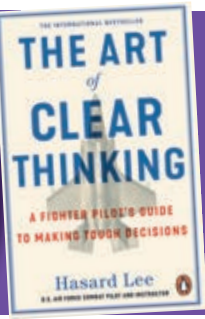


The Forces' favourite paper



Inside the mind of a top USAF pilot
See R'nR page 5

Horses for heroes: Equine Warriors
See pages 14-15



ROYAL AIR FORCE

Friday, May 1, 2026
Edition No.1631

Only 99p

RAF NEWS



Taking the flak: Beaufighter boys

See pages 14-15



Boxing
Sgt aiming to turn pro



See p23

Six Nations
Cokayne is off to a flyer



See page 26

Gridiron
Mustangs reclaim IS



See page 27

Recruits bonanza



Staff Reporter
Halton
AIR CHIEFS have hailed a new era of recruitment as a record number of RAF Rookies hit the parade ground to begin their training at Halton.
A total of 145 recruits started their basic training last month, reversing the fall following the Covid pandemic as Aviator Training Academy chiefs recorded their highest head count for decades.
Those on the record-breaking Pearson Intake will now begin 10 weeks of intensive drills as they take their first steps in the Service.
Continues p2

BiteSize

“For me it was the sound of the engine that really evoked emotion – it’s iconic,”



Aviation fan and actor Warwick Davis joins the Spitfire 90th celebrations at Newquay Airport

See page 19

“I’ve been able to reclaim who I was before I was a Spice Girl,”



Pop star Mel C on her new album, *Sweat*

See R’n’R pp4-5

“I want to perform at a high level in air traffic control and in pro boxing,”



Inter-Services winner Sgt Cam Lewis

See page 23

Recruitment record



ROYAL AIR FORCE
RAF News

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● *Continued from p1*

The record-breaking parade follows Chief of the Air Staff Sir Harv Smyth’s drive to increase the Service’s base rank by five per cent.

AOC 22 Group, Air Vice-Marshal Ian Sharrocks, said: “It is great to see an intake of 145 new recruits starting their RAF journey at Halton, the largest intake in decades.

“This number is not a surge; it is the new normal and a clear contribution to our goal of growing the size and fighting capability of the RAF.

“A real-team effort from across the Air Force has helped make this happen and it is tangible evidence of how the RAF is increasing agility, integration and readiness to fly and fight.”

Aviator Training Academy chief Gp Capt John Hetherington added: “This is a tremendous achievement and a clear sign of the RAF’s continued growth. It reflects the dedication of all involved in training and preparing the next generation of aviators.”

RECORD-BREAKERS: New recruits on Pearson Intake hit the parade ground at the Aviator Training Academy at Halton



This Week In History



1958
Canberra first

CANBERRA SQUADRONS with the RAF’s 2nd Tactical Air Force based in Germany acquire nuclear strike capability.

1945
U-boat strikes

BEAUFIGHTERS EQUIPPED with rockets with 236 and 254 Sqns sink four U-boats attempting to escape to Norway on the surface.



1982
Buck starts here

VULCAN PILOT Flt Lt Martin Withers bombs Stanley Airfield during Op Black Buck as the UK launches offensive air operations to reclaim the Falklands.

Extracts from *The Royal Air Force Day By Day* by Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork (The History Press)



CRAFTSMAN: David Dunkley has been marking the changes at St Mawgan for 40 years

Dave's sign of the times

By Susie Wood

FOR FOUR decades, one highly-skilled craftsman has made his mark on St Mawgan.

Signwriter David Dunkley hand paints the name of every new incumbent on the wooden Station Commanders' Board inside Station Headquarters.

Since he daubed his first name in 1982, technology has moved on and hand-painted signs now represent just two per cent of his company's work.

But traditional skills are still in demand at military



STEADY HAND: David at work at station

sites like RAF St Mawgan.

"These signs are always in prominent places," Mr Dunkley explained. "You only get one chance to make that first impression."

"A good signwriter can paint a straight, upright line without thinking about it. I get properly 'in the zone,' if someone needs my attention, it is best they make a noise from a distance.

"When I started, all the Station Commanders were older than me. Now they are all younger than me and include ladies, very much like our own organisation.

"I don't think I'm one of the last. There are youngsters trying to follow. They just need practice. Lots of it. You need to be dedicated and not to give up."

Shrouded in secrecy: Drone 'blinds' radar

UAV can disrupt air defence systems to protect Lightning and Typhoon

Simon Mander

A NEW drone that can blind enemy radars and disrupt air defence systems to protect Typhoon and Lightning is set to come into RAF service.

Developed using lessons from the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, it blends crewed and uncrewed autonomous platforms.

"This is a seminal moment for the RAF to maintain our advantage in Air Combat and national security," said Chief of the Defence Staff ACM Sir Rich Knighton.

"The RAF is committed to exploring innovative technologies that can enhance its lethality and survivability in a more contested and dangerous world.

"Autonomous collaborative platforms will revolutionise how we conduct a range of missions, from intelligence gathering to strike and logistical support."

From its introduction last May, 216 Sqn completed the first in-service flight of StormShroud on air weapons ranges at Spadeadam.

This historic flight set the stage for follow-on tests at RNAS Predannack and the



TESTING: StormShroud will soon be ready for RAF frontline service

Salisbury Plain Training Area with single aircraft cooperation, to multiple platforms operating simultaneously.

In September 2025, 216 Sqn deployed to Spadeadam to advance the platform's operational capabilities and demonstrate the critical role of the RAF Regiment in operating Autonomous Collaborative Platforms.

Since then, the unit has also been using regular aircrew, engineers and gunners, augmented by reservists including

UAS industry specialists operating in small teams in high threat environments.

Flying in Cornwall was conducted in February and high-profile domestic and international exercises are planned throughout the year.

These efforts will focus on refining how to operationally use the drone to ensure it remains at the forefront of technology.

The platform for StormShroud, the Tekever AR3, can carry Leonardo UK's BriteStorm electronic warfare payload featuring radar jamming capability, improving the survival rate and operational effectiveness of crewed aircraft.

Developed in the UK as an urgent operational requirement by the RAF's Rapid Capabilities Office, StormShroud marks a significant step in integrating autonomous systems into the frontline.



PASSING ON THE BATON: Tug hands over to wife Sim at RAF Brize Norton

SWO Tug of love

A HUSBAND-AND-WIFE team made history when the top NCO's job at RAF Brize Norton was handed over from one to the other.

WO Sim Rezazadeh-Wilson is the new Station Warrant Officer, taking over from her other half, Tug.

She said: "Brize is not only my workplace but also my home. Having served here since 2002, one particularly clear memory for me, as a young Aircraftwoman, was seeing a female SWO in post.

"Her leadership inspired me to work hard towards my

own aspirations because to see it is to believe it is achievable."

The SWO supports the welfare and professional development of Service personnel and is the lynchpin between them and the Station Leadership Team.

WO Tug Wilson said: "I have fulfilled a career and life ambition by having the honour and privilege to be the Station Warrant Officer at the largest RAF station."

Brize Norton continues to support global air transport, air-to-air refuelling and aeromedical evacuation operations.



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RAF veteran
Bill Sannwald

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Regt chief who survived 'chute failure dies, aged 83

Simon Mander

A FIGHTER pilot who was involved in one of Britain's worst parachute disasters and survived an air drop with an unopened parachute has died aged 83.

Former RAF Regiment Commandant General, Air Cdre Tim Thorn, nicknamed 'Tiger', was a liaison officer on the infamous Kiel Canal jump in 1974 in which six paratroopers drowned.

The Nato exercise involved 35 Hercules aircraft dropping 540 troops – 15 of whom landed in Kiel Canal during a night drop due to strong winds and navigation errors.

Sudan

Poorly-functioning life jackets contributed to the deaths.

Born in Atbara in the Sudan in 1942, Thorn entered Cranwell in September 1961 and was selected to become a flying instructor straight out of training.

Promoted to squadron leader in July 1972, he was seconded to the Army and joined 16 Parachute



Brigade, where he completed more than 100 jumps.

Appointed to Wg Cdr in July 1979, he commanded II (AC) Sqn, flying the Jaguar at RAF Laarbruch.

Thorn was the first and only Jaguar pilot to achieve 100 per cent air-to-ground strafe scores on no less than seven occasions.

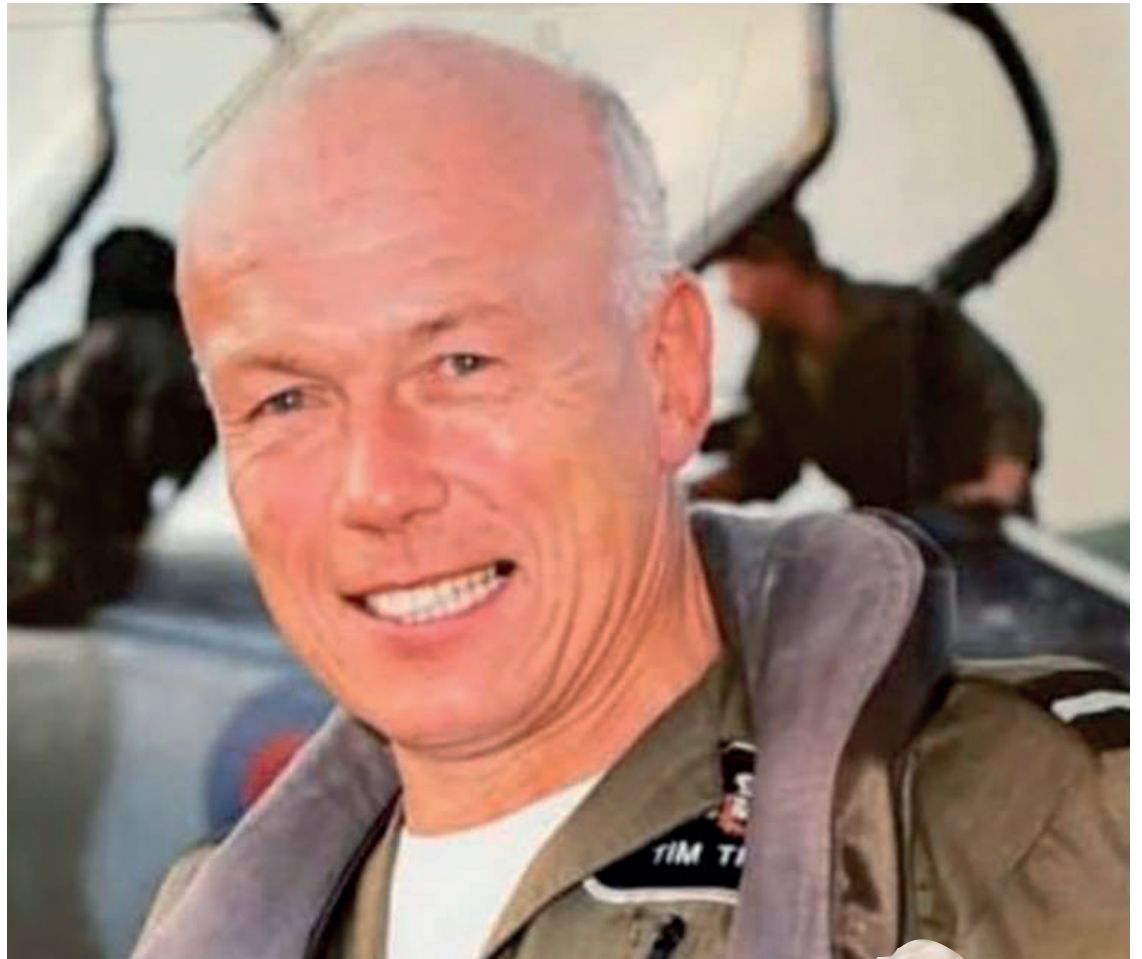
He was awarded the Air Force Cross in December 1982.

During his career Thorn survived 10 major airborne emergencies, three in a Jet Provost, four in a Hunter, one in a Chipmunk and another in a Bulldog.

In 1974 he survived a descent with an unopened parachute jumping from a Hercules aircraft flying at 650 feet at night.

In January 1983 he was posted to the Operations Directorate in the MOD with responsibility for the development of a new nuclear weapon.

He was promoted to Air Cdre and became the first officer of that rank to be appointed the Commandant General of the RAF Regiment. He retired in 1995 and is survived by his wife, Rosie.



Reds spring into action

Simon Mander

THE RED ARROWS have arrived in Greece to complete their final pre-season training.

Exercise Springhawk is a five-week period which allows them to perfect and polish their new 2026 display.

"The Greeks will be able to see the team improving their skills and synchronisation, ensuring they deliver a captivating spectacle seen during the summer airshows," said Red Arrows spokesman Andy Morton.

The finer weather in Greece provides more guaranteed conditions compared to those over their Waddington base.

"The team can fly up to 15 sorties a week in their red Hawk T1 jets at locations and in environments that better simulate what they will find at display venues and airshows in the summer," added Mr Morton.

During the exercise, senior RAF officers assess the team for a Public Display Authority.

If this is awarded, the team's pilots change from green overalls



RED HOT: Arrows prepare their show-stopping routine in Greece ahead of storming the summer display season

into their famous red flying suits and the ground crews will be able to put on their royal blue display coveralls.

The team's aerobatic displays change each year, with the first half consisting of synchronised,

formation aerobatics, followed by a more dynamic second half.

The Red Arrows' first UK airshow appearance for 2026 is expected in late May.

The transit from RAF Waddington to Hellenic Air Force

base Tanagra was completed over two days.

It included a refuelling stop at Podgorica – allowing the team to carry out engagement with the Montenegrin Armed Forces and to work alongside Nato allies.



WARTIME ROLE: Plotter Sybil Piper. PHOTO: Ollie Dixon

Tributes to WAAF Sybil

TRIBUTES HAVE been paid to World War II WAAF intelligence plotter Sybil Piper who died at the age of 100.

Born in 1925, Sybil joined the WAAF at the age of 19, working at RAF Medmenham in the photographic intelligence centre, handling highly classified aerial reconnaissance material.

"It was top secret, intense and often emotionally challenging, but the camaraderie of my colleagues helped me through," she said.

She worked at RAF Odiham until 1947, after which she married her husband James and went on to work in education.

RAFBF chief executive AVM Chris Elliot said: "Sybil embodied the resilience, dedication and quiet determination of her generation."

Milroy: now MoD plans to take appeal to a higher court



IT PAYS TO UNDERSTAND YOUR PENSION



CHAMPIONING ARMED FORCES PENSIONS SINCE 1946

In August 2024 an Employment Tribunal ruled that Major Charles Milroy was unfairly treated as a part-time reservist.

Under the Part Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations (PTWR), the Tribunal ruled that Major Milroy had been denied access to AFPS 75 and that calculation of his daily rate of pay was less favourable than for a comparable full-time worker.

The MoD appealed this decision in September 2024 and in January of this year (2026) The Employment Appeal Tribunal refused the MoD's appeal on all the grounds raised.

This decision appears to indicate that non-mobilised reserve service prior to 2015 should have been pensionable under AFPS 75 and 05 subject to the 2 year qualifying period. Also, that when calculating the reserve rate of pay, an annual divisor of 365.25, rather than a smaller amount that took account of non-working days, was wrong.

Unhappy with this refusal to appeal, the MoD has now appealed to a higher court, the Court of Session for permission to challenge the initial decision. This, despite a debate on 24 February when the Minister accepted the case "raises important questions not only in law, but in how we recognise and support those who serve and have served our country, including through reservist service."

The Court of Session may or may not agree to consider the case and its decision could take weeks or months to be determined. Meanwhile, if you think you may be impacted by the original judgement, you may find it helpful to visit the Forces Pension Society website (forcespensionsociety.org) for more detailed information.

