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What it's like to fly world's iconic aircraft

See page 17

Win!



ROYAL AIR FORCE

Friday, April 17, 2026
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RAF News



Honouring Op Telic's heroes



See pages 14-15

Skeleton
2 decades at the top



● See page 24

Darts
Aiming for first Inters



● See page 25

Hockey
Men win at the double



● See page 27

Tribute to an air icon



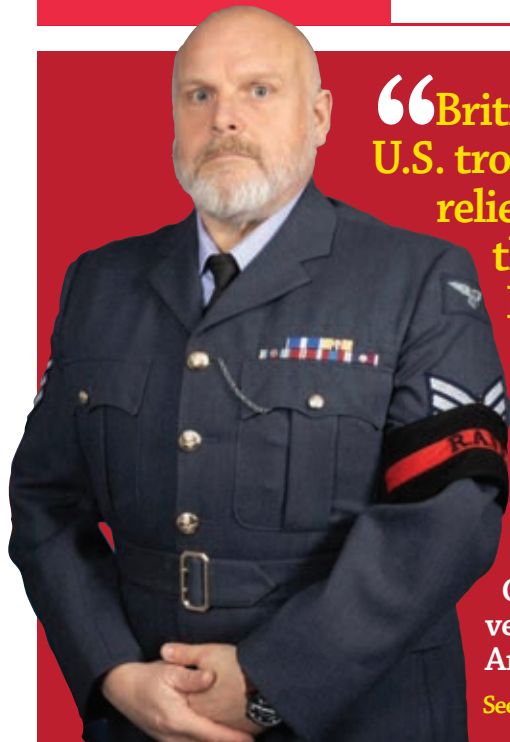
A PAIR of F-35s joined a replica Spitfire in the skies over Marham as the UK marked the 90th anniversary of the iconic WWII aircraft.

The prototype K5054 Supermarine fighter designed by RJ Mitchell made its maiden flight in March 1936.

To mark the anniversary, a two-seater Supermarine Spitfire bearing the original aircraft's markings flew over key airfields and sites with historic connections to the aircraft, alongside current RAF jets.

Organisers auctioned off nine flights in the rear seat to raise funds for Air Force charities and the aircraft was escorted by the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight's Spitfire as it performed a flypast over RAF Coningsby.

BiteSize



“British and U.S. troops relied on the RAF’s Harrier Widow Makers,,

Op Telic veteran Sgt Andrew Blake
See pages 14-15



“I’ve been on tour my whole life, but it’s harder now I have a wife and daughter,,

Former Strictly dancer Kevin Clifton stars in *Priscilla the musical*
See R’n’R pp4-5

“I’m one very proud RAF team manager,,



Netball chief WO Claire Bullen
See page 26



ROYAL AIR FORCE RAF News

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P-8 halts Putin plot

Simon Mander

ANTI-SUB AIRCRAFT helped stop a Russian plot to use conflict in the Middle East as cover to snoop on Britain’s critical underwater cables, it can be revealed.

Lossiemouth-based RAF P-8s used sonobuoys to track the intruders round-the-clock over thousands of miles.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: “While the eyes of many – understandably – were on the Middle East, our Armed Forces were simultaneously responding to rising Russian threats north of the UK.

“As we act to defend our interests and Allies in the Middle East, we are tackling increasing threats to Nato in the High North, maintaining strong support for Ukraine and protecting our homeland.

“To Putin, I say this: we see you, we see your activity over our underwater infrastructure. You should know that any attempt to

damage it will not be tolerated and would have serious consequences.”

RAF aircraft and warships identified a Russian attack submarine entering international waters in the High North several weeks ago, it has now been disclosed.

UK and Norwegian service personnel also identified other vessels as part of the Russian Main Directorate of Deep-Sea Research, known as GUGI, used to survey underwater infrastructure during peacetime, then damage or destroy it during a conflict.

Both the GUGI units and the Akula class submarine have retreated home, having failed to complete their operation in secrecy.

Subsea fibre optic cables are essential for all digital communications, carrying more than 99 per cent of international data traffic, underpinning global banking, trade and communication.



DEEP SEA DETECTORS: Poseidon P-8 crews pick up Russian subs using sonobuoys

This Week In History



1923 Radio debut

THE RAF Central Band becomes the first-ever military musical ensemble to make a radio broadcast with a performance transmitted from BBC Marconi House.

1945 Eagle's attack

A STRIKE force of 359 Lancaster bombers and 16 Mosquitos attack Hitler’s Eagle’s Nest chalet and an SS barracks at Berchtesgaden.



1967 Hercules flies in

THE HERCULES transport aircraft enters service at RAF Colerne ahead of relocating to Lyneham with 36 Sqn in July.

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

All fired up

Staff Reporter

Brize Norton

BRIZE FIREFIGHTERS stepped in to help mental health crusader Cpl Hayley Court smash her fundraising target – clocking up 10 miles by climbing their ladders.

The stunt helped Hayley's charity, Healing Military Minds, top the £200,000 barrier. She said: "I cannot thank Sgt Vince Chambers and his team enough. Blue Watch stepped up to take on a huge challenge for an incredible cause."

Volunteers completed more than 10 miles by climbing their 10 metre ladders hundreds of times, wearing full protection kit, to raise funds for the group.



TALL ORDER: Hayley, centre, joins Blue Watch volunteers for Brize fundraising stunt

Bulletin



DEFENCES: Mr Healey meets RAF crews in Qatar during Middle East tour.

UK boost for Gulf

Simon Mander

AIR DEFENCES from the UK have been sent to the Middle East to protect Gulf partners from Iran's missile and drone attacks.

Defence Secretary John Healey visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain for talks on the conflict, the Strait of Hormuz, and further UK-Gulf cooperation as the war enters its second month.

Mr Healey said: "Iran's aggressive attacks continue to threaten our Allies and interests in the Middle East."

"Now we're delivering further support by extending UK jets in Qatar and deploying extra air defences to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait."

The joint UK-QAT Squadron has been flying since day one of the conflict and the deployment of British jets to Qatar has been extended.



Vets net funding

SCOTTISH VETERANS will get extra help after £1m funding was awarded to charity SSAFA.

In its first-ever announcement, the government awarded the money to Glasgow's Helping Heroes to develop its services under the Op Valour scheme.

It's one of 14 centres across the UK to be awarded up to £1 million each to act as a single point of contact for veterans. A second round of funding will open later this spring.

New kit targets drone terror



LOW-COST: APKWS



Simon Mander

TYPHOONS COULD be equipped with a relatively low-cost precision weapon to counter drones.

The APKWS laser-guidance kit manufactured by BAE Systems in the US was evaluated in Warton, Lancashire using an RAF jet to launch a successful strike on a ground-based target at a UK military testing range.

BAE Air Sector managing director Richard Hamilton said: "We play a crucial role in supporting the UK Armed Forces –

working closely with the Ministry of Defence to develop technologies that strengthen our national defence capabilities.

"This trial with the APKWS laser-guidance kit on Typhoon is a cost-effective solution that would enhance the aircraft's impressive range of weapons capabilities."

Typhoon carries a wide range of advanced air-to-air and air-to-surface weapons, including Meteor long-range, air-to-air missiles, Storm Shadow and Brimstone air-to-surface weapons.

The APKWS laser-guidance kit enables air-to-surface and air-to-air strikes.

BAE Systems is delivering a package of Typhoon capability upgrades for the RAF including the ECRS Mk 2 advanced new radar with electronic attack capability, and helmet-mounted display.

Earlier this year it was awarded a £453.5m contract for the full production of the ECRS Mk2 radar allowing the aircraft to detect, identify and track multiple targets in the air and on the ground.

The APKWS system is manufactured at facilities in Hudson, New Hampshire and Austin, Texas and can hit targets with pinpoint accuracy and minimal collateral damage.



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quality time together
as a family”**

RAF veteran
Bill Sannwald

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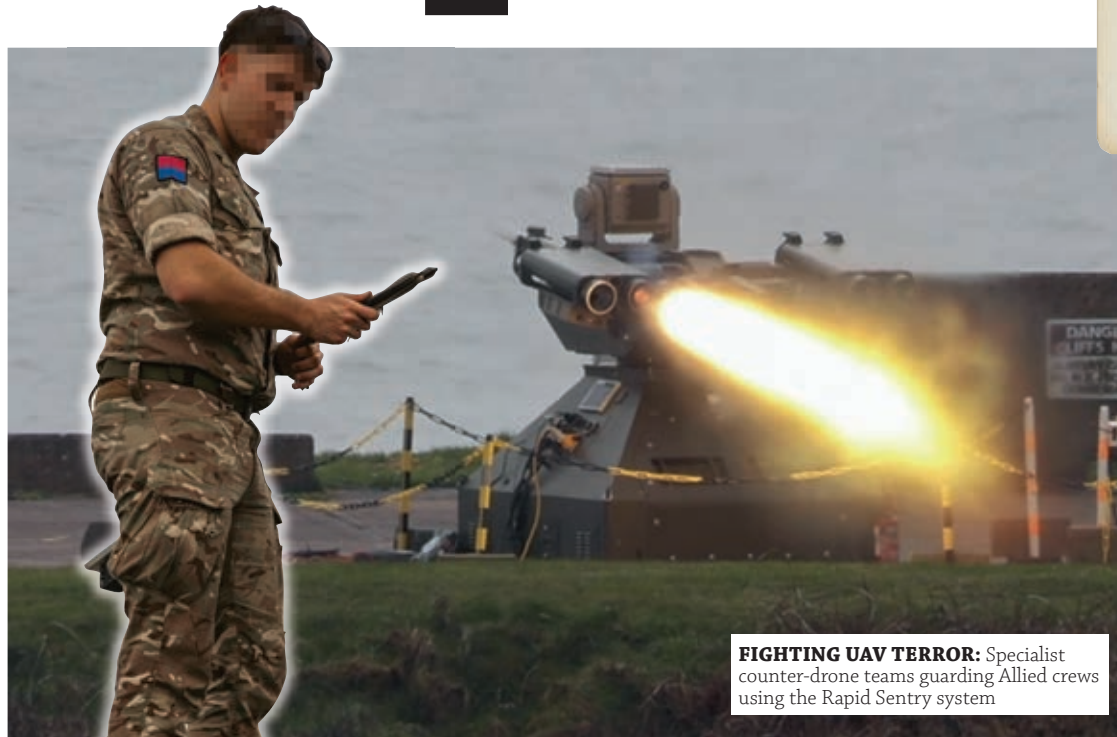
Gunners win title for Gulf drone Op

Simon Mander

RAF REGIMENT gunners have become 'Aces' for the first time, after blasting Iranian drones out of the sky during operations in the broader Middle East.

Four personnel were awarded the status after taking out five or more of the uncrewed air systems as part of a tradition stretching back to World War II.

Operating early-warning sensors, electronic warfare, and the state-of-the-art Rapid Sentry air defence system armed with Lightweight Multirole Missiles, they faced complex swarming technologies designed to disrupt



FIGHTING UAV TERROR: Specialist counter-drone teams guarding Allied crews using the Rapid Sentry system

operations and endanger personnel on the ground.

2 Counter-Uncrewed Aerial Systems Wing CO, Wg Cdr Richard Maughan, said: "Since late February, RAF Regiment personnel have been at the

forefront of countering persistent one-way attack drones targeting UK and Allied personnel, infrastructure and assets in the broader Middle East.

"During March 23 and 24, RAF Regiment gunners

operating within a ground-based counter-drone unit delivered the most effective defensive outcome achieved in a single night to date."

Commander Global Enablement, Air Cdre Paul Hamilton, said: "Our deployed

gunners are showing outstanding courage to defend deployed UK personnel, allies and partners every day. They are genuinely putting their own lives at risk in the defence of others."

It comes as the Defence Secretary announced Britain will deploy Rapid Sentry to Kuwait to support the country's air defence.

The MOD also confirmed that the UK intends to buy further Lightweight Multirole Missiles to supply to British Forces and support partners in the region.

The weapon, manufactured by Thales UK in Belfast, has proven highly capable for air defence in the Middle East.

