

**The Forces' favourite paper**

**WWII's Special Duties pilots**

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**Win!**



**Zeppelin monsters terrorised Essex**

See R'n'R page 5

**Win!**



**ROYAL AIR FORCE**

Friday, May 15, 2026  
Edition No.1632

**99p**

# RAF News

**Win!**



**Nuke test pilots flew into HELL**

See pages 14-15



**Rugby**

**3 from 3 for Red Rose Amy**

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**Skiing**

**Scand & deliver**



● See page 24

**Boxing**

**National champs**



● See page 27

# Spirit of The Few



ACM Sir Harv Smyth



**Simon Mander**

CHIEF OF the Air Staff, ACM Sir Harv Smyth evoked the spirit of the Battle of Britain as the latest Ukrainian fast jet and rotary pilots graduated after completing the RAF's Elementary Flying Course.

He said: "From our own history we understand more than most how powerful

the few can be against the many.

"We've had our Battle of Britain, and you are having yours at this moment, and we will help you to win that."

The efforts are the UK's contribution to the Air Force Capability Coalition, spearheaded by the US, Denmark and the Netherlands, to equip the war-torn state with modern fighter jets to face down Putin's Russia.

Instructor Flt Lt Copperwheat Dayle added: "It is having a real-world effect teaching these students and seeing what is going on in their country every day, it is very admirable."

This initial course focuses on critical hand-eye coordination and precise stick control, and follows the tradition of Harrier pilot training allowing graduates to move on to fast jet tuition on F-16 fighters.

# BiteSize

## DFC hero tributes

Remembering Bomber Command pilot and charity fundraiser George Dunn, who has died aged 103

See pages 9 & 21



“To ever be associated with Frank Sinatra or The Beatles is a huge honour,,

Actor and musician Jeff Goldblum takes his band to venue of legends, the Royal Albert Hall

See R'n'R pp4-5



## RAF stars shine at UKAF Sports Awards

Rugby League chief among those honoured in presentation event at RAF Club, Piccadilly

See page 26



# ROYAL AIR FORCE RAF News

**RAF News**  
Room 68  
Lancaster Building  
HQ Air Command  
High Wycombe  
Buckinghamshire  
HP14 4UE

**Editor:** Simon Williams  
**Email:** editor@rafnews.co.uk

**Executive Features Editor:**  
Tracey Allen  
**Email:** tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk

**News Editor:** Simon Mander

**Sport:** sports@rafnews.co.uk

**All advertising:**  
Edwin Rodrigues  
**Tel:** 07482 571535  
**Email:** edwin.rodrigues@rafnews.co.uk

**Subscriptions and distribution:**  
RAF News Subscriptions  
c/o Intermedia,  
Unit 6 The Enterprise Centre,  
Kelvin Lane, Crawley  
RH10 9PE  
**Tel:** 01293 312191  
**Email:** rafnewssubs@subscriptionhelpline.co.uk

# VR kit cuts training costs

## Andy Whitehead-Hughes

FUTURE FIGHTER pilots are using a new mixed-reality system at Valley which it's hoped will save millions of pounds a year in training costs.

Delivered on time and within budget, 11 synthetic devices are now in service across the Hawk T2 and Texan fleets.

By maximising the quality of each sortie, future fast jet operators will be able to learn, rehearse and refine key flying skills – before they are assessed in a live aircraft, training chiefs say.

Head of Flying Training Air Cdre Rob Caine said: “By integrating mixed reality into the training pipeline, we are improving student readiness and ensuring every live sortie delivers maximum operational value.”

Using a ‘fly-fix-fly’ concept, industry engineers and RAF instructors collocated at the Welsh airbase rolled out the system within 24 hours.



Air Enablers Head Cdre Steve Jose said: “By placing the industry experts directly in a team with our fast jet instructors, the joint team had the freedom

to explore innovative ideas and update their joint understanding of problems and solutions with minimal friction.”

Using the latest mixed-reality

headsets, trainees can look down and see the real cockpit, their own hands and all physical controls.

For the first time, they can practise circuits, visual manoeuvres, formation admin, and low-level navigation with realistic depth perception and 360-degree awareness.

One student said: “Fast jet flying is physically demanding, and while revising in your room is still essential, being immersed in the 3D virtual world while still seeing and interacting with a real cockpit feels like a massive step forward.”

The new training kit requires only 10–20 per cent of the physical space of legacy dome simulators and costs around only 10 per cent as much to build.

The system hopes to get up to two more pilots to the frontline annually and save up to £4 million per year in outsourced training – an estimated £28 million through-contract saving over the next eight years.

## This Week In History



### 1965 Arrows debut

THE RED Arrows display team flying the Gnat make their first public display at the Biggin Hill Air Fair.

### 1941 Dawn of jet age

THE FIRST flight by a British-built jet takes place at Cranwell as a Gloster Meteor launches a training sortie.



### 1982 Falklands scramble

SEA HARRIER pilot Wg Cdr Peter Squire leads the first operational sortie of the Falklands conflict from the deck of HMS Hermes.

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

# How The Few inspired 007

Simon Mander

**RARE LINKS** between fictional superspy James Bond and the RAF's Battle of Britain pilots have been unearthed by researchers

A former Commanding Officer can even claim to have been related to the publishing world's favourite British agent.

Sqn Ldr Harry Eeles, who commanded 263 Sqn Hurricanes in 1940, had a stepbrother called James Bond whose name author Ian Fleming said he borrowed for the hero of his novels.

National Memorial to the Few database consulting editor Geoff Simpson said: "Two other pilots have distinct links to the James Bond spy novels written by wartime naval intelligence officer Ian Fleming.

"Hurricane pilot Sqn Ldr Charles Derek Whittingham was wounded in combat with 151 Sqn, but one of his brothers, Jack, a prominent screenwriter after World War II, was hired for a Bond movie that was never made, but its plot became the basis of the novel *Thunderball*.

"Old Etonian FO Ralph Hope flew against the Luftwaffe with 605 (County of Warwick) Auxiliary Sqn."

Mr Simpson added: "His sister gave him his Bond connection. Margaret Hope married John Henry Godfrey, who was Director of Naval Intelligence, whom Commander Ian



**NAMESAKE:** Battle of Britain pilot Sqn Ldr Harry Eeles, whose step-brother was called James Bond

Fleming served under.

"It is sometimes suggested that Godfrey was a model for the spy chief 'M' in the Bond novels. Certainly, he would have been much in Fleming's mind as he wrote."

Hurricane pilot FO Hope did not survive the Battle of Britain as he was in one of four fighters scrambled near Croydon in poor visibility and crashed either through striking a balloon cable or being shot down by anti-aircraft fire.

The Air Ministry announced that Hope had lost his life while preventing his aircraft hitting houses. Witnesses stated that he sought to land on allotments before baling out very low.

The village of Nettlebed in Oxfordshire, close to Benson, is at the heart of an area where the Fleming family owned houses. Ian played golf on the nearby Huntercombe course.

The family can still be found there in the Nettlebed Creamery Cheese Shed which is owned by Rose Grimond, great niece of Ian Fleming.

**LICENCE TO THRILL:** Author Ian Fleming based the iconic 007 character on WWII RAF heroes, according to research carried out by the Battle of Britain Memorial Trust



## Bulletin



## Tribute to Luftwaffe

Staff Reporter

**FORMER ADVERSARIES** came together as the RAF Regiment King's Colour Sqn led a tribute to the Luftwaffe in London.

German Air Attaché Gp Capt Stefan Kleinheyer took part while wreath-laying ceremonies took place simultaneously at the Luftwaffe Memorial at Furstenfeldbrück, Germany.

The ceremony honours airmen of both nations who lost their lives in the service of their country.

# Darts duo target a cash bullseye

Staff Reporter

**FUNDRAISING** CPLS Zara Durrant and Hayley Court are teaming up to smash their £250,000 target to help fight PTSD in the British military.

The duo are hoping to hit the cash bullseye by giving Forces darts aces the chance to step up to the oche and take on Europe's top pros later this summer.

Dubbed Operation Bullseye, the showdown will see Armed Forces players square off against a host of UK top talent including former world Champion Glen Durrant, Alan Soutar and Ricky Evans and Dutch supremos Deta Hedman and Dimitri Van den Bergh.

Proceeds from the event will be donated to Healing Military Minds, the group set up by Brize Norton-based Hayley four years ago to combat mental health problems.

Since its inception in 2022, HMM has raised more than £200,000 with a host of events to boost the coffers, including an annual glitzy ball which has become one of the big-ticket events in the RAF social calendar.

Zara launched Operation Bullseye in a bid to help fight loneliness among new arrivals



**ON TARGET:** Fundraisers Cpl Zara Durrant (left) and Cpl Hayley Court

at RAF stations and has battled to get darts recognised as an official sport across the Services.

Hayley said: "It's going to be a great night and were hoping to

smash the £250,000 target by the end of the year. Zara's done a great job getting darts into RAF stations but I have to admit that neither of us can even play, despite the

fact that her uncle Glen Durrant is one of the UK's best players, who'll be there on the night."

● Go to [defencedartscommunity.co.uk](http://defencedartscommunity.co.uk) for details.



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# Happy Valley

## Wills marks station 85th

**Simon Mander**

A SMILING Prince William wished a Royal happy birthday to his old airbase when he visited Valley.

He was in Wales to mark the station's 85th anniversary where, from 2010 to 2013, he served as a Search and Rescue helicopter pilot.

Station Warrant Officer Sharon Smart raised the Royal Ensign ahead of the visit during which HRH met personnel at 72 (Fighter) Sqn and 202 Sqn, RAF Regiment gunners, 4 Flying Training School Commandant Gp Capt 'Boomer' Ward and Station Commander Gp Capt Gez Currie.

Operating as Flt Lt William Wales on C Flight, 22 Sqn, the Prince flew the

Westland Sea King helicopter on missions across the UK, taking part in demanding rescues over mountains and at sea.

During the posting he and Catherine, the Princess of Wales, lived on Anglesey.

In 2023, he was appointed Valley's Royal Honorary Air Commodore and has returned over the years since for a nostalgic visit to meet crews and present awards at the base.

Established in 1941 on the Isle of Anglesey, the World War II fighter airfield played a key role in training aircrew and supporting air defence operations. Post-war, it evolved into one of the RAF's most important fast jet training stations, instructing generations of

pilots on the Vampire, Gnat, Hawk and Texan T1, before they progressed to frontline aircraft such as the Typhoon and F-35 Lightning.

The station has also hosted air-sea rescue operations with Sea King helicopters, one of three RAF Mountain Rescue Teams, and today it is still a frontline base and home to No. 4 Flying Training School.



**ROYAL RETURN:** HRH Prince William joins station personnel at Valley to mark the station's 85th anniversary. *Inset right, HM The Queen visits William during his training in 2010*



## Servicewomen eye new armour

**Simon Mander**

BRITISH SERVICEWOMEN could be issued with new body armour specially designed for the female form by 2029, Defence chiefs say.

Women fighting in Ukraine are the first to get tailor-made body armour to protect them from bullets and shrapnel under a MOD deal with UK manufacturer NP Aerospace.

It is hoped the bespoke curved plates will close gaps made by their figures and help them take aim with a pistol or rifle thanks to the suit's snug fitting.

The company is making 2,000 sets of the armour which is being bought by the MOD to send to the Baltic warzone.

However British Servicewomen will have to wait for a new replacement for the



**FITTED:** Curved body armour heading for the frontline in Ukraine

current issue single-size Osprey protection system.

A MOD spokesperson said: "A project for complex geometry body armour is being initiated. Subject to trials and validation, this could begin to deliver new armour plates from 2029."

# AFPS15 Remedy (McCloud) MoD asks for continued patience



GUIDANCE WHEN YOU NEED IT MOST



CHAMPIONING ARMED FORCES PENSIONS SINCE 1946

IN its latest statement, issued at the end of April, the MoD asked for continued patience and understanding.

In spite of the Forces Pension Society's efforts to secure clearer timelines, none have been provided.

The remaining cases have "an element of complexity" attached to them and we are told work continues on finalising a schedule for completion.

This means the latest update doesn't move the dial. For those veterans seeking to make firm decisions affecting their financial future, the wait continues.

However, the latest MoD update did confirm that for those planning to leave service with pension benefits, an RSS (Remediable Service Statement) will be provided "as usual".

Forces Pension Society CEO Maj

Gen Neil Marshall, commented: "For the thousands left in limbo by the inability of the MoD to commit to a timeline, planning for many will simply be on hold. It's a most regrettable state of affairs.

"In this latest message, we are told the next update won't be until August this year. On behalf of our Society Members and the wider military community, we can only express our dissatisfaction with this lack of progress. We appreciate that the task is a sizeable one but with proper planning and resourcing, we should be in a better place."

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



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ESPORTS FOR THE ARMED FORCES



## Bulletin



**SECURITY PLEDGE:** Defence Minister Luke Pollard joined senior military officials in Jordan for trials

## Skyhammer guards Gulf

### Staff Reporter

BRITAIN'S MILITARY and Gulf partners are stepping up defences against drone attacks following trials of the new British-built Skyhammer interceptor missiles and launchers in Jordan.

The trial comes less than a month after the MOD signed a multi-million-pound contract with UK veteran-led start-up Cambridge Aerospace to buy Skyhammer interceptor missiles for the UK Armed Forces.