Maj Gen Neil Marshall, CEO of the Forces Pension Society said: "This is an unsettling time for all those impacted, including many of those among our 65,000 Members. No-one wants to feel they have been unfairly treated."

"We hope the Court of Session makes an early decision about whether it is prepared to consider an appeal. Meantime the Society will monitor progress closely and keep our Members informed."

FPS is an independent, not-for-profit membership organisation providing pension guidance to its growing membership base of more than 65,000 serving personnel and veterans. The Society champions pensions on behalf of the whole military community and, this year, celebrates its 80th anniversary. For more information about our work, visit forcespensionsociety.org



Neil Marshall, CEO of the Forces Pension Society



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ESPORTS FOR THE ARMED FORCES



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Bulletin



FAMILY SUPPORT: RAF Kidz supporter TV chef Matt Tebbutt joins the fun

Parent power

Staff Reporter

SERVICE CHARITY chiefs have launched a 24-hour online support service for RAF parents struggling to balance family life with military duties.

The RAFAKidz Resilience Hub is offering online sessions designed to address a range of issues including coping with stress, health and wellbeing, eating habits and coping with deployments.

Josie Mapes, Executive Director of RAFAKidz, said: "Service life often comes with a unique set of challenges, not just for the person serving, but for the whole family.

"We hope our Resilience Hub will help families overcome some of those challenges by giving them the tools they need to work together as a unit, improve their wellbeing and thrive as a happy, healthy family."

C-17 delivers for 'Frozen Chosen'



EXTREME MACHINE: C-17 takes off from an ice strip runway during supply missions to Station Alert, 1,100 miles inside the Arctic Circle

Simon Mander

AN RAF transporter has delivered vital supplies to Nato's most northern outpost for the first time.

Operating from Pituffik Space Force Base in Greenland, 99 Sqn crews made eight trips to Station Alert, delivering 300,000 litres to the inhabitants nicknamed the 'Frozen Chosen'.

The Operation Boxtop mission was to the frozen snow runway of the remote Canadian base, 1,100 miles inside the Arctic Circle.

The 99 Sqn C-17 teamed up with the Royal Canadian Air Force to land on the frozen wastes and deliver a million litres of jet fuel to run everything from heaters to radios.

"Flying into the High Arctic is demanding, especially when the weather can change on a dime, but that is exactly why this activity is so important. The C-17 performs superbly in these conditions," said pilot Flt Lt Mike Chandler.

It is the most northerly permanently-inhabited settlement on Earth at 82.5 degrees North and is a critical Nato signals intelligence base.

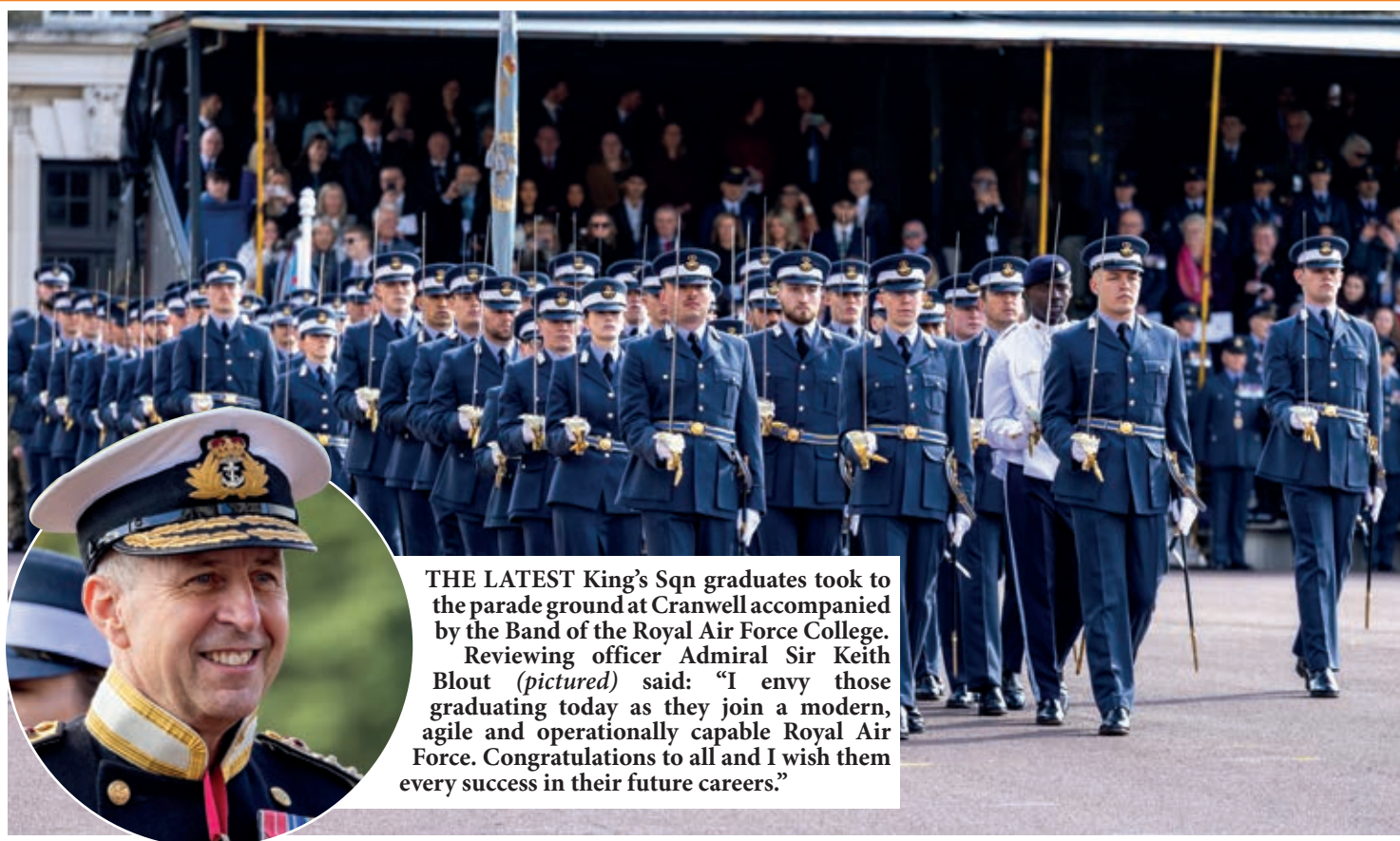
Almost entirely encapsulated by the Arctic ice sheet, which only thaws for 30 days a year, the only way to supply its few hundred inhabitants is by landing on a semi-prepared runway made of gravel and compacted snow less than half the length of

a normal airport strip.

"This is a powerful demonstration of the RAF's reach, readiness and capability. Operating thousands of miles from the UK, in the extreme cold and with limited infrastructure, proves that we can generate operational air mobility wherever it is needed," said Commander Air Mobility Force, Air Cdre Daniel James.

Designed for global strategic lift, the C-17s at Brize Norton have been the workhorse of the RAF for the past 25 years.

Operating in the far north enhances the RAF's readiness for operations in extreme environments, while validating its ability to support allies wherever required.



THE LATEST King's Sqn graduates took to the parade ground at Cranwell accompanied by the Band of the Royal Air Force College. Reviewing officer Admiral Sir Keith Blout (pictured) said: "I envy those graduating today as they join a modern, agile and operationally capable Royal Air Force. Congratulations to all and I wish them every success in their future careers."



Joshrun in the running

TYPHOON TECH Flt Lt Joshrun Mann has finally realised his dream of taking on the London Marathon - after winning backing from Services welfare group SSAFA.

More than one million runners took part in the public ballot for this year's event and the Coningsby airman hit the streets in the capital alongside 60,000 competitors.



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Reunited

101-year-old vet Doug reaches for the sky for Spitfire's 90th



VINTAGE STUFF: WWII pilot Douglas Seale prepares for his flight at Leuchars marking the 90th anniversary of the Spitfire's debut

Spitfire picture spread p19

Laura McGarvey Leuchars

A 101-YEAR-OLD Air Force veteran has been reunited with the iconic warbird he flew in World War II as the UK marked the 90th anniversary of the Spitfire's first flight.

And former pilot Douglas Seale had no hesitation getting on board for another sortie.

Spotting the Spitfire, he said: "It's like seeing an old friend. I'll take it up!"

He was at the former RAF base to watch the aircraft land to mark 90 years since the first prototype took off in March 1936.

The fighter, painted in pale blue with tail number K5054 to replicate the original, flew nine legs of the UK, starting and finishing its tour at Southampton Airport, formerly Eastleigh Aerodrome.

Australian Mr Seale joined the RAAF aged 18 and trained in Sydney. "On my first sortie, I remember the instructor asking me if I knew which direction the airfield was in. I was able to tell him straight away, to which he



responded that I would make a good pilot," he said.

Earning his wings so young didn't faze him. "It wasn't scary, no, it was exciting. We were so young – 18, 19, 20 years old – it was a busy time with lots going on," he said.

Sent to the UK, he was thrown into the fighting.

"I was told I was being sent to RAF East Kirkby for a rest, but I was a fighter pilot being sent to a RAF Bomber Command squadron, so there certainly wasn't any rest," he said.

Douglas remembers being sat on his father's shoulders as a three-year-old watching the landing of the first-ever solo

flight from England to Australia in 1928 in an Avro 581E Avian light aircraft and witnessing the 50th anniversary sortie flying the same journey.

"In 1978, I saw the de Havilland DH.82A Tiger Moth aircraft, flown solo by RAF pilot David Cyster, land in a field as it completed the final leg of the journey," he said.

Years later, Mr Seale bumped into Mr Cyster on a flight to Uist in the Outer Hebrides.

In addition to flying the Spitfire, Douglas also flew the Hurricane, and described it as "a nicer plane, much more comfortable. It turned faster and was much sharper."

Returning to Australia, Mr Seale met a girl from Edinburgh, and they decided to head back to Scotland, where he has lived ever since.

The RAF and the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight have collaborated with Spitfires.com to give members of the public the opportunity to bid for a place to fly as a passenger in this iconic aircraft, to raise money for The Mark Long Trust and the RAF Benevolent Fund.

Bulletin



UK SUPPORT: Defence Minister and military veteran Al Carns (right) joins his Ukrainian counterpart Serhii Boyev in Kyiv

Ukraine tribute

ARMED FORCES Minister Al Carns visited Ukraine to show solidarity as the country continues to defy sustained Russian aggression.

The former Colonel, who won the MC during four tours of Afghanistan, shook hands with his counterpart Ukrainian Deputy Defence Minister Serhii Boyev at the Wall of Remembrance of the Fallen.

Mr Carns also laid flowers at the Kyiv shrine.



UK WINNER: RAF Museum Midlands has been voted Britain's best attraction

Museum tops poll

THE RAF Museum Midlands has been voted one of the UK's top family attractions by consumer champion Which?

The venue came joint first in the search for the nation's favourite days out, beating 2,000 other sites in the UK-wide survey, netting an approval rating of more than 90 per cent.

Visitor director Barry Smith said: "We are incredibly proud to be rated joint top of Which's best UK museums list.

"We scored consistently highly across all areas, and this recognition is a testament of the team's dedication to delivering an enjoyable and accessible day out for everyone."

He added: "Ask any RAF veteran and they will tell you it is the best aircraft museum in the world."

News

Robo-kit unleashed

Simon Mander

ROBOT DOGS, drones and four-wheel vehicles that can climb stairs, open car doors and use tools could replace RAF personnel responding to future high-risk incidents.

Defending against chemical, biological and radiological substances is currently the responsibility of the RAF Regiment but in future technology will be brought in to handle chemical spills and gases, allowing human operators to remain at a safe distance away from harmful substances.

In recent tests the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory used robotic and autonomous systems to navigate through a disused shopping complex to detect, sample and clean a contaminated environment.

Dstl's technical chief said: "This trial has allowed us to bridge the gap between research and the operational environment. Dstl has expertise in operational analysis, uncrewed vehicles and autonomy.

"We bring all these together to deliver innovative science to



ROBOTIC TRIALS: Boston Dynamics Bomb disposal system, dubbed Spot the Dog, deals with an IED in recent Dstl testing

improve UK resilience."

Scientists are working on a multi-directional drone with a swabbing system to test for contamination and apply decontamination spray, and a fleet of robots to gather information and samples, including dogs.

Bristol University is pioneering an uncrewed ground vehicle with a robotic arm that would work with a tethered drone to clean with a spray system at a range of heights.

A Defra recovery scientist said: "These sorts of trials are critical for us to deliver the best

value for taxpayers' money.

"They test our newly developed techniques and technologies in representative environments and throw up exciting new possibilities and opportunities for development far less apparent in a lab context."



HONOUR: MT driver Thomas Dougherty

Doug lands civic honour

WARTIME AIR Force driver Thomas Dougherty has been granted the freedom of his home town - at the age of 99.

The Northern Irish veteran was honoured by civic leaders in Lisburn and Castlereagh for his contribution to the Armed Forces and his local community.

He served as a driver in the mechanical transport section, rising to the rank of Corporal, and in Singapore at the end of the conflict.

The Mayor of Lisburn and Castlereagh, Alderman Amanda Grehan, said: "Even at 99 years of age, Tommy continues to inspire us all. His fundraising efforts and role in community life are a testament to his character."



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Sgt Robert Small

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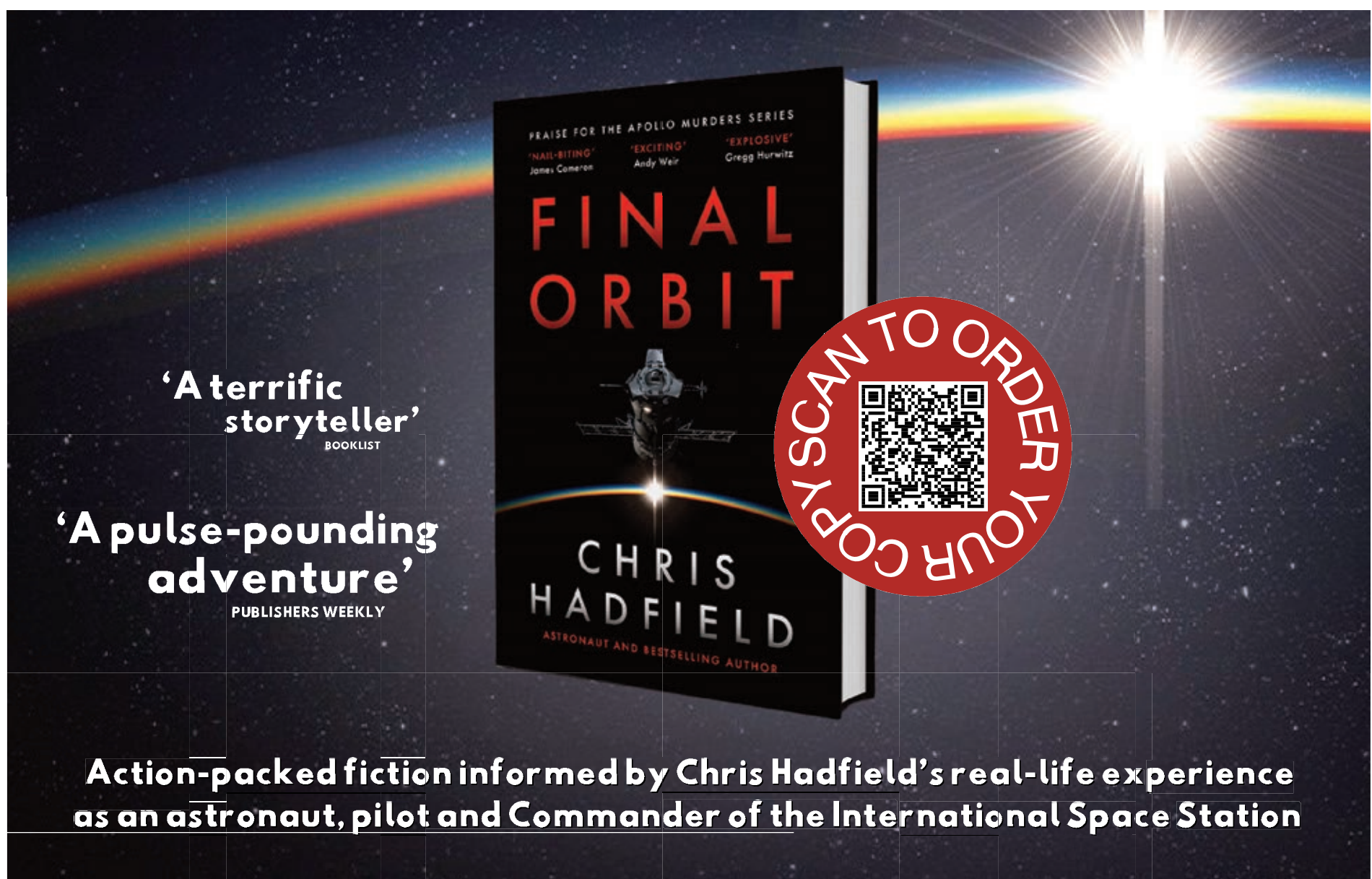
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Bulletin



Frame game

ARTIST LUCY FREUD brought some colour to the Star and Garter as the veterans' care home in Surbiton marked World Art Day.

