

The Forces' favourite paper

History of India's Jodhpur Flying Club **Win!**
● See page 17



Win tickets to top winter fantasy circus **Win!**
● See R'n'R pp4-5



ROYAL AIR FORCE

Friday, Dec 12, 2025
Edition No.1622

Only 99p

RAF News



Skydivers spread their wings for Cyprus adventure

See page 21

Bobsleigh Dream debut



● See p23

Football Manager's starring role

● See p25



Boxing Brad's back



● See page 27

International stealth service



Highmast home run as Lightning goes global

THE UK'S Lightning Force returned to the UK after eight months spearheading air power across the globe with the Carrier Strike Group.

As the fifth-generation stealth fighters flew into their home station RAF Marham, air chiefs heralded a new era in F-35 capability.

Lightning Commander Gp Capt Jim Calvert said: "Highmast underlined the truly global nature of F-35 and showcased its ability to integrate across the domains and deliver decisive effects, operating at warfighting scale and intensity."

● See pp3 and 14-15

BiteSize



“Competing against friends and colleagues caused serious banter,”

RAF photo comp winner Cpl Tom Barnard

See page 9

“The more the audience know what’s coming, the more they laugh,”

Eric and Ern stars on Morecambe and Wise tribute


See R’n’R page 5



“He came to knock my head off, which I quite like,”

RAF boxer Cpl Brad Axe after winning his latest pro fight

See page 27





ROYAL AIR FORCE
RAF News

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Pact guards Atlantic

UK CRITICAL undersea infrastructure will be protected from Russian submarines through a ground-breaking defence agreement that will see British and Norwegian navies operating side by side in the North Atlantic.

The agreement comes as Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Støre arrived at Lossiemouth, home of the UK's Poseidon maritime patrol fleet, tracking Russian vessels operating in UK waters – including the Russian intelligence ship Yantar, recently detected north of Scotland.

The new Lunna House Agreement will see the Royal Navy and Royal Norwegian Navy operate an interchangeable fleet of British-built Type-26 frigates. It follows a 30 per cent increase in Russian vessels threatening UK waters in the past two years.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: “In this new era of threat in the North Atlantic, our strength comes from hard power and strong alliances. When our critical infrastructure and waters are threatened, we step up.”



MARITIME SECURITY: UK Defence Secretary John Healey and Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Støre sign the Lunna House Agreement in London

This Week In History



1924
Trenchard Brats

LORD TRENCHARD reviews the first 399 aircraft apprentices to complete training at the No 1 School of Technical Training at Halton.

1941
V-1 mission

617 SQN launch the first attacks against V-1 rocket launch sites in Northern France, dropping 12,000lb bombs on a location near Abbeville.



1987
Desert Fox attacks

12 SQN Tornado GR1s operating from Kuwait launch strikes on targets in Iraq as part of Operation Desert Fox following Saddam Hussein's failure to comply with UN resolutions.

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

Mission accomplished



HOMEcomings HEROES: Family, friends and well-wishers gather on the beach at Portsmouth to welcome back the Carrier Strike Group after mammoth deployment

Staff Reporter

THE CARRIER Strike Group made an emotional return to the UK following a milestone eight-month mission spanning Europe, The Middle East and the Indo-Pacific.

Families and well-wishers gathered at the Lizard peninsula to welcome HMS Prince of Wales and at RAF Marham in Norfolk as F-35 Lightning crews touched down.

Since leaving the UK in April, the force has sailed more than 40,000 nautical miles – one and a half times around the world – with half the deployment spent east of Suez.

F-35s, helicopters and uncrewed aircraft have flown more than 2,500 sorties in support of the deployment, which sought to demonstrate the UK's commitment to global security with its Allies.

Highmast took the Task Group to northern Australia for the country's largest military workout, Exercise Talisman Sabre, followed



EPIC VOYAGE: HMS Prince of Wales

by large-scale exercises with the US and Japanese maritime forces.

During Operation Highmast the British Naval and Air Force crews operated with nine different carrier groups, with its jets landing on four different aircraft carriers.

At its peak the mission involved more than 4,000 UK military personnel sailing with the

task group and deploying on combat exercises.

Upto 26 F-35B Lightning strike fighters operated by RAF 617 Dambusters Sqn and the Royal Navy's 809 Naval Air Sqn spearheaded air operations with Allies, supported by A400M Atlas transporters and Voyager tankers.

Commander of the UK Carrier Strike Group, Cdre James Blackmore, said: "It has been a privilege to lead the nearly 4,000 soldiers, sailors, aviators and marines who have sailed over 40,000 nautical miles as part of the Strike Group, working with over 30 nations en route.

"The UK Carrier Strike Group has reached full operating capability. That is a testament to the hard work both on Operation Highmast and of those who have served before us to reach this milestone.

"The Strike Group has come home stronger for Nato than it departed and I am incredibly proud of all those who have taken part in Operation Highmast."



100 NOT OUT: Cambridge UAS

University challenge

OXFORD and Cambridge battled it out in a University Challenge-style quiz as they celebrated the centenaries of their Air Squadrons.

The event was hosted by CDS and former CAS Sir Richard Knighton.

Cambridge was the first UAS in the country and operated at Duxford and Wyton, before its current home at Wittering, and includes Sir Frank Whittle, Kenneth Campbell VC and Lord Peach among its alumni.

Oxford celebrated its 100th anniversary at New College, where Chancellor and former Tory leader Lord Hague met students with the unit's Senior Mentor, AM Sir Johnny Stringer.

The festivities continued with a Hangar Bash at RAF Benson among aircraft that have defined the squadron's flying heritage – from the Tiger Moth to the Bulldog and Chipmunk.

Meanwhile, air displays by a former Harvard trainer and modern Tutor brought the OUAS's flying history to life. A formal dinner at St John's College followed, where the Sir Peter Norriss Trophy was awarded to an outstanding alumnus.

Cambridge UAS OC Sqn Ldr John Rowe said: "These events have been a chance to reflect on the role of the UAS and to value Lord Trenchard's founding vision."

Covenant is in the bag at Tesco

SUPERMARKET GIANT Tesco has pledged its commitment to supporting serving Armed Forces personnel, veterans and their families by resigning the Armed Forces Covenant at RAF High Wycombe.

The signing comes as the Tesco Armed Forces Network announces its new three-year partnership with military charity Help For Heroes, recognising Tesco's long-standing dedication to veterans, reservists and their families.

Tesco was the first retailer to sign the Covenant in 2014, publicly declaring its support to the military community.

The Tesco Armed Forces Network will sponsor Help for Heroes' flagship fundraising event, the Big Battlefield Bike Ride, as well as the Heroes Hike and other customer events.

Trailblazing anti-drone laser to be fitted to Navy destroyer

A LASER capable of shooting down drones travelling at more than twice the top speed of a Formula 1 car has been ordered by the British military.

MBDA's DragonFire system's most recent trials at the MOD's Hebrides range involved drones which can fly up to 650km an hour.

The company has now been awarded a £316 million contract. Under the deal MBDA will work in partnership with QinetiQ and Leonardo to develop the capability, that will be delivered almost five years faster and

continuously improved.

It will be Britain's first above-the-horizon tracking, targeting and shooting down anti-drone device. At £10 per shot, it is accurate enough to hit a £1 coin from a kilometre away.

It is a more cost-effective method in comparison to traditional missile systems, which cost upwards of hundreds of thousands of pounds per shot, the MOD said. DragonFire (pictured) will be fitted to a Royal Navy Type 45 destroyer by 2027 and will help to create and sustain 590



jobs across the UK, including 200 highly skilled jobs in Scotland, 185 in the Southwest of England and 75 in the East of England.

Tests equipping RAF fighters and transport aircraft with high-energy defences began earlier this year.



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**Royal Air Force
Benevolent Fund**



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The RAF Benevolent Fund is a registered charity in England and Wales (1081009) and Scotland (SC038109).

AIR FORCE chute-ing star FS Mark Clayton (below) has been appointed to train the Falcons display team as they prepare for a blockbuster summer season performing across the UK and Europe.

Alongside honing the 2026 routine, the former Falcon will also lead team members through training to become military freefall and high-altitude instructors.

He said: "I'm looking forward to leading a professional group of parachute jump instructors on displays around the world into some iconic venues, representing the RAF."



Correction

IN RAF News No. 1621 in the feature 'Beyond the call of Duty' and in a news story on p5, it was stated that WO Norman Jackson crawled along the wing of his burning Lancaster at 2,000ft. This should have read at 20,000ft. We are happy to correct the error.



Bulletin



Serving up at 50

SERVICE CATERERS marked their 50th anniversary with a gourmet commemorative dinner.

Members of 3 Mobile Catering Sqn ate among equipment used over the past five decades.

And earlier they gathered at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire, to install a plaque to mark the occasion.

The Cyprus Emergency in 1974 saw the idea of a mobile catering unit take shape, which was realised with the formation of the RAF Mobile Catering Support Unit.

The aim was to have a dedicated team capable of deploying quickly with their equipment to support exercises and operations worldwide.

Today, 3MCS has personnel deployed across Europe, the Falkland Islands, the Middle East, Cyprus and the UK.

In the coming year they deploy to Australia, Norway and Belize.

Personnel strive to improve and develop, adhering to the chefs' motto: "You're only as good as your last meal."

Ukraine training ace nets double



BATTLE READY: The RAF is spearheading training of Ukrainian pilots, including use of the g-force generating centrifuge. Right, Flt Lt Lewis with his two RAeS awards

Tracey Allen

AN AIR Force specialist who joined the international programme to train Ukrainian pilots for the frontline has been recognised by the Royal Aeronautical Society and industry chiefs.

Training ace Flt Lt Robert Lewis received two awards for his work driving the International Defence Training programme for Ukrainian ab initio pilots. He was presented with the Bronze award and the specialist Flight Simulation award.

Also recognised with a Silver award were members of 1312

Flight for a daring Search and Rescue mission in the South Atlantic which saved the lives of 14 seamen on board a stricken vessel hundreds of miles off the Falklands coast.

There was also success for Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, which was presented with a Bronze award for building a new set of tail planes for the vintage modification in the last airworthy World War II aircraft's history.

Dave Edwards CEO of the RAeS, said: "The Society is proud to recognise the exceptional achievements of the 2025 Honours, Medals and Awards recipients.



SAR STARS: 1312 flight crew.

Their dedication, innovation and commitment to excellence has made significant contributions to advancing aerospace.


"Their work embodies the highest standards of our industry

and inspires progress across the global aerospace community."

RAeS President Alisdair Wood said: "We are proud to honour the exceptional individuals and teams recognised in this year's Honours, Medals and Awards. Their achievements represent the highest standards of excellence in aerospace, driving our sector forward and inspiring the next generation of aerospace pioneers."

Indie rockers Public Service Broadcasting scooped the Young Persons' Award for two space-themed concept albums *The Race for Space* and *The Last Flight*.

Nominations for next year's awards are now open.



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Stamp of approval for WAAF super spy

Tracey Allen

THE FEMALE spy and former WAAF who was tortured and executed after being captured in Paris by the Nazis has been commemorated by France with the issue of a new postage stamp.

The image of Noor Inayat Khan, the Special Operations Executive who was posthumously awarded the George Cross, is among a set issued by French postal service La Poste to honour "Figures of the Resistance" who fought against Nazi Germany.

Noor joined the WAAF before joining the SOE and became the first female radio operator infiltrated into occupied France in June 1943. She was eventually captured and deported to Dachau concentration camp where she was tortured and executed on September 13, 1944, aged 30.

Noor is featured with 12 other war heroes in the series released to mark 80 years since the end of World War II.

Her biographer Shrabani Basu said: "Noor sacrificed her life in the fight against fascism. She grew up in Paris, joined the war effort in England, and it is wonderful to see her face on a postage stamp which will be posted by ordinary people in France."