With a range of 30km and a maximum speed of 700km/h, the weapons system is designed to counter Shahed-style attack drones targeting bases across the region.

Tests took place in desert conditions at one of Deep Element's defence development facilities.

The trial came as Defence Minister Luke Pollard visited Kuwait and Jordan for talks on regional security, the Strait of Hormuz and further defence cooperation.

He said: "We are stepping up alongside UK industry to offer rapid support to our partners in the Middle East.

"The Skyhammer trials are a perfect example of UK innovation delivering cutting-edge technology and shows the UK is standing by our promise to provide support to our allies."

# NATO goes Pro at Waddington



**PROTECTOR FIRST:** The uncrewed aircraft made its debut flying through European civilian airspace en route to Akrotiri

### Simon Mander

**SURVEILLANCE EXPERTS from across Nato joined forces at the UK's first Protector International MQ-9B event at Waddington.**

The conference comes as the UK's uncrewed aircraft became the first to transit European airspace, flying more than 2,000 nautical miles for 14 hours across France, Italy and Malta before landing at Akrotiri.

Meanwhile personnel from Canada, Denmark and Norway gathered at the Lincolnshire base bringing together aircrew, engineering and intelligence experts from Nato nations.

With an in-depth overview of the UK's MQ-9B operations it covered aircrew and engineer training, airfield integration, weapons capabilities including Brimstone and Paveway IV, intelligence support, security and cyberspace operations.

Gp Capt Rich Long said: "The first RAF MQ-9B Short Look event has brought together years of experience and expertise from across the RAF, and our UK industry partners, for the benefit of our Nato colleagues.

"Protector offers a step change in capability and opportunities over its predecessor MQ-9A, and this event maximises the platform's utility for all nations and the Alliance."

While Reaper relied on restricted routes to reach theatre, Protector can fly alongside crewed aircraft under normal air traffic control.

In Cyprus, the remotely piloted air system is flying defence missions over the Mediterranean island.

At Waddington the UK drew on its own experience of bringing the MQ-9B into service and from its first operational deployment over the Middle East last November.

Norwegian Detachment Commander Lt Col Hedenstrom said: "We are sincerely grateful to the RAF for providing such an open, honest and comprehensive introduction to the MQ-9B Protector system.

"The insights into its current ISR capabilities and challenges, as well as the future tactical opportunities, have given us a unique and valuable foundation for informing future national decisions on RPAS implementation in Norway."

The initiative assists Nato allies by informing the future planning and procurement for those nations interested in, or in the process of, procuring the MQ-9B.

The event is part of the MQ-9 International Co-operation Support Partnership.

The UK will continue to host forums for partner nations as more countries adopt the system.

## Kids day takes off

### Susie Wood

CHILDREN JOINED Air Force veterans at their local station St Mawgan to test their flying skills by designing paper aircraft under the supervision of former Forces crews.

The fun-packed event marked the Month of the Military child and is part of the RAFBF's Airplay scheme.



## Cadets flying high

### Susie Wood

YOUNGSTERS TOOK to the air to prove their disabilities did not prevent them from getting a taste of what it's like to be an RAF pilot.

Cadet Cpl Imogen who uses a prosthetic left arm and her hearing-impaired comrade Sgt Eliza took to the skies with 3 Air Experience Flight.

Normally based at MOD Boscombe Down, the detachment temporarily operated from St Mawgan to host youngsters from across the South West.

Flying four Tutor aircraft, supported by RAF aircrew, they flew from Newquay airport and saw the visit of a Spitfire fighter.



CADET CPL IMOGEN



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Bulletin



**COLD WAR ICON:** Europe's only airworthy MiG-17F will be performing at the first Hampshire Air Festival in July

# MiG's in for show

Staff Reporter

THE LAST Flying MiG-17F in Europe will be taking to the skies at the first Hampshire Air Festival this autumn.

The Cold War-era Soviet fighter will be flying in from Poland to take part in the show at Thruxton Aerodrome in September.

Built in 1958 at WSK Mielec, the aircraft is a Polish-produced Lim-5, a licensed version of the Soviet MiG-17F.

The type was a key Cold War fighter, known for its swept-wing design, strong low-altitude agility and rugged construction.

Powered by a Klimov VK-1F turbojet with afterburner, the MiG-17F delivered improved high-speed handling over the MiG-15 and remained in service with air forces around the world for decades.

Organiser Johnathan Moore said: "We're thrilled to welcome such a rare and historically important jet to the inaugural event. The MiG-17F's presence reflects the festival's aim to combine spectacle with substance, creating a weekend that will appeal to enthusiasts, families and those discovering aviation for the first time."

● For more information go to: [hampshireairfestival.co.uk](http://hampshireairfestival.co.uk)



# Leeming nets award honour

**Simon Mander**

LEEMING HAS been crowned Station of the Year in the RAFBF awards for leading the fundraising charge and championing the Service charity's welfare programmes.

Alongside supporting national and international exercises and RAF frontline operations, the North Yorkshire station has risen to the charity challenge raising thousands and hosting national events to promote the Service's largest charity.

Fund Chief Executive AVM Chris Elliot said: "From serving personnel and veterans, to the many civilian supporters who fundraise, provide vital welfare support, every contribution plays a part in strengthening the positive outcomes we achieve for many in the RAF Family."

Also honoured on the night was RAFBF Ambassador Bob Grieg, who turned to the charity after a life-changing parachute accident. He received the Heart



**COMMITTED:** RAFBF Ambassador Bob Grieg receives his award from ACM Smyth and AVM Elliot

of the Fund award for his service to the fundraising cause.

The 'Riding on Air' team were named Fundraisers of the Year for their 2025 cycling challenge which covered more than 600 miles between RAF Lossiemouth

in Moray, Scotland and RAF Wyton, raising over £58,000 for the group's Airplay youth programme.

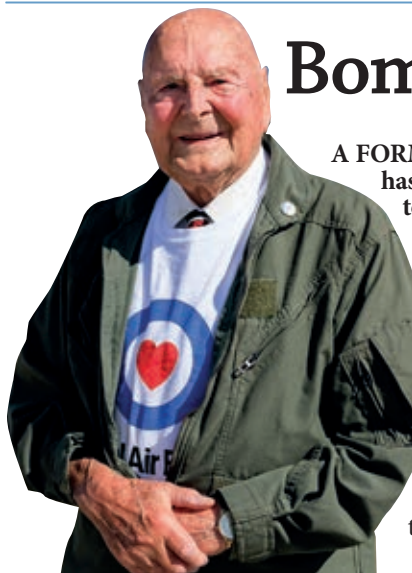
The Squadron of the Year award was

presented to 27 Sqn, Julie Corbett scooped the Above and Beyond award for her charity efforts and cyber-security experts Fortinet won the Partnership of the Year trophy.

AVM Elliot added: "Our annual awards give us a valued opportunity to come together and recognise the extraordinary support we receive from people and organisations who give so generously in support of the RAF Family."



27 SQN WINNERS



# Bomber hero George's last mission - to help others

A FORMER Mosquito pilot who won the DFC has died aged 103 - just days before he was to be honoured at the RAFBF awards.

Bomber Command veteran Flt Lt George Dunn signed up in June 1941 and earned the RAF's highest bravery award aged just 20.

At 97 years old he took to the skies once more in a Spitfire, 72 years after his last flight in one to raise awareness of the RAF Benevolent Fund.

He also featured in fundraising appeals, appeared on special-edition prints, and took part in a recording of the poem *High Flight*.

Mr Dunn raised £100,000 for the Fund

and received Special Recognition at its Awards in 2017 as part of the Bomber Command Air Crew Veterans Group, and again as a solo recipient in 2020.

In further recognition judges selected him as the winner of this year's Heart of the Fund Award and visited George at home to present him with his trophy.

He was 17 years old when World War II was declared and joined the local Defence Volunteers. At 18 he volunteered for air crew.

Training as a pilot in Canada, he completed 44 operations. Posted to 76 Sqn at Linton-on-Ouse, George flew his first tour on Handley Page Halifax bombers. He went on to fly missions, including the infamous Peenemunde raid, and won the DFC.

George then flew Mosquitos, firstly with 608 Sqn and then as a meteorologist pilot with 1409 Flt, where he learnt to fly in poor weather conditions.

After the war he was posted to Egypt to test-fly refurbished single-engine fighters and transported a Spitfire to the Greek Air Force.

Aged 98, George co-wrote a book titled *Resolute - To War With Bomber Command*, with his wartime flight engineer Ferris Newton DFM, and historian and author Steve Darlow.

Fund chief executive AVM Chris Elliot said: "George meant a great deal to everyone in the RAF Family. While he will always be remembered for his remarkable service during the Second World War, he truly embodied the values and ethos of the RAF Benevolent Fund."

News



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# Falcons fall in



**FALL GUY:** The Falcons' Sgt Mike Atkinson chats to local school pupils at the launch of the team's summer season at Brize Norton

**Simon Mander**

**DAREDEVIL PARACHUTISTS** the RAF Falcons marked the start of their 2026 display season with a spectacular launch day on home turf at Brize Norton.

Taking to the skies above the Oxfordshire station in a C-17 Globemaster, they delivered a dynamic display of precision military parachuting in front of an audience that included local schoolchildren.

It's the first public opportunity for fans to see the team in action ahead of engagements across the UK and overseas.

Officer Commanding Falcons Flt Lt Dominic Compton-Davies said: "Launch Day is always a special moment for the team, but jumping into our season here on home turf at RAF Brize Norton makes it even more meaningful.

"This display marks the culmination of months of preparation and training, and it's fantastic to share that moment with our local community, colleagues



and supporters as we step into the 2026 season."

The team play a key role in inspiring future generations, engaging with communities and representing the Service at public events.

To keep up to date with the RAF Falcons throughout 2026 follow them on Facebook, Instagram or X.

## Marham marks F-35 arrival

**Staff Reporter**

**THE UK'S 48th F-35B** landed at Marham, marking the final delivery of the first Lightning procurement programme.

The latest stealth jet will be operated by 617 Dambusters Sqn and brings the fleet total to 47 aircraft, following the loss of one during a failed take-off from the deck of HMS Queen Elizabeth.

Defence chiefs confirmed the UK is to buy a further 12 F-35As, the conventional take-off and landing variant, capable of carrying nuclear weapons, which will also be based at the Norfolk station.





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**In Brief**



**CAS tribute**

ACM SIR HARV SMYTH flew via Akrotiri to meet frontline personnel combating the Iranian drone threat. Specially-trained Regiment Gunners operating the UK's new Rapid Sentry air defence system have destroyed several drones targeting sites across the broader Middle East.

# Jess's miracle marathon

**Clare Wildblood**

CRANWELL MEDIC ASI Jess Corps beat cancer to realise her dream of completing the London Marathon. The 21-year-old was left fighting for her life when she was struck down with acute myeloid leukaemia two years ago. Her illness forced her to give up RAF training as she underwent life-saving treatment. But now she's back in uniform and celebrating after hitting the streets in the capital and raising funds for the Teenage Cancer Trust charity which supported her during her fight back to fitness. Jess said: "I don't have to run, but I'm delighted that I get to run."



# Red-letter day

## BFSA duo conquer Ascension challenge

**Staff Reporter**

**SUPERFIT PERSONNEL** braved torrential rain and high humidity to complete a charity challenge to help the seven-year-old daughter of a friend and fellow Service member, Olive, who recently suffered a brain haemorrhage.

Cpl Ben Brown and Cpl Jack Broderick completed the endurance feat on Ascension, covering all 43 of the island's letterbox hiking routes.

The duo covered 65 miles in 33 hours, climbing 22,716 feet, and navigating some of the island's most demanding terrain.

They were supporting the Butterfly AVM charity that supports those affected by arteriovenous malformations.

Ft Lt Hayley Leggott, who supported the pair, said: "Throughout the challenge, both personnel drew motivation from Olive's resilience and the strength shown by her and her family. This proved vital in sustaining momentum during the most physically and mentally demanding stages.

"Conditions were pretty extreme with rainstorms



**POSTMEN DELIVER:** Cpls Ben Brown and Jack Broderick take a break during the Ascension challenge. Inset above, support team

giving way to intense heat exceeding 30°C, with the island's volcanic landscape, steep inclines, loose rock and uneven ground compounding fatigue,

particularly at night." Ascension Island locals joined the fundraising bid, covering sections of the route AirTanker delivered social

media coverage, organised fundraising through the island café, and provided event T-shirts. The event has raised more than £4,000.

**Bulletin**



## Danes date

**MOVERS MARKED** two decades of supporting operations, at the RAF church of St Clement Danes.

Past and present Brize Norton-based No.1 Air Mobility Wing personnel came together to witness the dedication of a plaque marking 20 years of passenger and cargo handling across the world.

Commander Support Force, Gp Capt Jon Smith, said: "For the people serving on IAMW today they should be proud for wearing that badge on their arm.

"The Wing throughout its 20-year span has been consistently at the heart of defence operations."

St Clement Danes Church is a perpetual shrine of remembrance to those who have died in service in the RAF.

It holds the Books of Remembrance and more than 1,000 slate squadron and unit badge plaques in its floor.