Residents brushed up their creative skills as part of the charity's Veterans Voice therapy programme for those suffering from dementia.

Lucy said: "Painting focuses the mind and is very meditative, and I see that with the residents during the sessions."

Anne marks medics' 30th

HRH PRINCESS Anne joined Forces medical chiefs at Brize Norton as the Tactical Medical Wing marked its 30th year.

The Princess Royal, who holds the rank of Honorary Air Commodore at the Oxfordshire station, paid tribute to personnel before joining senior Service medical officers for a tour of facilities by unit chief Wg Cdr Rosie Barrow.

The Royal visit follows a demonstration of frontline life-saving skills attended by civic leaders and defence partners.

Wg Cdr Barrow said: "As we open our 30th anniversary year, it is a powerful statement that our strength lies in our capability built over 30 years and the exceptional people and partnerships behind it."



ROYAL VISIT: HRH Princess Anne joined Service medical chiefs at Brize Norton to mark the Tactical Medical Wing's 30th anniversary

Boeing lands Chinook deal

Simon Mander

AVIATION GIANT Boeing Defence UK has won an £879 million deal to keep the RAF's Chinook fleet airborne.

The Rotary Wing Enterprise contract is to deliver long-term maintenance and support and sustains around 700 jobs across Southern England and Scotland.

Additionally, around 500 jobs will be supported at UK-based partner StandardAero, which plans to increase apprenticeships to 50 over the next three years.

"This contract highlights the UK Government's commitment to maintaining a world-class rotary wing capability and strengthening the country's defence industrial base," said President of Boeing UK and Ireland Sir Jeremy Quin.

The contract is described as a comprehensive support service for Joint Helicopter Command and makes the company the prime contractor for Chinook.

"We are honoured to deepen our support for the UK's Chinook fleet," said Boeing Managing Director Thom Breckenridge.

"By consolidating support contracts, Boeing Defence UK will provide a more integrated and efficient service to the Ministry of Defence, enhancing platform readiness and sustaining over 700 highly-skilled jobs."

£879m service contract safeguards 700 UK jobs

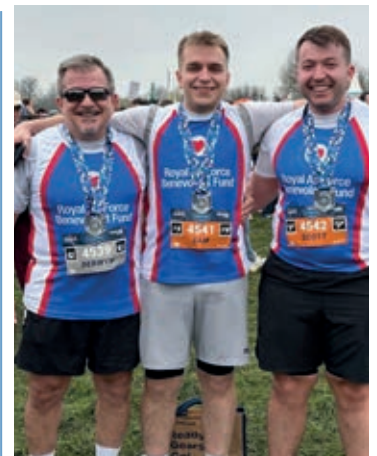


Defence Readiness and Industry Minister Luke Pollard said: "Our workhorse Chinooks help keep our Armed Forces safe and operating effectively while on deployment. This contract shows how we're ensuring our

Armed Forces have the kit and equipment they need to keep Britain safe.

"We are investing record levels into defence, meaning no return to the hollowed out and underfunded Armed Forces of

the past." The deal covers ongoing aircraft support, maintenance, supply chain management, training and integration services, ensuring the UK's helicopters remain mission-ready.



FAMILY AFFAIR: Derywn Hardwick (left) with Spadeadam-based Sam and Scott on the finish line after half-marathon

Hip parade

DOUBLE HIP-OP dad Derywn Hardwick marked his recovery by challenging his sons Sam and Scott to a half-marathon to raise funds for the RAF Benevolent Fund.

The trio took on the Cambridgeshire-based event to support the Air Force charity after aviator Scott, who is based at Spadeadam, highlighted the work of the Forces welfare group.

Derywn, 55, said: "Scott mentioned the RAFBF - it's a worthwhile charity and it felt like the right choice for us to support. It was also encouraging during the run to hear ex-RAF runners say it was a good cause."

HALF-MARATHON MAN: Airman Sam raising funds for the RAFBF



TAKING THE

The brave Beaufighter pilots who belatedly took on the deadly anti-shipping role during World War II

IT SEEMS incredible that an island nation like Britain went for much of World War II without anti-shipping aircraft.

As recent events have shown with RAF P-8s tracking Russian submarines suspected of taking advantage of war in the Middle East to scope the potential for sabotaging the UK's vital undersea digital cable network, defending these shores against intruders has never been more important.

But, according to a new book, for a full two years until 1943 successes against Nazi vessels were 'negligible,' while 300 aircraft were lost. Indeed, throughout 1940 bombers sank only six ships but 161 aircraft were downed.

Third Reich

And what happened next was more by accident than design and added to the Allies' eventual victory by helping deny Hitler's regime of strategically vital metals being transported into the Third Reich from Scandinavia.

According to *Beaufighter vs German Flak Ships*, by Matthew Willis, this was "a brutal struggle between a type of ship that did not really exist, and an aircraft not designed for anti-shipping warfare."

There was no such thing as a Flak Ship in the Kriegsmarine, or German Navy, instead the term referred to a range of disparate escorts, even armed trawlers – many of which survived the war to re-enter commercial use.

But their potency was no less real and their use to protect merchantmen off the Norwegian and Dutch coasts effectively neutralised Air Force attempts to sink them.

Then came the siege of Malta where the Beaufighter proved brilliant at suppressing anti-aircraft defences with its cannon and bombs. RAF Coastal Command took the hint and the rest, as they say, is history. But it was not without cost.

"In 1942, operational analysis revealed that a torpedo bomber's crew's chances of survival after their first 200-hour tour of operations was just 17.5 per cent," said Willis. And for their next tour it fell to three per cent.

Fortified by training that was as much naval as it was air-minded, the exploits of Coastal Command overcame obstacles often put in their path by inter-Service rivalry with the Royal Navy.

Why, for example, the RAF was forbidden from attacking German merchant shipping until April 1940 will probably forever remain a mystery.

Before then its few torpedo-bomber squadrons were equipped with obsolete biplanes whose targets were enemy capital ships.

And even after seven squadrons of Coastal Command were formed following the invasion of Norway, with Hudsons and Blenheims, attacks were infrequent.

But former Dambusters CO Wg Cdr Leonard Cheshire summed up the awe which members of this Cinderella Service inspired when he said:

"We consider ourselves pretty tough flying over Germany under the cover of darkness at vast heights, but what of these Coastal Command boys who come in over in broad daylight at zero feet and think nothing of it? Makes you think, doesn't it?"

And in a series of delightful vignettes, which I only wish there were more of, historian Willis brings the personalities involved in both sides of the conflict to life.

Men like Flt Lt Sydney Simon Shulemson, dubbed "The Killer" by his comrades for his ruthlessness in combat.

A quiet, unassuming, and good-natured man, he also won the DSO for beating off



ATTACK: Beaufighters swarm over a ship (Matthew Willis Collection)



GUNNERS: Nazis with 'Vierling' gun (Matthew Willis Collection)

Messerschmitt Bf 109s attacking a fellow 144 Sqn Beaufighter.

He also won the DFC, making him the most highly-decorated Jewish Canadian serviceman of WWII.

And as an interesting postscript, the author also adds that afterwards he lobbied behind the scenes for the UN partition of Palestine and helped set up the Israeli Air Force.

Facing him were men like Karl Jorb.

Already 29 when war broke out and despite his low rank of Bootsmannmaat, he was one of only five naval Unteroffizier in WWII to win the Knight's Cross with 12 observed kills.

And as the conflict spread to the Balkans, veteran South African Air Force pilot Lt Col Don Tilley proved no less lethal.

On February 24, 1945 he attacked the converted 4,000-ton escort vessel Kuckuck, which was heavily armed with numerous 'Flak towers.'

Tied up in a mole, it could only be hit from the north where cranes obstructed the approach.

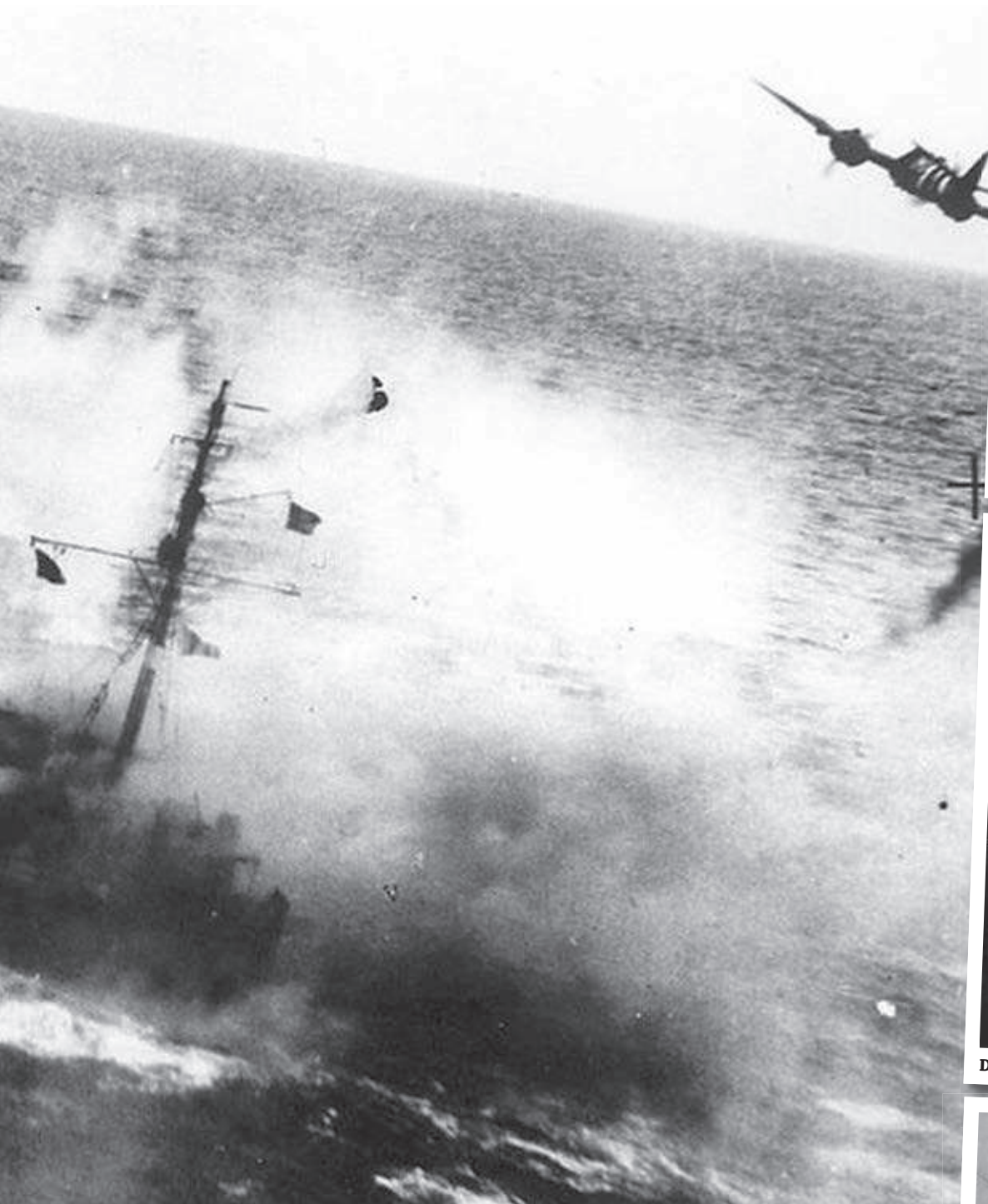
Rockets

Nevertheless, 16 and 19 Sqn Beaufighters swooped and Tilley's rockets struck the ship, sinking it and earning him the DSO.

At only 80 pages the book is ideal

by Simon Mander

E FLAK



'THE KILLER': Flt Lt Sydney S Shulemson (*Library and Archives Canada*)



DEADLY: Beaufighter pilot had a 17.5 per cent survival rate (*Matthew Willis Collection*)



MISSILES: Three-inch Rocket Projectiles, effective anti-shipping weapons, are loaded onto a RAF Beaufighter (*Matthew Willis Collection*)

for the general reader and aviation enthusiast with tales of derring-do from the men who fought, as well as technical specifications of the aircraft they flew and armaments they used and faced.

Packed with photographs and full-colour illustrations as part of publisher Osprey's *Duel* series, this volume traces the missions of various RAF strike wings in the North Sea and in Malta, where they flew to cut off the supply lines to the Afrika Korps

● *Beaufighter vs German Flak Ships North Sea and Mediterranean 1941-45*, by Matthew Willis, is published by Osprey, rrp £15.99.

Win a copy of the book

YOU COULD win a copy of *Beaufighter vs German Flak Ships* by answering the following question correctly:

What was the survival rate of Beaufighter pilots in their first 200 hours of operations?

Email your answer, marked Beaufighter Competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by May 15. Please include your full postal address with your entry.

Win!



Advertorial.

“One foot in front of the other”: Elaine’s story of love, service and relentless strength

Elaine Paxton has always believed in teams.

Long before life tested her in ways she could never have imagined, she and her husband Adrian were already a winning side. Married for 32 years, together for 36, with two grown children, James and Katie, they built a life rooted in laughter, shared values and an instinctive understanding of one another. They called it Team Paxton.

Elaine served for five years in the Royal Navy as a telephonist, working in communications on busy air stations across England and Scotland. The military, she says, gave her confidence and resilience. “It taught me what I was capable of,” she reflects – lessons that would later prove vital.

Adrian served in the RAF. They met on an air station in Fife in December 1990. “He came past on a motorbike in green-and-white leathers,” Elaine smiles. “It was love at first sight.”

For years, life was good. They raised their children, worked hard, renovated their home together and laughed constantly. Then, in January 2022, everything changed.

At one in the morning, Adrian fell out of bed – completely out of character. “I knew instantly something wasn’t right,” Elaine recalls. Moments later, he couldn’t speak. When he stopped breathing, Elaine resuscitated him. Paramedics rushed him to hospital, but COVID restrictions meant she couldn’t go with him.