RESISTANCE HEROES: Noor (circled above) is honoured alongside other French WWII agents. Inset left, her statue unveiled in Bloomsbury, London by HRH Princess Anne in 2012



Each stamp is in the form of an etching taken from a photograph, with the stamp of Noor showing her in her British Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) uniform. She was born in

Moscow in 1914 and educated in Paris. When France fell in WWII, the family escaped to England. Noor was awarded France's highest civilian honour, the Croix de Guerre, and a posthumous George Cross by Britain in 1949 in recognition of her immense bravery. Her GC is displayed at the

RAF Museum in London and one of the rooms at the RAF Club, where her portrait hangs, is named after her. Others in the set of stamps include the British-French SOE agent Violette Szabo who was killed at Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany.

Bulletin



Cyber aces net award

Simon Mander

BOFFINS ARE celebrating after the RAF was named one of the best employers of IT specialists in national awards.

The accolade recognises the career development offered to personnel with full 'zero to hero' training through apprenticeships and degrees.

It also highlights the travel opportunities and competitive starting salaries available for those in IT posts.

Director RAF Digital Dr Arif Mustafa said: "It is an honour for the RAF to be 'Highly Commended' in the category of Best Place to Work.

"Our opportunities for innovation and high job satisfaction rates make us one of the best places to work in IT within the UK."

In Brief



Elf check

RAF MUSEUM chiefs are recruiting volunteers to join its Royal Elf Force.

Staff at the Midlands venue are promising a fun-packed festive experience for young visitors, including parcel parachute drops, reindeer flying formations and a behind-the-scenes look at airborne delivery.

Survivor Jacqui signs on at Cranwell

Simon Mander

AN AIR Force logistics expert who survived horrific sex abuse as a child to rise through the ranks added her name to Cranwell's Wall of Honour.

As Wg Cdr Jacqui Wilkinson joined the ranks of the Services' latter day heroes, she spoke of her ordeal and how she overcame her personal tragedy, to the latest UK and Qatari aircrew to complete their survival training.

Aircrew SERE Training Centre Officer Commanding Mark Fairhead said: "A truly extraordinary woman, Jacqui gave a frank account of her own story that forged her resistance and her techniques to manage her own PTSD."

Joining the RAF in 2003, following high pressure tours and promotion to Sqd Ldr, she hit a psychological tsunami when her father died, her mother was incarcerated and her husband's

mother and her own aunt passed away.

Mr Fairhead added: "This triggered a release of emotion that overwhelmed her and after suffering years of abuse and neglect it all came to a head in an attempt on her own life as she hit rock bottom.

"She gave a very personal account of adverse childhood experiences and the impact they have on health, mortality and the ability to resist trauma and build resilience.

"Jacqui is an inspiration, she has shown incredible resilience; and as a leader, mother, wife, mentor, author and advocate of physical and mental well-being, she still finds time to devote to helping others."

In 2023, Jacqui authored a book, *Turning the Tables on Trauma*, giving a graphic and candid account of her own torment and the techniques and tools she developed to survive and overcome the experiences.



Advertorial.



FROM SOLDIER TO CIVILIAN: THE UNSEEN TOLL OF MEDICAL DISCHARGE

For 15 years, Craig lived his dream as a Royal Engineer in the British Army, rising to the rank of Lance Corporal. From childhood, he had only ever imagined one future: a life in the military.

"As a child, I used to say to my mum and dad, 'I don't really need school – I'm going in the Army,'" he said. "It was all I ever wanted. So, it was a kick in the teeth to be told I couldn't do it anymore."

Craig's military career was cut short by a wrist injury he sustained playing rugby for his regiment. The injury was initially missed. As Craig continued to work and exercise, it got worse until one day it completely gave way. Further tests revealed it had become a serious and complex break. After major reconstruction surgery, Craig was sent home to recover. Complications followed, and further operations were needed.

"For 14 to 15 months, I was completely isolated at home. I barely spoke to my unit. I was forgotten," Craig said. "Before the injury, I was a 'can-do-everything invincible soldier.' Afterwards, I couldn't even do basic household or garden tasks. I felt useless, a burden

to my wife. I was no longer invincible – I was broken."

Despite his hope of returning to duty, Craig was sent to a medical board and discharged from service in November 2018.

"By the next morning, I wasn't a soldier anymore. Just like that. When I handed back my kit, most people had moved on. Very few people in the squadron even knew who I was. I felt like I'd never existed," he said. "The process made me feel isolated and unimportant after giving 15 good years to the Army."

Craig's experience is not unique. Every day, five people are medically discharged from the Armed Forces due to illness or injury*. Many, like Craig, struggle with the abrupt end of their military career and face the daunting task of adjusting to civilian life.

"I was given three months to prepare for discharge – most people leaving the military get 12 months. I was still receiving treatment, still in pain, and had no idea what came next," Craig recalled. "It took months for my first Army pension payment to come through. Without my family, I don't know what I would've done. I can see how so many veterans end up homeless."

Help for Heroes has been a vital part of Craig's recovery.

The charity provided him with occupational health support, pain management advice, and a specially designed wrist splint. He also receives therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder through their Hidden Wounds service, which offers counselling and psychological support tailored to veterans and their families.

Craig's medical discharge was tough for his family too, especially his wife, Georgina. The couple have two young children together.

"Craig's discharge has been an emotional rollercoaster," she said. "He lost the only job he ever wanted and his sense of identity. There was huge pressure on me to support him through the pain and provide for our family. The system must change to support families during these vulnerable times."

Craig has since retrained as an electrical engineer but worries about the long-term impact of his injury. Now, he's encouraging others facing similar challenges to seek support.

"Don't be afraid to ask for help," he said. "Help for Heroes are always there when I need them, but it shouldn't fall to charities to do what the military should be doing for its own."

* MOD: Annual Medical Discharges in the UK Regular Armed Forces (2024)



Help for Heroes is there for anyone who's worn the uniform, for as long as it takes. Find out more at helpforheroes.org.uk/get-help.

**HELP for
HEROES**

Hot-shot Tom tops poll

Halton snapper wins public vote to take People's Choice accolade



'The Office': 1,237 votes

Tracey Allen

A STUNNING shot taken from the ramp of an Atlas transporter flying through the famous Mach Loop in Wales has topped the public poll to find the RAF's image of the year.

Cpl Tom Barnard's photo edged out the competition to net more than 1,200 votes and take the coveted People's Choice crown.

Tom said: "It's a huge achievement for me and something that all Visual Communicators want to win at some point in their career."

"The image was taken during a low-level training sortie through the Mach Loop, the Lakes and Scotland. I've flown at low level a number of times but it was particularly challenging with the turbulence and poor weather."

"This year's competition was very tight, especially towards the closing date of the vote, and competing with friends and colleagues caused some serious banter in the office."

Since joining up in 2019, the Halton based 25-year-old has travelled across the world on humanitarian missions, security operations and high-level multinational exercises.

The annual photo shoot-out highlights global operations and showcases the work of personnel across the service on the front line and at home.

Vis Com Tom's image, cheekily titled 'The Office', received 1,237 votes, edging out runner-up Halton colleague Cpl Jake Hobbs' celebration of the Puma helicopter ahead of its retirement this year, which polled 1,125.

Along with scooping the

People's Choice award Tom said capturing images during the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, where RAF Typhoons supported air security operations over the stadium, was a highlight. He added: "Before I joined up, I'd only been abroad once. Now I've travelled to more than 30 countries."

"A standout moment was having the opportunity to capture the opening World Cup flypast from the back seat of a Typhoon. That was a real pinch me moment."

"On top of that, I have deployed in support of humanitarian crises, aid delivery and multinational exercises and operations, all whilst doing the job I love. It may sound clichéd, but it definitely is the one trade in the military that allows you to experience a little bit of every other trade."

'End of the hunt': 1,125 votes



Fan'tache-stic



FUNDRAISERS HIT the rowing machine to support the annual Movember campaign to highlight men's health issues.

The 45 Sqn team put in a 24-hour shift to burn up an estimated 43,000 calories to represent the monthly male death rate in the UK.

Space ace lands at Coningsby



HANDOVER: Gp Capt Hampshire is welcomed by Gp Capt O'Grady

AIR AND Space Operations chief Gp Capt Andy Hampshire has taken over command of RAF Coningsby from outgoing boss Gp Capt Paul O'Grady.

He served as duty operations controller at PJHQ before postings to Cranwell and Brize Norton, where he ran Air Mobility operations.

Speaking after the official handover of command he said: "My job is all about making sure that Coningsby's people have got what they need to live, work and thrive; the right equipment, the

right accommodation, the right opportunities outside of work, and effective welfare."

Gp Capt O'Grady will be moving on to the Defence Academy at Shrivenham. He added: "Commanding RAF Coningsby has been a privilege and an honour."

"I reflect most on the quality and passion of our whole force team and could not be more proud of what they have achieved and continue to achieve for UK Air Defence and Global operations."

News

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Simon Mander

THE RAF'S Black Cats squadron have been named best unit in the RAF's 1 Group, scooping a top award.

Marham's 207 Sqn, who earned their nickname during their combat debut in WWI, has won the Dacre Trophy named after a DFC winner killed in action over Germany in 1943.

The award recognises the unit's transformation of its simulator training to focus on wartime-style missions and its engineers, who met their annual flying targets while supporting global operations.

During preparations for the Carrier Strike Group's eight-month deployment on Operation Highmast, 207 Sqn prepared all 18 Lightnings for embarkation on HMS Prince of Wales.

A further six of their aircraft were dispatched to participate in Exercise Falcon Strike, bringing the number of jets onboard to 24, the largest number of



UK F-35B aircraft ever assembled on the aircraft carrier.

The squadron also supported flypasts and displays for VE Day, The King's Birthday and the Royal International Air Tattoo.

Wg Cdr Ben Durham, 207 Sqn's Commanding Officer, said: "Despite significant challenges with staffing and resources, our team has consistently delivered exceptional results through innovative thinking and unwavering commitment to service."

Reds thrilled the radio star

Tracey Allen

RADIO 1 presenter Greg James took to the skies with the Red Arrows after accepting a challenge from the BBC's *Children in Need* charity mascot Pudsey Bear.

Swapping the airwaves for the skies over the Red's Lincolnshire base, he said: "It's the greatest thing I've ever done."

"When do you ever get the opportunity to do something like this? I've loved the Red Arrows ever since I was a kid."

The theme for this year's TV fundraiser was 'Challenge Yourself'

and organisers are hoping Greg's experience with the RAF aerobatic aces will encourage others to do something extraordinary in aid of a worthy cause, a spokesman said.





'A terrific storyteller'
BOOKLIST

'A pulse-pounding adventure'
PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



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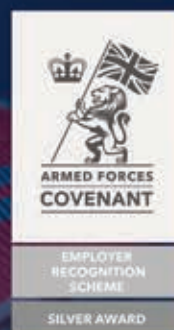
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Clash of the Titans

AIR FORCE Chinook crews launched combat training sorties across northern England as temperatures across the region plummeted.

Four Air Force squadrons took part in the drill alongside Army Wildcats and Apaches during Exercise Pinion Titan across Dishforth, Catterick and Otterburn.

Helicopter crews are honing their frontline skills during troop insertion and extraction, medical evacuation and kit transport training with the 2nd Battalion Parachute Regiment.



NEW COMMAND: Gp Capt Taylor (left) welcomes Gp Capt Haith at Cranwell

Just the job

GP CAPT Darren Haith took over command of Recruitment and Selection from outgoing chief Gp Capt Gareth Taylor at a handover ceremony at Cranwell's Adastral Hall.

He takes over recruitment duties ahead of the 2027 launch of the Tri-Service Armed Forces Recruitment Service.