**Feature** Nuclear test heroes



**NUKE TEST VETERAN:** Colin Duncan campaigned for the Nuclear Test Medal, inset below PHOTO: ZHENGHAN HUANG

**“The aircraft were red-hot and full of radiation – we wiped them down without even wearing gloves”**

EX-543 SQN member Colin Duncan, 87, was among ground crew sent to Lima, Peru, in 1968 where the French were carrying out nuclear testing.

Squadron personnel were tasked to fly the Victor B2 through nuclear test clouds to collect air samples from the French nuclear test programmes.

Mr Duncan said: “They let off a series of about six H-bombs – when we were told one had been detonated we scrambled an aircraft which was fitted with radiation detectors and two sampling pods on drop tanks. It flew through the centre of the cloud, opened the scoops, picked up all the radioactive material and brought it back to base.

“The scoops were then offloaded by RAF personnel with Atomic Weapons Research Establishment chaps monitoring the unloading. Samples were put in lead-lined containers, then wooden boxes, and transported back to the UK.”

He added: “When the aircraft came back they were covered in radioactive material and were red-hot.

We were never issued with any protective clothing. The aircraft were hotter than the no-go zone round Chernobyl.

“I had to wipe the aircraft down by hand, not even wearing gloves. We were monitored afterwards and found our hair, hands and arms were completely covered in dust from the aircraft. We had to scrub ourselves down – I had to do it three times to get it to what was classified as an acceptable level.

“Those aircraft all had to come back to the UK. Sometimes they were washed down in an American airbase on the way back. All this stuff was secret at the time, no one on the squadron spoke about it to each other.”

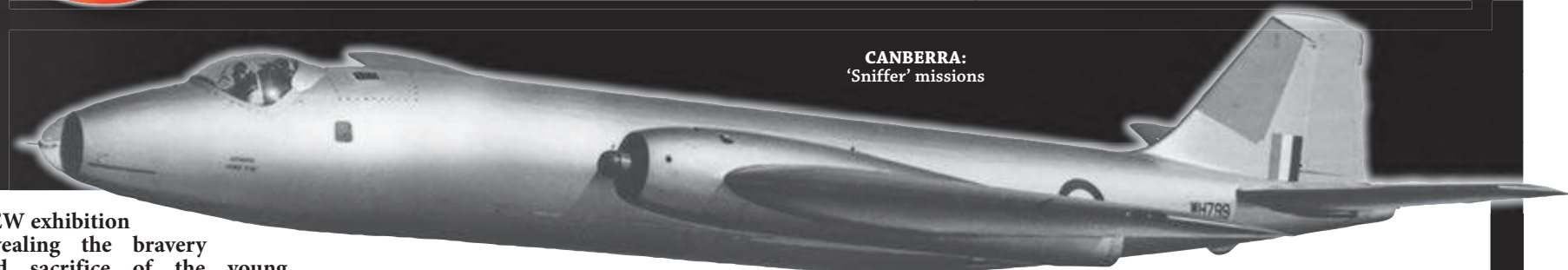
Colin later developed serious medical problems, including a thyroid issue. He joined up with former colleague Barry Fagg to campaign for a medal for nuclear test veterans to be extended to more personnel, including those tasked with maintaining the contaminated aircraft on their return to the UK, and for it to be converted to a full military honour.



**“It was like looking at the face of God”**

**GRAPPLE BLAST:** Bigger than that at Hiroshima and Nagasaki

# ng into hell



CANBERRA:  
'Sniffer' missions

**A** NEW exhibition revealing the bravery and sacrifice of the young RAF pilots who took part in the UK's H-bomb test programme in the South Pacific as Britain entered the atomic age has opened.

Nearly 70 years after Canberra crews took a ringside cockpit seat at the dawn of the nuclear arms race by flying into the heart of the mushroom cloud during the UK's first nuclear trials, their stories can be told, organisers say.

Housed in the Wings Museum in the shadow of Gatwick Airport in West Sussex, *Into The Atom* lays bare the experiences of those who risked their lives gathering high-altitude samples moments after nuclear detonation.

The first British H-bomb was dropped on May 15, 1957 from a Valiant 400 miles south of Christmas Island. Just 20 minutes later, 76 Sqn 'sniffer' crews flew their Canberras fitted with sensors into the mushroom cloud to collect samples.

Operating at more than 50,000ft, way above the aircraft's altitude limits, crews battled to maintain control in the maelstrom unleashed by the detonation of Britain's first thermonuclear devices.

Speaking at the launch of the exhibition, nuclear test veterans campaigner Alan Owen said: "This exhibition will hopefully ensure the public understands what our crews experienced on these operations, what these men endured and the devastating effects it has had on them and their families."

"Imagine being ordered to fly an aircraft through a nuclear cloud. Imagine

your children being ordered to do that." At the heart of *Into The Atom* are the flight logs and personal testimonies of pilots and ground crews who took part.

Flt Lt Joe Pasquini was a navigator during Grapple Y, a nuclear blast which at 3,000 kt dwarfed the destructive power of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II.

Pasquini, who died in 2021 after a long battle with cancer, was a keen amateur artist and produced watercolours of what he saw in the wake of his experiences flying through the nuclear storm, which are displayed.

Writing about his experiences, he said: "It was like looking at – and then seeing – the face of God. Gathering speed as it rose, the cloud passed the aircraft at an altitude of nine miles.

### Two Suns

"We were flying between two Suns. One 98 million miles above us and the other just a few miles away as we approached.

"Flares of multi-coloured liquid magma licked around the sides of the cloud as it rushed past, travelling at more than 200mph, revealing the energy and the power and violence contained within it.

"Two minutes before impact we started to pick up radiation shine on our instruments. Too late to turn back we were committed and wondering what we would be flying into.

"It was like the jaws of death. With

## The RAF Canberra crews who came face to face with nuclear mushroom clouds



**NUCLEAR MISSIONS:** Canberra pilot Terry Hilliard, left, and Navigator Flt Lt Joe Pasquini

the pressure that came up with the cloud it warmed the upper reaches of the atmosphere so much rain formed at incredibly high altitudes, carrying contamination down onto the ground."

Test program documents recently released by the government reveal the true scale of radiation contamination crews in the air and on the ground were exposed to.

Canberra pilot Terry Hilliard died just days before the launch of the exhibition. Speaking to *RAF News* last year he described his own memories of the test.

He said: "The flash of the explosion just cannot be described, with eyes screwed shut and covered tight, for a moment I could see every bone in my left forearm as if it were a super X-ray."

"Entering the cloud, we went from bright tropical sunshine into a dark, dense, turbulent, writhing air mass which was a combination of compressibility turbulence, combined with stalling shudders and indescribable tantrums of vertical lifts and drops in a nuclear mushroom.

"Visibility was ever-changing, from small clear spaces to very dense clumps of cloud. Our aim was to fly through

the darker patches as high as possible as they were more likely to contain the best residual samples we were seeking."

The issue of the Nuclear Test medal in 2023 has been welcomed by campaigners. However the fall-out continues as the risk faced by those who volunteered for 'Special Duties' becomes clear.

A spokeswoman for the Pasquini family, who helped curate the *Into The Atom* exhibition, added: "We hope to capture and relive through the eyes of the men who flew into the billowing clouds of a freshly detonated mushroom cloud what it was like. It is something that will never be repeated again."

"There were Navy vessels which sailed through fall-out to take radiation readings and the Army played an important role facilitating the tests and on occasion going into ground zero after detonations.

"We are only showing a small fraction of the story due to the limits of the exhibition space at the Wings Museum, which has given us the chance to bring this epic story to the public."

● Go to [info@wingsmuseum.co.uk](mailto:info@wingsmuseum.co.uk) for details of *Into The Atom*.

## Win RAF nuclear testing book

**FLYING THROUGH a Nuclear Cloud** (pen-and-sword.co.uk) by Robin Adams is the unusual story of a frontline navigator who flew on Canberra, Shackleton and F4 Phantom

collect samples resulting from nuclear explosions.

To be in with a chance of winning a copy of Robin's compelling book, tell us:

When was Robin Adams involved with nuclear weapon testing?

Email your answer, marked Robin Adams book competition, to: [tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk](mailto:tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk) or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by May 29. Remember to add your full postal address.

squadrons between 1954 and 1974. It also reveals his involvement with nuclear weapon testing in 1956 and 1958.

In 1955 Robin volunteered for 'an interesting overseas tour' – the task, revealed only after the volunteers arrived in Australia, was to

**Win!**



Advertorial.

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

## Elaine Paxton has always believed in teams.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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](https://helpforheroes.org.uk/get-help).

**I**N 1940 Winston Churchill set in motion the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and its network of secret agents. The operation required a clandestine transport infrastructure to support nascent resistance movements in Occupied Europe.

With only the moon to guide their way, the daring pilots of 161 Sqn faced constant danger: their locations could be discovered, had to be contended with and they dealt with the worst of European weathers. Despite these risks, the Special Duties pilots were remarkably successful.

In his new book *Moonlight Crusaders, Special Duties Pilots Over Occupied Europe* (ospreypublishing.com), Paul Smiddy explores the history of the men who flew these dangerous missions and the main aircraft they used – the unarmed Lysander.

The skills of agent and insertion and pick-up had been learned (to a degree) in World War I – and then forgotten. As France fell in 1940 much more quickly than expected, SIS (MI6) was caught napping, and had to hurriedly build an agent network. Churchill famously commissioned the creation for behind the lines sabotage, but SIS was soon at loggerheads with this young upstart. These two fractious organisations were the key customers of the Special Duties (SD) Squadrons that ferried men and material into Occupied Europe. And, in the case of No. 161 Sqn, which is the main subject of this book, brought some of those men and women back to England.

161's main asset was the Westland Lysander, designed for Army Co-Operation flying and really the only game in town for agent pick-up work (once modified). But its design had a fatal flaw or two that killed a handful of 161's less experienced pilots during training and on ops. Its development as an SD asset was nurtured by the remarkable 'Gunner' Geddes – an artilleryman and pilot who switched several times between Khaki and Russian Blue during his illustrious career; he deserves to be better known.

CAS Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal and AVM Arthur 'Bomber' Harris were very loathe to devote any resources to the creation of 161 and 148 Sqn (the latter focusing on Whitley and Halifax work), and indeed pushed them round the dregs of Bomber Command's real estate until they ended up at the new (and very muddy) Tempsford in Bedfordshire. This was too far from 161's targets, so a forward operating base was set up at the Fighter Command airfield at Tangmere.

The Lysander pilots decamped there for every moon period, giving them three benefits – Chichester and Bosham's excellent pubs, the station's excellent R&R facilities, and the fact that for the married pilots, almost all the wives remained around Tempsford!

It took a while for the process of approving landing fields in



**LIMITATIONS:**  
MkIII SCW  
RAF Lysander  
modified for the  
Special Duties  
Squadrons  
© Leonardo

# The Special Duties pilots who flew into the dark unknown in unarmed Lysanders

## Copies of the book up for grabs

WE HAVE copies of Paul Smiddy's excellent new book up for grabs. To be in with a chance of winning one, tell us:

*What does SOE stand for?*

Email your answer, marked **Moonlight Crusaders competition**, to: [tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk](mailto:tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk) or post it to: **RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by May 29. Please include your full postal address.**

**Win!**



France to be established. Benson's PRU Spitfires were used to provide evidence of each site's suitability. Communications with the field were as problematic as they were for SOE and SIS – the operational life of radio operators was very limited, as was airtime.

The squadron's commanders varied quite a lot: starting with the regally connected 'Mouse'

Fielden, through film star and later Mosquito ace Pick Pickard, Lewis 'Bob' Hodges – who went onto great things, and towards the end, the much less successful Kiwi Alan Boxer.

Pilot selection was refined over time. Several Sergeant Pilots, such as the inimitable James ('Mac') McCairns, were commissioned after completing their 161

induction. Initially the recruits tended to be chums of existing 161 pilots, but when that source was exhausted pilots such as those Benson PRU guys proved adept. For 161, Lysander jockeys had to be used to solo navigation (in their case at night) over long distances into occupied Europe in an unarmed aircraft, under conditions of radio silence. That they had a high success rate is testament to their skills and courage. Apart from Luftwaffe nightfighters and flak, their main enemy was, of course, the weather. The weather-guessers' forecasts could be patchy, yet 161 were expected to operate on nights that grounded the rest of Bomber Command. On one fateful night in December 1943 the squadron lost two aircraft when unforecast fog took many Bomber Command crews as well.

161's pilots developed strong relationships with some of their passengers – those that they had trained in Bedfordshire in the art of landing field selection and

operation. But one of the most important operators was proved later in the war to be in the pay of the Germans. In this way many of 161's passengers were arrested a few kilometres from their landing field.

Like most RAF units the operational tempo increased in the run-up to D-Day. 161 brought back, for example, detailed maps and drawings of both Brittany's U-Boat pens, and defences on a swathe of the Normandy beaches. As the Allies swept through France their role took on a less exciting aspect, but 148 Sqn was formed in Italy, and Peter Vaughan-Fowler (a 161 star) had much fun organising agent flights into Northern Italy and the Balkans. And into 1945 similar Lysander flights were carried out from India into Burma – with different operational challenges.

These were a remarkable bunch of RAF pilots – I hope I have done them justice.