Armed Forces Minister Al Carns said: "Several of these heroes have achieved 'ace' status neutralising Iranian drones. The first of its kind, it isn't just impressive, it is exceptional.

"We don't say it enough in the UK, but thank you for your service."

Regt is standing on the shoulders of giants



Dilip Sarkar, MBE

THE 'ACE' concept arose during World War I, identifying exceptional fighter pilots credited with the destruction of five or more enemy aircraft.

It became potent morale-boosting propaganda providing the public with a whole new cult to hero worship.

Aces on all sides were lauded, the public eagerly following their careers, revelling in their success – despairing when some of these heroes fell.

Indeed, even today, the names of some remain legendary and well-known, not least Rittmeister Manfred Albrecht Freiherr von Richthofen – better known as Germany's infamous 'Red Baron'.

This practice continued into WWII, from which, on the RAF side, officers like 'Sailor' Malan and Douglas Bader emerged from the Battle of Britain as household names.

Bader, having lost both legs in a



ACE OF ACES: WWII pilot Johnnie Johnson credited with 38.5 kills

pre-war flying accident, rocketed to global acclaim post-war due to Paul Brickhill's bestselling but much romanticised biography *Reach for the Sky*, while Johnnie Johnson, a Volunteer Reservist, emerged as the RAF's top-scoring 'Ace of Aces' with 38½ confirmed

aerial victories to his name.

With wartime bombers bristling with machine guns, some airgunners also achieved ace status, and a separate list was recorded for Allied fighter pilots who destroyed five or more pilotless flying bombs.

Indeed, during the Vietnam War, increasing technology dictated that weapons systems operators, back-seaters in fast jets, were similarly recognised.

Today, RAF Regiment gunners have become the first in history to achieve Ace status by destroying five Iranian drones.

Whilst clearly an incomparable combat scenario to engaging the Red Baron, one-to-one, over the Western Front, this simply reflects the changing face of both war and military technology.

● Dilip Sarkar is the most recent biographer of Gp Capt Sir Douglas Bader, AVM Johnnie Johnson and Gp Capt 'Sailor' Malan.

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PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



**Action-packed fiction informed by Chris Hadfield's real-life experience
as an astronaut, pilot and Commander of the International Space Station**

Italian tribute

Simon Mander

WELSH RESERVISTS paid tribute to the RAF's fallen Pathfinders as they visited the Italian town where 614 Sqn bombers were based during World War II.

Today the Amendola Airfield in the Foggia region is the Italian Air Force's main base for its F-35s and MQ-9 and MQ-1 Remotely Piloted Air Systems.

But towards the end of the conflict it was home to 614 Sqn Halifax and Liberator bombers that attacked heavily-defended enemy targets, including Romanian oil refineries, losing 83 air and ground crew.

During its return to Italy, the Sqn stayed in a small coastal town called Manfredonia.

Flt Lt Martin Wade said: "Manfredonia was the place, 20km from Amendola Airfield, where Sqn members came to relax and recharge when not on duty.

"The closeness of the relationship between 614 Sqn and the town was shown on Christmas Eve in 1944, when the Sqn invited orphans to see a pantomime they had put on and then treated them to a Christmas party.

"In gratitude, Manfredonia's Mayor, Domenico La Marca, hosted members of 614 Sqn at a civic reception where he thanked them for helping to liberate the town from fascism."



PATHFINDER PILGRIMAGE: Reservists from 614 Sqn join Italian crews at Amendola. Inset above, personnel honour fallen at the War Cemetery in Bari

Members of Wales' only RAF Reserve squadron saw the war cemetery at Bari, where 10 of their fallen lie, and woollen poppies knitted by the daughter-in-law of a pilot were placed at each of their graves.

614 Sqn's Wg Cdr Lee

Matthews said: "It was a powerful and poignant end to a visit which will live long in our memories.

"We are grateful to the Air Attaché and the Defence staff at the British Embassy in Rome, the Mayor and the people of Manfredonia, the Commander

of 32 Stormo at Amendola Italian Air Force base and the gardeners at Bari War Cemetery for the help and warm welcome we received."

A small group of fellow reservists from No 502 (Ulster) and 600 (City of London) Sqs accompanied the visit.

Bulletin



Typhoon on NATO beat

Staff Reporter
Borcea, Romania

BRITISH TYPHOONS took over from a German Eurofighter contingent at the beginning of their latest Operation Biloxi mission.

During the next four months 121 Expeditionary Air Wing personnel will operate alongside Romanian personnel conducting Quick Reaction Alert missions at 86th Air Base, at Borcea.

Jets from Coningsby-based 3 (Fighter) Sqn will also conduct joint training to reinforce Nato's collective defence posture on its most eastern border.

The UK has supported Nato's Air Policing operations across the Black Sea and Baltic regions since 2014.

Saddle score

CYCLISTS WILL be following in the pedals of ex-RAF pilot and England rugby star Rory Underwood and former England rugby captain Martin Johnson as they saddle up for this year's RAF Rides.

The celebrity duo joined 2,000 riders in last year's event and organisers are looking for volunteers to take on this summer's fundraising challenge.

They will be running rides at Kendrew Barracks, Leeming, Brize Norton and Marham, giving participants the chance to take part in 12 to 100-mile routes.

Organiser Liam Clark-Brown said: "RAF Rides is much more than a military cycling event, giving participants an opportunity to meet up with old friends, make new ones and challenge themselves."



Ukraine £100m air defence vow

BRITAIN IS to commit another £100 million air defence package to Ukraine to protect cities and critical infrastructure.

The funding will be deployed to strengthen Ukraine's air defences against relentless Russian attacks.

This latest package means the UK has committed £600 million over the last two months.

The UK pledge comes as Joint Expeditionary Force leaders met in Helsinki and follows President Zelenskyy's visit to London.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "I am determined to make 2026 the year this war ends.

"The axis of aggression between Russia and Iran makes it increasingly important that we build on Ukrainian expertise and innovation, supported by British industry, and ensure that Ukrainian fighters see benefits from that as they continue to push back Putin's illegal invasion."



THREAT: Rescue workers look for survivors following Russian strike on Kharkiv

The pledge builds on the UK's £500 million air defence package announced in February at the Ukraine Defence Contact Group at Nato headquarters in Brussels.

That funding enabled the delivery of air defence interceptors, alongside more than 1,000 Lightweight Multirole Missiles made in Belfast.

In addition, the UK is delivering a further 1,200 air defence missiles and 200,000 rounds of artillery ammunition through the Air Defence Consortium.



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Typhoons strike Syria terror lair



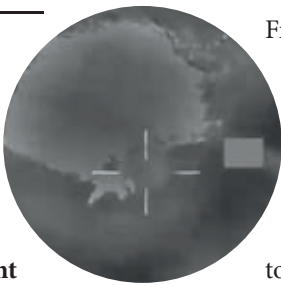
TARGETING TERROR: Ground crew carry out checks ahead of Typhoon mission. Below, Paveway strike on arms cache

Staff Reporter
Middle East

UNDERGROUND WEAPONS and explosives caches used by Daesh terrorists have been obliterated by RAF Typhoons in a recent mission.

British combat jets used Paveway IV guided missiles on access tunnels in mountains some miles north of the ancient Syrian site of Palmyra.

They were supported by a Voyager refuelling tanker and



French aircraft in a joint strike in January, details of which have just been released.

British aircraft have continued Operation Shader patrols over Syria to help prevent any attempted resurgence of the Daesh terrorist movement following its military defeat at Baghuz Fawqani in March 2019.

The area around the terrorist weapons facility was uninhabited by civilians, the MOD said.



Staff Reporter
Akrotiri

MILITARY WORKING dogs are stepping up security at Akrotiri as the Cyprus base remains on high alert.

Handlers have doubled patrols carrying out more than 500 hours of security checks around the airfield with dogs trained to sniff out explosives and electrical devices since a drone attack last month.

A spokesman for the MWD section said: "As regional activity has intensified, RAF Akrotiri has seen an increase in RAF assets stationed there. The dramatic surge necessitates greater security measures across the base, especially around the airfield."

CAS Gulf Typhoon tribute

Simon Mander

AIR CHIEFS paid tribute to Typhoon pilots flying round-the-clock missions to defend Qatar from Iranian drone and missile strikes on a recent Middle East visit.

Chief of the Air Staff ACM Sir Harv Smyth saw personnel from the joint Coningsby-based RAF-Qatari 12 Sqn who train, operate, and fight side by side.

He said: "The fact that RAF Typhoons are currently flying defensive missions above Qatar, defending our ally from Iranian air attack, tangibly demonstrates that our commitment as a security partner is not just words on a page."

The deployment of additional Typhoon aircraft to Qatar in recent weeks has reinforced the UK's commitment to regional stability and collective defence.

ACM Smyth said: "I also visited RAF personnel deployed in Qatar to support our defensive

mission, which extends across the broader region.

"Their recent operational efforts in extremely challenging circumstances have been nothing short of exemplary."

Amid escalating regional tensions caused by the US and Israeli-led Operation Epic Fury and direct attacks against Gulf states, Qatar called for support from its international partners.

In response, RAF Typhoons were deployed to reinforce air defence protecting critical infrastructure and allied nations.

In early March, British jets participated in intercepting and destroying an attack drone directed towards Qatar.

ACM Smyth said: "It was a privilege to visit Qatar and meet with the Commander of the Qatar Emiri Air Force, to discuss ongoing operational demands in the region, and to reaffirm the enduring partnership between our two nations."

"Our joint efforts, including



FRONTLINE FIREPOWER: CAS Sir Harv Smyth joins Typhoon crews deployed to Qatar

the continued development of shared capabilities such as the Typhoon, highlight the strength

of our alliance. "These advanced platforms not only enhance our operational

effectiveness but also serve as a symbol of the trust and cooperation that underpin our partnership."

News

Plain sailing for Atlas drop

Simon Mander

IN WHAT has been billed the biggest military parachute jump in Britain for 10 years the RAF has dropped 270 troops onto Salisbury Plain.

Three A400Ms swooped on the Wiltshire training area at 800ft to drop soldiers from 16 Air Assault Brigade under the call-sign Ronin1, 2 and 3.

A fourth aircraft dropped 24 tonnes of equipment and supplies frontline fighters need to survive in the combat zone.

The operation was mounted from Brize Norton by members of 47 Air Despatch System, who put together 18 pallets of material into a 24 Block Container Despatch System.

It included quad bikes, ammunition and a First-Person View drone operated by the Uncrewed Aircraft System Platoon, 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regt onto the drop zone.

The jump was a test of the Joint Airborne Task Force formed by 16 Air Assault Bde and the Air Mobility Force, to be ready to respond to crises ranging from natural disasters to armed conflict.



RAFA nets Reds funding

Staff Reporter

YOUNGSTERS WITH learning difficulties are to get language and speech therapy following a funding pledge by the Red Arrows.

The display team's charity trust is to help cover the cost of the UK-wide programme run by the RAF Association.

The funds will be used to develop the existing RAFAKidz initiative to support language and communication development.

Charity spokeswoman Suzy Everitt said: "This investment recognises the importance of

early communication support. Families can wait years to access therapy through the NHS.

"For Service children, who often move between educational settings and local authorities, it's even harder for families to get the help they need.

"Our provision means our children get the support they need with their language development quickly and without delay. The grant will enable us to build on our strong inclusive provision and make an even bigger difference to our children and families."

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Ocean divers' close encounter



DEEP DELIGHT: Divers cross paths with batfish, turtles and tiger sharks during Maldives training expedition



Natasha Nicholson Maldives

SERVICE DIVERS braved sharks, mantas, rays and turtles along a recent exercise to the Maldives.

Personnel who normally keep the Service's helicopters airborne swapped spanners for aqualungs to mark the 50th anniversary of the handover of the former Gan airbase to the Maldivian government.

Trainee diver Fg Off Kizzie Struselis said: "The marine

life was spectacular; we were surrounded by turtles and manta rays and even had a close encounter with tiger sharks.