EXCEPTIONAL: FS Curran was described as the 'consummate professional' by colleagues



Tributes to RAF's man in Uzbekistan

TRIBUTES HAVE been paid to an RAF NCO who has died in Uzbekistan.

FS Stephen Curran was serving as the Assistant Defence Attaché in Tashkent at the time.

"The sad news of Stevie's passing has sent shockwaves across the Service," said Lossiemouth Principal Air and Space Operations Manager WO Crabb.

"Having known him both personally and professionally for 17 years, I know that Stevie has touched the hearts of so many people. His passion for football was but one pursuit where he demonstrated team ethos in abundance and will be fondly remembered.

"Stevie strove for perfection in everything he did, and was a fiercely loyal and dedicated friend to all."

Integrated Global Defence Network deputy director Cdre Lamb said FS Curran had demonstrated an exceptional ability to unite people.

He said: "A consummate professional, Stevie's contributions to the Embassy team were consistently of the highest standard."

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan Defence Attaché Wg Cdr Stedman said: "His absence will be felt deeply and I will remember Stevie for his character, his kindness, his dry wit and his ability to bring people together."

Benson steps up for Puma

Station calls in engineers as Chinook fleet takes the strain

Simon Mander

BENSON-BASED ENGINEERS are keeping Britain's Chinook force airborne after the Puma helicopter was taken out of service.

A team of 120 engineers expect to work 4,000 hours a year on the battlefield workhorse.

The move comes as the final fleet of 24 Puma helicopters – retired in April – are put up for sale.

"Benson is far from a sleepy hollow, you might not see Pumas in the sky, but Chinook Force is still very busy," said WO Alan Sharp.

"With a shortfall of personnel at Odiham, there was much initial enthusiasm for pushing ex-Puma personnel there.

"But a shortage of living and technical accommodation meant the alternative was to bring the work here."

The UK's fleet of 50 plus Chinooks are now the mainstay of the support helicopter force and keeping them flying will be Benson ground crew's priority until the new medium helicopter enters service.

Engineers have been undertaking Chinook blade repairs and picking up some longstanding Merlin work while



the station's Survival Equipment section continues to support flying activities at two UK locations, as well as in Brunei.

"These changes have coincided with all the activity to sell Puma, involving 're-deploying' everything from

Brunei and Cyprus, conditioning and categorising it into sales packages, from tools to wheels, main rotor heads to engines," said WO Sharp.

"This will see all airframes ready to move to whoever takes on this remarkable aircraft."

Feature

Operation Highmast



After an historic worldwide deployment on Operation Highmast F-35s can fight with Allies across the globe, Lightning Force Commander Gp Capt Jim Calvert tells *RAF News*



FORCE PROTECTION: Guarding F-35s as Strike Group sails through Suez Canal

LIGHTNINGS are ready to fight anywhere in the world following the successful completion of Operation Highmast.

The eight-month exercise – which spanned continents, strengthened partnerships, and demonstrated the UK's global reach – saw more than 600 RAF personnel take part at its peak.

From the Mediterranean to the Indo-Pacific it showed how the Air Force can project air power worldwide, integrating with Allied forces across three continents.

Commander Lightning Force, Gp Capt Jim Calvert, said: "Highmast demonstrated the UK's commitment to operating seamlessly alongside our closest partners such as the USA, Japan,

Italy and Australia. We reinforced trust and deepened operational understanding.

"These relationships are critical for delivering integrated Air Power on a global scale."

Led by HMS Prince of Wales, the mission included some of the most complex and far-reaching manoeuvres ever undertaken by the Carrier Strike Group.

Ex Talisman Sabre

"Exercises like Talisman Sabre showcased the F-35's ability to integrate across domains and deliver decisive effects," said Gp Capt Calvert (pictured inset right).

"Highmast confirmed that the

platform can operate at scale, sharing data in real time and enabling joint force commanders to make faster, better-informed decisions."

The UK regularly trains with the US and Nato Allies but the voyage also saw the RAF working with relative newcomers Korea and Japan.

"That underlined the truly global nature of the F-35 enterprise and the strength of our partnerships in the Indo-

Pacific," said Gp Capt Calvert.

"Highmast accelerated interoperability and validated tactics, techniques and procedures with multiple F-35 operators, proving that the global fleet can fight as one.

Sharing data

"This is about more than flying together as it's about sharing mission data, sustainment solutions and operating at warfighting scale and intensity."



by Simon Mander



oes global

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED:
(From left above) Carrier Strike Group enters Portsmouth after eight-month deployment; F-35s line up on the flight deck during the operation; Lightning demonstrates its Short Take-off and Vertical Landing (STOVL) capabilities; loved ones wait on the beach to welcome back personnel; and F-35 pilot of 617 Sqn reunites with family after arriving back at RAF Marham after Operation Highmast

reducing risk and enabling extended operations far from home," said Gp Capt Calvert.

At the heart of Operation Highmast was the RAF combining Carrier Strike, Combat Air, Air Mobility and ISTAR into one global force.

For the first time, two full UK F-35B Lightning squadrons embarked aboard HMS Prince of Wales, operating alongside Typhoon, P-8 Poseidon and the Air Mobility Force.

From Voyager tankers providing essential air-to-air refuelling, to A400M Atlas and C-17 Globemaster aircraft delivering personnel, equipment and humanitarian support, transporters also kept the mission moving.

Their efforts included a Middle East Surge which saw tankers forward based at RAF Akrotiri, enabling sustained air operations across the Red Sea and Gulf.

Ex Bersama Lima

RAF engineers worked alongside Australian and Malaysian colleagues at RMAF Kuantan to service a UK F-35B – proving rapid, flexible sustainment in the Indo-Pacific on Exercise Bersama Lima.

The task group included HMS Dauntless, HMS Richmond, an Astute-class submarine, and Allied escorts from Canada, Spain, and Norway, including HMCS Ville de Québec, Méndez Núñez, HNoMS Roald Amundsen and HNoMS Maud.

The lessons and partnerships forged will shape the RAF's next chapter of global operations.

"Highmast proved that the UK Lightning Force can deploy globally and integrate with Allies at pace. The ability to project combat air power worldwide is now a reality," said Gp Capt Calvert.

And while focusing on integrating with current aircraft such as Typhoon and F/A-18, the task force also trained with so-called legacy Tornados and Harriers.

"This mix of capabilities is vital; F-35 brings stealth and sensor fusion, while fourth-generation fighters deliver mass and persistence. Together, they create a highly effective Combat Air team.

"Highmast sends a clear message: UK Forces are agile, interoperable and ready to operate globally alongside our Allies. It reflects our commitment to deliver cutting-

edge air power wherever it's needed," said Gp Capt Calvert.

The Highmast deployment has showcased the F-35's ability to operate on the international stage in high-value combat drills.

Ex Mediterranean Strike

Exercise Mediterranean Strike involved 21 warships, three submarines, 41 fast jets and more than 8,000 personnel combined.

Heading across the Pacific the F-35 Force trained alongside the Republic of Korea

and Japanese Defence Force on Operation Hightower, in advance of the Carrier Strike Group's arrival in Japan.

The return to Mediterranean waters included Exercise Falcon Strike, which saw British Lightnings reunited with Harriers and Tornados to exercise with the Italian Air Force.

"Operating at distance highlighted the importance of the F-35 global supply chain, which allows us to source spares and support from partner nations.

"This network is a force multiplier,



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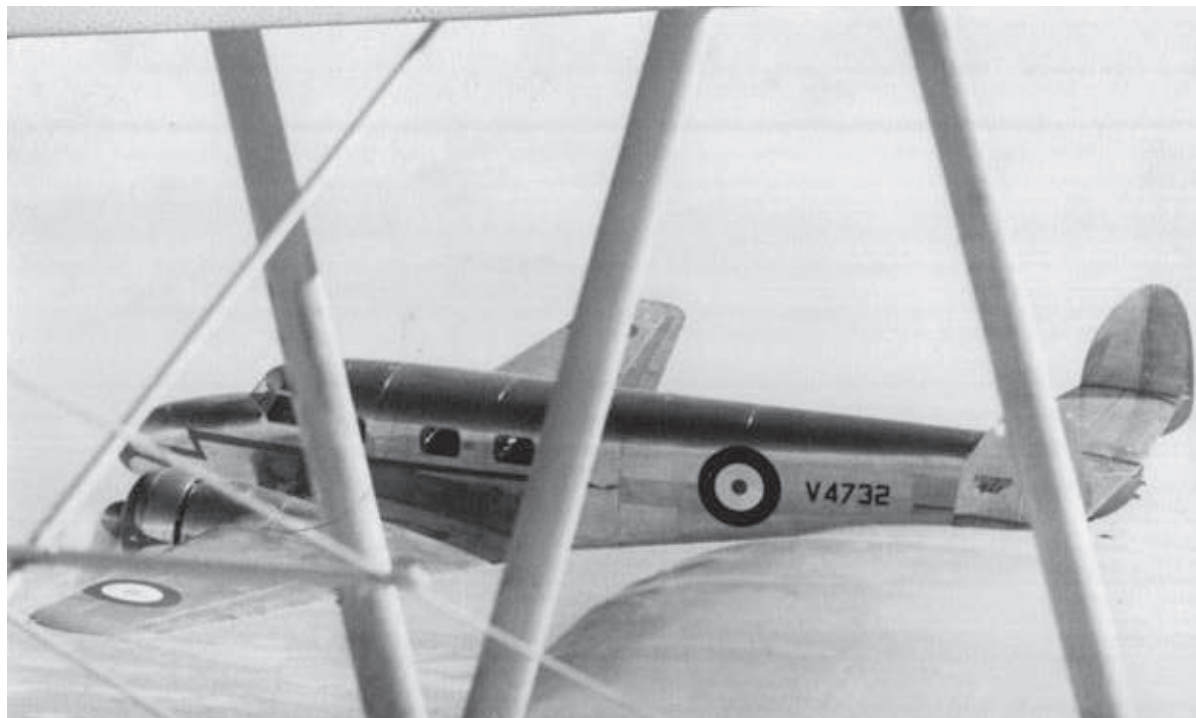
www.rafconcerts.uk

By Tracey Allen

Features



C-IN-C: His Highness (seated) with Chiefs of Staff in uniform he designed for them



PRIDE AND JOY: The Maharaja's Lockheed Electra, donated to the RAF for the war effort

MAHARAJA UMAID SINGH was a keen aviator who gained his pilot's licence during graduation from RAF Cranwell. He oversaw the establishment of the Jodhpur Flying Club in 1931, which soon became an important stopover for keen adventurers of the 1930s. The club also contributed to the establishment of early commercial air routes to South East Asia.

By World War II it had been set up as an RAF training base and hosted the Air Force with the establishment of No.2 Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS) in support of the Allied war effort.

With *The Illustrated History of the Jodhpur Flying Club And The Royal Air Force in Princely India* (grubstreet.co.uk), author Peter Vacher pays handsome tribute to the club, the people who made it a success and the birth of aviation in the early 20th century.

12A Electra

The book's fascinating photographs document what life was like in Jodhpur and the club. And they provide insight into the maharaja's love of aviation and the collection of aircraft he amassed during the club's years in service, including one of the first Lockheed 12A Electra to be owned in India.

Vacher said: "When Maharaja Umaid Singh established the club in 1931, he could hardly envisage the role it would play in the opening up of aviation to the East, and latterly in the defence of the free world. Little did he know that the airfield he created in Jodhpur would become a key staging post for the great airlines of Imperial Airways, KLM and Air France as they became global operators.

"Neither could he have anticipated that brave adventurers such as Bert Hinkler, René Lefèvre, Lores Bonney and

Jodhpur Flying Club: Gateway to the East

Copies of the book up for grabs

YOU COULD win a copy of this superb book – for your chance to own it, tell us:



In which year did Maharaja Umaid Singh establish the Jodhpur Flying Club?