By Paul Smiddy



# RAF News

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# Reed all about it

## Sgt Lucy-Ann's debut novel in the running for £50k literature prize

**C**OULD AN RAF sergeant be the next JK Rowling? The Air and Space Operations Manager, who uses the pen name TJ Windwood, has written a fantasy novel, *The Lost Zodiac: Air of Truth* that's a contender for a £50,000 literary prize.

Sgt Lucy-Ann Reed's debut novel is competing with five other new voices in fiction for the prestigious Libraro Prize, launched in partnership with publishing group Hachette UK. The prize package comprises £30,000 cash, £20,000 worth of marketing support and a book deal with Hachette.

*The Lost Zodiac* was chosen from 2,000 entries to make the shortlist of six for the prize.

A panel of industry professionals, chaired by bestselling author Joanne Harris, were due to announce the winner as *RAF News* went to press.

TJ said: "It's been a bit of a whirlwind, I had 28 rejections from agents and went full-steam ahead with planning independent publishing before I found out I was shortlisted for the prize."

Her book is described as a gripping fantasy about a world in peril, which takes inspiration from her professional experience. It blends militarised training, zodiac mythology and slow-burn romance in a world where memory is the price of power.

TJ explained: "The book is 'romantasy', a genre blend – at its core it's a fantasy but it has a romantic element to it. It's 'upper YA (Young Adult)' and can cross over into adult fiction. It's the first in a four-part series and I'm currently writing book two."

### Yielding

"There's a ceremony that happens in the book called 'The Yielding' – if you are or have served, this will probably resonate with you – when you join the military you attest but you don't really understand what you're attesting to. And when you start going through the training you begin to realise that your civilian self is not being 'stamped out' but 'calmed down' a bit while you're being moulded into this Service person that the RAF needs."

She added: "That mirrors my 'yielding' concept, where my characters submerge themselves into a yielding ceremony. When they emerge, they are not themselves anymore, they are given powers and they don't remember their families."

"When you have been through Phase 1 and Phase 2 training you go home and everything around you has changed, you've changed but your family's the same – so that's where I gained inspiration from."

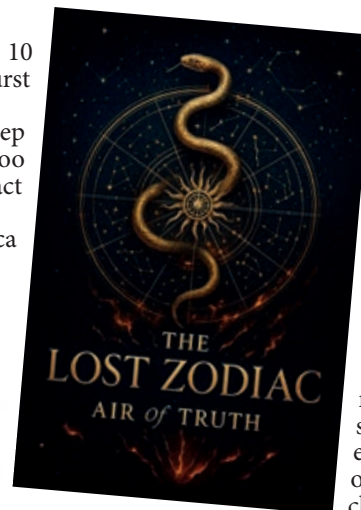
TJ, 39, who has served in the RAF for 18 years, wrote the novel between May and August last year, then between August and February did about five edits.

She said: "I really lived and breathed the book. I was determined to find the time to do it. I tend to put time aside at weekends and when on leave. I use every spare minute that I can to write and try

to balance it with my RAF career. If I have 10 minutes at lunchtime and have a sudden burst of inspiration I write, or in the evenings.

"I've tried getting up early to write but sleep is paramount for me. And I try not to write too late in the evenings as I don't want it to impact my day job."

She cites American authors Rebecca



Yarros and Sarah J. Maas as inspirations, adding: "But when I write I try not to read as I don't want to emulate those authors."

Libraro describes itself as a community-driven digital platform which aims to remove barriers from the traditional book publishing process.

A spokesperson said: "The six unpublished novels in the running for the prize were selected for their ability to engage readers, and the quality of voice, storytelling, plot and characterisation."

"The shortlist includes a World War II historical novel inspired by a true romance; a modern fable about cancel culture; a moving family drama; a page-turning crime novel; an intriguing sci-fi novel set in the Outer Hebrides, and a gripping fantasy about a world in peril."

The shortlisted authors are from the UK and Ireland with one from the USA. They range from an architect inspired by his time on the remote Scottish island of North Uist, an executive coach based in Cumbria, a translator, science writer and editor in Ireland, a British-born creative writing student now based in Queensland, Australia, to a secondary school English teacher in America.

The spokesperson added: "The Prize is unique in giving readers an active role in deciding what gets published. Over the past two months, more than 15,000 readers have engaged with around 2,000 submissions, helping to shape the eventual shortlist."

### Readership

TJ said: "I recently went to my first book club, near where I'm stationed, as an author, so I got to talk about the book and build up more readership for when I do publish."

"I'm a 'pantser' – a writer who drafts a story by the seat of their pants – essentially someone who doesn't plot out the entire book before writing it, you let the characters take you to where you're going to go."

She added: "I've always been interested in writing and I did a couple of creative writing courses with the Open University. I think we all secretly want to write a book."

"My RAF colleagues have been very supportive of my writing career and I'm taking one of them to the awards ceremony with me. I'm looking forward to it – but I'm very nervous."

● **Go to: [app.libraro.com](http://app.libraro.com) for more details about the competition.**

**A NOVEL EXPERIENCE:** Sgt Lucy-Ann Reed will be rubbing shoulders with other writers from across Britain and one from the USA

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# Bomber DFC and charity champion dies aged 103

**F**LT LT GEORGE DUNN, who has died aged 103, flew 44 bombing missions over Germany in Halifax and Mosquito aircraft and later raised almost £100,000 for the RAF Benevolent Fund.

He was 18 years old when he began training as a wireless operator/air gunner in 1941 but was soon identified as a potential pilot and sailed for Canada on Christmas Eve 1942, where he trained under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

On return to England a year later, he converted to bombers and joined 76 Squadron at RAF Linton-on-Ouse, near York, in the spring of 1943. Bomber Command had just launched a campaign which became known as the Battle of the Ruhr. After flying two sorties as a second pilot with an experienced crew, he and his all-sergeant crew flew their first operation on May 29, when the target was Düsseldorf.

This was followed by attacks against many of the major industrial centres, including Essen, Gelsenkirchen, Cologne and Wuppertal. At the end of July, a series of raids were launched against Hamburg when the electronic counter measure 'window' was used for the first time. Bundles of thin strips of aluminium foil were dropped to disrupt the enemy radar systems. Dunn flew on two of these raids, which devastated the German city.

By early August, Dunn and his crew had flown 20 raids when losses to the German air defences were at their highest, including the loss of his Group Captain. On August 12, he attacked Milan, a mission that lasted almost 10 hours. Five nights later, he flew on the raid to the German secret rocket site at Peenemünde on the Baltic coast.

The 596 bombers attacked in three waves under the control of a Master Bomber for the first time. The Halifax squadrons were in the first wave as a Mosquito force headed for Berlin as a diversion and to draw away the German night-fighters. Dunn and his colleagues attacked successfully but the later waves, mainly of Lancasters, suffered heavy losses once the Germans realised that Peenemünde was the target and not Berlin. The raid set back development of the V-1 and V-2 rocket programme by several months.

On August 23, the day he was commissioned as a pilot officer, Dunn attacked Berlin and a few days later went to Munich. On October 3, he flew his 30th and final mission when he bombed Kassel, a



**REMEMBERING:** George Dunn at the Bomber Command Memorial in London's Green Park last year. PHOTO: Oliver Dixon



**76 SQN:** Dunn, centre, with his bomber crew during the Second World War

few days after his 21st birthday.

Dunn always claimed he was lucky. His aircraft was never intercepted by a night-fighter and only once did he have to escape the radar-controlled searchlights by taking violent, corkscrew action. His aircraft suffered slight damage from flak on occasions, but he and his crew survived when many of their colleagues were lost. He was awarded the DFC for "high skill, fortitude and devotion to duty", and other members of his crew were also decorated.

After completing his 30 operations, he became an instructor at a bomber training

unit, a job he described as "necessary but boring", so he and his navigator volunteered to return to operations, and they converted to the Mosquito.

He joined 608 Sqn at Downham Market in Norfolk in December 1944. The squadron was part of the Light Night Striking Force whose tasks were to fly "nuisance raids" in small numbers to major cities to keep the emergency services and working population awake at night. Most of his 14 sorties were to Berlin. He was Mentioned-in-Despatches.

After the war, he left for Egypt where he tested Spitfires, ferrying

some of them to the Greek Air Force. He also test flew and ferried Halifax bombers, making frequent trips back to England. His last flight was to ferry a Halifax to England in June 1947 when he left the RAF.

When asked about his wartime experiences, he identified the Peenemünde mission as the most memorable he had flown. He spoke admiringly of his ground crew, some becoming personal friends in later life. He attended the dedication of the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park, London, which he described as "a marvellous memorial but long overdue." In later years he was awarded the French Légion d'Honneur for his wartime service.

Dunn was a great supporter of the RAF Benevolent Fund and featured in fundraising appeals, appeared on special edition prints, and took part in a recording of the poem *High Flight*. He attended airshows across the country, where he signed books in exchange for donations to the Fund alongside fellow members of his Sussex Bomber Command Air Crew group.

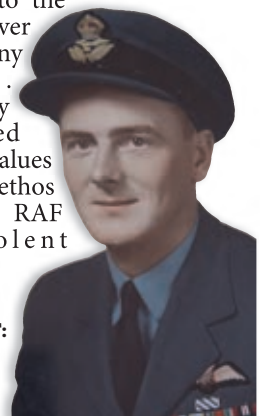
At 97 years old, he took to the skies once more in a Spitfire, 72 years after his last flight in the fighter, another of the many ways in which he helped to raise awareness of the Fund. He requested that

donations be made in celebration of his 100th birthday and went on to arrange further collections beyond this milestone.

Through his tireless efforts, he helped to raise in the region of £100,000. In recognition of his exceptional contribution, he received a special award at the RAF Benevolent Fund Awards ceremony in 2017 as part of the Bomber Command Air Crew Veterans Group, and again as an individual recipient in 2020.

On learning of his death, the chief executive of the Fund, Air Vice-Marshal Chris Elliott, commented: "While he will always be remembered for his remarkable service during the Second World War, he was equally cherished for the generosity, warmth and unwavering commitment he showed to the Fund over so many years. He truly embodied the values and ethos of the RAF Benevolent Fund."

**PILOT:** George Dunn





**SUZUKI HAS** always been very good at producing cars that fill a niche, in a subtle, no-fuss sort of way. The S-Cross is no exception. This is a car that is practical and immensely good value, though it's not going to turn many heads.

Buying one is a very simple affair, because there are only two trim levels to choose from. Even the entry-level 'Motion' variant comes with plenty of standard kit and £29,799 will get you the S-Cross Ultra, with AWD. The Ultra also gets a bigger touchscreen for the infotainment system, a 360-degree parking camera, part leather seats and a panoramic glass roof.

The long and short of it is that the S-Cross is well-pitched, well-priced and a refreshingly simple offering.

**Outside**

Our test car was the S-Cross 1.4 Hybrid Ultra Allgrip, so it came with all the whistles and bells. Smart alloy wheels, modern LED lights and the signature Suzuki front grille set out its stall very clearly. Rugged plastic trim protects the wheel arches and the rear bumper, while the nose looks chunky and mean. There are also some nicely placed contour lines to break up the, otherwise, flat sides.

**Inside**

The interior lay-out is simple. The infotainment screen dominates the dashboard, sitting high up, in easy view. Below, sits a set of physical controls for the dual-zone air conditioning. The driving mode dial (to flip between Normal, Sport and Snow modes) is conveniently placed next to the handbrake. Everything is easily to hand.

The pedals line up well with the driver's seat, the steering wheel adjusts for reach and rake, and every S-Cross has driver's seat-height adjustment. A centre armrest and an adjustable backrest help to make the S-Cross comfortable for most. There's plenty of leg and headroom for adults, all-round.

The cabin is packed with tech and the S-Cross's standard safety systems, such as collision avoidance, are better than most class rivals.



**uzuki** **implicity**



The only downsides in here are that electric seat adjustment isn't available, the part-leather seats could offer more side support, USB ports/air vents are in short supply in the rear and there's a fair bit of scratchy plastic on display.

**On The Road**

The S-Cross is not oversized. It weighs a maximum of 1,330kg, in 4WD auto trim, and that makes it lighter than most rivals.

It's not what you would call fast, but it's a nippy thing, thanks to subtle electrical

assistance that bridges the performance gap left by the 1.4 petrol's turbo lag.

The front-wheel-drive manual will do 0-62mph in 9.5 seconds, with our AWD test car reducing that sprint down to 12.2. Top end, on the AWD was 111mph. Average fuel consumption is given as 53.2 and we came close to that figure. It won't break the bank.

Despite the sensible specs, Suzukis always feel sharp and the S-Cross handles well on the open road. It has well-balanced steering that feels nicely organic in nature. You'd struggle to use the word 'fun', but the S-Cross comes surprisingly close.

Wind and road noise are well contained on the motorway and it's a nimble companion around town. Another well-pitched motor from Suzuki that ticks all the right boxes for good value family motoring.

**Suzuki S-Cross**

**Pros**

- Well-equipped as standard
- A practical family wagon
- Cheap to run

**Cons**

- Scratchy plastic on display
- Infotainment software could be quicker

THE S CROSS offers plenty of equipment for a reasonable price. It handles sharply and can be ordered with a slick manual gearbox. This works very well with the 1.4-litre engine and AWD. It has its faults. The infotainment system is a little slow and the interior materials are uninspiring in places, but it's gutsy, fuel efficient and easy to live with.