The next day came the call she will never forget: Adrian wasn’t expected to survive. Elaine was told to say goodbye. Standing by his bed, she turned – as she always had – to humour. “I told him I’d just bought him a £500 lifetime

membership to a distillery, and he’d only had it 17 days,” she says. “That wasn’t acceptable.”

Adrian survived. But the stroke left him severely disabled, initially unable to walk or speak. He spent 18 months in hospital. Elaine finished their house alone, grieving the life they once knew – yet certain that Adrian was still Adrian.

“When the hospital talked about a care home, I didn’t even contemplate it,” she says. “I told them, ‘Just watch me. He’s coming home.’”

Elaine challenged decisions, called meetings and refused to back down. “I was fighting for our life,” she says. From the outside, she appeared to cope. Inside, the weight was immense. “One night I went into the garden and screamed into the darkness. I had nothing left.”

Everything began to change when Elaine attended a local veterans’ breakfast club and met Jane, a Veterans Clinical Advisor for Help for Heroes.

“Jane asked, ‘What’s your story?’ and I told her everything,” Elaine says. “She told me, ‘You’re not alone. We can help.’”

Help for Heroes supported the whole family – arranging occupational therapy, counselling, respite and practical help. After being let down elsewhere, Elaine was sceptical. But the support kept coming. “It was the start of not feeling alone,” she says.

The impact was felt across Team Paxton. Adrian’s confidence began to return. His speech and mobility improved. Katie noticed the shift too. “Knowing Mum finally had people who understood made such a difference,” she says.



Jane, who served as an RAF nurse for 44 years, adds: “It’s not just about the veteran, it’s about the whole family. Elaine was exhausted and heartbroken when we met. Seeing hope return has been incredible.”

Life looks different now, but it is still full. They plan days out, holidays and small goals. Adrian is working towards baking and gardening again. Elaine is looking forward to getting back on her bike. There is laughter every day – and gratitude in the smallest moments.

Strength, she’s learned, isn’t loud. “It’s strength of mind. Strength of character. Showing up, every day.”

Her message is simple: “Find your people. You don’t have to do it by yourself.”

“One foot in front of the other. One step at a time. It’s Team Paxton – and it’s going to take more than this to bring us down.”

If you served and you think Help for Heroes can support you, please get in touch today.

By Tracey Allen

Warrior Equine **Feature**

Former RAF Reservist John Lewis used to be, he admits, terrified of horses. After a devastating accident which left him suffering from PTSD, he initially resisted taking part in equine therapy. But it proved his salvation and, since being involved with the not-for-profit organisation Warrior Equine, he hasn't looked back.

John is now an ambassador for Warrior Equine CIC (Community Interest Company), founded in 2014 by military wife Ele Milwright, which supports Armed Forces veterans, serving personnel, first responders and members of the police force who have experienced severe psychological trauma. The organisation travels to locations around the country and uses local equestrian facilities, thus avoiding the expense of having its own horses and stabling.

Royal Windsor Horse Show recently hosted a day at Flemish Farm, Windsor, highlighting the work of Warrior Equine, its official charity, which runs mental resilience and positive wellbeing courses for groups of up to 10 people. It says its aim is to facilitate long-term positive changes in mental health, resilience, confidence and self-worth – John's experience is certainly testament to that.

Following his service with the reserves, John, from Devon, worked within the community and with schools on pre-Service training.

Injured

He explained: "While on a school visit I was injured [crushed by a tank that a bus had crashed into], suffering multiple broken bones. I spent several months in hospital and had 11 operations, which ended both my reservist career and my civilian job in sports and outdoor education in special schools."

He added: "After 13 years of trying various therapies and medications, Help For Heroes suggested Warrior Equine. I was very sceptical, I turned back three times on my way to the course [John suffered from debilitating separation anxiety from his family as a result of his PTSD], the thought of spending three nights away from home, with horses – that I was terrified of – was not the most appealing therapy.

"My mask, that had beaten so many therapists before, couldn't be hidden from the horses. It sounds strange to say, but the horses told me where I was going wrong inside, where I wasn't able to understand what was going on inside me.



FOUNDER: Ele Milwright



ROAD TO RECOVERY: Ex RAF Reservist John Lewis (right) with Warrior Equine Chief Instructor Jim Goddard and one of the horses from The Light Cavalry. Photos: @RoyalWindsorHorseShow/PeterNixon

Veterans with PTSD are back in the saddle

The equine charity giving renewed confidence to troubled personnel

"No amount of masking could hide the panic, anxiety and anger from the horses; they give instant feedback. Once I understood that, I could let go and pay attention to what they were telling me about myself. I've taken those feelings, held them close inside and apply them every day, in my job, my life, with everyone around me. My anger and my panic are gone and my life is back, and I'm in the light that is at the end of the dark

tunnel, thanks to Ele, the Warrior Equine team and the horses."

Former Chief Petty Officer Rachel Virdee, who served in the Royal Navy for more than 32 years, was diagnosed with PTSD and depression in 2012.

She said: "Over the next few years I completed several forms of therapy but left the Navy in July 2024 feeling very low and lost – I needed to find out who I was now, not Rachel the CPO but Rachel the veteran. I jumped at a place advertised on the April 2025 Warrior Equine course."

She added: "Even though I had ridden before I joined the Navy, I was nervous, but for once I felt that fear and just went with what was being asked. It's hard to put into words the feeling when in the pen with the horse off the lead and this gentle, understanding

animal walks up behind you and nuzzles you on your shoulder, the connection was intensely emotional.

"Having a horse mirror how you are feeling at that precise moment, following your breathing and body language, it's a connection I have held onto, often drawing from it when I'm feeling stressed or overwhelmed."

A former Sgt with the Army's

Intelligence Corps, who completed tours of Bosnia Herzegovina and Northern Ireland, Al Strudwick is also an ambassador for Warrior Equine.

He was diagnosed with PTSD in 2020 – described as 'both complex and chronic' – derived from his tour in Bosnia. Al contracted sepsis in 2021, which led to severe sepsis, then septic shock. All his major organs shut down and he 'flatlined' in hospital.

He explained: "After being brought back to life, I was finally discharged after 50 nights in hospital – but as a double leg amputee.

Amputations

"Warrior Equine was recommended to me by other veterans who had attended their course. I was sceptical to say the least. I was still very mentally fragile and trying to come to terms with my leg amputations. I was also afraid of horses.

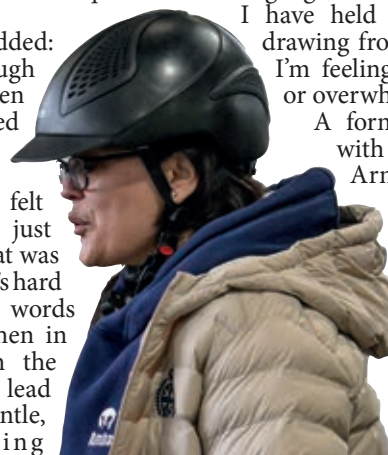
"But I forced myself to attend and quickly gained enormous respect for these beautiful and sensitive animals. At the end of the course, I found the 'round pen session' – where a horse off the training lead chose to be with me rather than being on his own – a life-changing moment."

Al said after attending the Warrior Equine course his self-confidence improved hugely.

"Warrior Equine is a superb organisation which helped turn my life around significantly for the better, I can't thank them enough," he added.

Royal Windsor Horse Show was founded in 1943 to support the war effort and is held annually in May, with more than 55,000 visitors attending. The Show, the only one in the UK to host international competitions in show jumping, driving and endurance, takes place this year from May 14-17. Its patron is HM The King.

● Go to: warriorequine.co.uk and rwhs.co.uk for more information.



LEADING THE WAY: Former Royal Navy Chief Petty Officer Rachel Virdee feels the relaxing presence of one of the horses trailing her in the round pen session



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WELSH WONDER: Spitfire and Texan trainer above St Athan
PHOTO: CPL JAKE HOBBS

Potty for Spitfires

Potter star hails Brit icon

Simon Mander

SPACE ACE Major Tim Peake and *Harry Potter* star Warwick Davis paid tribute to the Spitfire as the UK marked the 90th anniversary of the iconic warbird's first flight

The fighter flew nine legs coordinated with modern RAF aircraft, starting at Southampton Airport – where the prototype took off – to Coningsby, Leuchars,

Lossiemouth, Valley, MOD St Athan, St Mawgan/Newquay Airport and Exeter Airport.

At Leuchars it was reunited with 101-year-old former pilot Douglas Seale who had no hesitation getting on board for another sortie.

He said: "It's like seeing an old friend. I'll take it up!"

Australian Mr Seale joined the RAAF aged 18, trained in Sydney and was sent to the former Bomber Command



STAR FAN: Actor Warwick Davis at Newquay with pilot Dave Stobie (centre) and Spitfires.com chief and pilot Matt Jones
PHOTO: CPL TOM CANN



STAR MAN: Maj Tim Peake in Dakota

PHOTO: SGT MATTY MATTHEWS

station at RAF East Kirkby.

He also flew the Hurricane, and described it as: "A nicer plane, much more comfortable. It turned faster and was much sharper."

On the Valley to MOD St Athan flight the Spitfire flew alongside a Texan trainer before BAFTA winner Warwick Davis welcomed it to Cornwall.

The *Star Wars* actor, whose roles include Wicket the Ewok and the goblin Griphook in the *Harry Potter* series, was at Newquay airport to see the Battle of Britain fighter touch down.

He said: "For me it was the sound of the engine that really evoked emotion, it really is iconic."

Unpredictable weather resulted in the visit taking place 24 hours later than advertised



LOSSIE LINE-UP: Spitfire with Typhoons in Moray
PHOTO: SGT BETH ROBERTS

but that didn't bother the crowd.

Spitfire pilot Dave Stobie said: "It is just so lovely seeing the auction-winning passengers, and the people who come to see the Spitfire looking so happy."

For the final flight the team were joined by astronaut and

author Major Tim Peake, who flew on a Dakota from Exeter to Southampton.

The event was a collaboration with Spitfires.com who auctioned rides on the aircraft and raised over £100,000 for Air Force charities including the Mark Long Trust and the RAF Benevolent Fund.

Royal Air Force In Concert



Registered Charity No. 1101767

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Cast, Doncaster

7.30pm Friday 2 October

Epsom Playhouse

7.30pm Friday 16 October

Terry O'Toole Theatre, Lincoln

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www.rafconcerts.uk

The Navigator who masterminded Black Buck Falklands raid

AIR CDRE Simon Baldwin, who has died aged 83, was an outstanding RAF navigator who planned the first Vulcan bombing attack during the Falklands War.

After completing his training as a navigator, he flew in Canberra bombers with 45 Squadron based at RAF Tengah, Singapore. This was at a time of the Indonesian Confrontation, and he flew patrols over Borneo.

After returning to the UK, he converted to the Vulcan before joining 617 Sqn at RAF Scampton, Lincoln. The squadron was equipped with the Blue Steel air-launched, nuclear stand-off missile.

In August 1970, he left for RAF Akrotiri, Cyprus, the home of two Vulcan squadrons, where he served as the navigation leader in the HQ Bomber Wing. After three years he returned to Scampton to be a senior navigation instructor on the Vulcan training unit.

During this period, in November 1974, he was instrumental in the team of four Vulcans achieving the RAF's best results in the annual US Strategic Air Command Bombing and Navigation competition, Exercise Giant Voice, flown from a USAF base in Louisiana. He was responsible for the pre-deployment training programme for the selected crews and then accompanied the team when he was responsible for coordinating all aspects of the Vulcan's navigation systems and the training of the crews. Accurate navigation was pivotal to success against the more sophisticated systems of the USAF bombers flying in the competition.

Trophies

The RAF team won two of the three major trophies, both for the first time after 17 previous attempts. In a field of 20 USAF B-52s and four Vulcans, Flt Lt P. Perry and his crew won the Mathis Trophy for the best crew for bombing and navigation combined and Flt Lt P. Langdown and his crew won the navigation trophy when against 20 B-52s, 27 KC135 tanker aircraft and four Vulcans. This spectacular success could be attributed to numerous factors, in particular excellent training, meticulous planning and firm leadership, and Baldwin's influence on each aspect was a major factor. In the Birthday Honours List of 1975, he was appointed MBE.

After a series of ground appointments, he returned to the Vulcan force as commander of 44 (Rhodesia) Sqn in July 1980. The UK's strategic nuclear deterrent had passed to the Royal Navy and the Vulcan force operated in the low-level conventional bombing and tactical strike roles in support of NATO plans. The highlight of his tour in command came in the following



ELITE: Air Cdre Baldwin (centre) and crew with bombing trophies

year when his squadron made a clean sweep of the trophies in the annual 'Double Top' bombing competition, against the other Strike Command Vulcan squadrons.

Within days of the Argentinian invasion of the Falkland Islands on April 2, 1982, Baldwin was tasked to establish a planning cell to review the possible use of Vulcan bombers to attack the island's Stanley Airport, being used by the Argentinian Air force.

The overriding issue was the extreme range for any attack, which would have to be mounted from Ascension Island, almost 4,000 miles from the Falklands. In addition, the bombers were configured in the nuclear strike role, for their Cold War missions, and their crews had no experience of in-flight refuelling, an essential requirement for the long-range missions.

Numerous initiatives had to be implemented concurrently. The aircraft had to be re-equipped to carry 21 1,000lb conventional bombs and new inertial navigation equipment had to be sourced, fitted and tested to supplement the bomber's radar navigation kit. The aircraft had

to be modified to carry specialist electronic counter measures and, on later missions, Shrike anti-radar missiles.

The in-flight refuelling system mounted in the Vulcan had not been required for its European role and considerable work was necessary to reinstate the system. Most important was to train the crews and Baldwin established a concentrated training programme for a select number of crews. A series of long-range navigation sorties, many at night, were flown to simulate the eventual mission.

A rapid training programme was put in place and the final composite sortie with the extensively modified aircraft was flown just 12 days after the orders to prepare and, two days later, two aircraft deployed to Ascension Island.

The following day, April 30, Operation Black Buck was mounted when two Vulcans and 11 Victor tankers took off and headed south. The primary Vulcan became unserviceable and the bombing task fell to the reserve crew, captained by Flt Lt Martin Withers. The in-flight refuelling plan was the most complex ever mounted at the

time and required some tankers to refuel others in order that sufficient had enough fuel to allow Withers to attack the target and return after almost 16 hours in the air.

After the final refuel at high level from a Victor flown by Sqn Ldr Bob Tuxford, Withers descended to low level before a 'pop-up' to 10,000 feet to bomb the runway at Port Stanley Airfield. One bomb hit the runway, preventing the Argentinians deploying their most potent fighter, the Mirage III, from the airfield. Withers was awarded the DFC and Tuxford the AFC.

To achieve this longest-ranged bombing mission in history at the time required meticulous planning, and in a very short time scale. Baldwin, the mastermind of this complex and successful mission, remained in the background but without his skill, perseverance and professional management, the mission would probably not have succeeded.

The withdrawal of the Vulcan force from RAF service, begun before the Falklands War, continued and Baldwin presided over the disbandment of 44 (Rhodesia) Sqn on November 21,

1982 – the last Vulcan bomber squadron.

He served as the personal staff officer to the C-in-C Strike Command, ACM Sir David Craig, before assuming command of RAF Wyton, near Huntingdon, the base for the RAF's Nimrod strategic reconnaissance force – an electronic warfare training squadron and the RAF's electronic warfare operational support establishment.

After spending a year on a Defence Fellowship at the National Defence University, Washington DC, he became the Air Attaché and Commander of the RAF Staff in Washington. He spent his final three years in the RAF as the UK National Military Representative at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe in Brussels. He retired in September 1996.