Email your answer, marked Jodhpur Flying Club 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, by January 16.

Win!

Jean Batten would experience Jodhpur's Rajput hospitality as they and their tiny machines flew on to China and Australia."

He added: "Through his good offices the Royal Air Force was able to establish the main training base for Indian pilots during the Second World War. More importantly, Jodhpur became the centre for overhaul of such aircraft as Hurricanes, Spitfires, Dakotas en route for Burma."

His Highness, Vacher explained, wanted the Jodhpur Flying Club to be run by a qualified RAF instructor from Britain. The role was accepted by Geoffrey Godwin, who joined the Air Force on a short-service commission in 1926, served as pilot officer to 9 Squadron at Manston and moved to RAF Central Flying School in 1929 for instructor duties.

Carmen Parodi, who married Sir Donald Field in late 1938, was an enthusiastic member of the flying club and a great favourite of her instructor Godwin. Chief Minister Sir Donald, also a keen aviator, ran Jodhpur State on behalf of the Maharaja and the British government.

No 2 EFTS

By April 1941 the Jodhpur Air Training Centre (Civil) had become No 2 EFTS, RAF, and Fg Off Godwin was in charge of training. The RAF arrived in force in May 1942 – a highlight that year was a visit from Lt Gen HRH the Duke of Gloucester.

Vacher said: "His Highness Maharaja Umaid Singh was the warmest and most fun-loving of characters. He liked nothing better than an excuse for a party. Once the RAF had become



VIP PUPIL: Governor's wife Carmen Parodi with instructor Geoff Godwin at Jodhpur

established at Jodhpur, the officers, and frequently the entire personnel, were invited.

"The Christmas parties of 1943, 1944 and 1945 have become legendary. His Highness invited every man on the base to join him for dinner on Christmas Day at his new palace [the Umaid Bhawan Palace]."

He greeted almost 1,000 guests of all ranks from the RAF, Royal Indian Air Force and US Army Air Force.

By June 1946 Geoff Godwin had been awarded the Air Force Cross and promoted to squadron leader. Vacher said: "He took command of No. 2EFTS on June 24...Geoff's command was brief, being released back to his duties

with the flying club in July.

"In April 1947, the Chiefs of Staff in London, in line with Attlee's instructions, issued an outline plan to nationalise the Royal Indian Air Force by June 1, 1948...The scheme for Jodhpur was implemented rapidly. Control of RAF Station, Jodhpur (in effect just No.2 EFTS) was handed to the Royal Indian Air Force, nationalisation being completed in May 1947 by which time all British personnel had been withdrawn."

After Indian Independence in 1947 and the Maharaja's untimely death in June that year of a ruptured appendix, aged 44, the club closed by the early 1950s.

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Armed Forces' Health Support

By Tracey Allen

Divorce **Features**

The RAF veteran guiding people through break-ups

CHRISTMAS SHOULD be a time for celebration but just after the festive period is when more people choose to start divorce proceedings, according to family law specialists. And in the UK January 7 has been dubbed 'divorce day.'

Reasons for the spike in divorce applications after Christmas include financial issues, a 'New Year, New Me' mentality, the stress of keeping up a façade of happiness during the holidays and excessive alcohol use in that time, making existing problems more acute.

Divorce rates among UK military couples are no higher than in civilian marriages but Armed Forces families can face particular challenges that their civilian counterparts may not.

Chris Paterson Deacon served in the RAF from 1995 to 2011 in the Provost Branch and is now an accredited Break Up and Divorce Coach, working, she said "with individuals who struggle to deal with the emotional rollercoaster of separation and divorce."

Unique pressures

She explained: "The most recent statistics show that the rate of divorce within the military is much the same as it in civilian life, however the circumstances surrounding the break-ups can become complicated by a variety of external pressures unique to the military environment.

"My background and personal experiences allow me to relate to military and ex-military clients; I understand the language, the pressures and the issues that can arise from a break-up."

Chris's former husband also served in the RAF. They divorced in 2015 and her ex-husband passed away in 2021.

She said: "I became a coach because I felt I had a lot of experience, compassion and empathy for people who were transitioning through very traumatic and difficult periods of their life and were therefore extremely emotionally vulnerable."



'EMPATHY': Break Up and Divorce Coach Chris Paterson Deacon, and, below, in RAF Provost days

She cited what she considers specific pressures on military couples and families as: "Isolation – families living separately if not in Service Family Accommodation (SFA) or families separated from their family/friend support network; separation – frequency of operational tours and exercises taking spouses away from home; effect on spouses' careers – if the spouse has their own career, they may often have to give it up in order to follow their husband/wife and then restart a new career that is transferable from base to base; finances – if a spouse has had to leave a career to follow their husband/wife, the income can be reduced.

"Whilst the pay and benefits are good in the military, regular moves, need for independent transport, can also apply pressure financially; effect on children – time apart from parents. If in SFA then moving every two to five years, leaving friends behind, changing schools or going to boarding school for stability; relationship – periods away

from home life mean that when they return, spouses can struggle to adapt to a new routine which can put a strain on marriage. Holidays or breaks have to work around operational requirements."

She added that break-ups can have repercussions operationally.

"The working environment in the military is very different to the working environment outside. It can be high pressure one minute and then back to normal procedures the next. Work hard play hard," Chris explained.

Operational environment

"If an individual has the additional pressure at home with relationship problems, then their performance could be affected. In a normal day to day environment this can be managed supportively but in an operational environment or in a high-pressure situation, then it could affect performance which may put pressure on colleagues or the effectiveness of the operation.

"I have seen that myself but wouldn't want to give any specific examples. Living and working in and around a base can feel like living in a goldfish bowl at times. Maintaining complete privacy can be difficult on a married patch, or in the Mess, and this can feel overwhelming and difficult to manage which can just add to the pressures."

The role of Break Up and Divorce Coach is a relatively new one, said Chris, and some family lawyers are not familiar with it. "I am very aware that when people go through a break-up, the range of emotions are enormous; fear, anger, shame, hurt, humiliation and many

others," she added. "Worlds are turned upside down and everything can become increasingly scary. If children are involved it can become even more complicated and frightening. Finances are a whole other pressure and are often one of the most contested areas, along with co-parenting.

Lawyers

"Whilst a Break Up and Divorce Coach does not provide legal advice, equally a lawyer is not a trained coach. Having spoken to family lawyers, they often find themselves having to provide that level of support, which takes up time and can slow the process down. A coach can help an individual struggling to make sense of things, to approach the process with more clarity and control."

Chris said she is hoping to work with charities to offer support within her field.

● Go to: christinepatersondeacon.com for more information.





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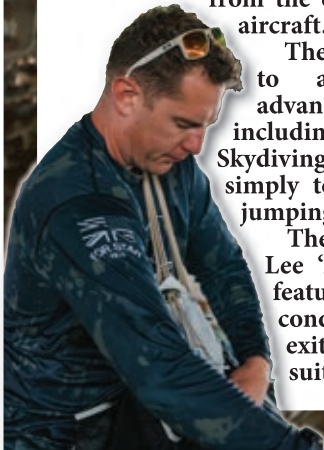
Skydivers stay in s-wing of things

THESE BRILLIANT shots capture RAF parachutists taking part in the Joint Services Adventurous Training Wing (JSATW) Cyprus, Parachute Advanced Training Course.

The week-long course over the skies of the island sees students, guided by their instructors and overseen by Chief Instructor WO Paul Floyd, jumping from the centre's 'Caravan' aircraft.

The skydivers work to achieve various advanced disciplines, including Formation Skydiving, Tracking, or simply to maintain their jumping currency.

The images by Sgt Lee 'Matty' Matthews feature a parachutist conducting a tracking exit and a wing-suit catching air.





World's best off-roader

IN A time of ever evolving SUVs, few retain their original purity. The Toyota Land Cruiser is one of the rare beasts to buck the trend. It is absolutely clear what it is supposed to be – one of the best 4x4s in the world.

There are those who will tell you that it is unsophisticated and a blunt instrument that's outdated by modern standards, but these criticisms pale into insignificance when you consider its outstanding off-road ability.

It's big, it's hefty and it's powered by gruff, rugged 2.8-litre diesel. If you're tempted to invest in a proper off-roader (and you absolutely should be) the Land Cruiser is as good as it gets.

Interior

The Land Cruiser is massive on the outside and that transfers into a spacious interior. The driving position is bang-on and visibility is great. If that's not enough for you, an off-road camera provides a clear view under the car and down the sides to spot unseen obstacles. Useful on and off-road.

The in-car tech has come on significantly since the last model. You get a sharp digital 12.3 inch driver display, along with a 12.3 inch infotainment system. The infotainment touchscreen is positioned high up so that it's easy to see and prod while driving. The system is responsive and it comes with smartphone mirroring as standard.

Despite the latest reboot, there's still a good helping of chunky buttons to operate the climate control and other functions. It's beautiful simplicity that is largely lost these days. Fitting for such a pure-bred 4x4.

Build quality is impressive and everything feels suitably robust. It's rough, tough and ready to rock. Exactly what you'd expect from a Land Cruiser.

On The Road

The Land Cruiser isn't the most refined on-road machine, but it is the most comfortable version we've ever seen. It retains its traditional ladder-frame chassis and sturdy rear axle, which means it's practically bomb



LEADING THE FIELD: The unstoppable Toyota Land Cruiser



proof over extreme terrain, but the pay-off is a rather agricultural experience on tarmac. It's neither quick, nor accurate through the bends, with a fair bit of tip, so it's difficult to gauge the car's limits. Feedback from the chassis is minimal.

Now that we've got that out of the way, let's put this into perspective. Most SUVs' off-road performance is reduced to enhance comfort. This makes

no such concession. It is, in my opinion, one of the best off-road vehicles that money can buy.

Without compromise, Toyota has worked hard on noise insulation and suspension refinement. The results are impressive. For a ladder-framed car, this is stupendously refined.

You won't find adaptive dampers here, but the seats are comfortable, noise is well suppressed and the cabin is a nice

place to be on a long-haul drive.

The 2.8-litre diesel engine produces enough torque to turn a small planet and it pulls like a train. Power delivery is gentle, but relentless, with the turbo whistling quietly away beneath the gruff thrum of the diesel engine. The package feels perfectly in keeping with the car's mud-plugging credentials.

Off-road

Here's where the Land Cruiser thrashes the competition, on the most hostile terrain that the world has to offer. The suspension is now sharp and precise. You feel exactly what each wheel is doing as you wind your way over mountains and wade through rivers. All the traditional tools that you need to keep moving are right there to be deployed. Diff locks and a low-range gearbox are hard to beat when you hit the thick stuff. Ground clearance is impressive and you can wade through water of up to 700mm.

Toyota Land Cruiser

Pros

- Brilliant off-road ability
- Seven seats as standard
- Lots of equipment

Cons

- Not cheap, for an SUV
- Engine could be more refined
- It's a big old bus to drive around town

Verdict

The new Toyota Land Cruiser is still fantastic off-road and deserves the title 'world's most capable SUV'. It's pure common sense and is backed by Toyota's excellent reliability record. Simple features like a button that turns off all the annoying bleeps and bongs make it an instant winner, with cool retro looks to complete the package. Costing around £80k, it comes with a hefty price tag, but if you love to push the limits the Land Cruiser will get you to places you never imagined possible.

Sport

BOBSLEIGH

World Cup debut 6th for aviator

Daniel Abrahams

THERE WAS a super sixth-placed debut finish for Service GB bobsleigh star Cpl Alex Cartagena in Cortina Milano as he homes in on Olympic glory next year.

The RAF ice sports star secured the podium finish in the 4-man GB bob team driven by Brad Hall at the Cortina d'Ampezzo in Italy, to open the IBSF World Cup season.