Sport

RUGBY

# Micks nick it in Northern Ireland



**TAKING THE MICK:**  
Blackthorn tackles Irish Guard  
PHOTO: AS1 ROB GARDINER

**Cpl Victoria Hamilton**  
502 (Ulster) Squadron

AN ALL-ARMED-FORCES rugby game in Northern Ireland commemorated the life of SAS founding member Lt Col Robert 'Paddy' Blair Mayne DSO.

The match took place to celebrate the centenary of the British Army officer's old school, Regent House Grammar, in Newtownards.

The game was between NI Blackthorns, comprised of Tri-Service regular and reserve personnel from across the province, and the Irish Guards, known as The Micks.

Blackthorns were created in response to an appetite from Northern Ireland-based personnel to play more military sport. Established in 2023, and after winning their debut tournament at the Holywood Festival of Rugby in 2024, they were keen to find an opponent to further challenge them.

Flt Lt Jamie Wilson said: "This is the first time two teams are playing each other as part of the Army Rugby Union governing body and to have regular and reserve personnel from the RAF, Army and Navy is really exciting. Sport is a great example of bringing people together, learning new skills and promoting a competitive mentality."

With showers threatening and clouds



**MUSICAL INTRO:** 502 (Ulster) Sqn pipe and drums

darkening, the teams were played out onto the pitch following an artillery display from 206 Ulster Battery Royal Artillery (The Ulster Gunners) and a spirited performance from 502 (Ulster) Squadron's pipes and drums.

The Blackthorns were sporting their new black jerseys decorated with shamrock detailing of red, light blue and navy to signify the three Services and the Irish Guards were in their traditional emerald green.

The Micks were confident going into the match, predicting a 15-0 win on their Instagram stories. An established team, they feature Fijians flanked by English and Northern Irish lads who boast an impressive

training routine via their social media pages. But, as time ticked towards half-time, it was in fact the NI Blackthorns who took the lead, 12-0.

It wasn't only the pressure from the Irish Guards keeping the Blackthorns on their toes, the ever-changing Northern Irish weather had them going from shielding their eyes to sliding across a rain-soaked pitch.

The second half saw the Guards storm back onto the pitch and score a try as they began to claw their way back into the game. With just a point between them, the Micks scored again in the last minute, taking the result to 22-19 in their favour.

Micks player Guardsman Ralawa (4 Company) had travelled over from Aldershot Garrison for the match. He said: "It's been fantastic to have the opportunity to play rugby on Irish soil with the Irish Guards. It's great to play alongside other regulars and reserves, and to go up against a Tri-Service team who have a shared ethos was a real bonding moment. But, more importantly, to come away with the win has been fantastic."

Around the school grounds were stands from RAF Cadets, 38 Squadron, the RAF Benevolent Fund and others, allowing those in attendance to learn more about life in the Forces and see Northern Ireland's military offering.

W6N



## Three & easy for Cokayne

THERE WAS another trademark try for RAF and Red Roses hooker Flt Lt Amy Cokayne as England marched on in imposing style in their Women's Six Nations (W6N) campaign in front of a sold-out crowd at Bristol's Ashton Gate.

The forward rolled off a maul in the 47th minute to go over and make her contribution to the 10-try, 62-24 thrashing of a spirited Wales, who did somehow manage to claw a bonus point for themselves after touching down four times.

Cokayne's score made it three from three for her, after similar heroics against Ireland at the Allianz Stadium in Twickenham in the tournament's opener and against Scotland at Murrayfield the following week.

England ran in five tries in each half in Bristol, with a brace each for veteran campaigner Marlie Packer and captain Meg Jones, and a debut score for Millie David – who later went off for a head injury assessment.

Injury woes are the only cloud on the horizon for a dominant Red Roses as they now turn their thoughts to facing Italy away in the Stadio Sergio Lanfranchi in Parma before a likely tournament decider, also away, to fellow contenders

France in Bordeaux the week after.



**AMY COKAYNE:**  
Three tries in three games for England in W6N

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**

**WATERSKIING**

# Surf's up...

ORGANISERS ARE hoping to be riding on the crest of a wave with a record entry for this year's RAF Waterski Championships.

The event is due to be held at Oxford Ski Club, Queensford Lakes, Dorchester from June 15-19 and all personnel are welcome to attend – from novice to expert.

There will be at least two coaching sessions a day from Monday to Wednesday and the competition itself takes place on Thursday – with prize-giving afterwards.

There will also be discounted Wake Surf Evenings, live music and a BBQ social evening.

Entry is £120 for association members and £160 for non-members.

Apply now by emailing: Wad-station-enquiries@mod.gov.uk

**CYCLING**

# Ups and down for cyclists at Mallorca camp



**HILL CLIMB:** Calm before the storm

MEMBERS OF the Royal Air Force Cycling Association (RAFCA) almost had their overseas spring camp blown off course by strong winds and snow in Mallorca.

Twenty-three personnel of mixed rank and varying ability descended on the Balearic island for road training and managed plenty of good sessions before the weather took an unexpected turn for the worse.

The aim of the camp was to develop members' physical and mental performance, enhance overall health and resilience, build team cohesion and develop advanced cycling skills. It also sought to prepare personnel to compete for the RAFCA in road and time-trial competitions during the 2026 season.

From their base in Puerto Pollenca, the camp commenced with a short shake-out ride to Alcúdia and back and an evening debrief.

Day 2 saw sprint-focused training, completing a 45-mile route, focusing on practising lead-out formations and descending skills.

The following day some cyclists tackled an 88-mile route, accumulating 8,150 ft of climbing and descending, while others completed an 83-mile ride with 6,850 ft of climbing.

After the weather deteriorated overnight, the cyclists had an enforced 'recovery day' as strong winds took hold and only shorter routes were deemed safe.

Weather improved the weekend,

allowing for additional longer rides and training to be undertaken before the winds returned on Sunday, meaning the final day of cycling was cancelled as conditions became too gusty and brought snowfall to the island's hilltops.

Spokesman FS Scott Hill said: "The camp demonstrated the significant value of sport within the RAF, both in developing individuals and in strengthening the Service as a collective."

"Training together improved team cohesion, enhanced confidence in group riding and accelerated skill development – particularly for less-experienced riders – while reinforcing trust, communication and collective discipline that directly translate to the operational environment."

**NORDIC SKIING**

# Skiers fuelled for success

## Chef ensures Nordic Challenge entrants have the stamina to take on the rugged Norwegian slopes

**Sports Reporter**

COMPETITORS AT this year's RAF Cross Country Ski Marathon Championships in the wilds of Norway had a lot on their plate... literally.

Needing plenty of calories to keep them fuelled, they were fortunate to be served up top scran by AS1 Jake Thorne, a chef from 3 Mobile Catering Squadron, RAF Wittering.

The champs took place as part of Exercise Nordic Challenge 2026, out of the Royal Marines' enclave at Bardufoss Air Force Base.

Attendees included RAF instructors, regulars, reservists, officer cadets and participants from sponsor Air Tanker.

After a few days of training and instruction, the men's 5km Development Race was held, with Fg Off Wade Tier from Lossiemouth first RAF man home, with Flt Lt Harry Brierley next.

In the women's event, honours went to Sqn Ldr Abi Bagshaw from RAF Cranwell and Flt Lt

Rebecca Tierney (DMRC) in second.

The penultimate day of the exercise is put aside for RAF Nordic's senior racers and final snow race of the season, the RAF Nordic XC Marathon Championship.

The 35km military Reistadløpet is revered for its 905m elevation gain and 60km/h descents to the finish line. It is not for the faint of heart. This year, 17 seasoned RAF Nordic skiers raced along with six development skiers.

With long ascents over a number of kilometres; short, steep uphill segments that sap the energy; and numerous twists, turns, undulations and steep descents, it's a grueling course

Of 119 military entrants and 92 finishers overall, the RAF achieved one competitor in the top 10, six in the top 20, and 15 in the top 50 – an incredible result when pitched against skilled Norwegian skiers.

Winning the RAF championship for the men was Flt Lt Harry Nuttall (2:19:00



**UPHILL BATTLE:** Flt Sgt Perry leads eventual winner Flt Lt Nuttall (above).



LEFT: (l-r) AS1 Russell Williams, Flt Lt Youmash Rai (eventual 3rd place), Sgt Dale Nuttall, Flt Sgt Stephen Perry, Flt Lt Harry Nuttall and Cpl Billy Hodgson  
PHOTOS: @REISTADLØPPET

(9/92) – MOD MB), with Flt Sgt Stephen Perry (2:24:00 (11/92) – RAF Lossiemouth) second and Flt Lt Youmash Rai (2:24:27) (12/92) – RAF High

Wycombe) in third.

The women's race was won by Flt Lt Lauren Gault (2:39:49) from RAF High Wycombe, with Sqn Ldr Amy Hill (2:41:43)

from Brize Norton in second and Henlow's Flt Lt Anna Clarke (2:57:37) third.

A spokesman said: "Ex Nordic Challenge 2026 was a phenomenal success. Everyone who attended had a brilliant time and would love to come back again."

● Follow the association through its social media channels @RAFNordic.

ANGLING

# Harrison & Howard have the common touch in pairs event

## Thorney Weir proves a challenging prospect for anglers

**Sports Reporter**

TWENTY-EIGHT MEMBERS of the RAF Carp Team travelled to Colne Valley to take on a gruelling 48-hour competition on Thorney Weir.

The venue represents the ultimate carp fishing challenge and hosts an abundance of mirror and pristine common carp, some over 40lbs. With small islands, snagridden margins, sunken barges, plateaus, gravel bars and dense weed beds, it offered every obstacle imaginable and no easy answers.

On the first morning with the draw completed and pegs allocated, pairs moved swiftly around the lake to their selected swims and as the hooter echoed across the lake, anglers wasted no time in getting to work.

Cpl Tom Walker opened the account with a pristine mirror carp weighing 18lb 08oz. The first day proved tough overall, with only limited action across the team. Three further fish were captured: FS Lee Wharleton added one to the tally, Cpl Lawrence Howard landed an impressive 31lb 03oz common, and Walker struck again with a standout 33lb 03oz personal-best mirror. That capture firmly cemented Tom and Sgt Lloyd Moore's early lead, setting the pace for the remainder of the competition.

As the sun rose once again, Sgt Dave Jones found himself bent into a solid fish that stubbornly held its ground. After a tense and hard-fought battle, he successfully guided a powerful 30lb 06oz mirror carp over the net cord, boosting morale across the lake. Later that day, FS Tony Jones also opened his account. Fishing into one of the more inviting bays, he was rewarded with a well-earned 25lb mirror.

Despite this early promise, the remainder of the day proved challenging, with action slowing considerably and most pairs experiencing a quiet session.

As the final night approached, the competition remained finely balanced. Leading pair Walker and Moore held two fish, while several other pairs had already opened their accounts. At this stage, a single capture could make all the difference in the standings.

Late into the night, Howard managed to pick up another fish, pulling him and Sgt Bobby Harrison to within just a couple of pounds of first place. Momentum stayed with the pair, and shortly afterwards they followed it up with another capture, pushing them into the lead.

Not to be outdone, Walker responded by slipping another fish into the net, keeping the pressure firmly on.



**WINNERS:**  
Cpl Lawrence Howard & Sgt Bobby Harrison



**BIGGEST FISH:** Cpl Tom Walker with huge mirror carp



BMX

TAYLOR:  
Leading the pack

## Taylor-made victory

RAF BIKE star Cpl Chris Taylor leads the Southwest BMX Regional Series after victory in the third round at the technically-demanding Decoy track, just outside Newton Abbot.

The St Mawgan man secured the holeshot (leading into the first bend) in the first moto, maintaining the lead throughout the entire lap.

In the second and third motos, he was drawn to the outside gates, which made securing the crucial holeshot more challenging, resulting in

narrowly missing out on first place in both races.

However, in the fourth and final moto, he once again achieved the holeshot and held on to claim the moto victory.

This performance secured him the overall win for the day, along with the fastest lap time, putting him first overall in the series standings.

The next round will be held at the Llynfi track in South Wales, where Taylor will aim to extend his points lead and retain the number one series plate.

With Jones and FS Matt Hunt also adding to their tally, the match was perfectly poised for a grandstand finish.

In the dying hours, Harrison clipped the overhanging trees with a marginal cast and was rewarded when his alarm erupted into life. Remaining calm under pressure, he expertly landed an 18lb 05oz common, a crucial capture that confirmed victory for the pair.

Despite far from ideal conditions, 16 fish were landed, including three impressive captures over the 30lb barrier, and a well-deserved personal best.

**Results**

- 1st:** Sgt Bobby Harrison & Cpl Lawrence Howard, 4 fish, 92lb 09oz
- 2nd:** Sgt Lloyd Moore & Cpl Tom Walker, 3 fish, 69lb 10oz
- 3rd:** FS Tony Jones & FS Matt Hunt, 2 fish, 45lb 07oz
- Biggest Fish:** Cpl Tom Walker, 33lb 03oz

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**

**AWARDS**

# Top UKAF honour for rugby league chief Clayton

**Sports Reporter**

RAF RUGBY LEAGUE stalwart Damian Clayton was among Service personnel honoured at this year's UKAF Sports Awards.