"I moved from Ocean Diver to BSAC Sports Diver by the end of the week, practising rescue techniques in the same area where RAF aircraft once landed."

A total of 10 divers, including four instructors, from Benson, Odiham, Halton and Brize Norton, took part.

Returning to the Addu Atoll exactly five decades after the base

was officially returned in April 1976, the expedition served as a poignant tribute to the RAF's legacy in the region.

Instructor FS Christopher Worrall said: "The Maldives provided an exceptional blend of adventure and professional development, set against the backdrop of nutrient-rich waters and vibrant coral.

"The expedition was structured to maximise training, offering instructor development opportunities.

Beyond the standard syllabus, every participant undertook rescue skills training in realistic emergency scenarios."

The exercise was marked with diplomatic engagement, with meetings with the Sri Lankan and Maldivian UK Defence Attaché.

And the Commander of the Maldivian Southern Area Command was presented with an RAF Scuba polo shirt.

Trainee dive leader AS1(T) Sam Manley said: "On the second day of Exercise Great

Gan, I achieved a major career milestone, gaining my Dive Leader status. Although I've been on five previous diving expeditions, this was by far the most rewarding because of the historical context."

The technical success of the exercise was clear, with the team qualifying one Advanced Ocean Diver, four Sports Divers, and one Dive Leader, while significantly building on Advanced Diver experience for the instructional staff.

Green light for Brize housing

Simon Mander

PLANNERS HAVE given the go-ahead for 265 new military quarters at Brize Norton.

In the first such MOD development since 2017, the flats, houses and bungalows will be built on land at Carterton, near the airbase, with construction starting in the coming weeks.

In addition, across the UK, 2,000 more military properties will be modernised in the next financial year with 1,250 worst-condition properties already brought up to standard.

The work is a step towards

encouraging recruitment and retention and widening access for families to whom a military home was not previously available.

Visiting the Oxfordshire station, Defence Secretary John Healey (*inset right*) said: "A decent home has never mattered more.

"Housing is at the heart of all our lives. And after years of neglect, the new development at Brize Norton demonstrates delivery."

The new homes follow the government's landmark deal to bring 36,000 homes back into public ownership – saving the taxpayer £600,000 per day in rent no longer needing to be paid.

And under the Defence Housing Strategy an interim rental allowance will widen access for those military families whose needs cannot be met in a particular location, as capacity on the estate increases.

Defence Housing Strategy Review chief Natalie Elphicke-Ross said: "Making sure that military families have a warm, safe, modern, comfortable home is central to our plan for a generational change to military housing."



Honouring the

Nat
wil
who

MORE THAN 3,000 serving personnel, veterans and their families are expected to attend a Service of Remembrance at the National Memorial Arboretum next month to honour the 179 Forces fighters who died during Operation Telic.

The service, marking the 15th anniversary of the end of the conflict in Iraq, will also recognise the sacrifice of more than 6,000 who were injured during the coalition operation which toppled dictator Saddam Hussein.

UK Forces joined the US-led Coalition in March 2003. In the years that followed until its conclusion in May 2011, violence escalated as a growing insurgency developed into bitter sectarian conflict.

More than 120 aircraft and 8,000 RAF personnel were deployed, alongside Coalition partners and Iraqi troops, facing constant threats from roadside bombs, snipers and rocket attacks on forward operating bases across the region.

Harrier Force

Sgt Andrew Blake (*inset right*) deployed to Ahmed Al Jaber Air Base, Kuwait, in January 2003 as a JNCO with the five-strong Police Force Protection team supporting the Harrier Force of 1 and 4 Sqns, integrated with the US 5th Marine Expeditionary Force in Kuwait.

He said: "The most immediate challenge was the sudden transition from a cold UK winter to the intense heat of the Kuwaiti desert. Stepping off the C-130, I recall feeling as though I had walked into a wall of heat.

"Support from the US Marine Corps proved vital. UK personnel were granted access to US ablutions and canteen facilities and were supplied with the materials needed to construct defensive positions, including sandbags and barbed wire.

The Borrowers

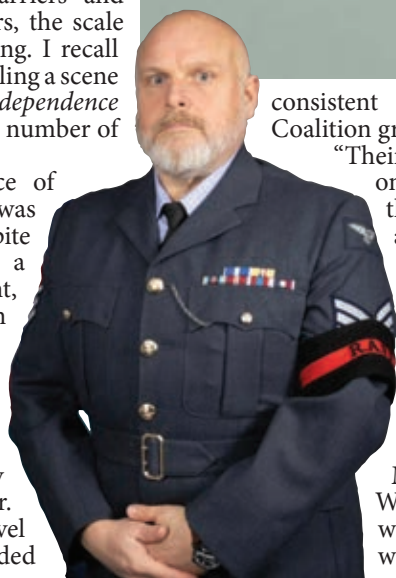
"The industrious efforts of the UK teams earned them the nickname 'The Borrowers.' Within weeks, UK-issued equipment began arriving, allowing British forces to establish a dedicated compound complete with tented accommodation, mobile ablutions and catering support.

"When compared with the vast array of US aircraft at Ahmed Al Jaber Air Base including A-10s, F-16s, F/A-18 Hornets, USMC Harriers and numerous helicopters, the scale difference was striking. I recall the flight line resembling a scene from the movie *Independence Day* due to the sheer number of American aircraft.

"The performance of the Harrier Force was exceptional. Despite operating with a modest complement, 10 jets from 1 Sqn and six from 4 Sqn, the RAF's contribution was significant.

"The Harriers' impact quickly became clear. Conducting low-level missions they provided

TONKA: RAF Tornado had vital role in Op Telic



consistent support to Coalition ground forces.

"Their ability to remain on station longer than many US aircraft, thanks to in-flight refuelling, meant that both British and American ground units frequently requested the RAF's 'Widow Makers' overhead. We really punched well above our weight.

"Conditions in the early stages were extremely austere. Adapting to extreme heat and frequent sandstorms presented a steep learning curve. Without acclimatisation, personnel were forced to adjust rapidly."

Chinook

Sqn Ldr Paul Kennard served with 18 Sqn, which deployed five Chinooks on HMS Ark Royal to insert Royal Marines of 40 Commando into the Al Fawr oil refinery ahead of the invasion.

He said: "The opening

phases of the conflict would not have been possible without what the Chinook did in the first 24 hours. The ability to seize and hold territory was crucial to success.

"What we were able to deliver in terms of capacity and flexibility with payload and troops was fundamental.

"Landing in the desert in the dark using NVGs [night vision goggles], the aircraft proved it was robust enough to take repeated hard landings. In the run up to the start of the war we did a lot of that, often in CBRN equipment and respirators.

Op Telic heroes

ational Memorial Arboretum service
I remember the 179 UK personnel
died and 6,000 injured in Iraq War



RAF HARRIER: 'Widow maker' provided support for ground forces



RELIABLE WORKHORSE: Chinooks were used to quickly insert troops onto the battlefield and proved robust and rugged in the heat

"During the first couple of landings there was absolute silence in the cockpit for 30 seconds afterwards while we got our heads back round how scared we had just been.

Engineers

"We had an aircraft with a hydraulic leak and didn't have a spare part. Our engineers took the broken part to the carrier workshop and they made us a new one. It worked perfectly. "It didn't leak and we flew the aircraft for weeks before the replacement part finally arrived.

We fitted it, and it leaked. "We were sometimes flying 20 hours a day. In the aftermath of one incident where we had grotesquely overstressed the aircraft we took it back to the carrier. "The engineers checked it over and told us it was absolutely fine and reset all the gauges. We went again a couple of hours later. That recovery was way outside the Chinook's published limitations. It was so rugged. "The fact we started with five aircraft and finished it with five aircraft is testament to the robustness of the Chinook. "Conditions were hard. The

temperature saps you and it takes a huge toll on the crew – particularly the rear crew. "As a pilot in the cockpit it's hot but you are resting most of the time – for the rear crew, they are working really hard in temperatures of 40-50°C. That's a hard graft. **Huge win** "The Chinook did everything the ground commanders asked us to do. "We brought everybody home that we went with, which in general war-fighting is a huge win."



CHINOOK FORCE: Sqn Ldr Paul Kennard, inset and seated

This advertorial contains references to suicide attempts which some people may find upsetting.

FROM SOLDIER TO CIVVY STREET. FINDING PEACE AFTER MEDICAL DISCHARGE.

For nearly two decades, Caroline served in the British Army. Her military life was filled with purpose and pride. But when her service abruptly ended, she faced invisible wounds, physical injury, and a deep sense of loss.

“The Army was all I wanted to do. Through it, I met my husband and served in amazing places, meeting people across the world.”

But behind those adventures were accumulating scars – the kind you can’t always see.

Long before her medical discharge, Caroline’s mental health was deteriorating.

“There were too many bad memories of previous tours. I didn’t tell anyone and kept it hidden.”

While deployed in Iraq, the weight became unbearable. She attempted to take her own life.

Back in the UK, Caroline faced bullying from colleagues who didn’t understand why she’d come home early. Six months later, she ruptured her Achilles tendon. The injury wasn’t taken seriously, and a delayed operation led to permanent nerve damage and drop foot – a life-changing disability.

But that wasn’t the only trigger. She was sent to Afghanistan, then posted to Cyprus – away from her husband, isolated, and barely coping. Over one weekend, she made other attempts to end her life.

“It didn’t work. On Monday, my alarm went off for PT. I was more scared of being charged for missing parade than what I’d done to my body. I made it to the parade ground and collapsed.”

She was airlifted to a UK mental health facility.

Caroline was later medically discharged. She found the process chaotic and negligent. Her care didn’t transfer. Her discharge paperwork was delayed. No guidance. No plan.

“I fell through every gap and felt like a failure.

“You lose everything. Your role. Your identity. Your future. You keep shaving bits off yourself to fit – but you just don’t.”

For years, Caroline struggled, but then she found hope in an unexpected way: an invitation to a Help for Heroes Christmas party.

That night, she met others who understood her and learnt how the Charity could support both her and her husband. From sporting and social activities to physical and mental healthcare, Caroline discovered that Help for Heroes offer services for anyone who served.

“I’ve now been with the Charity for ten years. Every year, there’s a bit of growth, a bit more healing. It’s not fast. It takes time.”

Today, Caroline has retrained through night school to become a gym instructor and personal trainer. She also tried new sports, adapted for her new reality.

“I kept clinging to the athlete I was before injury. At some point, I had to



accept that version had gone. So I tried something new.”

She earned qualifications in indoor rowing and powerlifting, joining the Help for Heroes Coaching Academy. In 2023, she became a powerlifting coach. Now, she coaches other veterans.

“One guy told me, ‘I never thought I’d get to do anything like this because I’m blind.’ So we adapted it. When he reached the right squat depth. The smile on his face was everything.”

Helping others heal through sport has become part of her own journey.

“I still struggle sometimes. But now, I can be the person I needed back then.”

Her message to other veterans still fighting for peace?

“You’ve already got determination built into you. You just need to channel it into something that lights you up. Whatever makes you feel strong again.

“When you do – you’ll feel it. That moment of pride. That freedom. That growth. And that’s everything.”

Win!

Aviation book

Competition



DISTINCTIVE LOOK: Vampire T11 G-VTII WZ507



FIGHTER JET: P-51H Mustang 'Crazy Horse,' Kissimmee 1997



AEROBATICS: Slingsby T67M-260 Firefly G-BWXJ, Earls Colne 2021

Let's Yak about aircraft

Bob and Keith focus on a shared love of aviation



PHOTOGRAPHER: Keith Wilson



RAF VETERAN: Pilot Bob Davy

WORLD-RENOWNED aviation photographer Keith Wilson and highly-experienced aviator Bob Davy have been combining their respective talents for more than two decades, flying and photographing a variety of aircraft.

Now the duo have produced *Warbirds to Workhorses, Bob and Keith's Book of Flight Tests* (Air World, pen-and-sword.co.uk), a detailed and highly-illustrated guide into what it's like to fly 15 of the world's iconic aircraft, ranging from the North American P-51 Mustang to the UK's last remaining airworthy and historically significant de Havilland Vampire T.11, and Bob's own Yak-3 UTI.