A member of his squadron described him as "a fantastic leader, fine officer and excellent role model for any aircrew officer; his squadron would have followed him anywhere."

He lived in Lincolnshire and was the first president of the Waddington Branch of the Royal Air Forces Association, a position he held for 16 years.



WAY BACK in the 90s and into the 00s, the Frontera was a rugged agricultural affair, with a spare wheel bolted onto the boot door and a proper 4x4 gearbox. I had a couple, my favourite of which was a bright red 1995 convertible. Convertible, in Frontera guise, meant getting the tool kit out and unbolting the rear roof section, of course, but it was a great bit of kit for the summer and I had hours of fun scaling Welsh mountains in it.

With such fond memories, I was excited to see that the Frontera was making a comeback and I decided to take it on a trip down memory lane, or at least the same winding mountain roads that I so often grunted around in my old General Motors, Isuzu-based Frontera.

The only question was, which version of the new Frontera to book. The engine range consists of two mild-hybrid petrol engines, and the Frontera Electric which, incredibly, costs less than the hybrids.

In fact, for under £23k you can get a Frontera Electric! That's a lot of car for a small price tag. The only problem being that, for the base price, you'll get a 111bhp electric motor, mated to a 44kWh battery. That will give you a maximum range of 186 miles on a charge. For my rugged Welsh run, I therefore booked the hybrid... Which the previous journalist promptly smashed up, swapping the booking to the EV at the last minute.

An EV, with minimal range, on cold, winding mountain roads? No chargers for miles? A trip nearing the maximum range? What could possibly go wrong?

Exterior

The new Frontera sits on Stellantis' Smart Car platform, which it shares with the Citroen C3, Citroen C3 Aircross and Fiat Grande Panda. It's a fair-sized wagon for the family, but not over-bulky. It's certainly more car-like than the old Frontera



In Front for value

and easy to live with, in and out of town.

It looks good too, with a smart Vauxhall Vizor nose, flowing side contours that bring the profile to life, a nice spoiler flick above the tailgate, contrasting black roof and sharp-cut alloy wheels. If you want to give your Frontera an old-school utility look, you can plump for the optional steel wheels, but it's a modern, stylish affair in all guises.

Interior

The cabin is spacious but also the most telling reflection of the Frontera's modest price-tag. It's far more upmarket than the interior in my old 95 mud-plugger, but there are a lot of hard, scratchy plastics on display, by modern standards.

Vauxhall describes it as a clean

user-experience and it does feel refreshingly simple. I even felt a twang of nostalgia for a moment.

Two 10-inch widescreens sit on the dashboard, one for the driver, one for the infotainment, but there's physical switchgear for the climate controls, which keeps life sensible.

The screens are clear and easy to read, with software that responds quickly, so Stellantis has got that bit right. You also get a fair few features, including sat-nav, DAB radio, Bluetooth, Android Auto, Apple CarPlay and wireless phone-charging.

The driver's seat has a wide range of adjustments and is relatively comfortable. My only gripe about the driving position would be that the steering wheel doesn't have much adjustment for reach, so you can't pull it

far enough towards you. That's rather uncomfortable if you have long legs, like me.

Space is, otherwise, plentiful for five and you can spec a seven-seat option on hybrid versions. Sadly, this option isn't available on the EV, which is a pity really.

On the road

My trip down memory lane started well, in bright sunshine, with dry roads. On the busier sections, the EV felt relaxed and smooth. It's certainly well-suited to town work. Then, we hit the open roads stretching into the borders between England and Wales. Here, the weather changed and, in true British fashion, shifted through four seasons within a couple of hours. A tough proving ground.

The steering is precise through long, undulating bends, feeling well weighted and body-roll is well controlled. There's a bit of wind and road noise at higher speeds, but the Frontera generally copes well with long-haul drives. Passengers have plenty of room to spread out and there's enough boot space to cope with all the clutter associated with family holidobbs.

Acceleration is disappointing, especially for an EV. 0-62mph takes a whopping 12.8 seconds

and you feel like you have your boot planted on the boards for an eternity to achieve that. Top speed is a meagre 88mph.

Other drawbacks include the brakes, that feel rather spongy, and the intrusive nature of the 'lane keep assist' and 'speed limit warning' systems. These automatically activate at the start of every journey. Fortunately, Vauxhall has thought about this and fitted some well-placed physical shortcut buttons to shut them down. Then there's the range. The entry-level Frontera Electric comes with a humble 44kWh battery and that takes some planning.

On my road trip, the weather had now turned to snow, it was dark and, as I approached Rhayader, my range was plummeting. I stopped to use a local charger and registered with Dragon Charging. After spending half an hour on a car park, fighting with attaching our own lead to the charger, it became apparent that the charger wasn't working and we moved on to look for another.

By the time we reached Llangurig, I'd shut down all non-essential systems, including the heating. Nearly three hours into my journey and we're hooked up to a fast-charger for a 20-minute top-up. Then, it was back on the road, still with the heating shut down, passengers wrapped in blankets, snow falling and a range estimation very close to the actual remaining mileage.

For the last 30 miles, I managed to find an articulated lorry that was making good time and slid up neatly behind it, slipstreaming the Frontera all the way to Aberystwyth. I'm pleased to say that we made it, with an estimated 9 miles left in the tank. Squeaky bum time!

I lost track of the energy consumption in the drama but, in the early stages, before the dark and the snow, we averaged just shy of Vauxhall's claimed 3.4mi/kWh. At that rate, we'd have travelled less than 150 miles, and we managed way less than that due to the weather.

As I sat down after the trip I wrote myself a note and it read 'If you don't travel hundreds of miles a day and can take advantage of cheap home charging, the cheapest Frontera EV is the car for you. If, however, you want Frontera nostalgia, long-range capability and seven seats, the Hybrid is the weapon of choice.'

On the upside, a 20-80 percent charge can take as little as 3.5 hours at home, so every cloud eh?

Pros

- Low buying and running costs
- Spacious and available with up to seven seats
- User-friendly interior controls
- Extended-range battery available

Cons

- Some wind and road

Vauxhall Frontera

- noise
- Scratchy plastic on view inside
- EV range is short on the cheapest model

Verdict

THE NEW Frontera bears little resemblance to the 90s classic it follows. It is,

however, a ruddy good effort from Vauxhall, that gives you a lot for your money. The cabin could be better appointed, but it's more than acceptable for the price and an EV that's cheaper than a mild hybrid, is unusual, if not a first. If you don't need a mud-plugger, or a car for regular long-distance running, it's phenomenal value.

Sport



RAF STAR: Sgt Lewis against Army opponent



ANOTHER WIN: Cam gets better of Navy fighter

IS winner Cam has shot at turning pro

BOXING

Andy O'Hara

AFTER HELPING the RAF to their first Inter-Services title win in more than half a century, boxer Cameron Lewis is pulling no punches in his bid to turn pro.

The light-heavyweight, originally from Widnes in the North West, has established himself as one of the leading boxers in the UK Armed Forces.

The Sergeant was an amateur Merseyside and Cheshire champion from his home town's Title Shot Amateur Boxing Gym and is still trained by the head coach there, Terry Spencer.

Competing at 80kg, Sgt Lewis has gone on to become a three-times UK Armed Forces Elite Champion, demonstrating consistent success at the highest level within the Services. His performances have also seen him progress into the National Amateur Championships.

Historic

Recently, Cam competed at HMS Nelson in Portsmouth, where he won his bout and played a key role in helping the RAF secure the Inter-Services Boxing Championship title for the first time in 54 years – a historic achievement.

He told *RAF News*: "I joined

the RAF in 2022 without really knowing much about it – I just gave it a proper shot. Boxing played a big part in getting me fit for basic training, and since then it's become a huge part of my life. The RAF has shaped me as a person and supported my sporting journey throughout.

Champ

"My amateur record currently stands at 51 fights, 35 wins, including becoming a three-times UKAF champion, International Box Cup champion, Haringey Box Cup bronze medallist and National finalist.

"Another highlight was when I defeated Army L/Cpl Aaron Doherty in the UKAF Inter-Services Championships. That win was a big moment for me and has catapulted me into the National Amateur Championships,



ELATED: Cam with the coveted Inter-Services Trophy

where I now aim to go as far as possible. Winning at that level would mean earning an England vest, representing England, and potentially gaining a GB Boxing assessment, which could open the door towards a successful professional career.

Kearns

"Within the RAF, I'm currently vice-captain of the RAF Boxing Team, working under WO John Kearns, who has played a huge role in my development. I joined the RAF as a development-level boxer, and under his guidance I've progressed to competing consistently at national level.

"Alongside that, I've been coached by Terry Spencer in Widnes since I was 16 years old, nearly 10 years now. He runs both a professional and amateur set-up, and I still train there whenever I'm on leave. Terry will also be my coach as I transition into the professional ranks,

which is a big part of my long-term plan."

Alongside his fighting career, Cam serves as an Air Traffic Controller at Odiham. He added: "Looking ahead, my ambition is to make this my strongest and most successful amateur season with the RAF before turning professional at the end of the year, while continuing my career in the Royal Air Force. I want to show that it's possible to balance both – performing at a high level in Air Traffic Control and in professional boxing – while proudly representing the military.

"The RAF has given me a platform and support system that's allowed me to get to this point, and I'm grateful for that. I'll need that continued backing as I push towards the next level in my career."

Axe

Lewis is hoping to emulate fellow RAF fighter Cpl Brad Axe, who turned professional in 2023 and made his pro debut in April 2024, beating Slovakian Edgar Kemsky. Firefighter instructor Axe is due to go up against Kevin Reavell in a middleweight clash at London's York Hall on May 3.

● **Follow Cam on Instagram:** @camlewis01, **Facebook:** @Camlewis01 and on **YouTube:** @Camlewis01 and on **BoxRec.**

To see your sport featured in *RAF News*, send a short report (max. 300 words) and a couple of photographs (attached hi-res jpegs) to: Sports@rafnews.co.uk

Sport

FOOTBALL

Kenny makes top lower league ref finals

LOSSIEMOUTH'S SGT Kenny Martin has been selected as one of six finalists for the Scottish Lower League Referee of the Year.

The honour recognises his 'outstanding devotion to and support of grassroots football in the community'.

Martin, from the Logistics Support Squadron, officiates for the Moray and Banff Referee Association, covering grassroots matches across the north of Scotland.

He said: "I'd like to thank everyone in the RAF for their support, it truly means a lot."

He added: "Refereeing prolongs my time and enjoyment in the game, increases my fitness levels, improves my mental health, and enables me to give back to various local communities ensuring

grassroots/lower league football are catered with a SFA qualified referee.

"It is also very enjoyable to be involved in a close-knit refereeing community through Moray & Banff Association, where support is second to none.

"This is all possible with being given the time to adopt referee training programmes and engage with RAF physiotherapists and rehab experts, which all contribute to being in the best physical condition to referee football games."

The awards ceremony is in Glasgow on September 4.

● For information on applying to become a RAF referee, email: Sheila.haining@royalairforcefa.com at the RAF Football Association.

GRASSROOTS: Sgt Martin officiates at women's game



ROWING

RAF flying the flag

Head of River Race triumph

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE claimed victory in the HM Forces Pennant at the historic Head of the River Race on the Thames, beating both the Army and Royal Navy in one of the most keenly contested Inter-Services races of the season.

The RAF delivered a powerful and composed performance through challenging Tideway conditions, recording a time of 20:03.5. That result placed the crew 216th overall from 369 entries in a highly-competitive field and secured the fastest time among the three Services, earning the coveted pennant and Inter-Service bragging rights.

The winning RAF Crew comprised Sgt Jamie Wrafter, Sgt Ben Kerry, A/Chf Tech Jamie Davis, Sqn Ldr Matthew Parle, Sgt Tom Jewell, FS Damen Sanderson, Fg Off Austin Burnand and Flt Lt Jamie Macdonald and cox Fg Off Eve Myers.

Pace

The Army were second among the Services, placing 258th overall with a time of 20:28.1. Despite a determined row, they were unable to match the pace set by the RAF across the course.

Completing the Inter-Service contest, the Navy finished 302nd overall in 21:06.4, rounding out a strong showing from all three Armed Forces.

Awarded annually to the fastest Service crew, the HM Forces Pennant is one of the highlights of the Head of the River Race, one of the world's largest and most prestigious head races. This year's result underlined the depth of rowing talent within the Armed Forces and carried on a



LEADING THE ARMED FORCES: RAF rowers make good progress on the Thames during the race PHOTO: ALL MARK ONE



AIN'T LIFE GR-EIGHT: Winning crew, with Cox Fg Off Eve Myers

long-standing tradition of rivalry on the Tideway.

RAF rowing success continued at the Vesta International Masters

Head of the River Race, with a Men's Masters D crew delivering a resilient performance in difficult conditions.

SIDECAR

Injured Sgt out for the foreseeable

RAF SIDECAR star Sgt Mark Middleton is likely to miss the majority of the race season because of injuries sustained during testing.

He will be replaced by Shane Colbrook, who has stepped into the breach for the team before.

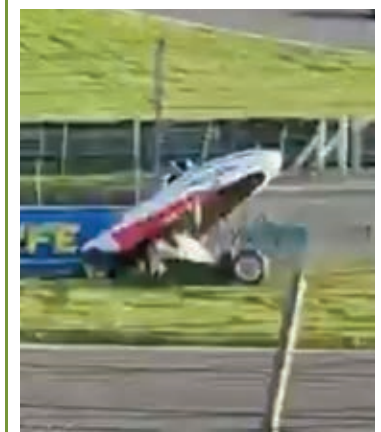
Middleton was the 'passenger' as he and driver Cpl Rob Atkinson put their F1 bike through its paces at pre-season testing at Brands Hatch last month.

A crash in the third session saw the bike spin nose over tail with Middleton suffering a broken radius in his left wrist (above). Atkinson was unhurt. The smash also totalled the duo's only F1 ride.

The team had secured P2 in qualifying and P4 in race one and two, but the crash in race three not only ended their weekend but leaves the team in a race against time to have the bike rebuilt in time for round one at Donington Park later this month (8-10).

A spokesman for the RAF set-up said: "We would like to wish Mark a speedy recovery and thank Shane for his commitment at short notice."

● See Facebook @RAFsidecar to follow the team.



CRASH: Pair's bike flips at Brands Hatch

The RAF crew, with an average age of 52, competed in Division 1 against 20 other Category D crews as part of a total field of 296 entries.

The RAF Men's Masters D Crew comprised FS Andy May, Chf Tech Davis, Mario (emergency stand-in from Germany), Cpl Mike Yeomans, Sgt Ben Kerry, Sqn Ldr Ian Guildford, Sqn Ldr Graeme Goldsworthy and Mr Steve Lawson, with cox Ms Eve Myers.

Battling strong winds and heavy traffic on the Tideway, the crew crossed the finish line in a time of 21:18, demonstrating determination, teamwork and depth of experience.

The RAF Masters crew rounded off a successful weekend of racing, contributing to an impressive overall showing for RAF rowing on the Thames.



INSPIRATIONAL: (From left) Swimmers Anna Hopkin, Cassie Patten and diver Matty Lee at Coningsby with association members PHOTOS: SGT NICHOLAS EGAN



IN AT THE DEEP END: Anna Hopkin is given instruction on the Typhoon simulator at Coningsby

SWIMMING

Olympians help mark centenary

Simon Mander

SWIMMERS MARKED the centenary of their foundation with a visit by Olympic medallists.

Exactly 100 years since the RAF Sports Board voted to form it, the Service's Swimming Association hosted three

GB Aquatics Olympians at Coningsby and Cranwell.