The retired Squadron Leader was instrumental in establishing rugby league in the Armed Forces and captained the RAF team from 1994 to 2006. He was given a Special Achievement trophy at the ceremony at the RAF Club, Piccadilly.

Clayton (*inset right*) was awarded an MBE in 2002 for services to the game in the Armed Forces. He is now CEO at championship side Halifax Panthers.

Also honoured was Sports Official of the Year, RAF Target Shooting's Sgt Scott Glanville, who was chosen ahead of Royal Navy rugby head coach Dave Pascoe and Army boxing's Staff Sergeant James Battle.

RAF rugby league was pipped for best team by Army netball.

And Service cycle ace Cpl Sarah Toms was runner-up in the Top Sportswoman category, losing out to Army and Fiji rugby star Manuqalo Komaitai.



**CYCLING STAR:** Cpl Sarah Toms accepts her award; and in action for the RAF, *right*

Toms was named the 2025 RAF Sportswoman of the Year last October, after an outstanding season representing the RAF and UK Armed Forces with stunning success across road, track and time trial events.

Also just missing out on the top title, this time for Sportsman of the Year, was RAF Angling's Steven Reid – the current holder of the same title in the Air Force.



**TOP OFFICIAL:** Sgt Scott Glanville



**CRICKET**

# T20 crown changes hands

## RAF defeat Army but soldiers take the title

THE RAF lost their T20 crown at Lord's, despite beating eventual Inter-Services winners the Army.

Bruised by a 15-run defeat to the Navy in the first game of the championship at Arundel Castle earlier in the week, the light blues were a different team as the action moved to the home of English cricket for their game against the soldiers.

First to bat, the aviators suffered the loss of Sam Moorby to an offspin from the Army's Jake Benson, caught and bowled.

The score stood at 14-1 after 1.5 overs when RAF captain Adam Fisher came into bat, joining Tom Shorthouse.

They put on 115 in 12.3 overs, before Shorthouse was bowled by Ross Dearden. He had made 51 and the score was 129-2 after 14.2 overs. Fisher went on to make 88 from 49 balls, included 8 fours and 3 sixes.



The RAF finished 188-6 and immediately put the pressure on the Army batsmen, who laboured their way to 29-2 by the end of the powerplay, with Jon Hawk and Tom Shorthouse seeing off Denzel James and Keddy Lesporis.

Soon they were 37-3 and marching on towards the RAF's target but the aviators kept control of the game, with spin bowler Jack Fuller finishing with 3 for 28 off his four overs and Shorthouse with 2 for 25 from his 4.

It was enough for the RAF to win by 33 runs.

With both the RAF and the Navy claiming a game each, the championship looked there for the taking by the Senior Service in the final match against the Army. But it was not to be.

When the Navy were pegged back to a modest total of 144 for 4, the tournament was wide open again, with all 3



**CLOSE TOURNAMENT:** All three Services won one of their games

PHOTOS: SHAUN ROSTER

sides still in the running.

But it was the Army who came out on top after a blistering start to their innings, with Denzel James hitting 25 in the first over, including 3 sixes and a four.

He fell on 40, with the score at 77-2, but the Army kept on the attack through Ollie Cross, hitting a six on his opening ball.

Two lost wickets stalled

proceedings for the Army at 96-6 from 10.4 overs before Shevin George helped them up the run rate again.

Swinging freely and racking up sixes for fun, he hit 40 to see the Army overtake the Navy total and steal the T20 Inter-Services crown from their heads.

● UKAF WOMEN produced a disciplined all-round

performance to secure a 21-run victory over MCC Women in a finely-balanced contest at Lord's.

The military ladies took to the crease first and made 149 for 6, with standout performances with the bat from Cant, on 46, and Potgieter, 53 not out.

MCC closed on 128 for 4, falling 21 runs short as UKAF sealed a well-earned win.

**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](mailto:Sports@rafnews.co.uk)**

# 5 RAF Sport

pages of



## Fuelled for Exercise Nordic Challenge

See p24

### Inter-Service winning RAF Boxing makes history again

# National honours for TWO fighters



**UNANIMOUS DECISION:** Referee raises AR Kennedy's arm at end of her bout

#### Andy O'Hara

TWO RAF boxers have made more history for the Service by becoming its first national champions in almost 30 years.

Sgt Cameron Lewis and AR Amelia Kennedy both took their weight class titles in the prestigious National Amateur Championships in Derby.

RAF Boxing is riding high after also recently taking the Inter-Services title for the first time in over half a century.

Odiham air traffic controller Lewis defeated Kamil Nowak from Basingstoke by a split-points decision in the Under-80kg category in the Nationals, while Brize Norton's Kennedy won by a unanimous decision against Impact ABC's Grace Massey, from Stoke, in the women's Under-54kg.

Lewis will now go on to represent England and there is every chance Kennedy will follow suit.

Lewis told *RAF News*: "It's been a brilliant few weeks and I'm really proud of what we've achieved. Winning the National Amateur Championships means



**DOUBLE JOY:** AR Amelia Kennedy and Sgt Cameron Lewis celebrate National success

a lot, especially representing the RAF Boxing team.

"I came through with a win against Kamil Novak. Walking out to the RAF March band music made it even more special. Myself and AR Kennedy both got the wins, so to come back to base as two RAF National Champions was a great moment for the team.

"Off the back of the Nationals, I've also secured my place to represent England at the Four Nations tournament against Scotland, Ireland and Wales at light heavyweight next month. To represent both my country and the RAF at that level is a dream come true.

"Between now and then I've got

multiple box cups representing the RAF, so the focus is on staying active, improving and building on the momentum.

"Long term, the goal has always been to turn professional, and I'm aiming towards making that transition towards the end of this year."

The RAF Boxing team is led by MOD Abbey Wood-based Command Fire Safety Officer WO John Kearns. He told *RAF News*: "The recent achievements of Sgt Cameron Lewis and AR Amelia Kennedy are a testament to the relentless dedication, discipline and fighting spirit that defines the RAF Boxing Team in recent years.

"To produce two national champions at the same time is exceptional, but to also secure the Inter-

Services Trophy for the first time in 54 years makes this a truly historic moment for us.

"This success hasn't come by chance, it's been driven by an unwavering will to win, a commitment to training and a team culture that demands the very best from every individual. From the boxers stepping through the ropes to the coaches and support staff behind the scenes, everyone has played their part in raising standards and delivering results.

"The coaching team and I are incredibly proud of what has been achieved and this milestone sets the benchmark for what we expect moving forward."



**YOU BELTER:** Cameron with his National and UKAF champ regalia



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# R'n'R



Win story of WWI  
Zeppelin raids ● p5

## **From *Midwife* to musical – Helen George in *High Society***

● See  
page 4

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**Theatre**  
**The Rocky Horror Show**  
 UK tour

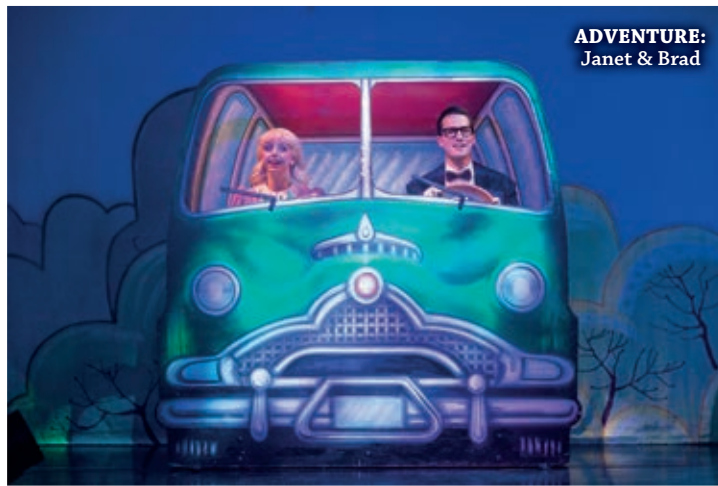
**Dig out your corset**

# A Rocky road for Webb

**R**ICHARD O'BRIEN's *Rocky Horror Show* is currently on a nationwide tour, bringing its unique blend of glam, glitter and outrageous fun to audiences. Stephen Webb will lead the cast as the iconic Frank 'n' Furter in the show that visits Aylesbury's Waterside Theatre (May 26-30), New Theatre, Cardiff (June 1-6) and Birmingham's Alexandra Theatre (July 6-11) among other venues, up to August 1.

The legendary role of the Narrator will be played by *Motherland* (BBC Two) star Jackie Clune with James Bisp starring as Brad and Haley Flaherty as Janet.

Producer Sir Howard Panter said: "This new cast brings an extraordinary energy and freshness to our legendary show. The thrilling mix of talent will continue to delight audiences across the country. *The Rocky Horror Show* is a guaranteed party, night after night - it's



**ADVENTURE:**  
Janet & Brad

fierce, fearless and not to be missed."

The show tells the story of Brad and his fiancée Janet, two squeaky clean college kids who meet Dr Frank'n'Furter by chance when their car breaks down outside his house while on their way to visit their favourite college professor. It's an adventure they'll never forget,

with fun, frolics, frocks and frivolity, bursting with timeless songs and flamboyant outfits.

It combines science-fiction, horror, comedy and music while encouraging audience participation - meaning, of course, getting dressed up in the most outrageous fancy dress.

Stephen revealed that when he found out he'd got the role

of Frank, he couldn't believe it at first.

He said: "When I originally wanted to audition for Rocky, I thought I'd be up for Brad and then they said, 'No, we want to see you for Frank.' When I got it, I was ecstatic, I couldn't believe that I got this role. But in the next moment, I was really anxious because it's such an iconic role, I just want to live up to the legacy."

He added: "Christopher Luscombe, the director, said, 'We don't want you to do an impersonation of Tim Curry [Frank in 1975 film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*], we want to see your version, which actually settled me. I portray Frank using an American accent instead of an English accent."

"Because the character was written during the 70s glam rock era, I take inspiration from David Bowie, T. Rex and Queen."

● **Go to:** [rockyhorror.co.uk](http://rockyhorror.co.uk) for more.



**70S GLAM:**  
Stephen Webb in Rocky Horror



**Film Review**  
**Rebuilding (PG)**  
 Out now

## A film for our times



**STRUGGLING:** Cowboy Dusty (O'Connor) with Callie-Rose (LaTorre)

**A** COLORADO cowboy is forced to relocate to a trailer park when a fire wipes out his family ranch, in this sad but hopeful indie drama.

Dusty (Josh O'Connor) doesn't seem angry or resentful, but clearly, he is in crisis. Having to sell his cattle at auction, you have to wonder if a cowboy is still a cowboy without his cows. Offered some work on the highway, he is keen to find employment that is truer to who he is, and so is looking for something else. A cousin's ranch up in Montana holds some promise, but then he would be leaving his daughter behind.

Separated from his high school sweetheart Ruby (Meghann Fahy), they are on good terms, and as sympathetic as she is to the situation, he still has duties to fulfil as a father. Spending days at his bleak trailer, 10-year-old Callie-Rose (brilliant newcomer Lily LaTorre) needs the internet for her homework and so Dusty routinely drives her to the closed library, joining the others sat outside to use the Wi-Fi.

There is a sadness that hangs over

*Rebuilding*, a sense of loss but crucially not hope. As the title suggests, the film is about piecing things back together. When Dusty applies for a loan to get the ranch back up and running, he is denied on the grounds that the fire was so bad nothing could grow for the best part of a decade, not to mention the chances of another wildfire reoccurring - climate change literally goes unmentioned. Dusty finds himself thrown together with others also going through a hard time, mostly played by non-actors, but then there's Mali (Kali Reis) who appears to inspire something in our forlorn rancher. Alone but together, this ragtag community still have their memories and are able to carve out some form of happiness together, where they can support one another.

Though it may be sorrowful, with a suitably tender acoustic score, the overwhelming message of the film is hopefulness. Certainly, a film for our times.

**Three roundels out of five** ●●●  
**Review by Sam Cooney**



**Film Review**  
**The Christophers (15)**  
 Out now

**Veteran actor shines**

## McKellen's artful

**A** JOBBING artist is hired for a restoration project that turns out to be something closer to a forgery - tasked with completing the unfinished works of a dying painter, right under his nose.

Lori (Mikaela Coel) is recruited by siblings Barnaby (James Corden) and Sallie (Jessica Gunning), children of Julian Sklar (Ian McKellen). Once a revered artist, Sklar traded prestige for notoriety when he became a reality show art critic, in the Simon Cowell role, joyously crushing people's dreams in an effort to get a laugh. Now, terminally ill, he spends his days in isolation, recording cameos for cash.

In his heyday though, Sklar was a visionary and his works sold for millions. His most celebrated art depicted his lover and muse, the titular Christophers. While two series of these paintings are out in the world, a third and unfinished series remains behind closed doors among the hoarded detritus in his twin London homes. The subject of much speculation, his children have discovered the unfinished canvases and are convinced if they were finished they could fetch a hefty sum, compensating for what they see as a lacking inheritance. Fixing Lori up as their father's assistant, she is entrusted to finish the job on the sly.