He said: "Sixth out of 31, yes, I am chuffed with that. It was my first time taking it all in. The lads had to manage expectations, with

injuries, new track and so on, but it was a wider podium finish, no medal but it is still podium, which is great."

The team of Hall, Cartagena, Leon Greenwood and Greg Cackett maintained its race spot to the end of the 1700 metre track, managing the 16 curves at speeds of 130kmh well, with a combined finish time of 1:50.74 – +1.01 off the eventual winning German Lochner team.

The aviator added: "We were sixth off fresh ice, we pushed quicker than in training, so we were happy with that, our load [getting in the sled] went well,



OFF TO A FLYER: Cpl Alex Cartagena (second from left) and teammates in Italy

we were down on the winning Germans, and we held that until the fourth corner, which means things were all good."

Cartagena has transferred to the 2-man for the next round of the cup in Igls, Austria.

He said: "The training for Igls has been odd as the track is being changed due to things being too quick at the finish."

"Things are being changed around personnel wise to get everyone time in the sleigh and

spread the load – which is great. I started in the two-man, so it will be interesting and another great challenge."

After Igls, Team GB compete in Lillehammer before closing out the year at Sigulda, Latvia.

ATHLETICS



ICONIC: Rooftop track

Runners lap up the Torino Marathon

SERVICE RUNNERS pulled off their own Italian job with top 10 and top 20 finishes in the Turin half-marathon and impressive efforts over the full marathon.

The squad of 16 athletes, led by Sqn Ldr Jo Johnson (Detachment Commander) and Cpl Grace Rowland (Project Officer), was divided into 14 for the half marathon and two for the full race.

Having warmed up the day before the main event on the iconic Fiat roof top track on the Lingotto Building, the Torino Half Marathon proved a showcase of RAF talent.

Cpl Adam Baker led the charge in the shorter event, finishing sixth overall in one

hour 10 minutes and 11 seconds, followed closely by Sqn Ldr Tom Bailey in eighth (1:11:42). Other notable finishes included: Chf Tech Matt Blunden – 18th (1:14:10), AS1 David Spencer – 21st (1:14:42), AS1 Laura Kaye – 99th (1:21:47), first RAF female home and Cpl Grace Rowland – 518th (1:34:26).

Over the full distance, Cpl Liam Brennan impressed with his third marathon in six weeks, having competed in the New York just three weeks earlier, while Sqn Ldr Nic Mackay, battling a hip injury, defied the odds to finish strongly as the team's sole female marathoner.

● Follow RAF Athletics on Instagram @raf_athletics.

ATHLETICS

WO Allen makes the grade.. at the double

Veteran will take on all comers in Abu Dhabi

IT WAS double duathlon joy for WO Matt Allen after securing European and World Championship places for 2026 with solid finishes in the UK.

The aviator kicked off his efforts with seventh overall and second in his age group at the Slateman Standard Distance Duathlon in Llanberis, Wales, before moving on to a similar event in Devon, where he finished 13th overall and in top spot in his age group.

He will now line up for the GB team in his age group at the July 2026 European Championships in Banyoles, Spain and the World Championships 2026 in Abu Dhabi in November for what promises to be a bumper year of racing.

Allen, 49, said: "These results are testament to the amazing support and opportunities the Service and RAF Triathlon in particular offer for personnel of all levels, I cannot thank both enough."

A tough hilly trail 5.km run started the Welsh event, with



STAMINA: WO Matt Allen

Allen coming home in third place overall in 25 minutes and 57 seconds. A wet, windy and hilly cycle route with 633 metres of climbing which included the narrow and winding ride up the iconic Nant Gwynant Pass was completed by the aviator in 1:54:17. His 55 minute, seven second time in the second run secured second in his age group.

Moving onto Roadford Lake, Devon, Allen knew the size of the challenge ahead. He said:

"We encountered all four seasons during one race. It was wet, windy with a little touch of sunshine."

Undeterred he completed the 10.5km course in 42 min 25 secs.

On the bike he held on to top spot his age group, in 15th overall, as he completed the 40km in 1:15:19.

The final 5.25km run was completed in 22min 41secs, seeing Allen hold top spot for his age group, a full 10 minutes clear of the second placed competitor.

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

DARTS

78 Sqn hits double top

Inter-Service call-up for Bowditch and Taylor

THE HITS kept coming for 78 Squadron darts team as they stormed to cup and league-topping glory with a double Inter-Service call-up to face the Royal Navy.

Flt Lt Jase Bowditch and Cpl Jay Taylor will be representing their Service this month in the IS championship opener, after 78 Sqn beat Delme 6-3 to secure a quarter-final berth in the Ellis Cup to face Fareham Bowls.

Team captain Bowditch said: "It's been a fantastic start to the season, top of the table and through to the quarters of the

Ellis Cup. You wouldn't believe most of the team only started competitive darts at the start of the season. Hopefully, we can keep the good run going."

The aviators stormed to the top of the Fareham Darts League after a crushing 8-1 away win to Sovereign SC 'B'.

With a lively crowd of supporters, Bowditch and AS1 Archie Pallister opened the contest with doubles and singles, hitting six tons between them, taking 78 Sqn to a 3-0 lead early on.

Cpl Ollie Cross and Cpl Alex

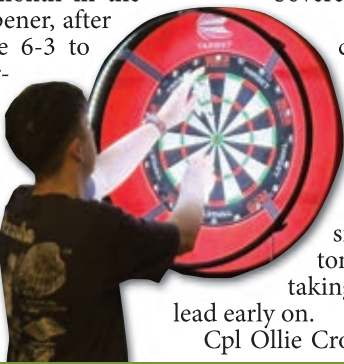
Le Marquand secured the victory, making it 5-0.

To put icing on the victory, Taylor hit the team's first 180, winning his singles and doubles with debutant AS1 Tristan Wright.

AS1 Luke Horner and Cross saw out the tail end of the match in some great games, resulting in an 8-1 win for 78 Sqn, who remain unbeaten along with Hill Park 'C', currently in second.

Bowditch added: "We play Fareham Bowls at home in the QF of the cup on December 22, but our next clash sees us face Hill Park 'C' in a top of the table clash, so someone's unbeaten record has got to give."

● Follow RAF Darts on Facebook @RAFDarts.



All aboard for Ally Pally

'TAXI FOR RAF Darts' will be the order of the day when the Bullseye TV show cab takes Service association members to the PDC World Darts Championship.

Darts association media officer Cpl Zara Warhurst received the offer from event and RAF darts sponsors Winmau for when the competition kicks off at London's Alexandra Palace later this month.

She said: "Being invited to the PDC by leading dartboard manufacturer Winmau is a brilliant milestone for RAF Darts. "It recognises the hard work

that has gone into growing the sport this year and gives us an opportunity to strengthen a partnership that is helping shape the future of darts across Defence."

Spokesperson for Bullseye Laura Wood said: "It's a privilege for us to provide the RAF with the taxi, ensuring that they arrive at the World Dart Championships in true style. It's an honour to support them on and off the oche."

The Championships runs from December 11 to January 3, 2026.

● Follow RAF Darts @RAF Darts on Facebook.

BOXING



DOMINANCE: AS1 Todd Samways (blue, right) beats Cpl Connor Meredith (red, left)

The 106th Wakefield Champs

● Continued from page 27
bout, which went the way of Samways by unanimous points decision.

After falling short in the semi-finals last year, Samways returned with his eyes set on the belt. Using RAF Wittering to assist with his training and sparring in the build-up, he dominated both semi-final and finals bouts.

AS1 Danny Ellis (15 Sqn RAF Regiment, Marham) and AS1 Shaun Mennie (2 Sqn RAF Regiment, Brize Norton)

battled it out at 75kg in the bout of the night, with Ellis winning by a unanimous points decision.

Bout 4 saw a 86kg bout between AS1 Alex Cross (Odiham) and Cpl Joe Bass (Halton). With both boxers winning their semi-finals with emphatic knockouts, this promised to be a big punching affair and so it proved for a solid three rounds, with the superior skill of Cross earning him the victory by a unanimous points decision.

The RAF Championship winners



AS1 TODD SAMWAYS



AS1 ALEX CROSS



AS1 DANNY ELLIS



LIGHT-WELTERWEIGHT: AS1 Callum Balzaretti



LCPL OLIVER WATKINS

FOOTBALL

Dynamite TNT TV debut for McNamara

Daniel Abrahams

THERE WAS a winning TV bow for Sgt Dan McNamara and his Wolverhampton Women's team as the TNT *Friday Night Football* cameras screened their 2-0 FA Cup win.

The delighted aviator (*inset right*), whose team sit second in the National League North Premier Division, secured the Adobe Women's FC cup win over Stoke in the latter stages.

He said: "For our game to be

chosen was good. It's another bit of history for the club being our first live TV clash.

"It's always difficult against Stoke – we didn't deal with the cameras well. We were poor in the top end of the field so at half-time we spoke about it. The occasion was a bit



much for us early on.

"Personally, the TV interest was good and was great preparation for what's to come. We want that sort of environment full-time, so it was a great occasion and a chance for us to learn on and off the pitch."

The game was won

after second-half strikes from Beth Merrick and Rachel Quigley as the aviator's side made it 14 wins on the spin after a recent 3-2 league victory over Loughborough Lightning. That result sees them sit second on 25 points, one off Burnley, with a game in hand.

McNamara, who was FA Women's National League Premier Division Manager of the Month for October, said: "I found it interesting and really enjoyed it, but I was worn out

after the game. You are conscious of being watched all the time, I am an emotional guy, so I found myself thinking about how I was looking on the sidelines but was mindful I needed to be there for the girls, which the late goals proved I and my team were.

"The girls took time out after the game and they are currently riding a wave, they keep finding ways to win so we want to keep that momentum going."

● Follow Wolves Women FC @wolveswomenfc on Instagram.



GAFFER: Aviator McNamara gets his point across

RUGBY LEAGUE

Hutchinson homes in on the Challenge Cup

SERVICE RUGBY league head coach Sgt James Hutchinson is dreaming of a hometown return after the first round draw for the Challenge Cup was made.

Hutchinson, whose charges were drawn away to NCL Division 1 side Heworth in the opening round of the tournament, could face a second round tie away to the aviator's former club Keighley Cougars.

Hutchinson said: "We'll be fully focused on round one and not looking too far ahead, but I'd be thrilled to get through to round two against my old club Keighley.

"It's a great club and I really enjoyed my time there as a player so it'd be great to go back there as a coach and see what we can do against them."

Having lost out in the opening round to the Army at Aldershot, the RAF, who narrowly lost out on back-to-back IS championship wins in September, will be ready for a tough



opening Challenge Cup clash to kickstart 2026 in style.

Hutchinson (*pictured*) said: "We knew we'd be in for a tough game being in the Yorkshire pool of the Challenge Cup draw, and it certainly will be against Heworth, who are a good NCL Division 1 side.

"This is the first time in two years we haven't drawn another Service team in the first round of the cup, having had the Navy in 2024 and the Army last year. We played a friendly against Heworth in 2024 and it was great preparation for us working towards the Inter-Services win that year, so we're looking forward to going up there again."

The RAF will face Heworth over the weekend of January 10-11, with the second round ties being held over the weekend of January 24-25.

● Follow RAF rugby league on Instagram @rafrugbyleague.

FOOTBALL

Fire Service prove too hot to handle

RAF Women	1
Fire Service Women	2

THE SERVICE'S women's footballer suffered a 2-1 defeat at the hands of the UK Fire Service as they continue to build towards next year's IS championship.

Team manager Acting WO Karl Craven said: "The game was closely contested and I feel we have continued to offer the experiences needed to progress our pathway to success and adding to the five IS championships the team have achieved in the last five years."