There's also a chapter on the Spitfire Simulator at Goodwood,



GOODWOOD: Bob receives Spitfire sim training from instructor Nigel Coverall

subtitled *When Did You Last Practice a Forced Landing?*

The new title features both military and civilian aircraft, from World War II to more modern designs. Bob explores each aircraft type from the pilot's perspective, revealing just how it handles.

This excellent book, lavishly illustrated and packed full of air-to-air photographs, also includes, for floatplane enthusiasts, a section on flying a Maule M-7-235B Rocket Amphibian on and off a lake in Essex. For aerobatics fans there are articles on the Pitts S-2A Special and Slingsby T.67M-260, and for airline enthusiasts, Bob takes the reader on a commercial flight in a BAe 146 from Paris to Dublin.

Bob learned to fly at Southend Airport before he started flying with the RAF, until progressive myopia ended his training. He transferred to commercial aircraft but kept his passion for military aviation, owning a succession of warbird trainers then a Yak-3 UTI, which he rebuilt. He has amassed a total of 16,000 hours



AUTHOR'S FAVOURITE: Yak-3UTI, North Weald, September 2021

Copies of the book up for grabs

YOU COULD win a copy of this superb book, for your chance to win one, answer this question correctly:

For how long have Bob and Keith been working together?

Email your answer, marked **Warbirds To Workhorses 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 1. Please include your full address with your entry.**

Win!



and flown a very impressive 300 fixed-wing types.

Bob and Keith first worked together just over 20 years ago when they combined their talents at White Waltham in 2005, flying and photographing an Aviat Husky Pup for a feature for *Pilot* magazine – the aircraft is featured in their new book.

The duo said: "As a team

we work very closely. That is inevitable in the environment we are operating in: close formation flying for air-to-air photography is a highly-skilled and demanding occupation. Flown badly it can be dangerous at best, and, at worst, fatal; that is why every flight is carefully briefed and even more carefully flown, with hand-picked cameraship pilots who

never compromise safety."

Bob revealed that his favourite aircraft are the P-51, the Bae Hawk T.1 and his beloved Yak-3, which he flies and bases in Belgium.

Keith is approaching photographing his 2,000th different air-to-air subject and said he still learns from every shoot he completes. Often asked what his 'hit rate' from a shoot usually is – how many good shots from a sortie he achieves – he said: "To be honest, this varies according to the demands of the shoot – the harder the difficulty factor, the lower the hit rate."

He added that he usually shoots around 300 images during a 'standard sortie' and expects to deliver a selection of around 100 to 150 images.

Bob and Keith said one of the hardest tasks when compiling their latest title was deciding what to leave out. They revealed that they are already planning the next volume.

Tracey Allen



RAF News

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SMOKE SIGNAL: Sending a sign for would-be rescuers



SHELTER: Taking cover against the harsh environment



FOOD FROM THE WILD: Anyone for a bunny burger?



IN A HOLE: Instructor briefs student about what to do when you've fallen through ice

NORTHERN EXPOSURE

Stunning scenery is cold comfort for SERE instructors in Canada

DEFENCE SURVIVAL experts put their skills to the test in the wilds of Canada as temperatures plunged to minus 40°C.

The Defence SERE Training Organisation's annual extreme weather drills put instructors through survival challenges in one of the harshest environments in North America.

The Canadian exercise, based in the forests of Manitoba, covers extreme cold weather training essential for personnel operating in the High North as Nato steps up security there.

It forms one of three annual tests for instructors, that also include desert and jungle survival training.

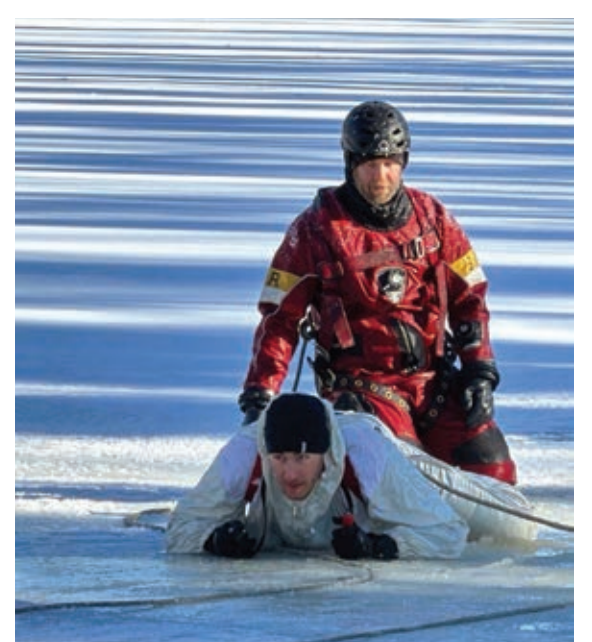
Once qualified, instructors go on to train Tri-Service personnel in the UK and from the Nato alliance.

A spokesman said: "The course teaches student instructors from across UK Defence and Nato the key Survival, Evasion and Extraction tools and techniques specific to that environment."

"Here we are qualifying 18 new Unit SERE Instructors in an Extreme Cold Weather environment, including students from the UK, Germany, Belgium, Czechia and Lithuania."

"The extreme cold and landscape in Manitoba provides a fantastic environment for our students to gain experience and learn."

"We owe a huge thank you to our Canadian counterparts at CFSSAT and the International Canadian School of Survival, who helped make the course a success."



ESCAPE: Student pulls himself from freezing water

There when you need her



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ready but is your
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Tim Morris



SURFER'S POINT



VENTURA HARBOR



BOTANIC GARDENS



CHANNEL ISLANDS

IN A modern world, where mass tourism rules, finding somewhere that offers a truly authentic experience can be difficult, especially in Southern California. Ventura County is, however, a travel destination that is a rare find. 'Ventura' is an abbreviation, taken from the original Spanish name for the settlement "San Buenaventura" and it beguiles you with old-school charm.

Picture soft, golden sands, warm sea breezes, a collection of unspoilt offshore islands and a welcoming downtown area that perfectly embodies the magic of small-town America. Throw in a picturesque harbour and a winding coast road, that feels straight out of a Hollywood movie, and you're starting to get the picture. It's not just the location that makes this place special, it's the welcome you get from the locals.

Ventura is tucked away on the sun-kissed Pacific coast, between Santa Monica and San Francisco. It's not a million miles from Hollywood, yet it's completely unpretentious and may just be the happiest place on Earth.

visitventuraca.com

Relax

With year-round sun and endless Californian sunsets, it's not hard to unwind in Ventura.

Start by taking a stroll down Ventura Pier, the focal point for the local community. Here, people come from miles around to enjoy an evening meander, walking out from the beach under red skies and over blue water. Built in 1872, it was once the longest wooden pier in the state, but the weather has taken its toll over the years. Nevertheless, it remains one of the most famous landmarks in the area.

Ventura Beach stretches away, in either direction, from the pier. Soft sands make it perfect for sunbathing and it has enough waves to attract the surf crowd. Want the beach to yourself? Roll in early on a weekday morning. The sand's untouched, the sun's up, and the waves are inviting. Not a morning person? Aim for golden hour (around 5pm) for warm orange skies that slip seamlessly into deep red sunsets.

Visiting the Ventura Botanical Gardens is also a must, for stunning views of the city and the ocean beyond. The garden spreads over 107 acres and contains 30,000 different



Venture to Ventura



PIER & BEACH

plants, brought from the five Mediterranean climate zones of the world (Chile, the Cape of South Africa, Southern Australia, the Mediterranean Basin and California). Entry is free on Fridays.

Soak up the vivid colours in the garden, then continue walking up to Serra Cross and Grant Park. Here you'll find the best views for miles and a humbling atmosphere. It's a special place, that locals hold dear. When the Thomas Fire raged across town in 2017, Serra Cross remained virtually untouched. Some may say, protected.

Travelling with young children? Take them paddling at Mother's Beach, where waves are calm and the slope of the sand is gradual.

Adventure

This is one of the world's most welcoming surf towns, so I have to start with that. Even beginners can experience the magic of catching perfect So-Cal waves at Mondos Beach.

Alternatively, head to Ventura Harbor Village, where you can stand up paddle board, or rent a pedal boat. If the exercise doesn't appeal, rent an electric boat, or just explore the harbour. You'll find great fresh seafood and some brilliant little boutiques.

Back at Ventura Pier you'll find Wheel Fun Rentals, where you can hire a bicycle for a cruise along the Ventura Promenade. Warm sea breezes, stunning ocean views and gentle exercise.

It's a great way to see the sights and get a golden tan along the way.

Finally, there's Ventura's secret weapon – a collection of islands, so unspoilt they absolutely must be seen. Called the 'Channel Islands', not to be confused with the Crown Dependencies of Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, Sark, or Herm, they sit between 12 – 55 miles off the California coastline. Island Packers offer cruises that will get you there: islandpackers.com.

I could write a whole piece on Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa and San Miguel, but my tip for adventure would be the sea cave kayaking experience on Santa Cruz Island.

Stay

We stayed at the Amanzi Hotel, part of the Ascend Collection. It's a boutique hotel, situated within easy walking distance of the beach and pier.

Theatres, shops, Surfer's Point and Plaza Park, the oldest park in the city, are also just short walks away. The hotel is situated just off historic US Coastal Highway

101, so it's well placed for those seeking a base for a main holiday, or those wanting a short break as part of a bigger California road trip.

You get the usual amenities that you would expect from a quality chain, including high-speed WiFi, a business centre, laundry services and an outdoor pool/hot-tub. You also get a 'manager's reception' in the afternoon, with a cocktail hour, and a free hot breakfast buffet each morning. We Brits are used to breakfast being included with hotel stays, but that's not the norm in the US, so it was a welcome change.

Guest rooms come with a 42-inch flat-screen TV, a microwave, a refrigerator, recharge stations, a work desk, a coffee maker, a hair dryer and ironing facilities. The beds are comfortably soft and it's beautifully clean. Staff are incredibly friendly and helpful.

See choicehotels.com/en-uk/california/ventura/ascend-hotels/ca92.

Downsides

The pool is very small and the pool area is tight, but the elephant in the room, which is actually more like a freight train through the room, is the proximity to the main highway/railway line. That's not an issue that's unique

to this particular hotel, because the freeway runs so close to the coast that it sits between most towns and beaches on this stretch. It does, however, rather ruin the ambiance of sitting by the pool, or on a balcony. Sound is well insulated in the rooms though.

Cost

Around \$180 per night (£136) in late April, with charges altering throughout the season.

Eat

In Southern California you absolutely must try the seafood! Grab a delicious bite on the pier, at Eric Ericsson's beach house, then stop off for a locally brewed beer at the Madewest Brewing Company.

Ventura Harbor Village offers a range of dishes, but the fresh fish cones from Coastal Cone take some beating. For oysters, check out the Jolly Oyster, on San Buenaventura Beach. It's only open at weekends but you can shuck your own oysters, right on the sand. It doesn't get more authentic than this.

Head downtown, to Ventura Avenue for authentic taquerias. Check out Johnny's for hard shell beef tacos, or Taqueria Cuernavaca (Mexican) for the quesabirria taco.



SERRA CROSS



AMANZI HOTEL



PLUSH:
Comfy rear seats

TECH:
TV and remotes

THE LEXUS LM is an interesting beast. LM stands for 'Luxury Mover' and that's a fitting title. If you want to travel in limousine luxury, without the garish image of rocking up in a 'stretch', this is what you're after.

Back in the 1990s I donned a black cap and took the wheel as 'Teapot' the chauffeur, for a series of comedy, limo-focused sketches on L!VE TV's motoring show *Drive L!VE*. After 30 years, I've reprised the role for this review. Ladies and gents, Teapot returns!

Exterior

Imagine listening to my voice. I'm speaking with a very gentlemanly British tone, delivered with extreme reverence and a gigantic undercurrent of mass sarcasm.

Sirs, Ma'ams, those of you who use the word 'dude' as a verb and any of you who expect to be greeted with the phrase WAG1 G... Your transport for this review will be a limousine that looks like a van.