Despite Steven Soderbergh's familiarity with the mechanics of the heist, à la *Ocean's Eleven*, *The Christophers* is less concerned with process than with motivation. Much



**FAILING GENIUS:** Sklar (McKellen) records a cameo

of the film is built on exchanges between Lori and Julian, or rather Julian holding court, monologuing unabashedly until Lori earns his attention. It is the electric presence of McKellen that gives this film its energy, and for all his catty barbs and political incorrectness, he is undeniably magnetic.

Michaela Coel, by contrast, feels underused - perhaps inevitably so when sharing the screen with such a commanding presence. The imbalance leaves Lori less defined than she ought to be, particularly given her central role in the premise.

This is a gentle and amusing film, that feels like it could have been a stage play, and certainly would have played to McKellen's strengths.

**Four roundels out of five** ●●●●  
**Review by Sam Cooney**



**Theatre**  
High Society  
UK tour



# By George, what a High-class cast



**SOCIETY GIRL:** Helen George stars as Tracy Lord, with support from Freddie Fox, left, and Julian Ovenden

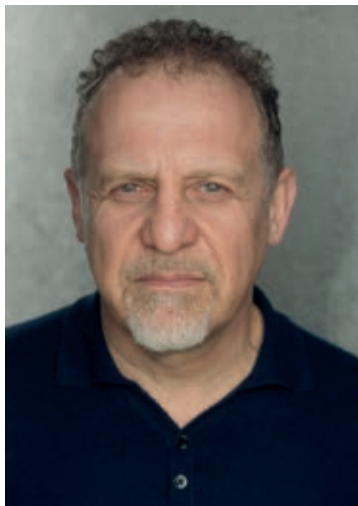
**A** LINE-UP of stars from stage and screen are set to join the company led by Helen George (*Call The Midwife*) as Tracy Lord in a new production of Cole Porter's musical masterpiece, *High Society*.

Direct from a summer season at London's Barbican Theatre, the show will start a six-month UK and Ireland tour beginning at High Wycombe's Swan Theatre on July 14.

Joining Helen are Freddie Fox (*Slow Horses*, *House of the Dragon*) making his musical theatre debut as the charismatic and unpredictable Mike Connor, Julian Ovenden (*Bridgerton*, *Downton Abbey*) who will play the suave and sophisticated Dexter Haven, Nigel Lindsay (*Mobland*, *The Capture*) as Uncle Willie and Malcolm Sinclair (*Pie in the Sky*) as Seth Lord.

The production is brought to life by a multi-award-winning creative team, including director Rachel Kavanaugh (currently directing Hugh Bonneville in the smash hit *Shadowlands* at the Aldwych Theatre), legendary choreographer Anthony Van Laast (*Mamma Mia*, *Kiss Me, Kate*), with musical supervision by Stephen Ridley (*The King and I*, *Anything Goes*) leading a full orchestra.

The show features Porter classics such as *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*, *I Love Paris*, *Well Did You Evah?*, *Just One Of Those*



**NIGEL LINDSAY:** Plays Uncle Willie

*Things*, *Let's Misbehave*, *You're Sensational* and *True Love*.

Fox, who has also worked as a director and producer, is a member of one of Britain's most distinguished acting dynasties.

He said: "I couldn't be more excited to be making my musical theatre debut in *High Society*. It's the realisation of a boyhood dream for me, and I can't wait to dive into this world, the music and the sheer joy of Cole Porter."

Ovenden returns to musical theatre following a celebrated screen career.

He said: "The idea of taking *High Society* on tour is incredibly exciting.

"There is nothing better than bringing a show like this to



**MALCOLM SINCLAIR:** Plays Seth Lord

audiences far and wide."

Producer Sir Howard Panter said: "We're absolutely thrilled that such extraordinary actors Freddie Fox, Julian Ovenden and Nigel Lindsay will be joining Helen George in the UK and Ireland tour of *High Society*."

Helen leads a 28-strong cast in a lavish production that sees plans for the society wedding of the year descend into chaos, with old flames and new flames vying for attention as a sharp-eyed tabloid reporter hunts for scandal at a waterfront estate.

The tour continues until November 14. Helen George will not perform at certain shows.

● Go to: [HighSocietyMusical.com](http://HighSocietyMusical.com) for more details.



**Music**  
The Mildred Snitzer Orchestra  
New album and world tour

# GOLD S

## Hollywood A-lister Jeff's a *Wicked* musician too

**H**OLLYWOOD STAR Jeff Goldblum is instantly recognisable for his major roles in blockbusters including *Jurassic Park*, *Independence Day*, *Wicked* and their sequels.

What's perhaps less well known is that Goldblum is a talented musician. He's currently on a world tour, playing the first of five UK and Ireland dates with his jazz band The Mildred Snitzer Orchestra at The Hall, Wolverhampton on May 28.

Goldblum will be playing the piano and singing tracks from his latest album *Night Blooms*, which includes collaborations with stars such as Cynthia Erivo, Scarlett Johansson and Charlie Puth.

The tour continues to Dublin, Glasgow and Manchester and culminates at the Royal Albert Hall, London on June 30.

The band's previous album, *Still Blooming*, reached No.10 in the UK album charts. Goldblum said: "The band and I can't wait to perform the new arrangements from *Night Blooms*. It's fun to do such beloved songs like *Over The Rainbow* and *If I Only Had a Brain*. We're still playing some of our favourites from previous records, such as *The Kicker* and *Let's Face the Music and Dance*.

"Audiences seem to really connect with us when we close the show with *Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye*. We're going to perform *Tattoo*, mainly for our UK and European audiences. It's delightful to do a beloved Eurovision song in a new way."

He's looking forward to playing in Manchester and to visiting Scotland for the first time.

"Manchester is truly a fantastic city. It has such rich history with music and bands. I feel honoured to even be a small part of that," he explained.

"I participated in a record signing event at HMV in Manchester a few months ago. It was invigorating and soul healing to talk to and meet so many wonderful Mancunians. I was honoured to perform a song in Manchester with the brilliant Laufey. I've never seen an audience

so welcoming. I can't wait to perform for them again with my band."

He added: "I've never visited Scotland before, but it's definitely been on my bucket list. It has such a rich legacy of art and culture. The Edinburgh Fringe Festival is something I hope to be able to attend some day."

*Night Blooms*, the companion album to *Still Blooming*, will be released on June 5.

"In my opinion, *Night Blooms* is our best album yet," Goldblum said. "The arrangements are, I think, quite a step up. We recorded with a live orchestra on many of the tracks. The strings add a depth to the music that raises the band and the singers, I believe, to a new level. All the special guests and collaborators are otherworldly and in top form. I'm brimming with excitement for the world to hear *Night Blooms*."

The album is packed full of collaborations, including a team-up with Jeff's good and bad witches from *Wicked*, Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande. He explained what it was like working with them in this new musical capacity compared

to filmmaking: "Cynthia and Ariana are two of the most talented people alive. Doing music with them feels like an extension of acting. We sang so much on the set of *Wicked* that it seemed only natural to move it to the recording studio. They are both enormously gracious with their time and amazing talent. I feel like the luckiest guy in the world to be able to make art with these two incredible women."

How does he balance filming demands with his passion for music making? Releasing two albums while fresh off the heels of two *Wicked* films is no easy feat.

He said: "I'm wildly grateful to have a career in acting and music. They work well together and complement each other. Music is about practice and discipline. On the set of *Wicked* I would practise piano every morning in order to keep up my chops. And while both worlds offer different and



Edited by Executive Features Editor Tracey Allen

# STANDARD



**Competition**  
Ogres in the Sky  
amberley-books.com



## The World War One Essex Zeppelin raids

**Z**EPPELINS WERE the biggest aircraft ever built and Germany led the way in their use as a weapon of war. In 1915 the German Kaiser authorised air attacks against Britain and Essex found itself in the firing line. Not only were its towns targets in their own right but it also lay on one of the main air routes to London and Zeppelins that failed to reach the capital often jettisoned their bombs on its population as they returned to base.

The raids were greeted with a mixture of fear and fascination. Despite official warnings and the risk of death or injury, as bombing began crowds thronged the streets to witness the unfolding drama.

High above them Zeppelin crews battled lack of oxygen and intense cold. Flying without parachutes, if they were shot down they faced a terrible

decision as their airship plunged to earth in flames – should they jump or burn? Many jumped.

A new book *Ogres in the Sky* by David Dunford (amberley-books.com) tells the incredible story of the World War I Zeppelin raids on Essex, illustrated with contemporary photographs and other images from the time.

You could win a copy of this fascinating title – for your chance to own one, answer this question correctly:

**In which year did the German Kaiser authorise air attacks against Britain?**



Email your answer, marked Ogres in the Sky competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by May 29. Please include your full postal address.



**Books**  
Dawn French  
Enough

**New French novel**

## Dawn's good *Enough*

**B**ESTSELLING-AUTHOR Dawn French, dubbed 'the queen of comedy' will be live on stage this month and in June for two 'in conversation' evenings to celebrate the upcoming publication of her fifth novel, *Enough*.

*Because of You*, and the non-fiction bestsellers *Me. You. A Diary* and *The Twat Files*.

● Go to: [Ticketmaster.co.uk/DawnFrench](https://www.ticketmaster.co.uk/DawnFrench) for more details. Each ticket purchased will include a copy of *Enough*.

She will be appearing at London's Lyceum Theatre on May 18 and Bath's The Forum on June 2 to discuss what has been described as her most ambitious, darkly funny and deeply human novel yet.

French (pictured right) said: "Frankly, I'm far too overexcited to be comin' atcha about all things new book. It's called *Enough*, so come along and let's see if it is!"

The new novel will be published by Penguin Michael Joseph on May 21. It follows on from French's four *Sunday Times* bestselling novels, including the 2021 Women's Prize long-listed



**MULTI-TALENTED:** Actor, musician and raconteur Jeff Goldblum's band will be playing venues including the Royal Albert Hall in London

unique creative adventures, I often experience a lot of craft overlap. Being present in the moment, for instance, is certainly a cornerstone of jazz music and acting."

The tour goes to the Royal Albert Hall, which has hosted The Beatles and Frank Sinatra among others. How does Jeff feel walking in the footsteps of these legends?

He said: "To ever be associated with Frank Sinatra or The Beatles is a special honour and a total treat. I was lucky enough to meet Sir Paul McCartney last year, so it's even a more personal honour now. This will be our return to the Royal

Albert Hall. We performed for the Royal Family on Remembrance Day in 2019. Performing within those sacred walls was the thrill and privilege of a lifetime. I can't wait to do it again."

With more than 50 musicians set to join Goldblum on stage, what can audiences expect from the shows?

"I think audiences are in for a real treat. This is a one-of-a-kind presentation," he said. "We are not just sculpting an orchestra show around our band. We started from scratch in order to make the orchestra and the band one entity.

We also picked some new and very fun songs.

"All the arrangers and orchestrators are the best in the world, and I'm overflowing with gratitude for what they've achieved with this harlequinade. We scatter in songs from *Wicked*, *Willy Wonka*, and there are several other surprise nods to cinema. It's truly moving for me to be playing piano with a full orchestra. The experience is kind of tough to put into words. I'm getting misty just thinking about it."

● Go to: [jeffgoldblum.decca.com](https://www.jeffgoldblum.decca.com) for full tour details.



## Your Announcements

You can email photos for announcements on this page to: [tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk](mailto:tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk)

### Death

**TESTER, Rex** died on April 4 aged 91. Rex joined as a boy entrant and went on to become a Flight Sergeant. Rex served for 38 years (1950-1988) as a telegraphist at RAF stations including Cyprus, Norway, Holland, Bawdy, Valley and finally Abingdon. If you wish to get in contact please email: [mail@greensfunerals.co.uk](mailto:mail@greensfunerals.co.uk).

### Seeking

I would be very keen to hear from any former members of Number 44G State Enrolled Nurse Course who undertook their programme of Nurse Education at RAF Hospital Ely (as it was at that time) between 1971 and 1973. Please email: [retiredraf8030192@gmail.com](mailto:retiredraf8030192@gmail.com). Paul Elliott P8030192, served between 1971 and 1985.

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

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

Kathryn Masters by email: [falconfieldassociationtng@gmail.com](mailto:falconfieldassociationtng@gmail.com) or mobile: 07885 378090.

### Associations

**RAF Bawdsey Reunion Association.** Have you ever served at RAF Bawdsey? If so, why not join our Association and come along to our next Annual Reunion to be held at Bawdsey Manor on Saturday, June 6. For full details please contact Doreen Calver on: [doreen.bawdseyreunion@btinternet.com](mailto:doreen.bawdseyreunion@btinternet.com) or telephone her on: 0751 3301 723.

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

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

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

**THE RAF Air Loadmaster Association (ALMA)**, which marks its 25th anniversary this month, is looking to recruit new members. If you are interested in joining, please email Les Weston on: [lesalma9001@gmail.com](mailto:lesalma9001@gmail.com) or call: 0753 1523456.

**THE 23 Squadron Association** is pleased to announce its intention to hold its Association Dinner on Saturday, October 10. The event will provide a valuable opportunity for former members of 23 Sqn to reconnect, share memories and celebrate the proud history of the Red Eagles.