Elite athletes Tokyo gold winners Matty Lee and Anna Hopkin and Beijing open water bronze medallist Cassie Patten were at Coningsby to share their top tips with personnel.

And they got a chance to see

how the Typhoon operates by flying a simulator carrying out low-level, air-to-air refuelling, and landing the aircraft.

They then moved to the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight where they watched the C47 Dakota taxi, before receiving a hangar tour.

The focus then switched

to Cranwell, where current Association members were competing in the 2026 RAF Swimming Championship before conducting a Q&A session and informal meet and greet.

The Olympians also took the opportunity to present RAF Colours to recognise Inter-

Service representation.

RAF Swimming Association 100 celebrations will continue throughout 2026, with events to mark Open Water Swimming, Diving and Water Polo.

Anyone interested in the RAFSA can contact their PED Flt or visit RAF Central Fund.

BADMINTON

The fabulous five

Badminton players smash their way to another title

IT WAS a net gain for RAF Badminton at the Navy-hosted Inter-Services at RNAS Yeovilton with a near clean sweep of team titles.

Victory went to the Women's, Men's and Mixed teams, meaning the aviators won the overall competition for the fifth consecutive year, ahead of the Army.

And there was further success for the RAF at the UKAF Open at the same venue, with the Women's Singles being won by Cpl Katie Witting for the fourth time in a row, and the Open Doubles being taken by Sqn Ldr Charles Badu-Boateng & Cpl Maxwell Clarke.

There were also runners-up spots for Sgt Sijan Rai in the Men's Singles and AS1 Jemima Cheetham & Witting in the Women's Doubles. Second place also went to Flt Lt Matthew Cross & Rai in the Doubles and to AS1



TOP TEAM: (Back, left to right) Fg Off Samuel Bell, AS1(T) Lewis Farrell, Cpl Alistair Berchier, Cpl Maxwell Clarke, Flt Lt Matthew Cross, Sqn Ldr Barry Garnham, Sgt Sijan Rai and Cpl Robert Moore. (Front, left to right) Chf Tech Joanne Wesley, Flt Lt Mary Clarke, Cpl Katie Witting, AS1 Jacob Marklew, Sqn Ldr Charles Badu-Boateng, AS1 Jemima Cheetham, Sqn Ldr Sophie Hyndman and Cpl Laura Horne

Jacob Marklew & Witting in the Mixed Doubles.

Ladies Captain Witting said:

"The Inter-Services competition was a resounding success, culminating in the RAF winning

the overall title. Despite challenges with player availability, the team's performance demonstrated the strength and depth of RAF badminton.

"It was great to welcome two new RAF players to the event - Cpl Laura Horne and Fg Off Samuel Bell - both earning their colours and further strengthening the team for the future.

"Notwithstanding the high level of competition, particularly this year, the event maintained a friendly and supportive atmosphere, with support for players evident across all three Services - a fantastic event and a privilege to be a part of."

Men's Captain Marklew added: "This year's tournament was incredibly challenging, with a relentless level of competition from the Army and the Navy. I am immensely proud of the RAF team for rising to that challenge



CAPTAINS: Witting and Marklew

and coming away with the Open, Ladies, Mixed and Overall victories.

"Clinching the Inter-Services title for the fifth consecutive year proves that the RAF remain the dominant force on the court, both in team depth and individual excellence. I am also really proud to be able to come away with a 2nd place in the mixed doubles with the Ladies Captain, Cpl Witting."

To see your sport featured in **RAF News**, send a short report (max. 300 words) and a couple of photographs (attached hi-res jpegs) to: **Sports@rafnews.co.uk**

Sport

ANGLING

Valhalla anglers spawn to be wild

Herring roe makes easy feasting for bigger fish

Sports Reporter

MILLIONS OF spawning herring had RAF anglers in a pickle during the annual Exercise Valhalla in Norway.

The endless supply of tasty morsels meant that other larger species usually caught in numbers by the aviators had already eaten their fill of seafood and weren't as interested in the fishermen's lures as they would otherwise have been.

Association spokesman FS Scott Rennie told *RAF News*: "Fishing this year was unfortunately not as successful as previous expeditions, primarily due to the number of herring in Trondheim fjord.

"This annual event sees millions of these 'silver darlings' migrate into the shallows to spawn, but the actual timing of the event is never truly fixed. It was our hope to get to Norway before it happened, as many of our target species had literally gorged themselves on this bounty. This made catching them with bait or lure particularly tough, but even a tough day in Norway produces fish in sizes and quantities you just can't get in the UK.

"Good catches of cod, haddock, and dabs kept us busy with occasional coal fish and pollock mixing things up. If you love fish and chips, then Norway truly delivers. Fishing at night produced the weird and wonderful, with shark species such as blackmouth dogfish, ghost sharks, and velvet-bellied lanternshark."

RAF Sea Angling members use Ex Valhalla to develop their skills in unfamiliar waters, from both boat and shore. There is also a focus on the teamwork and team spirit which are as important to competitive angling as the fishing itself.

Rennie added: "In an environment such as Norway, working as a team is a must and



STILL SMILING: FS Scott Rennie with haddock catch



LIAISON: Scott with Navy angler, left

safety the prime driver. Duty of care from individual to group ensures safe fishing, in often austere and inclement conditions. Empowering personnel with responsibilities such as vehicle inspections, boat inspections, equipment checks, etc, shares the workload and reinforces team ethos. It is this approach we firmly believe pushes us to the successes reflected in our continued Inter-Service and UK Armed Forces results.

"As you can see in the pictures, it's a rare thing to see an unhappy

angler in Norway. Valhalla 27 will see the RAF securing a trip in either February or April to avoid the herring spawn and find more cooperative fishing.

"A true success of this trip was sharing with anglers from the Royal Navy. While not directly associated with the exercise, some Senior Service anglers shared the week with us, which turned out to be a real bonus. It provided an opportunity to maintain our excellent Inter-Service relations and input a very friendly competitive element. We hope this joint approach may be considered again moving forward. Further to this, relations with our Norwegian hosts continue to grow, seeing the RAF visit becoming more of an event rather than just a fishing trip. This is a direct result of the impeccable behaviour of all attending, past and present – true RAF ambassadors."

RUGBY UNION

Women lead way in Inter-Services

THE WOMEN got their 2026 rugby union Inter-Services off to a strong start with a convincing 36-7 victory over the Royal Navy at Cinch Stadium, Franklin Gardens, in Northampton.

There were tries from Cpl Tyler Lewis, AS1(T) Sinead Skillen and newcomer Cpl Hannah McCabe as the dominant aviators went in 24-0 at the break after bossing the first half.

The Navy did put up more of a fight in the second half but couldn't stop LCpl Kim Grundy adding another try for the light blues, with AS1 Daisy Fahey (pictured inset) continuing to add the extras.

Sub Philippa Griffiths spared Navy blushes with a converted try, but the RAF were sitting pretty at 36-7 at the final whistle and have the chance to take the title off holders the Army when the sides meet at Gloucester's Kingsholm Stadium on May 16.

There was a reversal of fortunes in the men's match where the Navy were the dominant force, beating the RAF 47-16.

The light blues were the first on the scoreboard, courtesy of a penalty kicked by

captain Cpl Mark Williams, but there was only to be another conversion for them in the first half as the Senior Service ran in three tries to really put their stamp on the game and go in with a commanding 21-6 lead at the break.

Battling hard, the aviators got their first try through AS1 Will Llewellyn, who beat the defence to score in impressive style and give the RAF a much-needed boost. It only seemed to spur the Navy into action again though, as they hit back with two scores from hooker Sam Matavesi.

With the RAF battling on, they closed the gap a little with a try from AS1(T) Josh Peacock, but it was never going to be enough and current champions the Navy closed things out with a sixth and seventh try to give themselves every chance of reclaiming the crown when they take on the Army.

The light blues will be hoping to stay in the mix by bouncing back against the soldiers at Kingsholm later this month, but the title could already be gone by then if the Navy defeat the Army at Twickenham's Allianz Stadium on May 2.



SIX NATIONS

Cokayne off to a flyer

AVIATOR FLT LT Amy Cokayne notched up her second try in two games as the Red Roses kept their Women's Six Nations campaign on track, thrashing Scotland 84-7 in front of a record crowd at Murrayfield.

The RAF and England forward rolled off a maul in the second half to add another score to the one she got in similar fashion in the 33-12 victory against Ireland at the Allianz Stadium in Twickenham the week before.

The 12-try Red Rose rampage against Scotland was witnessed by 30,498 spectators – the most ever in that country for a women's match.

Ellie Kildunne and Sarah Bern both touched down twice for England and there were also scores for Meg Jones, Kelsey Clifford, Emma Sing, Marlie Packer, Sadia Kabeya,

Mia Venner and Haineala Lutia, as well as Cokayne. Fly-half Zoe Harrison was in superlative form, kicking all 12 conversions.

Against Ireland, Cokayne grabbed the first of her side's five tries from close range after just seven minutes as they shook off the cobwebs in their first game since winning the World Cup at the same venue last September.

There were also two tries for Sarah Bern as the home side went in 21-0 up at the break in front of a W6N record crowd of 77,120 in South West London.

Further scores in the second half by Jess Breach and Ellie Kildunne secured the bonus point.

England next face Wales at home on April 25, after *RAF News* goes to press.

To see your sport featured in *RAF News*, send a short report (max. 300 words) and a couple of photographs (attached hi-res jpegs) to: Sports@rafnews.co.uk

5 RAF Sport

pages of



See p23

History-making boxer wants his shot at going pro

GRIDIRON

Inter-Services glory for American footballers Mustangs on offensive as they reclaim crown

Staff Reporter

THE RAF Mustangs powered to victory against the Army 29-14 in Abingdon to reclaim the Inter-Services American Football crown.

Once again, the championship was decided on the final game, with the soldiers hosting at Tilsley park in Oxfordshire.

Both teams went into the game having beaten the Royal Navy, with the Army exuding confidence having not conceded any points in their first game – the first shutout in the tournament’s history.

The match started with the Army having first control of the ball. During the first drive a significant injury to one of their players halted proceedings, with both teams leaving the field to keep warm. Once back underway, the RAF were able to hold strong and an interception by AS1(T) Dylan Pole got the ball in the aviators’ hands.

They wasted no time in methodically passing and running their way down the field, culminating in a touchdown pass from Cpl James Turner to Cpl Lewis Truman. The extra point was missed, leaving the score 6-0 to the RAF.

Strong defensive performances from both sides saw the only other points coming from an RAF field goal from Pole, leaving the score at half-time 9-0 to the RAF Mustangs.

The second half got underway and after a couple of mistakes by the RAF and good defence on both sides, the Army eventually broke the deadlock, driving down the field and scoring. With the extra point missed, it was now 9-6.

This appeared to be what the Mustangs needed to light a fire, with the defence led by Flt Lt Ashley Allum staying strong, time was given for the offence to get in gear, where they were able to put together another scoring drive,



RUNNING GAME: A change of tactics kept Mustangs on front foot
PHOTOS: SOPHIE DAINTY

again seeing Turner hit Truman in the endzone. 16-6 to the RAF going into the 4th Quarter.

The Mustangs got the ball early with some great play from Turner before AS1 Elliott Knight eventually got the opening he wanted, taking the ball 40 yards for the score. The extra point missed, it stood at 22-6 to the Mustangs.

The Army

WINNING WAYS: FS Adam Hennessey is presented with the IS trophy



were not done however, taking the ball methodically down the field to score and bring the game within touching distance having scored a 2-point conversion for 22-14.

Both defences once again took it up a level and held the opposing side to minimal gains. With under five minutes to go the Mustangs took control and with a change in tactics they decided to keep the ball on the ground by running more, which

proved not only timely but also extremely pivotal.

Play by play marching down the field, the clock running down, they were able to get within touching distance of the endzone, when the ball was handed off to AS2 Arthur Fox, just months into taking up the sport, who then darted around the outside for the score. With the extra point successful, the game was now 29-14, and so it stayed until the clock ran out.

Delighted Mustangs General Manager Chf Tech Paul Wakeford told RAF Sport: “Winning the Inter-Service championships is hard enough, repeating it is even harder. It takes exceptional dedication from the players and creativity from the coaches to not

be too predictable.

“The entire organisation deserved this win; with the on-going work commitments and deployments we required everyone to step up and make an impact. In the Army game this was no more apparent than with the players on the Offensive line. Often forgotten about, these guys go about their work with little or no praise. In this game there were only five of them, with backups pulled from other positions if required. They stayed strong and fit, sustaining no injuries nor taking any breaks. That enabled us to win this game, so special mention to Sqn Ldr Simon Bracewell, Cpl Lee Teasdale, Flt Lt Ben Parkin, AS1(T) Tom White and Flt Lt Fraser Simmons.”



TO EVERY WOMAN WHO WORE THE UNIFORM

We understand that your military experiences are unique.

Over half of our staff who've served are ex-servicewomen, so you'll be met by people who understand service life, transition, and what comes next.

Our support is:

For everyone who served.

Inclusive, welcoming and confidential.

Built around your needs, not assumptions.

Your service mattered. You matter.

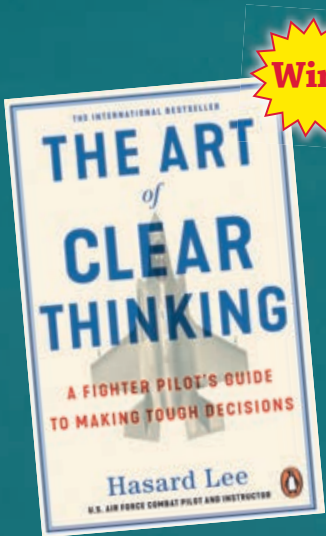
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R'n'R



Win!

Win international bestseller ● p5



Rave on - Melanie C live

● See pages 4-5

BREW+
BAKE!



IT'S TIME TO BREW AND BAKE FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH.

We all know it's good to talk. Host a Brew and Bake coffee morning or bake sale on station, at home, or in your community and make a life-changing difference to a veteran whilst having a brew, some banter and a slice of cake.



Simply sign up online for your free fundraising pack. Raise funds by asking for donations in return for a delicious brew and some baked goodies.

**COMBAT
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FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

Exhibitions

Tutankhamun: The Immersive Exhibition
Birmingham NEC Campus, June 19 to September 13

Walk like an Egyptian at NEC Campus

AFTER HUGELY successful runs in London and Glasgow with more than 300,000 visitors, Tutankhamun: The Immersive Exhibition visits Birmingham in June.

The event, which opens at the NEC Campus on June 19 for a limited 12-week run, features an eight-metre high 360-degree immersive video mapping room, a seated virtual reality experience, and interactive digital metaverse room and replicas and artefacts directly from Cairo.

A spokesperson said: "The exhibition will showcase a selection of original ancient Egyptian artefacts from as far back as 4000 BC, including a funerary shabti from the 20th

Dynasty that belonged to Howard Carter's private collection, statuettes and vases from the reigns of Tutankhamun and Ramses II & III, as well as high quality replicas and facsimiles from Egypt in the exceptionally curated 'treasure rooms'.

"After dazzling audiences in 13 cities across three continents and captivating over 2.5 million visitors, the exhibition comes for a strictly limited run to Birmingham after incredibly successful runs in London, Glasgow and Stockholm."

Created in collaboration with Egyptologists and historians, the exhibition features one of Europe's most expansive immersive video mapping rooms



REALISTIC: Children and adults alike will be enthralled by the displays

with projections on 8-metre-high surfaces. Blending cutting-edge technology with Egyptian history, the Birmingham edition of the exhibition will transport visitors through six galleries that delve into the fascinating lives of ancient Egyptians.