When I say 'a van', I mean a van that you'd expect to find in a *Star Wars* film, complete with a front grille of Death Star proportions and an Imperial troop transporter profile. One wouldn't besmirch the Lexus brand by labelling it the Vader Van, Sir, but you may, of course, wish to contemplate a likeness.

And, to be quite precise, it may have van-like proportions, but it actually uses the same underpinning architecture as the Lexus NX and RX. So it looks like duck, quacks like a duck but it is, apparently an eagle, Sir. Let me get the door for you. The large side door slides silently open from the remote control – dub sounds of Death Star doors – cut to interior.

Interior

Let me start, Sir, by pointing out the huge TV screen. Yes, the TV just below the automatic frosted glass partition that shields me from your incessant moaning.

It's a 48 inch ultra-widescreen that is tilted to 15 degrees for the best viewing position. It can be configured as a full screen TV, a widescreen cinema, or as separate left and right screens to run different content.

There's hardly a trace of hard plastic to be seen anywhere and each occupant has a detachable smartphone-sized tablet which controls the TV, seats, audio,



BIG AND BOLD:
Lexus LM

Van-tastic Lexus limo

climate, electric blinds and ambient lighting.

The four-seater LM, in 'Takumi' spec, features thermal sensors which use infra-red surface temperature tech to scan the occupants and adjust the cabin atmosphere accordingly. Lexus calls this 'Climate Concierge' which, apparently, also uses nanoe™-X2 air purifying technology to 'minimise viruses and allergens'.



Let me liken the seats, Sir, Ma'am, to the type you'd expect to find in first-class air travel, but better. Less sway, less motion sickness, less low-frequency vibration and more support, delivered through the use of outstanding materials. There's an air pocket lumbar support system, and seven different massage settings. They also fold,

almost, flat (*see photo below*).

Audio is supplied by a bespoke Mark Levinson 3D surround sound system, with 23 speakers. If you turn down the stupendous audio system you'll note the epic sense of calm in the cabin. This is thanks to the acoustic glass and active noise cancelling system, plus a ton of insulation.

To further sweeten the experience, there's also a good sized refrigerator under the TV, which you may find useful for chilling your Moet.

The LM appears to be a jolly good attempt by Japan's biggest luxury brand to rival Rolls-Royce.

It's pretty good from where I sit too, with big, comfy front seats and a selection of materials that are an exemplar of Japanese attention to detail.

Traditional Japanese Yebane herringbone wood trim catches the eye and the steering wheel is tinted with a hint of Bengala red pigment.

The infotainment system is easy to use and there are physical knobs for the climate control, that are beautifully crafted.

On The Road

The LM is based on a car platform, but it's still tall and hefty. One, therefore, wouldn't dream of giving it, what these

terrible journalist types may describe as, a damn good wellying. I can, however confirm that it's a remarkably composed machine on the move, thanks to uprated body stiffness and double wishbone suspension, supported by adaptive dampers. It has nicely weighted steering and gives you a good idea of what the wheels are coping with below. Low wind/road noise on a run and electric running around town help to complete the package.

There are five drive modes including 'Rear Comfort'. This reduces body movement during acceleration and braking.

The LM is powered by a 2.5-litre, four-cylinder, Atkinson-cycle, petrol engine – the same one fitted in the NX and RX. In the LM, it's paired with two electric motors for a total system output of 247bhp and 176lb ft of torque. Performance is 0 to 62mph in 8.7 seconds and a top speed of 118mph.

The only downside for me is the CVT gearbox, which is not suited to the sedate ambiance of a limousine, at all. Although the power delivery is smooth and the engine provides plenty of propulsion, the serenity is shattered by the sound of massive over-revving while accelerating or overtaking.

Lexus LM

Pros

- Absolute serenity inside
- Nicely-weighted steering
- Composed ride
- Feels expensive

Cons

- CVT gearbox undoes the luxury feel
- Not a driver's car, all about the passenger

Verdict

The Lexus LM is, in my opinion, Sirs and Ma'ams, a brilliant, understated limousine. It will get you to your private jet in comfort and style. What's more, you'll appreciate that the seats in your car are better than those on your jet, complemented by cutting-edge technology and outstanding build quality. The unfortunate CVT gearbox is the only fault, that even a master chauffeur, like one's good self, struggles to keep under wraps. Perhaps an all-electric version would be a good idea, when one becomes available. Yours, Teapot Esq.

Sport

ATHLETICS

Men's teams leading the way after Army athlete disqualified

Headphones ruling sees aviator Chris jump up to second place in senior race

Daniel Abrahams

THERE WAS Army heartbreak and RAF joy at the IS Cross Country Championships as a disqualification saw aviator Flt Lt Chris Davies finish third, promoted to runner-up.

Army athlete Sam Griffith crossed the finish line first but he was wearing headphones – which is against the rules – and he was disqualified.

There were RAF team wins for the Senior Men and Masters Men, as well as the Women's Under 23s.

The Army-hosted competition saw contenders take to the grassy hills and boggy plains around Tedworth House in Tidworth, Wiltshire.

The men's race, over 10km, featured a strong field of competitors. With support out on the course, the RAF soon put themselves in a strong position.

Original second-placed RN athlete Lt Callum O'Neill was promoted to first after the disqualification, with a very

quick time of 32.16, with Flt Lt Davies second in 32.17, and Sgt Wood taking third in 32.38.

The women's event was over a challenging 8km course and was won by RN's Lt Chelsea Baker

Aviator AS1 Lucy Rycroft was seventh in the field of 38 in 32.01 for the Senior Women and first RAF lady over the line, with Sgt Catherine Cory taking second RAF female in a very credible 33.50, with AS1 Lucy Williams (U23) following closely in 33.53 – helping the U23 women to the RAF team title.

Post-race all teams gathered for the presentations. It was a triumph for both the RAF Senior and Masters' Male teams, coming first, joined by the U23 Ladies team, leading the RAF to an Inter-Services victory for the first time. The RAF Senior Ladies, Masters Ladies and U23 Men's team took second place to the Army.

The focus for several military distance athletes now switches to the London Marathon on April 26.

● Follow RAF cross country on Instagram @rafathletics.



FROM THIRD, TO SECOND: Flt Lt Chris Davies
PHOTOS: ARMY SPORT, NEIL KENNEDY, ALLIGIN PHOTOGRAPHY



SECOND PLACE: RAF ladies' teams



WINNING WAYS: RAF men's Senior and Masters teams claimed the honours

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

Two decades of DOMINANCE

20 years at top for men's skeleton and anglers



NO.1: Thornbury in 2022



PRIME EXAMPLES OF RAF SPORTING DOMINATION: The Sea Angling Boat Team in Plymouth with their Inter-Services trophy and the triumphant men's skeleton team in Norway after taking the title for the 20th time in a row

Daniel Abrahams

IN RECENT times 'success' has become a byword for RAF sport but last month's Inter-Services skeleton men's team's 20th title conjures up a new buzz word – dominance.

And the alpine athletes are not alone, with the other longest run of success being 19 years for the Sea Angling Boat Team.

RAF News Sport spoke with two of the faces behind the successes, Flt Lt Rhys Thornbury from the world of ice sports and angler WO Daz Rose.

International UKAF and RAF star Rose said: "It's a huge sense of pride to have gone on one of the most remarkable winning streaks in military sport. Only the Covid-19 hiatus briefly interrupted what has become a near two decade run."

Olympics

And Thornbury said: "The 20-year mark shows we are a team. Nobody takes part in skeleton until they join the RAF – so it's amazing to be part of a record like this. There are not many sports like that."

Continued success is the holy grail of all sports teams, so what secret weapons do the aviators have that has helped this?

Thornbury, who represented New Zealand at the winter

Olympics in South Korea in 2018, said: "We have a civilian coach who was ex-serving, Chf Tech Carl Beet (Ret'd). Twenty years ago, he was in the Service and part of the team. He has stayed with us in a coaching capacity – the other Services do not have that."

"In a team that changes constantly due to deployments and so on, he has been the one constant and now I coach as well,

so that line has continued. The other Services bring in external coaches and chop and change them, so that's definitely one advantage we have."

Rose said: "For us something that was a major challenge became an advantage, that we were scattered across the UK – often making collective preparation difficult. The diversity of fishing environments meant we unintentionally built a squad of highly-experienced specialists, with at least one top-class angler fishing at international level in every region of the UK."

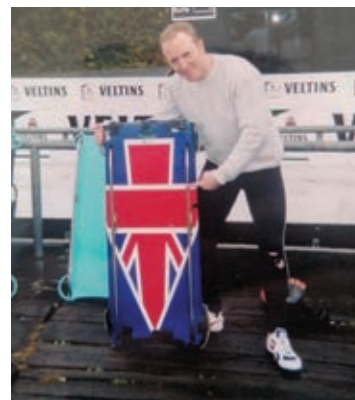
Thornbury added: "When I started, we were winning, so the senior men sliders set the tone, and newcomers see the level and what is required, but it's not pressured, people just step up to the plate."

"I don't think the time we have won for is seen as a pressure, it is much more a case of 'do your best and results will come' but keeping it fun and safe."

Rose can pinpoint the moment everything started to click, the Royal Navy hosted Inter-Services 2009 in Arbroath: "We'd already been shaping tactics and sharing knowledge, and when Arbroath was announced we already had a Scottish international in our ranks. That insider knowledge ultimately contributed to a decisive RAF victory – much to the



BIG FISH: WO Daz Rose



SECRET WEAPON: Skeleton's Carl Beet

surprise of the hosts."

The two teams both share one huge similarity, being able to adapt, and two eureka initiatives, the Festival of Sea Angling and trials and development weeks for skeleton.



SLIDER: Flt Lt Rhys Thornbury

Thornbury said: "We're always looking for new members, the team is always changing, never the same five guys – there is no one person that is key."

"So, people cannot say; 'Oh they only win because of so and so', the truth is everyone steps up and adjusts to what is needed."

Rose added: "The success story is due to our ability to evolve and adapt, and a commitment to continuous improvement. For us the game changer was the festival, now known as New Member Engagement, even 19 years later it remains a defining difference between the Services."

"This structured introduction builds skills, confidence and tactical awareness from day one. The result? A consistently strong talent pipeline."

Thornbury said: "We know the type of person we are after physically-wise, and our trials allows us to find them. At the development weeks we simply let people go at their own tempo. We've accrued a lot of knowledge within the sport, so that can always be dialled in – but we keep it chilled, we don't focus on winning, that will take care of itself."

And it seems to have done very nicely for both teams, two decades of success do not lie.

● Follow RAF Sea Angling on Facebook at: Royal Air Force Angling and Skeleton on Instagram @raf_skeleton_team.

DARTS

On the oche for new RAF tournament

Event is precursor to Inter-Services champs



LEADING THE WAY: A Tri-Service Darts event was held at RAF Leeming last year, with the winner going on to represent the UK

Daniel Abrahams

THE JUGGERNAUT that is RAF darts hit another fast lane as news of its first-ever championship was announced.

It only became a recognised sport in the Service in February last year and since then the association has been hunting down the opportunity to hold its first Inter-Services tournament.

That requires it to first stage a RAF championship, which has now been scheduled for May 28 at RAF Cosford.

"This is an really exciting opportunity. Now that the old stigma has gone from darts, players are being recognised for the dedication and talent that is required to be successful in the sport," said Flt Lt Daz White, OIC RAF High Wycombe Darts.

The Cosford event will be a 128-player knockout tournament,

which will also determine the Inter Station Champion for 2026.

The winners of these Championships have been offered a place on Operation Bullseye – a charity darts exhibition in association with the PDC on July 2.

Within the first 12 months, the RAFDA has established an active 14-team league with players across London, the Midlands, Oxfordshire, Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Scotland, the South Coast and the Falklands.

There are other initiatives forming to grow the sport ready to take on the Army and Navy in the first Inter-Services darts competition.

RAF Darts Association President AVM Simon Edwards said: "Darts has always been a game that almost anyone can play or get involved in. It offers inclusivity and opportunities that others simply cannot. When we

took the sport to RIAT last year, we attracted crowds and really engaged with the public – it was great to see."