The Squadron Committee cordially invites all previous personnel who have served with 23 Sqn – across all eras and roles – to register their interest and request further details, including venue details, timings, menu and booking instructions via the email address: [red eagles23sqn@outlook.com](mailto:red eagles23sqn@outlook.com).

**RAF Catering Warrant Officers' and Seniors' Association:** all serving or retired TG19 WO or FS and all former Catering Branch Officers are invited to join the RAF CWO&SA. We meet twice yearly. Please email: [jbateson@gmail.com](mailto:jbateson@gmail.com).

### Reunions

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

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

### Fundraising concerts

**THE Royal Air Force Music Charitable Trust's 2026 fundraising concert tour** is continuing with dates in Weston-Super-Mare (May 29), Newark (September 26), Doncaster (Sept 27), Epsom (October 2), Lincoln (Oct 16) and Worksop (Oct 18). Go to: [rafconcerts.uk](http://rafconcerts.uk) for more details.

## Obituary

# Tribute to WO, 104



**HOMAGE:** RAF Leeming and 90 SU personnel formed a lining party

RAF WORLD WAR II veteran Ernest Pearson has died aged 104. Joining the RAF at 20, he served from March 1941 to August 1946. He trained and qualified as a wireless operator in March 1942, then qualified as an Air Gunner, in November 1942. He went on to complete his radar training in South Kensington with the Mobile Meteorological Unit, in December 1942.

Ernest married Annie on June 6, 1942, while carrying out his initial RAF training.

His first training flight with the RAF was in September 1942, he was then transferred to Limavady in Northern Ireland in January 1943, where he flew for the remainder of his service in Vickers Wellington bombers.

In 1943 he started his service overseas in Cairo. He spent some time in Egypt and Tunisia carrying out coastal command missions. He was stationed in Africa until October 1943, where he then transferred to 221 Sqn, a Wellington-equipped maritime Coastal Command patrol squadron, stationed in Luqa, Malta.

He had only been with 221 Sqn for 23 days when, on October 23, 1943, preparing for another mission, his aircraft crashed on take-off, causing it to burst into flames and break up into pieces, with the crew all still aboard. Ernest was thrown from the aircraft and

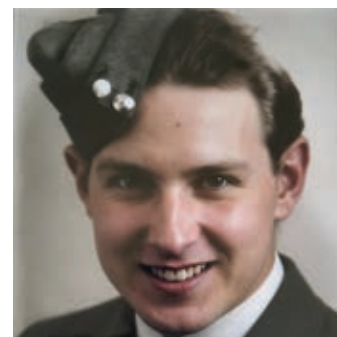
pulled away by ground crew, sustaining severe cuts and burns to his head and legs.

He spent two months in hospital then was transferred to a convalescent camp to continue his recovery.

By now he was becoming rather impatient and bored so set up a basketball team, against another squadron of recuperating military men. He proudly stated that they 'kicked arse' against them. He was discharged back to 221 Sqn on December 19 and got back into an aircraft two days later.

Ernest continued to serve overseas with 221 Sqn, carrying out missions in Malta, Grottaglie and Foggia Main in Italy, until he took his last recorded flight on August 3, 1944. He flew a total of 465 hours. He was then stationed in England, until he was officially discharged on August 26, 1946. He settled in Bradford after being demobbed.

Members of RAF Leeming were invited to WO Pearson's 102nd birthday on May 27, 2023 and kept in touch afterwards. Sgt Allan Waring from Ceremonial said: "A lining party was organized from RAF Leeming and 90 SU personnel and WO Pearson's coffin was dressed in a Union Flag with a folded RAF Ensign (this was presented to him on his 102nd birthday) a SD Hat and his World War II medals."



**SERVICE:** Ernest as a young airman and in later life

### How to use our service

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

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# Wittering's marathon man

RAF WITTERING Serviceman ASI Caylum van Empel ran the Manchester Marathon last month in aid of the RAF Benevolent Fund – and has almost doubled his fundraising target.

The 27-year-old, from Gloucester, a Logistics Supplier at Wittering serving in 1 Expeditionary Logistics Squadron, smashed his £500 aim, raising £894 to date.

Caylum, who has been serving for over seven years, said: "I chose to run for the Benevolent Fund because it's a charity that means something personal to me.

"Having previously supported them, I've seen the positive impact they have on the lives of serving personnel, veterans and their families. It makes me proud to be able to do this challenge for a cause that looks after our own.

"Running the marathon was my way of giving back and showing appreciation



**KEEP ON RUNNING:** Caylum strides out

for the community I'm proud to be part of."

He added: "Training and taking part in the run gave me a real sense of purpose, resilience and clarity."

Caylum's mum and nan joined him at the start line, giving him the encouragement he needed.

He said: "There's something special about that shared energy, especially knowing I'm running for the Fund. Crossing the finish line was a big moment for me too."

● You can donate to Caylum's fundraiser on JustGiving.



# Museum hosts Pride in Service Day

THE RAF Museum in Hendon, North London, is hosting Pride in Service Day on Saturday, May 31, celebrating LGBTQ+ personnel and veterans' contributions to the Armed Forces.

The free public event will feature live performances, storytelling, exhibitions, community activities and special guest appearances.

At the heart of the programme is the unveiling of *The Echoes and Shadows of Identity* (2026), a new commission by veteran artist David Tovey, co-created with LGBTQ+ veterans and serving personnel.

It was commissioned by the RAF Museum to mark the 25th anniversary of the lifting of the Armed Forces

'gay ban' (1967–2000).

Following sustained campaigning, the military ban on LGBTQ+ personnel serving openly was finally lifted on January 12, 2000.

Pride in Service Day recognises both the hardships endured and the progress achieved since then, said a Museum spokesperson.

● Go to rafmuseum.org.uk

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# R'n'R



## Prize Crossword No. 409

Solve the crossword, then rearrange the 11 letters in yellow squares to find an airbase

### Across

- 1. Some Classics pedant moved quickly (4)
- 8. Deduce aunt may be ignorant (10)
- 9. Crumbles flake for six thousand at foreign air base (8)
- 10. Manage bad smell on ship (4)
- 12. Subject Saskatchewan jug to sharp criticism (6)
- 14. Wizard helicopter? (6)
- 15. Musical flowers (6)
- 17. The endless corrosion of an RAF jet (6)
- 18. Michael Corleone embraces Queen in upmarket car (4)
- 19. Rare uses employed to raise spirits (8)
- 21. Was this German attack lightning fast? (10)
- 22. Bart and Lisa's dad almost in residence (4)

### Down

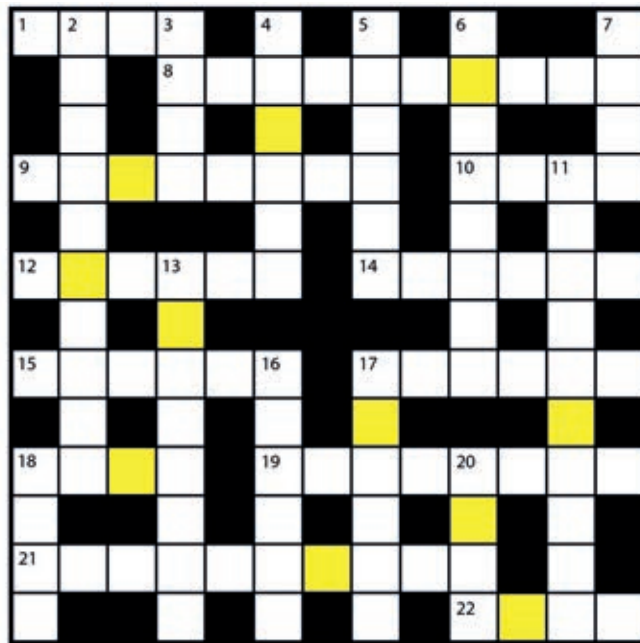
- 2. It's not the sharpest tool in the box (10)
- 3. Fight for two, by the sound of it (4)
- 4. Creature to exist and maintain (6)
- 5. Bed in the middle of Columbia? Gibberish! (6)
- 6. Ban carer from Australian city (8)
- 7. Not a date Caesar enjoyed (4)
- 11. Escape water caused by RAF aircraft (10)
- 13. Striking RAF aircraft? (8)
- 16. Pat's golf score (6)
- 17. The first cigar returned with deadly consequences (6)
- 18. Crowds around Farah outside Buenos Aires (4)
- 20. First Symphony involving Grieg had sad sound (4)

Name: .....

Address: .....

RAF airbase: ..... Crossword No. 409

The winners of our Prize Crossword and Prize Su Doku puzzles will receive a recent top aviation title – please send your entries to the address printed in the adjacent Su Doku panel, to arrive by May 29, 2026.



Prize Crossword No. 408 winner will be announced in our next edition.

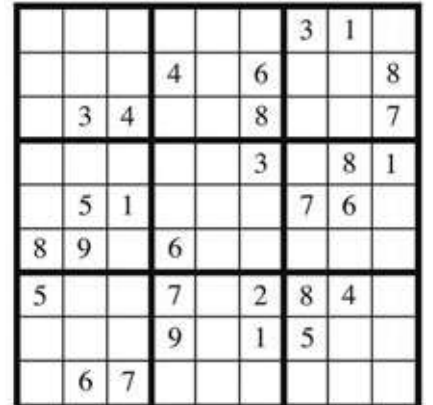
### Solution to Crossword No. 408

**Across** – 6. Honiley 7. Delay 9. Drone 10. Herring 12. Freedom Hawk 14. Flying Hours 18. Javelin 19. Spire 21. Virgo 22. Aerosol  
**Down** – 1. Board 2. Sinner 3. Set 4. Search 5. Barn Owl 8. Peloton 11. Penguin 13. Albania 15. Ice Age 16. Raptor 17. Orion 20. Jet  
*RAF aircraft - Transporter*



## Prize Su Doku No. 419

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



Solutions should be sent in a sealed envelope marked 'Su Doku' with the number in the top left-hand corner to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP14 4UE, to arrive by May 29, 2026. The winner of Su Doku No: 417 will be announced in our next edition.

### Solution to Su Doku No. 418



## Film Review

**Normal (15)**  
In cinemas now

# Hot Fuzz meets John Wick in Normal American town

**A** TEMPORARILY-installed sheriff finds that the town of Normal, Minnesota is anything but – in this gory action-comedy from director Ben Wheatley and the team behind *John Wick*. Bob Odenkirk (*Better Call Saul*) plays laissez-faire lawman Ulysses, but if you've seen the *Nobody* films, you'll know that he's really a stealth action star, fully capable of throw downs and shoot ups. His assignment follows the conveniently odd death of the previous sheriff, and from the outset the town, including Mayor Kibner (Henry Winkler), feels just a little too normal to be trusted.

The townsfolk are initially wary of outsider Ulysses, but his laidback charm seems to win them over. Coupled with a simple but sweet Deputy (Billy MacLellan), with matching moustaches, they spend their days breaking up little quibbles with warnings for minor offences. All of these small town shenanigans will pale in comparison to a grand conspiracy that is quickly unfolding, but it is clear that the mystery is not the point.

The script over-explains everything, as if worried the audience might fall behind, restating the story with clunky dialogue and occasional voiceover. It's also deeply predictable, telegraphing its turns so blatantly that it is frustrating. But all of this plotting is revealed to simply be a vehicle for a bunch of fun and full-on kills. In theory it is *Hot Fuzz* set in the town of *Fargo*, but in practice it is a *John Wick*-style shoot 'em up. The result is that violence



**HIDDEN DEPTHS:** Bob Odenkirk as sheriff Ulysses

feels less shocking, and more expected, although there are some real gnarly and inventive moments. Considering how dark and funny Wheatley's earlier films are, it's a shame that it underserves the comedy, especially with a proven comic actor front and centre.

At a mere 90 minutes, what it does achieve is a simple story packed with some brutal deaths and truly testing the limits of a bulletproof vest.

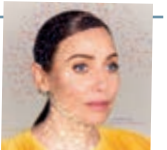
Three roundels out of five ●●●  
 Review by Sam Cooney



## Music

**Natalie Imbruglia**  
Algorithm

**NEW ALBUM:**  
Algorithm



**N**ATALIE IMBRUGLIA is known to millions as the star behind the global hit *Torn*, which remains one of the defining songs of the nineties.

It started a phenomenal run of success which has included two BRIT Awards, three Grammy nominations, a Silver Clef, eight ARIA Awards, seven million sales of her debut album *Left of the Middle*, and a No.1 for *Counting Down The Days*. Recent times have seen her back in the spotlight, having performed alongside Olivia Rodrigo.

It's just been announced that Natalie will release her new album *Algorithm* on September 4 and she's launched the record with its lead single *Upside Down*. It's the Australian-British pop star's first album in five years and is described as a deeply personal record. She co-produced and co-wrote every song on the new album.

She said: "On this record I chose to work with collaborators who also co-produce so from start to finish we were all so invested in every song."

"I really hope that people get as much joy from listening to this record as we did making it. And that they dance their a\*s off."

"This was by far the most fun I've ever had making a record."

# Imbruglia figures it all out for Algorithm



It also happened to coincide with the most challenging time I've had with my mental health. This is the beauty of music and artistic expression. You can take something dark and turn it into light."

Natalie will follow the release of *Algorithm* with select festival dates.

● Go to: [natalieimbruglia.com](http://natalieimbruglia.com) for further information.