With one win and one defeat (Newquay Ladies 13-0 (W), Wolves Academy 4-2 (L)) from their opening two warm-up matches, Craven was hoping to see things click into place for his side at Wolverhampton Wanderers' Compton Park Training Ground.

Two quick-fire chances saw the aviators go behind, the first after goalkeeper AS1 Jamie Lee-Bamford spilled a cross and the second after she raced out to deal with a counterattack but



GOALSCORER: AS1 Lucy Farrow (left) and AS1 Shaunna Jenkins PHOTO: BFBS

was lobbed by the oncoming Fire Service forward, with Cpl Ashleigh Housley-Stott unable to clear off the line.

The Air Force's sole goal came in the second half after a fast-paced attack and low strike from AS1 Lucy Farrow left the Fire Service goalkeeper with no chance, but a vital second goal to level things up could not be found.

Craven added: "Each meet presents new dynamics, while new talent emerging from across the RAF system integrates into

the squad. We consistently challenge ourselves against strong opposition, and this approach will remain integral throughout the season and was true here.

"We have already made meaningful progress and I am incredibly proud of what the team is building together as we work towards the Inter-Services Championship and continue our pursuit of Women's Service Football dominance."

● Follow RAF ladies on Instagram @rafladiesfootball.

Sport

RUGBY

We are in a period of growth



LEG-ENDS: RAF Rugby Union players listen in to coaching advice

Daniel Abrahams

“WE ARE in a good place now and seeing the benefits of our overall approach,” said RAF Rugby Union men’s head coach WO Tom Gardner as he looks to 2026.

After just over a year in the post, the former IS winner has put in the hard yards to shake up the Service game’s set-up, with impressive results and a new style of play which is upping scores and excitement levels along with the team’s profile.

“Last Inter-Services we scored more tries than in the previous two championships combined,” he said. “While our approach to invest in youth is proving its worth.

“The U23s recorded their first IS win since 2006, which is a huge statement, and we have a massively positive relationship between them and the Seniors now, which

Young squad reaching their potential, says head coach

hadn’t really existed when I played.”

The Senior team opened their season with a 48-12 defeat to the French Air Force in the game dubbed Le Crunch in Bordeaux and a 45-17 loss to Rams RFC, with 2026 kicking off with a return to Cardiff Met University and also Caldy RFC, interspersed with two training sessions with Championship side Worcester Warriors.

Gardner said: “Regardless of the results, there were huge positives to take away. In

the French game 15 of the squad were U25s and nine U23s.

“The IS clash was men against boys in many places, where every point scorer was a player exposed to the Senior team.”

He added: “Post Christmas is exciting, before the Cardiff game we train against Worcester, which will test our boys, with U23s involved. The boys love it, granted they will be exposed and make mistakes, but it’s all part of a growth mindset.

“Every player is open to growth. If you



GARDNER: Investing in young RAF players

are happy with that mindset, you are happy to make mistakes, you are happy to take risks and if you are happy to do that you might get your just rewards.”

Strength in numbers as rugby recruitment drive pays dividends

“SOLID WIN today against Aylesbury,” said RAF women’s rugby union head coach Sgt Sian Williams after her charges’ 25-5 IS warm-up win.

The away victory at Ostler Fields offered the light blues and Williams the opportunity to field several new players after a recruitment drive over the last year.

Williams said: “The fixture was arranged with a clear purpose, to give the squad valuable live set-piece practice, supported by on-field coaching and referee feedback, before moving into open game play.

“The new players stepped in confidently and showed the work they’ve put in during the week. There was good progress, positive signs, and a strong platform to build on



RAF WOMEN: Growing places

for the rest of the season.”

The association’s investment in new talent has seen a total of 44 RAF women take part in training

so far, strengthening competition for places and giving Williams and her coaching staff selection depth across the squad. That

growth was evident throughout the evening against a buoyant Aylesbury team.

The match highlighted the

growing confidence among the newly selected players as AS1 Isabel Weaver marked her debut with a try in Service colours while AS1(T) Kirby Redrup impressed throughout with strong carries, dominant collisions and a relentless work rate, earning her the Coaches’ Player of the Match award.

Cpl Taylor Lewis ran in a hat-trick of tries while Flt Lt Emily Russell returned to RAF colours with a solid display throughout.

Sgt Ros Mills, Team Manager, said: “Overall, it was a performance that reflects the direction the RAF Women are heading this season: increasing depth, growing quality, and a squad that’s pushing standards every week.”

● Follow RAF women’s rugby union @rafrugby on Instagram.

5 RAF Sport

pages of



World Cup GB debut for flying Cartagena

See page 23

BOXING

Axe is back with a bang

Victory over warring Steve Davis

Daniel Abrahams

IT WAS a thumping return to the ring for Cpl Brad Axe as he secured a unanimous points win in his return in Bristol after six months away.

The RAF firefighter instructor, who defeated Steven Davis after four rounds of blistering action, said: "The crowd was incredible; the night went exactly according to plan. I had my trainees from my recruiter course there flying the flag for the Air Force. To get unanimous points and shut him out was great."

Axe, roared on by a large RAF contingent, belied any issues over his lengthy absence due to a cut eye suffered during his last training camp. He bombarded his opponent from the opening bell, before landing a huge right upper cut, rocking Davis to his core.

"There was confusion about the length of the fight. I was



prepped for six rounds, but it was actually over four," revealed the aviator.

"It meant my game plan was altered and my pace. He came to knock my head off, which I quite like. It meant I could read him well. He rushes his opponents, so

I wanted to slow that up – I stuck it on him early, so he knew not to try it."

Axe continued to produce powerful punch combinations which had the referee eyeing Davis, who was having to produce quick replies to take the



IT'S A COVER-UP: Davis is snookered by onslaught from Axe, who is cheered on by RAF contingent, below left

ref's mind off how hurt he was to prevent him from stopping the fight.

Axe continued to move well, forcing Davis into numerous misses, which he countered with great combinations.

Axe said: "I made him miss

and made him pay. I am delighted with the shut-out. My fight was co-main event, so the eliminator bout afterwards still had the crowd signing my name, which was funny."

● Go to @brad.axe.7 on Facebook to follow Brad.

CRUISERWEIGHTS:
AS1 Alex Cross (blue, right) outpoints Cpl Joe Bass (red, left)
PHOTOS: PAUL SAXBY



A first for Wakefields at youth light-heavyweight

Daniel Abrahams

A STUNNING night of ring action marked the 106th Lord Wakefields at RAF Cranwell.

The event, also the Service's annual boxing tournament, hosted the first-ever Class A 80kg Youth Championship bout, with AS1 Bradley Higgs of Odiham taking the honours. The Hampshire station went on to win the Unit Trophy.

The headline fight of the evening was the Class A 92+kg (heavyweight) clash between LCpl Oliver Watkins from Honington and Cpl Ben Gurnell from Brize Norton.

The action saw a number of thumping punches traded, and

it was Watkins who celebrated victory by a referee's stoppage in the third round to become the champion.

Opening the evening was the Class A 63.5kg bout between AS1 Callum Balzaretta (Wittering) and AS1 Frankie Watmore (15 Sqn RAF Regiment, Marham) – a rematch after the two met just two months earlier, with Balzaretta winning by a first round stoppage. This time Watmore came close to redemption but narrowly missed out on a split decision.

AS1 Todd Samways (Wyton) and Cpl Connor Meredith (Halton) fought out a 67kg

● Continued on p24

AT HELP FOR HEROES, WE SEE THE IMPACT SERVICE CAN HAVE EVERY DAY.



At Christmas we ask people to send a message of thanks to our Armed Forces community. The response from the public is always incredible.

Every message reminds us: people haven't forgotten those who serve and the families who stand beside them. And neither have we. We wish you a peaceful Christmas. And remember, we're here for anyone who's worn the uniform and for their families too.



See the messages left for you here:
sendamessage.helpforheroes.org.uk

**HELP for
HEROES**

R'n'R



Win tickets to Cirque
Enchantment ● p4-5

**Bring me sunshine
– Eric and Ern
live on stage**

● See
page 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
STRESS**
FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

R'n'R



Theatre

Dick Whittington

Now until January 4, 2026, Oxford Playhouse

Diversity's to the fore in Oxford's '90s panto

Dick goes Dotty in London

IT'S WELL and truly panto season at Oxford Playhouse with its reimagining of the classic story *Dick Whittington* now playing until January 4.

The production has a new band of characters, a 90s Britpop setting and matching soundtrack and is written by Toby Hulse, the creator of last year's award-winning *Sleeping Beauty* – this marks his fourth pantomime at the theatre.

Toby explained: "The original pantomime story is inspired by the life of a real person, Richard

Whittington, who became the Lord Mayor of London three times over. Dick is an ordinary young man from Gloucester who travels to London with his cat to make his fortune, having been told that the streets are paved with gold.

"When he finds that this isn't true, he nearly returns home, but hears the bells of London tolling 'Turn again, Whittington'. After many further adventures, including a trip to Morocco, he and his cat rid London of a plague of rats. Through this Dick finds love, happiness and riches,

and becomes Lord Mayor."

In the Oxford Playhouse panto however, things are a bit different...

"We have kept all the main elements of the story, but thrown them up in the air, sprinkled them with glitter, and created an entirely new pantomime set in a weird and wonderful version of the 90s," Toby said.

"Dick is now Dot, a trader from Gloucester Green Market, lured to London by a fairy disguised as a cat, to help defeat the evil brothers Liam and Noel Rattagher.

"And that's just the beginning of the silliness – expect, amongst other things, breakdancing rats, an all-singing all-dancing bus, a mop-wielding army training to Britney Spears, and the owner of a pie and mash shop aiming to be Lord Mayor."

In amongst the fun there's a serious message – acceptance; choosing who you want to be and embracing that fully.

Toby added: "Each of the main characters is in some way held back by tradition, and, for them to achieve their dreams, they have to assert themselves

against what is expected of them by others.

"Running alongside this is the Rattagher brothers' evil plan to make everything in the world uniform, identical and bland. To defeat this, our heroes have to find out and express how they are different and unique. These are universal, human themes, and, although the world of our pantomime is a very daft one, the story has a lot to say about the challenges that we all face."

● Go to: oxfordplayhouse.com or call the Box Office on: 01865 305305 for ticket details.



UPDATED: Cast of the Nineties version of Oxford Playhouse's Dick Whittington, inset, Toby Hulse

PHOTO: ANDREW WALMSLEY



Theatre

Inspector Morse: House of Ghosts

On tour: inspector Morse on stage.com

Ghosts of past haunting Morse

IN ANOTHER corner of fictional Oxford (or, rather, Aylesbury's Waterside Theatre), there's a murder mystery to solve and, first on the scene is the city of dreaming spire's own Chief Inspector Morse.

Tom Chambers (Inspector Sullivan in *Father Brown*) is excellent as the nation's favourite curmudgeonly copper – famously played on television by John Thaw – in the first major stage adaption of the series. In *Inspector Morse: House of Ghosts* by Alma Cullen (one of the TV show's script writers) Chambers delivers not merely an impersonation but a

carefully-observed interpretation of Thaw in the role combined with his own take on the sardonic super-sleuth.

Morse just happens to be in the audience for a production of *Hamlet* when the young actress playing Ophelia (Eliza Teale as Rebecca) shockingly dies on stage. As you'd expect, he's immediately involved, running the investigation, assisted by loyal colleague DS Lewis (an energetic Tachia Newall) in his own immutable way, with stops at his local, The Crown, for contemplation.

Set in 1987, the clever plot, which finds Morse discovering



PARTNERS: Morse (Chambers, right) and Lewis (Newall)

a connection to sinister events in his own life when he was an Oxford undergraduate 25 years ago, will keep you guessing whodunnit to the end.