White added: "It is an honour to lead such a dedicated team to organise this event on behalf of the RAFDA.

"I only ever played darts for recreation and enjoyment before retiring from rugby. It has become a mental health coping strategy and part of my recovery programme.

"I hope to be part of the RAFDA development team of the future, to help others to reach their potential and maybe help the RAF to win the Inter-Services."

● **To enter the RAF championship, contact your Station Darts OIC or your PED Flight for the online form, or email the RAFDC secretary: martin.knight993@mod.gov.uk.**

BOXING



RAF BOXERS: History-makers

Boxers take Inters title after 54 years

RAF BOXING is celebrating after winning the Inter-Services for the first time in more than half a century.

The overwhelming victory at HMS Nelson in Portsmouth means the aviators take the crown after last holding it in 1972 – 54 years ago.

The RAF won four of the seven championship bouts to overcome traditional favourites the Army, with the Navy getting the wooden spoon after struggling to field enough boxers to contend for the title.

Vice-captain Sgt Cameron Lewis (RAF) took the deciding bout when he beat the Army's Cpl Aaron Doherty by unanimous decision.

Results for the RAF were: Men's 60kg, AS1(T) Jaydon Johnson by split decision; Men's 62.5kg: AS1 Ky-Mani Coleman by split decision; Men's 65kg: AS1(T) Blaine Lambert by split decision; Men's 70kg: defeat by split decision Cpl Arran Devine (RAF); Men's 80kg: Sgt Cameron Lewis by unanimous decision.

FITNESS

Teams needed for first Cosfit Games

Daniel Abrahams

"WE ARE looking for the fittest in the RAF," says Cpl Jess Stewart, OIC of the inaugural Cosfit Games 2026, coming next month.

Stewart is the brainchild of the event, which will see 18 teams of four (male, female and mixed) compete throughout the day at Cosford in pool, gum and athletics challenges.

She said: "This is the first of its kind, there have been similar before, but this is a revamp from a slightly different angle.

"The 2018 Resilience Games worked well and challenged personnel mentally and physically; particularly their robustness for operational fitness. But it was an individual event. This time we have gone for teams, to attract more people and cover the teamwork aspect of things – which in the military is vital."

She added: "The day is open to all. We would obviously like loads of PTIs, but the door is open to all.

"There is already a good buzz going around about this, with

people putting out challenges and so on. RAF Cosford station commander Wg Cdr Ruth Wilson is onboard, along with Gym OIC Sqn Ldr Paul Giblin.

"The reaction has been great. I have used a few personnel as a sounding board who have loved the idea, and the PTIs have kicked off an online buzz, which is great.

"We want a good bit of rivalry, anyone who did the Resilience Games, we would love to see them come along and try this out."

Full details on the disciplines are not being released but the day will feature two events in the morning and two after lunch, with one being strength based, another cardio based in the pool, a third will be anaerobic on the athletics track and another will feature cardiovascular equipment.

Accommodation is available for the night before and after the event on May 6 and the cut-off date for entries is April 22.

Further details via your station PTI or email: Jessica.Stewart181@mod.gov.uk.

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

NETBALL

Head coach Bullen in seventh heaven



INTER-SERVICES: Sgt Emily Fitzpatrick on the attack, with Flt Lt Maisey Osborne facing her, during game against the Army

RUGBY UNION

Gardner is aiming to 'scare' the opposition

BUOYANT RAF Rugby men's head coach Tom Gardner is hoping to put the frighteners on the opposition ahead of this year's Inter-Services.

The Brize Norton-based Warrant Officer spoke to *RAF News* as he put his charges through their paces at their final pre-tournament training camp, at Cosford.

He said: "We came very close last year in both games and now we are a known threat. We always go out to win and back ourselves and we are out to scare a few people this time.

"Both the Navy and the Army will have to be on their mettle when they play us. We have a good mix of youth and experience and things are looking good for us.

"We have respect for both teams, but are a match for anyone.

Fijians

"The Navy, last year's champions, play a structured percentage game and go for territory, while the Army are perhaps more entertaining and free flowing. They play a running game, particularly through their Fijian internationals. We are a blend of the two styles and will adapt to challenge whatever we face on the day."

The squad has been affected by the absence of vice-captain Fg Off Alex Stanley, due to work commitments, and Fg Off Kieran Forbes, through injury, and also retirements in the coaching staff.

"It is a real test for the front row in particular," said the Airborne Engineering Squadron WO.

"Alex and Kieran are big losses, but all three teams will have had similar challenges."

The Inter-Service championships kick off at Cinch Stadium, Franklin's Gardens, home of Northampton Saints RFC, on April 18, when the RAF play the Royal Navy.

The aviators face the Army at Kingsholm Stadium, Gloucester, on May 16. Tickets for both games are available at: northamptonstains.co.uk and gloucesterrugby.co.uk respectively.

RAF players dominate UKAF squad

Daniel Abrahams

AFTER THE thrill ride that was netball's 2026 Inter-Service championship, the RAF celebrated with seven players being selected for the UKAF squad.

The selection of AS1 Liv Towie, Sgt Kayleigh Briercliffe, Flt Lt Maisey Osborne, Cpl Libby Weddle, AS1 Meiva Makutu, Sgt Emily Fitzpatrick and Fg Off Alexandra Hart means RAF players now make up 50 per cent of the Tri-Service set-up.

The squad kicks off its matches in Switzerland this month, before a clash against a yet to be confirmed Super League team at Cosford in May



HEAD COACH: WO Claire Bullen

and an international fixture against Wales at Imjin Barracks, Innsworth, Gloucester, in June.

Osborne, who is celebrating a third year of UKAF selection, said: "It's incredible to see how many RAF players have been selected and a real testament to our performance at the Inters.

"From the opportunity to play together in Switzerland and the experience we will gain from the match against Wales, our performance



SELECTED: Sgt Emily Fitzpatrick

next season is looking stronger and stronger."

RAF netball head coach WO Claire Bullen said: "To have 50 per cent of the squad RAF is a true representation of the dominance we had during the Inters.

"Even if the results did not go our way at the champs, the level of performance has been reflected in the UKAF selection and it is something special.

"I am proud of the players and one very proud RAF team manager."

● Follow UKAF netball on Instagram @ukafsport.

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

5 RAF Sport

pages of



20 years at top for bobsleigh team and boat anglers



See p24

HOCKEY



SIX OF BEST: Aviators on their way to victory over the Army
PHOTOS: GRAEME MAIN

Perry's hat-trick hero as men do the double



WOMEN: Lost 2-0 to Army

Staff Reporter

A STUNNING 6-0 win against the Army at Aldershot was enough for the RAF men to take the Inter-Services title.

Having lost 4-1 to the Navy in the first game, the aviators needed something special – and found it to score half a dozen times and take the championship on goal difference, after the soldiers had beaten the Senior Service 5-3.

PTI Cpl Scott Perry was the star of the show, with a stunning hat-trick helping the RAF to

Outdoor title to add to the indoor crown

victory, along with strikes from Flt Lt Finn Carvalho, Cpl Paul Goldie and Cpl Owen Stephenson.

It was a cleansweep for the RAF, as they also won the indoor title earlier in the season.

RAF captain AS1 James Holt said: "We knew, if we played our game, that we could beat the Army. We needed a big win and, fortunately, it went our way."

The women lost out to two late goals from the Army's

Welsh international 2Lt Hannah Cozens, who went on to reclaim the crown they won last year.

There was some success for the ladies though, who earlier in the competition trounced the Navy 4-0.



TO EVERY WOMAN WHO WORE THE UNIFORM

We understand that your military experiences are unique.

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Our support is:

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Visit: helpforheroes.org.uk/exservicewomen



R'n'R



'World's worst singer' – Wendi Peters in Glorious!

● See page 3

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

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



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**COMBAT
STRESS**
FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH



Theatre
Glorious!
UK tour

Wendi goes with the Flo

FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS was a tour de force. The American socialite, dubbed 'the worst singer in the world' didn't let the fact that she couldn't hold a tune stop her from staging classical recitals – she even sold out New York City's legendary Carnegie Hall.

Dressed in elaborate costumes and supported by her faithful accompanist, Cosmo McMoon (*EastEnders*' Matthew James Morrison), the inimitable Florence, whose famous fans included Cole Porter and Irving Berlin, was able to indulge her passion for performing only after the death of her wealthy father.

"While he was alive, her father didn't want her singing in public," revealed actor and singer Wendi Peters who plays Florence in *Glorious!* by Peter Quilter, now on a nationwide tour.

It's at the Oxford Playhouse until April 18, then goes to venues including Haymarket, Basingstoke (April 23-25), Cheltenham's Everyman Theatre (April 28 to May 2) and the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry (May 19-23).

Best-known for her role as Cilla Battersby in *Coronation Street*, Wendi is a seasoned

Peters reprises role of world's worst singer

musical theatre performer and, unlike Florence, has a lovely voice.

She said: "*Glorious!* is such a joyous show, we're having great fun. The audience has two hours of complete joy, which is so lovely in this world at the moment."

She has reprised the role after a limited run at the Hope Mill Theatre in Manchester which garnered rave reviews.

Glorious! first wowed audiences in 2005 in its original West End production starring

character, she's an inspiration to all of us really – enjoy life, don't worry about what people say and be a bit more Florence."

Set in 1944 (although, said Wendi, Florence is still living in the Twenties) the show follows the heiress as she prepares for her

Maureen Lipman. The 2016 film version, entitled *Florence Foster Jenkins*, starred Meryl Streep and Hugh Grant.

Wendi added: "I love playing her, she's such an extraordinary



TOUR DE FORCE: Wendi as Florence, with Cosmo (Matthew James Morrison)

concerts, builds an unlikely friendship with Cosmo and defies her critics to follow her dreams.

But she wasn't totally devoid of musical ability and, as a child, showed precocious talent as a pianist.

Wendi explained: "She played at the White House when she was six. Personally, I don't think she really heard the extent of what she was singing. She was deaf in one ear, but she truly thought she had this most wonderful voice,

and she was giving this joie de vivre to people and they were loving it."

The unstoppable Florence even self-funded an album – Wendi quipped "Nobody else was going to" – which you can find on online music streaming services.

Wendi added: "She truly was a terrible singer, bless her, but I adore Florence, her hutzpah and her love of life."

● **Go to:** gloriousplay.com for tour details.

By Tracey Allen



Theatre
Lenny Henry
UK tour

FOR MORE than five decades, actor, writer and comedian Lenny Henry has been telling stories – on stage, on screen and through a host of characters. His new live tour, *Still At Large*, is part stand-up, part storytelling and part conversation.

In his first UK tour since his critically acclaimed *Cradle to Rave* in 2010, *Still At Large* will see Lenny return to the experiences that shaped him while also exploring the ideas, challenges, and creative sparks driving him today.

The tour kicks off at Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn on May 5, then tours across the UK before culminating at London's Hackney Empire on November 3.

Lenny said: "I'm so excited to bring *Still At Large* to the theatres around the UK. It's good to be back on the road with my new tour because I'm this Lenny now – I'm not 16 anymore, it's like I've shed 15 skins since then!"

"I'm going to come on stage and tell some stories and then the audience can ask questions, too. Come and



Lenny's living it large

join me – you never know, you might learn something new."

From the days of *The Lenny Henry Show* and *Chef!*, acclaimed dramatic performances in *Othello*, *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* and *Every Brilliant Thing*, to the co-creation of Comic Relief and multiple children's books including *Tyrone's Cool Crown* and *The Boy With Wings*, Lenny traces the roles, characters and moments that have defined his remarkable career – and shares what continues to inspire him now as he reflects on a life lived out loud.

● **Go to:** Fane.co.uk/Lenny-Henry for ticket details.



Film Review
Broken English (15)
Out now

A Faithfull portrayal

THE TURBULENT life of late music legend Marianne Faithfull is explored in this stylised twist on the music documentary from directors Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard. Recorded not long before her death in January 2025, Faithfull appears in the film with an oxygen tube beneath her nose, having recently suffered from Covid – a reminder of her fragility, set against the power and toughness of her voice.