"After successful runs in cities such as Madrid, Hamburg, Cairo, Sao Paulo, Barcelona, Vienna and Malmö, the exhibition invites visitors to take a journey through

ancient Egypt, discovering the myths and mysteries surrounding Pharaoh Tutankhamun," the spokesperson added.

"Guests will enter via an interactive walkway which leads into a museal area presenting captivating background stories about Egyptian civilization alongside carefully curated replicas and artefacts.

"Following this, the experience continues into a huge immersive

video mapping room which recounts the rich history of Egypt, its landscapes, heritage, the life of Tutankhamun, his tomb, and its ground-breaking discovery. The moment of the discovery of the tomb is described in a recorded interview of Howard Carter, the famous British archaeologist."

● **The experience runs until September 13. Go to: tutankhamunexperience.com for further details.**



Music
Madonna
New album

NEW LP:
Madonna



Madge in mood for Confessions

MADONNA HAS announced that her eagerly anticipated new album *Confessions II* is set for release on July 3. The album is the continuation of the iconic

counterpart *Confessions on a Dance Floor*.

Madonna summed up the new record by quoting the first few lines of her song *One Step Away*: "People think that dance music is superficial, but they've got it all wrong. The dance floor is not just a place, it's a threshold: a ritualistic space where movement replaces language."

She added: "When Stuart Price and I first started working on this record, this was our manifesto: We must dance, celebrate, and pray with our bodies. These are things that we've been doing for thousands of years – they really are spiritual practices. After all, the dance floor is a ritualistic space. It's a place where you connect – with your wounds, with your fragility. To rave is an art. It's about pushing your limits and connecting to a community of like-minded people."

● **Go to: madonna.com for more details.**



MADONNA:
Up for a rave



Theatre Review
Glorious!
On tour: gloriousplay.com

Based on a true story

Wendi wows as tone deaf Foster Jenkins

WENDI PETERS delivers a memorable performance as the American socialite Florence Foster Jenkins, dubbed 'the worst singer in the world', in the 20th anniversary touring production of *Glorious!* by Peter Quilter.

Peters is best known for her long-running role as Cilla Battersby Brown in *Coronation Street*, where she demonstrated her excellent comic timing and ability to portray a larger-than-life character – talents she displays in this winning production of *Glorious!*

When I saw the show at the Oxford Playhouse, Peters not only prompted plenty of laughs from the audience with Florence's startlingly off-key deliveries at her self-financed classical recitals, she also gained the audience's sympathy with her moving portrayal of a seemingly unstoppable woman whose supreme self-confidence masks a sadness and vulnerability originating from her early life. (Florence was briefly married at 14 to a much older man who gave her syphilis, which may have affected her hearing.)

In his witty script, Quilter (who wrote *End of the Rainbow*, adapted for the Oscar-winning film *Judy* starring Renée Zellweger) deftly shows the development of the friendship between Florence

and her accompanist Cosmé McMoon. Matthew James Morrison (*EastEnders*) gives a stand-out portrayal as Cosmé, who is initially sceptical and hesitates to accept Florence's offer of a (very well paid) job as her pianist but quickly comes to adore and admire his eccentric employer, despite her obvious lack of musical prowess.

An experienced musical theatre performer, Peters obviously has a superb voice and is able to sing spectacularly badly to convey the quality of Florence's enthusiastic but error-filled performances – no mean feat if you can sing in tune easily yourself. And her over-the-top costumes are, indeed, glorious.

Caroline Gruber and Sioned Jones provide good support – Gruber in the dual roles of Florence's bad-tempered Italian maid Maria, and as Mrs Verrinder Gedge (or 'Veranda Hedge' as Florence quips), a posh protestor who expresses her horror at Florence's mangling of music, and Jones as Florence's devoted friend Dorothy.

It's a strange but true story and makes for a highly entertaining evening – despite Florence's appalling singing, you can't help but root for her.

Four out of five rounds ●●●●
Review by Tracey Allen



DOUBLE ACT: Peters (left) and Gruber



LITERARY POWER COUPLE: Leonard and Virginia Woolf photographed in 1914, The Charleston Trust

Words power 37th Charleston Festival

A STAR-STUDDED line-up has been announced for the 37th Charleston Festival which takes place in Firle, East Sussex, from May 13-25.

The two-week event includes more than 60 talks and performances, set in the idyllic grounds of Charleston, once home to the Bloomsbury group and a historic meeting place for some of the 20th century's most radical artists, writers and thinkers.

Among the top names appearing are Jennifer Saunders, Sandi Toksvig, Michael Heseltine, Sheku Kanneh-Mason, Olly Alexander, Kae Tempest, Jung Chang, Nazanin Zahhari-Ratcliffe, Irvine Welsh and Rose Wylie.

A major theme for the 2026 festival is The Power of Words and in its opening event publishers Margaret Busby and Sharmaine Lovegrove explore the radical legacy of the Hogarth Press – founded by Virginia and Leonard Woolf in 1917 – and the role of publishing as a cultural and political act.

Charleston hosts a major exhibition exploring the hand-printed books and radical publishing legacy of Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press, one of the most influential independent printing presses of the 20th century. The exhibition, which features more than 100 rare books alongside archival material, letters and artwork, brings together for the first time the most complete collection to date of hand-printed books produced by the press and explores Virginia and



FAMILY FAVOURITE: Jennifer Saunders

Leonard's pivotal role as printer, publisher and makers, revealing a lesser-known but fundamental aspect of her creative life. The power of words theme continues with events with leading literary figures including Colm Tóibín, Jeanette Winterson and Irvine Welsh.

Other highlights include art, performance, politics and music; Nazanin Zahhari-Ratcliffe, imprisoned for more than six years by the Revolutionary Guard in Iran, explores how creativity in confinement can restore identity and hope; award-winning poet, novelist, playwright and performer Kae Tempest reflects on the relationship between poetry, performance and long-form fiction in a wide-ranging conversation; world-renowned cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason, in conversation with fellow musician Linton Stephens, discusses the discipline and drive behind his rise to fame, the family that shaped him, and elitism in the world of classical music and Michael Heseltine reflects on power, leadership and the long view of political life, drawing on his recent book, *From Acorns to Oaks*.

Family events feature stage and screen stars Hugh Bonneville, Jennifer Saunders and Simon Farnaby.

Closing the Festival the actor and singer Olly Alexander brings writer Christopher Isherwood to life in *Goodbye to Berlin: Christopher Isherwood in His Own Words* – with readings from diaries, letters, memoirs and fiction.

● **Go to:** charleston.org.uk for more details.



Music

Mel C
New album and tour

Mel C raves about new dance album

BEFORE SHE became Mel C of the Spice Girls (aka Sporty Spice), she was Melanie Chisholm of “The F**king Yeah Four”, a group of 18-year-old friends dancing through the Costa Brava rave scene in the early '90s. Those nights of breakbeats, sweat and freedom would shape her forever. Decades later, Melanie C channels that same raw energy into *Sweat* – her ninth studio album released on May 1. And a special show at O2 Academy Brixton in October 23 has been announced.

Sweat captures the spirit of a generation that found itself on the dance floor. “When we were young every weekend we’d go out dancing all night long,” she recalled. “In a room of friendly strangers, we found the place where we belong.”

In 2018, a chance invitation to DJ at queer club night Sink The Pink reignited Chisholm’s connection to dance culture. Within a year, she was spinning at Ibiza institutions like Pacha and Café Mambo, and commanding festival crowds across the globe. That same year, she rejoined the Spice Girls for their landmark 2019 reunion tour, culminating in three sold-out nights at Wembley Stadium.

Sweat is a record about resilience and joy in dark times. “There are so many horrific things going on in the world, when you make pop and dance music, it can seem almost churlish. But music is what gets me through tough moments. I’m really happy I am bringing out a joyful record at a very dark time,” she explained.

“Every album I’ve ever made, it’s really been a reflection of that moment in my life. And over the last eight years I’ve been DJing. I’ve been lucky enough to play in so many great festivals all over the world, as well as playing in Ibiza. And it just really reignited a passion I have for dance music.”

She added: “When I turned 20 I auditioned for the band that became the Spice Girls and that took over my life. All of my priorities changed. We were so focused, so determined to succeed. And then of course once music was released, our schedule was crazy, so there wasn’t much time for going out, socialising, and I’d almost left that part of me behind.



SWEAT: New album

“I’ve just been able to kind of reclaim who I was before I was a Spice Girl. I’ve had so many influences through my life, I’ve been so lucky, worked with so many amazing people, and this felt like the time to really put all of those pieces together.”

Melanie added: “I really wanted to bring my work as a solo artist closer to what I play as a DJ. I play multi-genre house when I’m out. So it was just nice to play with all of those different things and find my own voice within that.”

She’s looking forward to an in-store signing tour that kicks off in her home town of Liverpool on May 1.

“It’s a very proud city...they really embrace you, look after you and celebrate you,” she explained. “I thank my city for how supportive they’ve been over the years of me, as a Spice Girl and a solo artist. It’s so important to get out there to the fans and the people who support you.”

Her world tour

Compiled by Executive Features Editor Tracey Allen



SPORTY BY NAME: Mel C lives up to her Spice Girl moniker

kicks off in Montreal on September 8 and UK dates include Glasgow, Manchester, London and Birmingham. What does it mean to her to be playing a live date at O2 Academy Brixton? She said: "I feel quite emotional about it. I've been to see some of my favourite artists at Brixton Academy. I saw Madonna there way back in the noughties. This will be my biggest UK headline show since I played Wembley Arena in the very early noughties. It means so much to me that at this point in my career, it's 30 years since I started with the Spice Girls, over 25 years since I became a solo artist, I'm 52 years old and I'm playing this brilliant iconic venue for the

very first time. So that show is going to be extra special." How does Melanie feel to be cited as an influence by the new era of musicians? "It blows my mind. I think all of us Spice Girls we're so proud. Obviously, we have left this beautiful legacy behind and we see constantly people who have been affected by it, and so many artists would mention the Spice Girls, and, you know, great artists. "It's very full circle because there are artists that talk about being inspired by the Spice Girls that inspire me. So that's really beautiful. And it's lovely to meet them as well, I meet so many artists and they're very excited to meet a Spice Girl," she said. "But I think the most surprising to me are the ones that weren't even born when the Spice Girls first came out. And I'm like, how do you know? But of course, this is music and a movement that is passed down through generations, whether it was your older sister or your mum. And that's what we see whenever the Spice Girls get back together, we see this whole generational effect that our music has on people." **Go to: melaniec.net for more information.**



Competition

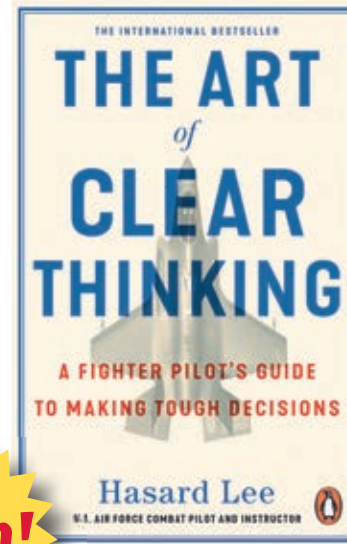
The Art of Clear Thinking, A Fighter Pilot's Guide to Making Tough Decisions
penguin.co.uk

Duke of Hasard ACE-d it as top USAF fighter pilot

AS A fighter pilot, Hasard Lee has to make frequent high-stakes, split-second decisions – his life has depended on it. In the international bestseller *The Art of Clear Thinking, A Fighter Pilot's Guide to Making Tough Decisions* (penguin.co.uk), Lee shares first-hand accounts to illustrate how the ACE Helix – assess, choose the correct course, execute – can be applied.

Lee has spent his US Air Force career flying the F-16 and F-35. He has flown 82 combat missions and led his squadron during one of the most intense periods of fighting during the war in Afghanistan. He became the first fighter pilot to fly two different types of jet into combat on the same day while supporting troops under fire.

The book covers the importance of assessing the problem, why power laws are important, that lessons learned from experiences and expertise



are more effective than memorisation and that the key to maximizing our mental resources is to focus only on what we have control of, which is the next decision to make.

He explains how tools like breathing, reframing and chair

flying (visualisation) have been used to great effect in Air Force training.

Lee was hand-picked to fly the F-35 when it was still in development. During his last role on active duty he became the Chief of Training Systems for the largest training base in the world, leading the development of new technology and teaching methods to train future fighter pilots.

The Art of Clear Thinking is his first book and we have copies up for grabs. For your chance to win one, tell us:

How many combat missions has Hasard Lee flown?

Email your answer, marked The Art of Clear Thinking book competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by May 15. Please include your full postal address with your entry.



Theatre

Trainspotting The Musical

Theatre Royal, Haymarket, from July 15

Renton hits the West End

THIRTY YEARS on from the release of the film, the world premiere of *Trainspotting The Musical* storms into the West End this summer, written by Irvine Welsh (adapted from his bestselling debut novel) and directed and developed by Caroline Jay Ranger (*Fawlty Towers*).

Described as a seismic British musical, it's at the Theatre Royal Haymarket from July 15.

Trainspotting was released in 1996 and became the biggest grossing UK film of the year. Taking more than \$76 million worldwide it won a slew of awards including a BAFTA for Best Screenplay. In 1999 it was ranked 10th in the British Film Institute's Top 100 Greatest British Films of the 20th century.

Now, three decades later, cult heroes of British youth culture Renton, Sick Boy, Begbie, Spud, Tommy and Kelly are back alongside an ensemble cast and a live band. Renton (played in the film by Ewan McGregor) will be played on stage by 26-year-old Scottish actor Robbie Scott (inset,



right), making his West End debut. Further casting will be announced soon.

Welsh said: "This musical has a bigger, loudly beating human heart than either the book or the film. The various stage adaptations of *Trainspotting* have become acclaimed and moving theatrical experiences and the soundtrack to the movie is obviously iconic. So it made sense to put the music and words together to create an explosive, provocative and entertaining show.

"People need to think about the world we're living in, and we offer that inspection, but they also really need to sing their hearts out and laugh their heads off – it's what being human is all about – and they'll be well served with this too."

The show features some of the electrifying tracks from the film together with original confrontational and celebratory songs – music and lyrics by Stephen McGuinness and Welsh.

You can go to: TrainspottingTheMusical.co.uk for ticket details.



Your Announcements

You can email photos for announcements on this page to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk

Death

HUNTER Ian (John) MBE, BEM. Died peacefully at home on April 14 aged 80. Ex-WO Pers Admin, Admin Apprentice who served 1962-2000. A loving husband of 59 years to Sue, father to Kirstie, father-in-law to John and proud grandfather to Daisy. The funeral will take place at 2pm on Tuesday, May 5 at St Thomas a Becket Church, Church Lane, Pagham, Bognor Regis PO21 4NU.

Seeking

I am trying to trace my brother, ex-FS R.E Lee (Bob) born in Sleights, N Yorks, March 1945-6, enlisted in RAF 1960 from West Sleekburn in Northumberland, was in the Telecommunication Branch. Last known posting was Brize Norton and he may have lived in the Oxford area, he would have served for 22 years. I have visited the UK a few times and tried to contact him without any luck. I would be grateful if anyone that knew him could contact me, Norman Lee, on: argemtis71@gmail.com.

DO you know anyone who trained at one of the six British Flying Training Schools in America in World War II? The Falcon Field Association: The Next Generation is holding its next annual event in Edinburgh on October 3-4. This year we are widening our invitation to include anyone connected with any of the BFTSs. If you learned to fly at a BFTS or are related to a pilot who trained there, we'd love to hear from you! Please contact Kathryn Masters by email: falconfieldassociationtng@gmail.com or mobile: 07885 378090.