Along the way we see a hint of romance with history professor Ellen (an impressive Teresa Banham) emerging from Morse's past, along with his strong

dislike of another of his student contemporaries, Lawrence (Josh Katembela) – now a successful but distinctly unpleasant theatre director – that threatens to cloud the Chief Inspector's judgement.

There's also drama queen Verity – a superb performance from Charlotte Randle – a former flame of Lawrence's, to contend with.

Everyone, including Lawrence's elusive, glamorous wife Harriet (Olivia Onyehara) is under suspicion.

It's a compelling production, full of intrigue and suspense, that makes this show well worth catching. The nationwide tour runs until April 18.

4 roundels out of 5 ●●●●●
Review by Tracey Allen

R'n'R



Theatre
Cirque Enchantment
UK tour

Fire up your imagination



SPECTACULAR:
Show's fire
performers and
acrobats and
hoop artists
(right)

CIRQUE ENCHANTMENT, the breathtaking winter spectacle for all ages, will tour in 2026 opening in Swindon on February 3. The production boasts a unique blend of circus, music, and show-stopping performances and has been dubbed the ultimate feel-good escape this winter.

It follows the journey of a young girl with a vivid imagination as she's swept into a dazzling world of wonder and discovery, encountering an extraordinary cast of weird and wonderful characters along the way. In a frozen circus wonderland a talented cast of aerialists, thrilling fire performers, jaw-dropping acrobatics, jugglers and hula hoopers are combined with beautiful choreography and West End-quality live vocals. The show is set to a powerhouse pop soundtrack featuring songs made famous by Take That, Kylie Minogue, Queen, Paloma Faith, Beyoncé, Little Mix, Eurythmics and more.

Producer Stuart Glover said: "It's an escape from reality, a fantasy fairy tale fused with a pop concert, packed with brilliant music and daring physical excellence in both dance and circus performance. It's pure spectacle from start to finish. It's a real visual and musical feast for the senses."

Powerhouse singer Stephanie Lovett, who plays White Witch Miss Enchantra, added: "I absolutely love seeing the audience reaction when they realise how many multi-talented performers are on stage, aerialists and trapeze artists, dancers and singers, fire artists, contortionists, hoop artists, jugglers... everyone works together to bring the enchanted world to life."

Acrobat Tasha Rushford agreed: "It is such a magical show because, as Stephanie said, it combines so many different elements. I get to perform all my favourite disciplines while also portraying a range of emotions, which keeps it exciting every single night. It's



such a pleasure to work alongside such an insanely multi-talented cast."

Stuart has produced a range of hit shows, including *The SpongeBob Musical*, *Madagascar the Musical*, *An Audience with Anton du Beke* and *Firedance*, starring Karen Hauer and Gorka Marquez. What makes *Cirque Enchantment* special to Stuart?

"The show is timeless, with iconic pop music that audiences instantly connect to," he explained. "But more than that, it's about stepping into a fantasy world, especially in the cold winter months. It's a unique experience that never fails to lift the spirits. It feels really magical."

"Every moment is carefully crafted, the choreography, the circus artistry, the music... and on stage, the soundtrack really drives the narrative, which takes you on this great adventure."

"I always enjoy the fire moments, they're thrilling to watch and get such an incredible audience reaction. But I



Exhibitions
Zandra Rhodes:
A Life in Print
Jan 24 to May 10, 2026
The Holburne, Bath

All Rhodes lead to The Holburne



Zandra Rhodes: *A Life in Print*, an exhibition showcasing a spectacular array of Dame Zandra Rhodes' vibrant screen-printed garments from the 1960s, 70s and 80s, is staged at The Holburne Museum in Bath from January 24 to May 10, 2026.

Rhodes (pictured left) broke new ground in the 1960s as one of the first designers to marry the craft of screen-printing with fashion design, launching a distinctive career that has spanned six decades.

Establishing her eponymous label in 1969, she has screen-printed and designed more than 100 fashion collections. Her bold garments have dressed rock

stars and royalty, including Freddie Mercury and Princess Diana, and in 2003 she founded London's Fashion and Textile Museum.

A spokesperson for the exhibition said: "Displayed as complete ensembles on dynamically posed vintage Adel Rootstein mannequins, the outfits are arranged into 'hero print' sections, each one telling the story of a Zandra Rhodes signature print and how Rhodes has translated them into her iconic garments."

"Within the Holburne's historic Ballroom, this vivid staging celebrates Rhodes as a



trailblazer in colour and screen-printed textile design, who completely redefined the role of print in fashion."

An audio tour, narrated

by Rhodes, accompanies the display and she shares stories of the cultural icons who have worn her exhibited garments, including a yellow Button Flower coat dress (inset left) worn by Joanna Lumley in *Absolutely Fabulous*, a green Field of Lilies ensemble worn by Bianca Jagger, and a white beaded Button and Bows dress worn by Princess Diana.

Dame Zandra said: "Working with [curator] Rosemary Harden to put *A Life in Print* together has been incredibly inspiring. Together, we carefully

Edited by Tracey Allen

Win!

nation



TV
BBC

Festive offerings



Amandaland meets Ab Fab in comedy yuletide special

THE BBC has unveiled what it calls 'a smorgasbord of spectacular treats that celebrate the very best in homegrown storytelling and creativity' for its Christmas TV schedule.

Tom Hiddleston is back in the hotly anticipated return of the multi-award-winning hit drama *The Night Manager*; and the *Amandaland Christmas Special* welcomes the *Absolutely Fabulous* star Jennifer Saunders, who plays Joanna Lumley's on-screen sister.

This year's festive trip to Poplar sees *Call the Midwife* celebrate Christmas with two episodes and there are seasonal specials of both *Beyond Paradise* and *Death in Paradise*, with guests including Adrian Edmondson in the former and Josie Lawrence in the latter.

Natural history lovers are treated to a new film from Sir David Attenborough, as he turns his attention closer to home to explore the wildlife of England's capital in *Wild London*.

In *The Mandy Who Knew Too Much* we join Mandy (Diane Morgan) as she has what can only be described as one of the worst Christmases ever. And in the *Two Doors Down Christmas Special* Eric and Beth (inset above) put their tree up earlier than usual, unwittingly kicking off the Christmas season in Latimer Crescent.



REUNITED: Saunders (left) and Lumley (right) in the *Amandaland Christmas Special*

Claudia Winkleman returns with the most talked about show of 2025 – *The Traitors*. There's an all-new civilian series of the ultimate game of trust and treachery from the Scottish Highlands set to grip the nation.

Claudia will also present *The Traitors at the Proms*, a concert featuring melodramatic versions of pop tunes heard on *The Traitors* from Britney Spears' *Toxic* to Billie Eilish's *Bad Guy*.

Everyone's favourite *Traitor* Alan Carr is also back as best friends Amanda Holden and Alan return to the sun-drenched

village of Moclin in southern Spain in *Amanda and Alan's Spanish Christmas*.

There are festive specials of *The Weakest Link*, *University Challenge*, *The Great British Sewing Bee* and *MasterChef* and Dame Helen Mirren, *The Gruffalo* author Julia Donaldson and Rob Brydon stop by *The Repair Shop* this Christmas hoping for some very special repairs from the barn's team of experts.

Dame Helen brings a beloved but badly broken cello and Julia tasks furniture restorer Will Kirk and ceramics expert Kirsten Ramsay with the repair of a toy farmhouse that once belonged to her granny.

● Go to: bbc.co.uk for more details.

also love the rich blend of music throughout the show; there really is something for everyone."

Cirque Enchantment will tour throughout February to Swindon, Ipswich, Dunstable, High Wycombe, Bournemouth,

Dorking, Stevenage, Leicester, Basingstoke, Peterborough, Chatham, Nottingham, Basildon, Crewe and St Albans.

● Go to: cirqueenchantment.co.uk to find out more.

Win pair of tickets

WE HAVE two pairs of tickets to win to see the show at the Wycombe Swan Theatre, High Wycombe, on February 12, 2026.

For your chance to win a pair, answer this question correctly:

Who is the producer of the *Cirque Enchantment* show?

Email your answer, marked *Cirque Enchantment tickets 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 January 12, 2026.

olburne



Theatre

Eric and Ern

Curve, Leicester, Jan 6-17

Eric & Ern turn 100

ERNIE WISE would have celebrated his 100th birthday this year, with Eric Morecambe's to follow in May, 2026.

To mark the legendary comics' centenaries, there's a limited run from January 6-17 at Leicester's Curve theatre of *Eric and Ern* starring Ian Ashpitel and Jonty Stephens, the Olivier-nominated duo behind the critically acclaimed West End hit *Eric & Little Ern*.

Eric and Ern is described as a show of Morecambe and Wise's most loved routines, songs and sketches – with, of course, a musical guest.

Ian Ashpitel said: "It's an absolute pleasure and a privilege to portray one half of the country's most loved and iconic comedy double acts of all time. For a couple of hours each night we get to share with the audience the joy of recreating some of the most famous comedy sketches, songs and routines

ever seen on British television. The more they know what's coming, the harder they laugh. Morecambe and Wise were simply the best."

Ian came into acting late in life after spending nine years in the Royal Navy as a radio operator.

Gary Morecambe, Eric's son, said: "It feels wonderful that there is still such great interest in Morecambe and Wise. Eric and Ernie are forever young on TV, so to imagine them now coming up to their 100th birthdays is extraordinary."

"It makes it even more exciting that Jonty and Ian are out there perpetuating them from their heyday."

The production is described as suitable for all the family from 8 to 80.

Eric and Ern was created by Ashpitel and Stephens, based on the writing of Eddie Braben.

● Go to: curveonline.co.uk for more.



TRIBUTE: Jonty Stephens and Ian Ashpitel as Eric and Ern

selected key pieces from my historical collections where print dominates and defines the shape and flow of the garment. For me, print and garment design are intrinsically linked.

"It has been wonderful to reflect on the inspiration stories behind each of my signature prints, like my observational drawings of Australia's rural landscape, and the memories carried by some of my most iconic garments, like the Button Flower coat.

"I hope visitors enjoy discovering the exhibition and listening to my audio tour as much as we enjoyed bringing it all together."

Zandra Rhodes will also appear live in-conversation at The Forum in Bath in March 2026.

● Go to: holburne.org for more information.



Your Announcements

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

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

CALLING all former TG11 comms personnel, T/phonists, TPOs, Tels, Wop Spec, TCOs, TCCs, TRCs and any comms titles that may have superseded the aforementioned. All are welcome to attend the Trade Group 11 Association reunion to be held on Friday, March 20 to Sunday, March 22, 2026. The venue will be The Marriott Delta Hotels, Mellors Way, off Woodhouse Way, Nottingham Belfry, Nottingham NG8 6PY. Further details if required can be found on the TG11 Association website at tg11association.com. If not a member, details can be found on how to join.

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, 2026. 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!). Its aim is to foster esprit de corps and comradeship, to promote and maintain the ethos and heritage of this incredible Signals Unit. 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 2025.

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: rafadappasn.org; or contact the Membership Secretary on: 07866 085834 or the Chairman on: 01933 443673.

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 with a vibrant gathering of retired and serving members. Please email: janedjones6@btinternet.com.

RAF Armourers past and present: RAF Association's Branch aims to provide welfare support and comradeship for all who have served or currently serve as an RAF Armourer. See: rafaarmourers.co.uk or please email the committee: plumbersrest@outlook.com.

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.

RAF Physical Training Instructors Association holds an Annual Dinner and AGM over a weekend, plus locally organised events. Contact RAFPTIA Hon Sec Denise Street-Brown on: ptisec@outlook.com.

Museum in from the cold

THE RECENT drop in temperatures has meant that volunteers at Newark Air Museum have been forced to reduce the amount of work being undertaken on the external exhibits around the site, said Howard Heeley from the Museum.

