"IT
WASN'T
JUST A
TRIUMPH
FOR THE
TEAM"**



● **HOCKEY** ace Sgt Johann Smith (AAC) tasted gold medal success with Fiji at the Pacific Games.

The 44-year-old captained his country in the short-format fives at the event, which saw more than 5,000 athletes competing across 25 sports in the Solomon Islands.

Fiji emerged with a 100 per cent record in the round-robin stage and went on to beat Papua New Guinea in a penalty shootout in the final.

"Winning the gold wasn't just a triumph for the team; as captain, it validated my passion, perseverance, and the enduring spirit of Fiji in international hockey," Smith said.

MONTH IN SPORT

February's key dates...



WHAT:
Inter-Services
Snowsports
Championships

WHEN:
February 3 to 9

WHERE:
Meribel, France

NEED TO KNOW: Team and individual titles in Alpine skiing, Telemark and snowboarding are all on the line, with Army athletes looking to build on a successful showing in 2023



WHAT: Inter-Services Under-23 Football Championships – Army v Navy

WHEN: February 14

WHERE: Army Military Stadium, Aldershot

NEED TO KNOW: The Service's next generation of footballing talent complete their quest for honours on home turf having faced the RAF a week earlier



WHAT: Army Table Tennis Championships

WHEN: February 19 to 22

WHERE:
Aldershot

NEED TO KNOW: The first key fixture of 2024, the event begins with a training camp ahead of the battle for individual honours and unit prizes. The top players will be looking to hit form ahead of April's Inter-Services



Pictures: OCdt Brian Leung, RLC

SHOWJUMPERS SHINE AT SEASON FINALE



**'WHAT
A HORSE
- I'M
REALLY
HAPPY'**

THE Army Equitation Association (AEA) ended their latest season on a high with a dominant showing at the London International Horse Show's Services showjumping competition.

The soldiers swept the board at the event, with seven of the eight qualified entrants coming from the Army. In an exciting finish, just 0.5 seconds separated the top three positions as Capt Lara Dixon (RLC), on her horse Topsy V, was crowned champion.

She completed the course with no penalties in a time of 29.15 seconds to finish ahead of teammates Cpl Holly Hall (RLC) and Capt Mary Pearson (RAVC) on the podium.

"I had a good chat with my coach, and he told me to believe in myself, sit up and she'll look after you," Dixon (pictured left) said. "What a horse - I'm really happy."

Retaining the Inter-Services title and increased participation at all levels were among the other standout achievements of the campaign, with the AEA now looking to

build on the momentum.

A pilot league for intermediate riders, designed to bridge the gap between the Army Grassroots League and corps representation, is due to launch in the coming months, while the set-up is to begin awarding scholarships to help individuals make the transition to its development teams.

Other highlights from last year saw dressage rider LBdr Lauren Sweetland (RA) return from Op Cabrit to qualify for a number of competitions on her horse Asby Mills Amigo – securing top placings in the process. She will compete at the next level up in 2024.

And in showjumping, newcomers OCdt Lucy Wisher (Exeter UOTC) and Dixon achieved their first podium finishes at the Chepstow Spring International competition. Hall qualified for and competed at the British Showjumping Championships, while SSgt Louise Hoyle (AGC) represented the Army and UKAF at the Bolesworth International Young Horse Championships. ■

Final Word



I think culture is more of a unit thing. The Parachute Regiment is obviously very male-orientated, with very few women, so when we get female attachments we have to be aware that what we would say to each other may not be right with them. You need to know your environment and your crowd.

Pte Lewis Cotterell, Para



If we stay in the same mindset and attitude we're not growing as an organisation. It's a great thing that the military has embraced diversity otherwise we'd just be stuck back in the Stone Age. Instead, we're moving with the times.

Sgt Daz Elms, RAPTC



When I joined the Reserve 12 years ago things were quite rigid, but now it's more relaxed – just small things like women being allowed to wear their hair differently or the talk about beards. We now look more at the individual rather than only at the collective. It's also becoming a lot more diverse in terms of race and religion, which is great to see.

Sgt Colin McDougall, RAPTC

Interviews: Becky Clark
Pictures: Graeme Main



I know there have been concerns about bullying but from my own view of things, the Army actually has quite a positive culture. I'm an air dispatcher based at RAF Brize Norton and we're all very friendly – if we have issues we work together to solve them.

LCpl Jonathon Hall, RLC



One of the sayings I dislike from the higher ranks is "that's how it was in my day". Well, we don't live in those days anymore and things need to change – which they have, for the better. I think it's a much more supportive environment.

Pte Joshua Ogilvie, Para

The C Word

As troops pause to reflect on Teamwork this month, we ask what the term "Army culture" means to them...

People are a lot more aware of what words they are using and more careful that they use them in the right setting. You still have to have banter, but you need to know where the line is.

Pte Michael Cummins, Para



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