Associations

RAF Bawdsey Reunion Association. Have you ever served at RAF Bawdsey? If so, why not

join our Association and come along to our next Annual Reunion to be held at Bawdsey Manor on Saturday, June 6. For full details please contact Doreen Calver on: doreen.bawdseyreunion@btinternet.com or telephone her on: 0751 3301 723.

591 SU Association. In its 72nd year of existence, 591 Signal Unit has established an Association (better late than never!). Ex-members and currently serving ex members of 591 SU are invited to visit the Association's website at: 591suassociation.co.uk for membership details and news of the next annual reunion along with other upcoming events for 2026.

IF you trained as an RAF Administrative Apprentice (or you are related to one) we would be delighted to welcome you to the RAFAA Association. Please see: rafadapassn.org; or contact the Membership Secretary on: 07866 085834 or the Chairman on: 01933 443673.

THE Association of RAF Women Officers (ARAFWO) is a lively, friendly, world-wide networking group. Please visit our website: arafwo.co.uk and discover the benefits of membership, plus see what activities and events we offer all over the world.

THE RAF Air Loadmaster Association (ALMA) will be marking its 25th anniversary this month with a weekend of special events. The Association will be holding a Gala Dinner at the RAF Club on Saturday, May 9 followed by a service of commemoration at the RAF church, St Clement Danes in The Strand, central London, on Sunday, May 10, followed by lunch. Both events will be attended by the ALMA's patron, former Chief of the Air Staff ACM Sir Andy Pulford. During the service, a commemorative Association crest floor tile will be unveiled. There will also be a visit to the Houses of Parliament on the afternoon of Friday, May 8, followed by dinner at the Archduke in Waterloo, then

a visit to the Tower of London on the afternoon of May 9. The Association is looking to recruit new members. If you are interested in joining, or would like more information about the anniversary events, please contact Les Weston via email: lesalma9001@gmail.com or you can call on the following number: 0753 1523456.

THE 23 Squadron Association is pleased to announce its intention to hold its Association Dinner on Saturday, October 10. The event will provide a valuable opportunity for former members of 23 Squadron to reconnect, share memories, and celebrate the proud history of the Red Eagles. The Squadron Committee cordially invites all previous personnel who have served with 23 Sqn – across all eras and roles – to register their interest and request further details, including venue details, timings, menu and booking instructions via the email address: red eagles23sqn@outlook.com.

RAF Catering Warrant Officers' and Seniors' Association: all serving or retired TG19 WO or FS and all former Catering Branch Officers are invited to join the RAF CWO&SA. We meet twice yearly. Please email: janedjones6@btinternet.com.

Reunions

309 Entry RAF Hereford C Flt 4 Sqn Cooks, April 1967 to May 1968. If anyone knows anybody from that Entry and wants to get in touch, with a view to meeting for a 60th anniversary celebration in 2027, please call Ian Dell on: 01202 722058

ALL ex Clk Secs who were trained on the Apprentice Wing at RAF Credenhill in the 1960s and 1970s are cordially invited to contact the undersigned with a view to arranging a reunion this year. Please email: David.tibbett@ntlworld.com.

RAF musicians on tour



IN HARMONY:
A recent Trust concert at Lincoln Cathedral

AS PART of its 2026 fundraising tour, the Royal Air Force Music Charitable Trust will present a spectacular concert in Lincoln Cathedral performed by the Band of the Royal Air Force College.

Performances will follow with the Central Band of the RAF and the Band of the RAF College in Weston-super-Mare, Epsom, Newark and Doncaster. The 2026 tour will end with a RAF Swing Wing big

band concert at the Terry O'Toole Theatre in Lincoln on October 16.

The Trust's founder, former RAF musician Malcolm Goodman, said: "Join us for an unforgettable musical journey celebrating the power of music, whilst also raising funds to support the wider Armed Forces Community."

● Go to: rafconcerts.uk for further information and ticket details.

Grants help RAFAKidz

RAFAKIDZ WILL be able to enhance three of its nurseries thanks to grants from the Ministry of Defence through the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust.

The grants were awarded on behalf of the MOD's Armed Forces Families Fund: Early Years Programme, said a RAFA spokesperson.

"RAFAKidz Valley and RAFAKidz Shawbury will be able to enhance their outdoor spaces, creating environments where children can explore the outside world and develop and thrive at their own pace. RAFAKidz Honington will invest in sensory resources where children can learn to self-regulate and manage their emotions," the spokesperson added.

Josie Mapes, Executive Director of RAFAKidz, said: "We are always looking for ways to enhance our provision and give our children the very best experience while they are with us. These generous grants will help us do that. We cannot wait to get the works completed so our children can reap the benefits and enjoy the new resources fully."

The MOD's Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AF3): Early Years programme supports early education and childcare settings to meet the unique needs of young children from serving Armed Forces families.

Anna Wright, CEO of the AFCFT, said: "High-quality learning environments are vital in helping children build skills, stimulate their imagination and play and to grow their sense of belonging and community in their earliest years – so we are delighted that MOD's Armed Forces Families Fund is supporting these RAFAKidz projects. We look forward to seeing how the work enabled by these funds creates new learning opportunities for the very youngest in the Armed Forces community."

Runnymede ceremony

THE ANNUAL ACT of Commemoration at Runnymede Memorial is on Sunday, May 17 at 11am.

Wreaths will be laid on behalf of the Commonwealth Air Forces and ex-Service organisations in honour of 29,263 members of the Commonwealth Air Forces who lost their lives in the Second World War in 1939-45 while operating from the UK and North West Europe and who have no known grave. This moving ceremony is open to all who wish to pay their respects to those named on the memorial.

How to use our service

There is no charge for conventionally-worded **birth, engagement, marriage, anniversary, death, in memoriam seeking** and **reunion** notices. For commercial small ads contact Edwin Rodrigues on: 07482 571535. We cannot, under any circumstances, take announcements over the telephone. They can be sent by email to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or by post to: **Announcements, RAF News, Room 68, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE.**

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Helping the homeless

AMEY TEAMS across the UK recently took part in The Great Tommy Sleep Out 2026, swapping a night of comfort for the challenge of sleeping outdoors to raise almost £20,000 for veterans experiencing homelessness.

Colleagues from depots, offices and senior leadership from the infrastructure services and engineering company slept out in challenging locations alongside clients and supply chain partners, raising £19,415 (including Gift Aid) for Royal British Veterans Enterprise (RBVE).

"A national charity, RBVE creates jobs, provides homes and builds supportive communities for veterans,"



COMMITMENT: Volunteers prepare for a night under the stars. Inset, snuggled down for the Sleep Out challenge



said a spokeswoman for Amey. "Its village in Kent is already home to more than 300 veterans and their families, and support from initiatives like The Great Tommy Sleep Out helps RBVE extend this work even further."

She added: "The funds raised recently will further support RBVE's work. "To date, Amey has invested over £5.5 million with the charity" Tom Silvey, Amey's Business Director for Defence, who took part in The Great Tommy Sleep Out, said: "Our teams showed incredible commitment to stand with those who have served."




SPECIAL EDITION: Stuart Robinson (left) with the fundraising print (inset)


RAF supporters launch print

THE APRIL Fools Club, a membership organisation that supports the RAF, has launched a special edition print in commemoration of Operation Highmast, to raise money for the RAF Benevolent Fund. Titled 'Wings Over Mount Fuji' the print features artwork by Nicolas Trudgian of the first-ever UK F-35B aircraft of 617 (Dambusters) Sqn landing

on a Japanese aircraft carrier, with Mount Fuji in the background. The event raised £4,000 through ticket sales, print sales and donations. Operation Highmast was an RAF-led mission in 2025 that saw UK aircraft and personnel deployed worldwide alongside the Royal Navy and international allies. The print was launched

at an event attended by 60 guests including RAFBF ambassador and Paralympian Stuart Robinson, who spoke about his career in the RAF Regiment and how the Fund supported him after an IED explosion in Afghanistan left him with life-changing injuries. Club members include serving and former RAF personnel.






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The official voice of the Royal Air Force

R'n'R



Prize Crossword No. 408

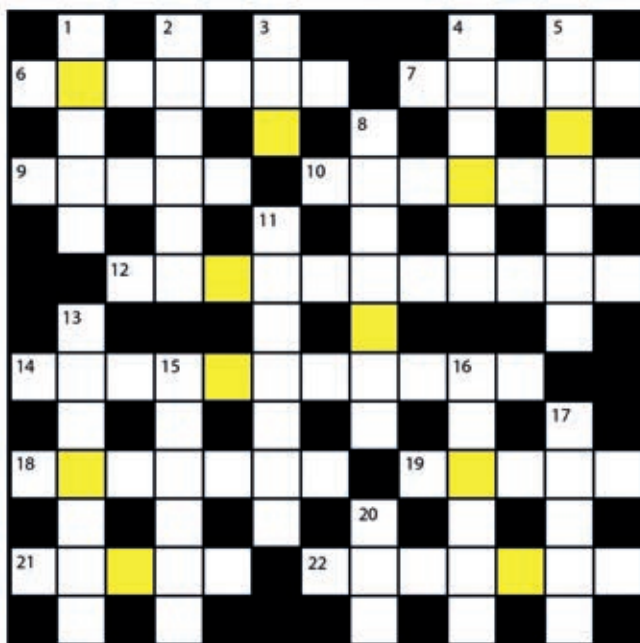
Solve the crossword, then rearrange the 11 letters in yellow squares to find an RAF aircraft.

Across

- 6. Sweet substance consumes the Italian at WWII station (7)
- 7. Hold up the Spanish during 24 hours (5)
- 9. Doctor has single Reaper (5)
- 10. The girl's band is a bit fishy (7)
- 12. RAF exercise gives liberty to bird (7,4)
- 14. Longish fury upsets what every pilot needs (6,5)
- 18. Evil Jan causes to athletics equipment (7)
- 19. At first Scheffler plays in red ensemble at The Belfry (5)
- 21. Sign six go right at green light (5)
- 22. A looser combination used in deodorant (7)

Down

- 1. Wild pig died in wood (5)
- 2. Is this tennis player an evil character? (6)
- 3. See 20 Down
- 4. Maybe left out Charles Hunt (6)
- 5. Bird which sounds unproductive (4,3)
- 8. Pole not used in group of cyclists (7)
- 11. Bird that hasn't flown for over 60 million years (7)
- 13. After Scotland, Ian moves country (7)
- 15. Chilly time (3,3)
- 16. US aircraft has music before the hill (6)
- 17. Or I am working at NATO exercise (5)
- 20. And 3 Down. In-crowd who live the high life? (3,3)



Across – 7. Icarus 8. Nellis 10. Borstal 11. Fatwa 12. Shed 13. Scrap 17. Shawl 18. John 22. Union 23. Risotto 24. Benson 25. Healey
Down – 1. Air Base 2. Carrier 3. Gusto 4. Red Flag 5. Sloth 6. Oscar 9. Clockwork 14. Chinook 15. Hostile 16. Antonym 19. Rugby 20. Piano 21. Aster

RAF base – *Coningsby*

Prize Crossword No. 407 winner is: Miss A Gilliland, Cheltenham.

Name:

Address:

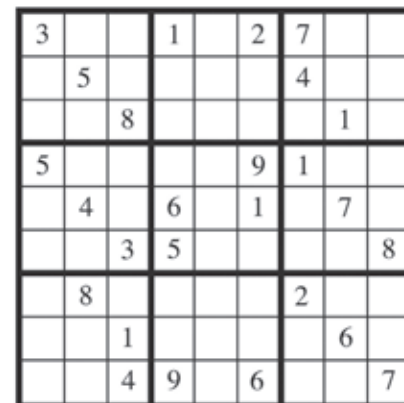
RAF aircraft: Crossword No. 408

The winners of our Prize Crossword and Prize Su Doku puzzles will receive a recent top book title – please send your entries to the address printed in the adjacent Su Doku panel, to arrive by May 15, 2026.



Prize Su Doku No. 418

Fill in all the squares in the grid so that each row, each column and each 3x3 square contains all the digits from 1 to 9.



Solutions should be sent in a sealed envelope marked 'Su Doku' with the number in the top left-hand corner to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP14 4UE, to arrive by May 15, 2026. The winner of Su Doku No: 416 is: Terry Smith, Hornchurch, Essex.

Solution to Su Doku No. 417

1	5	8	4	7	6	3	2	9
4	2	3	9	1	8	5	7	6
9	6	7	3	5	2	8	1	4
5	9	6	2	8	3	1	4	7
8	4	1	7	6	9	2	3	5
3	7	2	5	4	1	9	6	8
6	3	5	8	2	7	4	9	1
2	1	4	6	9	5	7	8	3
7	8	9	1	3	4	6	5	2



Theatre Review

Barnum – The Circus Musical

On tour: kenwright.com/productions/barnum-2026-uk-tour

Mead's a ring leader

TAND West End star Lee Mead smoothly steps into the shoes of the legendary showman P.T. Barnum in this dazzling production which features a cast of more than 20 actor-musicians, stunning circus acts – including amazing acrobats and fearless fire-eaters – and over 150 instruments played live on stage.

Mead delights as the charismatic Barnum in this original musical, which inspired the 2017 film *The Greatest Showman* starring Hugh Jackman, and took the country by storm when it was staged at the London Palladium in the early 1980s, with Michael Crawford performing a nightly tightrope walk.

When I saw this production at Aylesbury's Waterside Theatre you could hear a pin drop as Mead executed that much-anticipated tightrope walk – and he nailed it. He's also a very accomplished singer, dancer and actor who delivers a winning portrayal as the exuberant American 19th century museum and circus owner Phineas Taylor Barnum.



CHEMISTRY: Lee Mead (*Barnum*) and Monique Young (*Charity*)

Mead has great rapport with Monique Young as Barnum's no-nonsense wife Charity, and there's also excellent support from Penny Ashmore as the beguiling opera singer Jenny Lind, known as 'the Swedish Nightingale' and powerful vocals from Dominique Planter as Joice Heath – said to have been 160 years old.

There's so much going on in this production – with stylish choreography by *Strictly Come Dancing's* Oti Mabusi – which

even includes an appearance from an impressive puppet elephant, that you almost don't know where to look next.

I was especially enchanted by those incredibly agile acrobats whose graceful and daring performances were absolutely mesmerising.

This is a very enjoyable, family-friendly show that's well worth catching.

4 out of 5 roundels Review by Tracey Allen



Music

Kasabian

Great Pretender

Kasabian warm up for Act III



AFTER KICKING off 2026 by collaborating with Calvin Harris on the dance floor banger *Release The Pressure*, Kasabian have unleashed their explosive new track, *Great Pretender*.

The track is the second to be taken from their forthcoming album *Act III*, which comes out on July 17.

"*Great Pretender* is about imposter syndrome, not as a weakness but as a sign you're on the edge of something real," vocalist, songwriter and the

band's co-founder Serge Pizzorno said of the single.

"It's that feeling right before you step on stage, when the lights go down and it's now or never?"

Act III is the band's ninth studio album – their last seven all went straight in at No.1 in the UK Album Chart – it's described as 10 tracks of guitar-driven, psyche-infused pop and three interludes.

The band – Serge, Chris Edwards, Ian Matthews and Tim Carter – return to London this summer for a massive headline celebration at Finsbury Park on July 4. Support comes from Louis Dunford, Razorlight, The K's, Miles Kane and SOFY. The band will also play a string of festivals across the UK and Europe this year, including Boardmasters, TRNSMT, Victorious Festival, Mad Cool Festival and more.

Go to: kasabian.co.uk/events/ for further details.