"However, this was not before they were able to complete the all-important application of detailed markings on their repainted Jaguar XX829. This T2A version of the Anglo-French strike fighter training aircraft now wears the wraparound camouflage markings it once wore whilst in service with 54 Squadron," he added.

"Sadly, work on the adjacent Lightning T5 aircraft, XS417 has also been suspended due to the weather, this is before the new 56 Squadron repaint could be completed.

"XS417 still requires the



REPAINTED: Jaguar XX829 now wears camouflage markings it had while with 54 Sqn

application of the detailed markings, which will be carried out when temperatures rise to acceptable levels."

Some in-depth restoration work is currently underway on the Blue Steel missile, which has

been moved into NAM's on-site workshop.

Elsewhere, onsite planning is underway for 2026 restoration projects that will be resourced and implemented in the New Year, said Howard.

New factory to boost vets' jobs

ROYAL BRITISH Veterans Enterprise (RBVE), formerly Royal British Legion Industries, is to invest £15 million in a new factory, creating jobs for veterans and people with disabilities.

A spokesperson for RBVE said: "Creating up to 80 jobs, the investment will grow RBVE's position supplying major national infrastructure projects and clients such as National Highways and Network Rail.

"RBVE has also increased funding to its Centenary Village in Kent – bringing the total development to £30 million – providing homes and community for veterans and their families."

The factory, also in Kent, will house a new Training Academy, supporting up to 100 veterans annually to gain new skills and transition into meaningful



INVESTMENT: Artist's impression of the proposed factory in Kent. Image: WebbGray

employment, the spokesperson added.

Lisa Farmer, RBVE's Chief Executive, said: "Our research shows that paid employment is key to independence and a

fulfilling life. For some veterans, transitioning out of Service is not always easy. Paid work gives people choices. That's why we're so passionate about creating real opportunities."

How to use our service

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Tribute to Vulcan crew

PERSONNEL and two Typhoons from IX (B) Sqn RAF Lossiemouth performed a flypast and attended a remembrance ceremony in Zabbar, Malta, to commemorate 50 years since a Vulcan crashed into the town.

Five of the seven aircrew onboard were killed and one civilian on the ground in 1975.

After the flypast, IX (B) Sqn personnel on the ground attended a church service to remember the tragedy.



IN MEMORY: Floral wreaths were laid in commemoration

Friendship Breaks help widowers

TWO RAF veterans who are both widowers say meeting during an RAF Benevolent Fund Group Friendship Break has transformed their lives.

The breaks are designed for Air Force veterans, their partners, carers, widows and widowers, offering a supportive environment to improve mental and physical wellbeing, reduce loneliness and build lasting connections, said a spokesperson for the charity.

John said: "We met at Littlemore House on our first break with the Fund last year. There were 20 of us but Rod and I hit it off and have kept in touch ever since."

The two men attended their second Group Friendship Break in Hayling Island in June. Both lost their wives to illnesses. John was caring for his wife who had vascular dementia until she sadly passed away in March.

He explained: "I was introduced to the Fund through the Admiral nurse, and it opened a whole new way of getting to know people and socialising. I thought I was pretty much on my own after

my wife passed. But Lisa [Fund community engagement worker] has taken the burden of that away by introducing me to Rod and other friends on these breaks. I'm so very appreciative of that."

Rod was a full-time carer for his wife, Denise, who struggled with her health, for 20 years.

He said: "I gave up work aged 48 to become Denise's full-time carer. The Fund offered us a break to Cornwall, but sadly she was unable to travel, and passed away in 2020 on the eve of my birthday."

"When I contacted the Fund again, and was offered one of these Breaks, it was a lifesaver."

Rod said: "We've enjoyed getting involved with the activities on the Break. There's been shooting, archery, swimming, a quiz or two and live music. Plus, the company is great."

John added: "We just generally have a bit of a laugh. That makes the world go round a bit better. While serving in the RAF, I experienced 20 years of

banter and it was like a survival method for some of us, that we all understand."

Rod attends a monthly veterans' group led by the Fund's community engagement workers, and since becoming friends, John has attended the group with him.

Rod added: "The Fund has really helped us through our different circumstances, mentally and emotionally. I'd like to thank them for that."

Rod said: "It's nice that other widows and widowers attend, because losing a partner is so isolating; it's great they're supported with these breaks from the Fund."

● Go to: rafbf.org for further details.

● The Telephone Friendship Service (TFS), launched by charity Royal Star & Garter in November 2022 to help veterans and their partners combat isolation, has marked its third anniversary.

Since launching, TFS has built a community of 47 trained volunteers.

FIRM FRIENDS:
Veterans Rod and John met through the RAFBF



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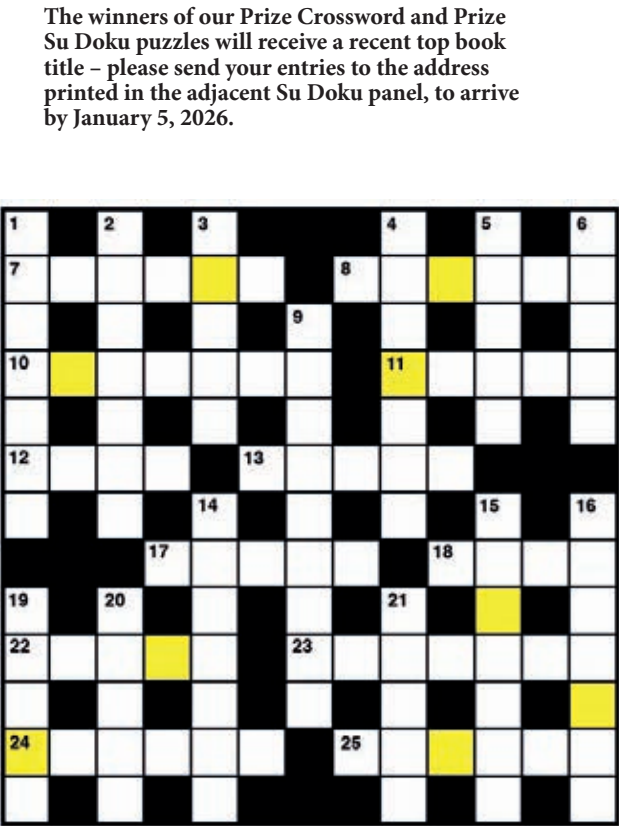
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Prize Crossword
No. 399

Solve the crossword, then rearrange the 9 letters in yellow squares to find an RAF station.



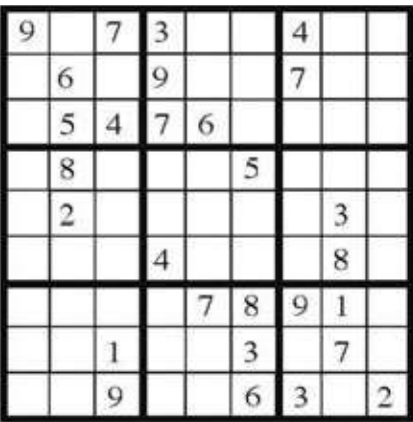
Prize Crossword No. 398 winner is: S Barnes, Ulceby.

Solution to Crossword No. 398
Across – 1. Balsa 4. Barrage 8. Niagara 9. Glass 10. Open 11. Airspace 13. Crow 14. Jets 16. Goose Bay 17. Acre 20. Ahead 21. Adamant 22. Daphnes 23. Kitty
Down – 1. Bank of England 2. Laage 3. Adam 4. Brazil 5. Register 6. Avatars 7. Eastern Sentry 12. Poseidon 13. Close-up 15. Harass 18. Chant 19. Hawk
RAF plane – Handley Page Hastings



Prize Su Doku
No. 409

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 January 5, 2026. The winner of Su Doku No: 407 is: Mr M.P. Jones, Anglesey.

Solution to Su Doku No. 408



Film Review
The Ice Tower (15)
In cinemas now

This left me cold

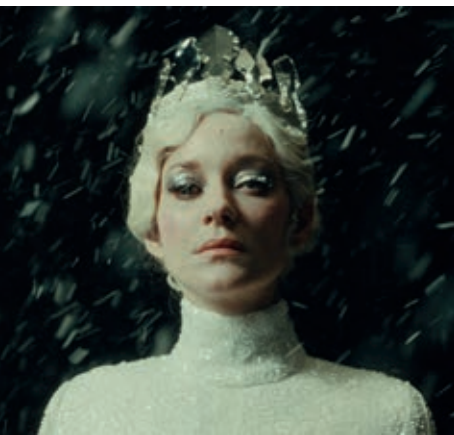
A SMALL 1970s film production of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen* begins to blur into reality for a young runaway who finds unexpected shelter on set, in this French fantasy-drama.

Since the death of her mother, Jeanne (Clara Pacini) has been living in a foster home. Carrying only a handful of beads and a postcard to remember her by, she slips out one night in search of the ice rink pictured on the card. Looking for somewhere to sleep, she breaks into a basement, only to discover a fairy tale world she recognises instantly.

When she peers through a crack in the wall and sees the Snow Queen herself (Marion Cotillard), it's only with the shout of "cut!" that things start to make some kind of sense.

Cotillard plays Cristina, an acclaimed actress whose intimidating iciness makes her an uncanny fit for the role. Jeanne becomes infatuated with her, following her around the set and spying on her whenever she can. As she spends more time lingering around the production, she ends up with a small supporting role, inching closer to her obsession until Cristina eventually takes her under her wing.

Early in the film, Jeanne takes a nasty



FROSTY: The Snow Queen (Marion Cotillard)

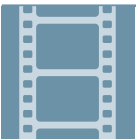
fall and hits her head, and from that moment the border between dream and reality becomes increasingly unstable. The film leans into this ambiguity, using the fairy tale imagery to play on what is real and what is fantasy.

The title refers to the tower from which the queen will eventually throw herself, hinting at a foreboding tension in the story.

The Ice Tower is a glacial, artistic film, that has striking imagery, a dreamlike score, and some truly stunning cinematography. Together with its measured pacing, these elements create a hypnotic, almost trance-like experience.

Whether this is pleasant or worthwhile, is a whole different thing though, especially when you're left with little else.

Two roundels out of five **Review by Sam Cooney**



Film Review
After the Hunt (15)
On Amazon Prime Video now

#MeToo scandal hits Yale

AN UNSEEN incident between a student and a faculty member at Yale has wide-reaching fallout in Luca Guadagnino's #MeToo morality play: *After the Hunt*.

Julia Roberts stars as Alma, a philosophy professor on the cusp of securing tenure. Though not directly involved in the scandal, she's dragged in by both parties, each telling her their conflicting stories and begging to be believed. Accused professor Hank (Andrew Garfield) instantly manages to appear both smug and smarmy. His overfamiliar presence, in which he is casually tactile with everyone within reach, resonates with the accusation that will be levelled at him – if not just hinting at a past with Alma.

The accuser, Maggie (Ayo Edebiri), is the daughter of wealthy benefactors to the school and a promising PhD candidate. As the situation



SHARED PAST? Alma (Julia Roberts) and Hank (Andrew Garfield)

escalates and draws wider attention, Alma is pulled into the centre of it all, despite her desperate wish to remain detached. At home she has dutiful husband Frederik (a scene-stealing Michael Stuhlbarg), though it is hard to know how the couple really feel about each other.

It becomes clear that Alma's private nature stands in contrast to how her younger students cope with their own struggles. This generational divide forms a conflict that tests the very ethics and morality she teaches, as Alma grows

increasingly frustrated by her privileged students' performative 'wokeness'.

While *After the Hunt* could easily have amounted to little more than liberal lecturers and students being clever at each other in various rooms, Guadagnino crafts a tense chamber piece of debate and moral reckoning.

His typically bold camerawork adds texture and unease, elevating what might otherwise play as a talky stage drama into something more like a thriller.

3 roundels out of 5 **Review by Sam Cooney**