The film frames her testimony within a playful Orwellian conceit: "The Ministry of Not Forgetting", with Tilda Swinton as The Overseer and George MacKay as a clerk archiving Marianne's life in her own words. There are also the obligatory talking heads, cutely rebranded as "reinforcements", alongside performances of Faithfull's iconic songs by artists including Courtney Love, Nick Cave and Warren Ellis.

Discovered at a party by The Rolling Stones' manager Andrew Loog Oldham while still a teenager, Faithfull would soon release two debut albums simultaneously: one folk, one pop, immediately marking herself as an artist hard to define or pigeonhole. And yet the following decades of partying, drug addiction and even homelessness would make Marianne a target for the press, who couldn't resist punching down, as we witness in archive interviews.

Dismissed as just Mick Jagger's girlfriend, she was perhaps further challenged simply for having opinions of her own. It provides a shocking glimpse back at the casually ingrained misogyny of previous decades. It is perhaps for this reason that MacKay provides the opposite energy: less confrontational, less self-assured, and eager to listen to her anecdotes



SELF-AWARE: Marianne Faithfull with 'clerk' George MacKay

and hilariously unapologetic takes.

What emerges most strongly is Faithfull's strength of character in the face of such brutal attacks. Whether in present-day interviews or archival press appearances, she is eloquent, funny and utterly herself.

For all its bells and whistles, *Broken English* is doing something genuinely interesting with the documentary form. Like Forsyth and Pollard's *20,000 Days on Earth*, it resists the usual template in favour of something more performative and self-aware. At times the artifice can feel distracting, but it is also refreshing and, crucially, it still captures the essence of Marianne Faithfull.

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



Exhibitions

Schiaparelli: Fashion Becomes Art
V&A, London, until November 8



STRIKING: Mae West wearing Elsa Schiaparelli in *Every Day's A Holiday* (1937)

Skeleton dress creator Elsa had fashion in her bones

DESIGNS CREATED with Salvador Dali, along with artworks by Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau and Man Ray, are among the items on display at the blockbuster exhibition *Schiaparelli: Fashion Becomes Art*, now on at the V&A in London, until November 8.

It is the first exhibition ever staged in the UK devoted to one of the 20th century's most innovative fashion designers, whose stunning creations embraced Surrealism – from a hat shaped to look like an upside-down shoe to the 'Skeleton' dress conceived in collaboration with Dali.

Spanning the 1920s up to today, the show traces the origins of the Italian fashion house Elsa Schiaparelli founded, from its first, paradigm-shifting garments, through to its present-day incarnation in the hands of its creative director, Daniel Roseberry.

A spokesperson for the V&A



DALI-INSPIRED: Skeleton dress



VOGUE 1940: Designer Elsa Schiaparelli wearing black silk dress with crocheted collar of her own design and a turban (Photo by Fredrich Baker Condeë Nast via Getty Images)

said: "The exhibition places her [Schiaparelli] at the nexus of innovation, a key figure within a stellar sphere of fashion, art and performance which spanned Paris, London, and New York in the years between the two world wars and up to her retirement in 1954.

"It highlights the history of a female entrepreneur and showcases her celebrated, yet little-seen, garments from the history of fashion. The show is the first of its kind to spotlight the London branch of Schiaparelli, its dynamic and independent clients and the founder's own involvement in the satellite location."

The exhibition comprises more than 200 objects, including garments, accessories, jewellery, paintings, photographs, sculpture, furniture, perfumes and archive material.

The spokesperson added: "The diversity of media, styles and subjects celebrate the house of Schiaparelli's boundless creativity."

● Go to: vam.ac.uk for more.



Theatre

Priscilla Queen of the Desert
UK tour

Strictly's Kev da different tune i

... but Clifton certainly has

STRICTLY COME DANCING professional Kevin Clifton is now leading the cast in the new UK tour of feelgood musical *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*.

Featuring spectacular costumes and a banging soundtrack of 80s and 90s disco anthems including *Hot Stuff*, *It's Raining Men*, *I Will Survive* and *Girls Just Wanna Have*

Fun, the heartwarming show also stars Adèle Anderson (*Fascinating Aida*) as Bernadette, Nick Hayes (*Groundhog Day*, *The Old Vic*) as Felicia/Adam, and Peter Duncan (*The Dame*; Edinburgh Festival/Park Theatre, *Blue Peter*) as Bob/Preacher.

Kevin grew up as a competitive ballroom and Latin dancer. Post-*Strictly*, he's been crossing off his dream roles in musicals, like Cosmo Brown in *Singin' in the Rain*, and delighting his goth-era younger self by performing in *Rock of Ages*.

Most recently, he's been touring with *2:22 A Ghost Story* with his partner and *Strictly* co-champion, Stacey Dooley. He is now taking on the role of Tick, and drag alter-ego Mitzi (pictured left), for the 30th anniversary tour of *Priscilla* – the role played by Hugo Weaving in the 1994 Oscar-winning film version on which the stage show is based.

Strictly's BAFTA award-winning costume designer Vicky Gill and her team have designed and created more than 100 costumes for the show, which follows the adventures of three friends travelling across the Australian outback in a dilapidated bus nicknamed Priscilla, to put on the show of a lifetime.

Priscilla tours until July 18 and visits venues including Wales Millenium Centre Cardiff (April 20-25), Aylesbury's Waterside Theatre (May 4-9), Brighton Theatre Royal (June 16-20) and Sheffield's Lyceum Theatre (June 29-July 4).

Joanne Clifton

Kevin (brother of another *SCD* pro, Joanne Clifton, also a musical theatre star) revealed that musicals were always a big part of his life.

He said: "When me and my sister were kids, growing up in Grimsby, mum and dad took us to London to see *Cats*. Apart from pantos, I think that was the first big musical theatre show I'd seen. My mind was blown. I couldn't believe what was happening. The flamboyance of it all, with the cats coming through the audience. I just wanted more of it. The next one was *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*. It felt like the whole country was talking about it and I remember falling in love with it."

He explained: "For me, everything was about ballroom and Latin competitions. Mum and Dad were dancers so they were training us when we were kids. Dad would talk a lot about the technique and stuff you have to practise, but would always



POZ ADVENTURE: B

drill into us that you have to affect the whole point of the display of technique make people excited inspire or entertain

"His way of was to take us to you feel when you're carried away story or a dance? approached my d

How does he stamina when on He explained: whole life. Once [Stacey] was born her and Stacey. I people living rock That's not me! I'm after my voice and all that stuff?"

Priscilla is a transphobia and he is proud to be

He explained: than ever. There now. My late unc something he alv relate to what it's sexuality, but we outsider. I grew u was ballroom dan fake tan for comp

Edited by Executive Features Editor Tracey Allen

ances to a in Priscilla n't lost his sparkle



Bernadette (Adèle Anderson) and Bob (Peter Duncan)

PHOTOS: JOHAN PERSSON

the most important thing is to connect with people emotionally. That's what we do. It's not just a show. You've got to go out and connect, make them want to cry, in them.

demonstrating that to us it's about musicals. He'd say, how do you're watching this? When you're away with a character and a story. So that's always been how I connect with dancing."

keep up momentum and energy on tour?

"I've sort of been on tour my whole life. Minnie [his daughter with Bernadette], it got harder. I really miss her. But you hear stories about her 'n' roll lifestyles on tour. I'm very nerdy about looking after her energy, tea and honey, and her health."

story of resilience against homophobia and Kevin said it was a part of the show.

"I think we need it more than ever. There's so much divisiveness in the world. He was gay, and I think it's important to have stories like his that we've struggled with. I can't imagine being judged for your sexuality. I can all relate to being an outcast in Grimsby and my thing about being outcast. I had to wear bottled petitions, and I'd come into



THE GLAM SQUAD: Mitzi and the girls in Priscilla

school with an orange neck. While everyone else was hanging out and playing footie on the weekend, I was doing ballroom dancing with my sister. She was a bit taller than me so I had to have a perm to make myself look taller. I was that kid! It was that feeling of being different and being laughed at."

He added: "I've never been the most confident person. Being on stage is the safe bit. So I relate to Tick when he, as his drag character Mitzi, can be anything he wants to be, whereas he's got all this conflict when he's just himself."

"I've always felt for people who feel they're out on the outside."

● Go to: priscillauktour.com for full tour details.



Competition
Cold War Aircraft
in Scale: Avro Vulcan
fonthill.media



Build a Vulcan



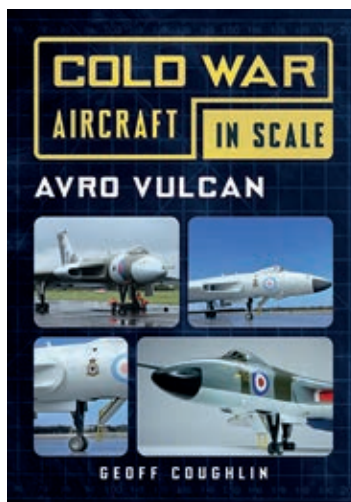
THE AVRO Vulcan ranks as one of the most popular of the RAF's aircraft, thrilling air show crowds with its distinctive sound, unique look and stunning displays. From schoolkids to veterans, admiration for the mighty V-bomber, that was retired from RAF service in March 1993, remains undimmed.

The last airworthy Vulcan, XH558, made its final flight in October 2015.

The aircraft was an integral part of Britain's nuclear deterrent. During the Cold War several RAF squadrons were equipped with Vulcans, including some assigned to Quick Reaction Alert sorties to counter immediately any threat launched by the Soviet Union.

The Vulcan was also suited to conventional bombing missions. In 1982, in Operation Black Buck during the Falklands War, Vulcan B.2s carried out the longest-ranged bombing raids in history up to that time.

Cold War Aircraft in Scale: Avro Vulcan by Geoff Coughlin,



GET BUILDING: Modeller's dream

recently published by Fonthill (fonthill.media), rrp £16.99, contains extensive photographs and profiles, unique reference materials and detailed step-by-

step scale model builds in all the main scales: everything you need to inspire, inform and instruct you to create your own showpiece replica of this iconic Cold War bomber.

The book features a foreword by former Vulcan pilot Gp Capt Roger Dunsford (Ret'd) and we have copies up for grabs.

For your chance to win one, simply tell us:

What was the name of the longest-ranged bombing raids in history carried out by the Vulcan during the Falklands War?

Email your answer, marked Vulcan book competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe HP14 4UE, to arrive by May 1.

Please include your full postal address or your entry will not be considered.



Music
Ministry of Sound Classical
Sandown Park Racecourse, July 24

Judge Jules takes reins at Sandown

LEGENDARY DJ Judge Jules will join Ministry of Sound Classical on July 24 at Sandown Park Racecourse.

For almost four decades, since hitting the decks in 1987, he has influenced a generation as a pioneer of the club scene.

Ministry of Sound Classical is a live concert-format production that takes iconic dance and club music and re-orchestrates it.

Celebrating more than 30 years of stand-out dance anthems, the 2026 edition promises

the power of an orchestra and sensational vocalists, all set to a stunning laser light production.

Judge Jules said: "I have been a part of Ministry Classical shows before at the Royal Festival Hall and The O2 and I've done some marvellous venues that I'd never imagined. If you add the right records to an orchestration, and the magic of an orchestra to an amazing outdoor venue like Sandown Park Racecourse, I think it's a really magical combination."

Sarah Drabwell, General Manager at Sandown Park Racecourse, said: "As one of the most recognised names in dance music, Judge Jules's legacy within



CLUB CLASSIC: DJ Judge Jules

the industry and connection with audiences worldwide promises a memorable live experience for both racegoers and music fans alike."

The Sandown Park Nights series combines afternoon racing with full headline performances from some of the nation's biggest music stars. Billy Ocean (*inset left*) will be performing live after the racing on July 29.

● Go to: thejockeyclub.co.uk for ticket details.



Your Announcements

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

Death

TOMKINS Simon, Sqn Ldr, passed away in hospital on March 21 aged 80 after suffering a heart attack the previous evening. Simon flew the Phantom FGR2 in the Strike Attack and Air Defence roles with 31 and 29 Sqsns respectively before joining 16 Sqn in the early Tornado days. After that he flew commercially with Air Europe, Eurocypria, British Caledonian and Thomas Cook, finishing on the A330 aircraft. A service to celebrate his life will be held on May 1 at 2.30pm in Christ's Church, Shamley Green (GU5 0UD) near Guildford – further details from: robsargent2@gmail.com.



Sqn Ldr Simon Tomkins

Seeking

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

anyone that knew him could contact me, Norman Lee, on: argentis71@gmail.com.

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

Please contact Kathryn Masters by email: falconfieldassociationtng@gmail.com or mobile: 07885 378090.

Associations

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

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

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

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

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

There will also be a visit to the Houses of Parliament on the afternoon of Friday, May 8, followed by dinner at the Archduke in Waterloo, then a visit to the Tower of London on the afternoon of May 9.

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

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

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

Tribute to comms personnel



CEREMONY: Air Cdre John Wariner (above) unveiled the memorial (inset, below)

A DEDICATION ceremony for the Trade Group 11 Association Memorial took place at the National Memorial Arboretum last month, writes **Gerald Rudman.**

The memorial was unveiled by Air Cdre John Wariner, ex 592 SU, TCW, & 90 SU, and the dedication was performed by Chaplain Rev Alan Kent MTh.

A total of 141 guests attended the memorial dedication and the get-together afterwards at the

Aspect Pavilion.

The memorial is dedicated to the many communications personnel who wore the Sparks Badge with pride and who served in operational theatres worldwide, in times of war and peace.

The decision to erect a memorial was taken at the 2024 Association Annual General Meeting, from an initial idea by Chair Ray Quant, aided by his team of Bob Gair, Mick Turmaine, Mick Williams and Brian McInnes.



VIBRANT SPACE: Air Cdre Harper plants herbs in the polytunnel

Green fingers at Northolt

RAF NORTHOLT officially opened its new community allotment polytunnel – a large tunnel-like structure used for growing plants and food – last month, funded through a station grant of more than £41,000 from the RAF Benevolent Fund.

Air Cdre Simon Harper, the RAFBF's Director of Operations, said: "The Fund is immensely proud to support RAF Northolt in bringing the Wing Roots polytunnel project to life. This vibrant space is far more than an area to grow produce – it is a place where serving personnel and their families can learn new skills, support one another, and strengthen the sense of community that is so vital to Service life."

Gp Capt Lee Wales, Northolt's Station Commander, added: "We are truly grateful for the Fund's support. This amazing facility will contribute towards the wellbeing of station personnel over the years to come. I am delighted to see it is already being utilised by our Whole Force, especially families."

How to use our service

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

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SPECIAL PROJECT: NAM volunteers have completed restoration work on Lightning T5 XS417. Inset, a close-up of the 'Firebird' tailfin markings

Lightning shows tailfin splendour

PROGRESS HAS been made with carried-over restoration work on Lightning T5 XS417 at Newark Air Museum (NAM).

"The recent warmer weather has allowed the museum's volunteers to apply the 56 Sqn 'Firebird' markings to the tailfin of XS417," said a NAM spokesman.

"This work brings the

successful completion of this particular project much closer to a conclusion," he added.

And the cockpit of Lightning F6 from XR757, which had been on loan to the museum, left NAM's site in Nottinghamshire at the end of last month for a new home in North East Lincolnshire.

The spokesman added: "This cockpit arrived at

NAM in summer 2015, when it had to vacate its previous display location at the former RAF Scampton airfield.

"Its new display location is much closer to the owner's home in Lincolnshire.

"During its time at NAM there were limited opportunities for museum visitors to view inside the cockpit."

Fund reveals awards shortlist

THE RAF Benevolent Fund has unveiled the shortlist for its 2026 annual awards, with the ceremony set to take place in central London on April 30.

"Earlier this year, the public were invited to submit nominations through the Fund's website, recognising individuals, groups and organisations who have gone above and beyond in support of the RAF Family.

"A panel of judges reviewed entries and selected the final shortlist," said a spokesperson for the charity.

"The Awards provide an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the remarkable dedication of the RAFBF's supporters. Serving personnel, veterans and non-serving supporters all play a vital role in supporting it - from raising funds to delivering essential welfare services that help the RAF Family



WINNER: Gary Walker receives the Special Recognition Award at the RAFBF Awards 2025
PHOTO: OLLIE DIXON, RAFBF

when they need it most," the spokesperson added.

AVM Chris Elliot, the Fund's Chief Executive, said: "Our annual awards are a key opportunity for us to come together to recognise the extraordinary support we receive from people and organisations who have given so much in the service of others.

"Thanks to their dedication, the Fund can

continue its life-changing work now and in the years ahead. Congratulations to everyone shortlisted this year."

RAF Henlow, Leeming and Odiham are shortlisted for RAF Station of the Year and on the shortlist for RAF Formation or Squadron of the Year are 27 Sqn, RAF Music Services and RAF Benson Medical Centre and Abingdon SMC.

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R'n'R



Prize Crossword No. 407

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

Across

- 7. Mythologically, I caused awful result underestimating Sun, originally (6)
- 8. **And 1 Down.** Sable Airlines converted Nevada facility (6,3,4)
- 10. Missing point, Alberto's dispatched to offenders' institution (7)
- 11. Islamic decree from corpulent Western Australia (5)
- 12. Cast off garden building (4)
- 13. Fight over piece of paper (5)
- 17. George Bernard left piece of fabric (5)
- 18. **And 25 Across.** He and Holy Jean upset Defence Secretary (4,6)
- 22. **See 19 Down**
- 23. Teacher returns German dish (7)
- 24. Franklin's performing at RAF station (6)
- 25. **See 18 Across**

Down

- 1. **See 8 Across**
- 2. Stephen King character: R Porter (7)
- 3. A wind to duck with relish (5)
- 4. Embarrassed to falter during RAF exercise (3,4)
- 5. Mammal known for its laziness (5)
- 6. Ordnance Survey directs vehicle to Wilde (5)
- 9. RAF Operation that went to time, presumably (9)
- 14. Chef embraces central machinery of helicopter (7)
- 15. Aggressive compere to lie about (7)
- 16. Dec's partner on my back? Quite the opposite (7)
- 19. **And 22 Across.** Burning, you adapt to competitive sport (5,5)
- 20. Quiet Scotsman has no instrument (5)
- 21. During repast, Eric has edible flower (5)

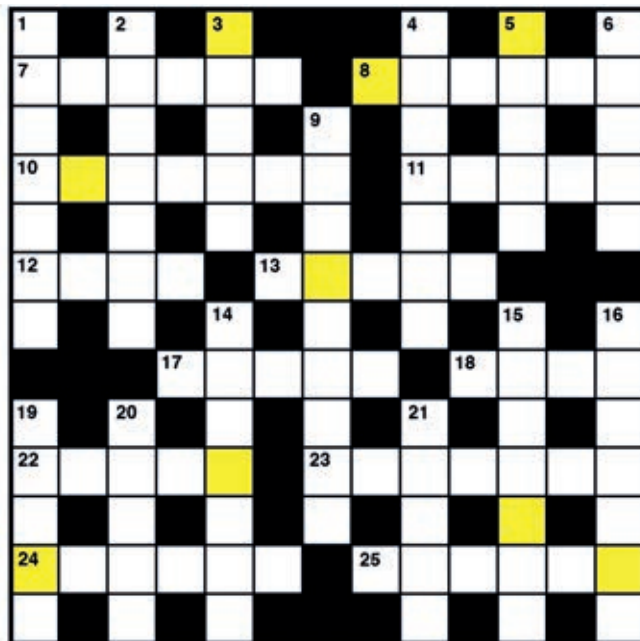
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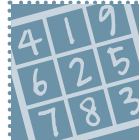
.....

RAF station: Crossword No. 407

The winners of our Prize Crossword and Prize Su Doku puzzles will receive a recent top book title – please send your entries to the address printed in the adjacent Su Doku panel, to arrive by May 1, 2026.

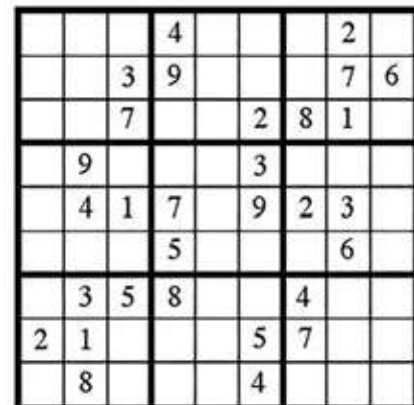


Across - 1. Taxi 8. Repeatedly 9. Mosquito 10. Cube 12. Cadets 14. Teller 15. Minute 17. Cashew 18. I See 19. Team-mate 21. Navigators 22. Kiss
Down - 2. Aerobatics 3. Iraq 4. Aphids 5. Cavort 6. Hercules 7. Lyre 11. Beefeaters 13. Eau-de-vie 16. Entrap 17. Crayon 18. Inns 20. Mask
RAF station – Cranwell
 Prize Crossword No. 406 winner is: Elaine Harris, Cheltenham



Prize Su Doku No. 417

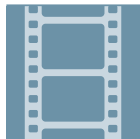
Fill in all the squares in the grid so that each row, each column and each 3x3 square contains all the digits from 1 to 9.



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 1, 2026. The winner of Su Doku No: 415 is: H Thompson, Birmingham.

Solution to Su Doku No. 416

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



Film Review No Ordinary Heist (15) In cinemas now

Extraordinary heist but an ordinary film

NO ORDINARY HEIST tells the story of the 2004 Northern Bank robbery in Belfast, where over £26 million was stolen without the criminals ever stepping foot inside the building.

The set-up is actually pretty simple: bank manager Richard (Eddie Marsan with a sometimes convincing accent) and cocky employee Barry (Éanna Hardwicke) both have loved ones taken hostage and are forced to carry out the robbery themselves during a normal working day.

From there, the tension ratchets up as they have to work out the logistics of emptying the vault, avoiding cameras and security, and passing it off like just another day – all the while knowing people will be killed if anything goes wrong.

As if things weren't stressful enough, Richard is having to lay off half the team, all in the run-up to Christmas. What works best is how contained the film feels, with most of it taking place across the day of the heist. We spend much of our time with the two reluctant assailants, who before now clearly disliked each other, but are forced to work together – though it seems Richard can't be sure that Barry isn't an inside man. It's a nice detail that might have been worth exploring more, but as it is, we see too much of mammy's boy Baz, and how he is struggling to cope with the pressure.

Mags (Michelle Fairley), the head of security, adds another layer of anticipation, with her formalities and



RELUCTANT ROBBERS: Bank staff Richard and Barry

attention to detail always threatening to expose the plan. There are some nice visual touches, especially the eagle-eye shots of cars moving through the city, which give the film a bit more scale and help break up the otherwise contained setting. But along with the pulsing score, it does become a bit flat and one-note after a while.

Overall, it's a well-made film of an interesting true story. But despite the incredible scale of the real-life heist, it is a pretty straightforward movie and it all ends up feeling a bit ordinary.

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



Music Doublespeak Doublespeak

Synth trio in sync

ERASURE'S VINCE **CLARKE,** Blancmange's Neil Arthur and the electronic producer-writer-synth-nerd Bengé have joined forces to form the new project **Doublespeak.** Set to be released on May 29, their self-titled debut album revisits 11 of their favourite songs from the past four decades.

A spokesperson said: "The album is divided between songs from the postpunk netherworld brought blinking into the light (Fad Gadget, The Sound, Young Marble Giants), pop radio monsters ushered back down a dark stairway into the club (ABBA, David Essex, The Carpenters) and buried treasures from the 1990s onwards (The Magnetic Fields, Ed Dowie and Laptop). Collectively, the album amounts to a shadow autobiography of the three collaborators' continuing musical education."

Neil said: "What's really stood out for us on this journey is how good these songs are."

"It's from doing your own version that you realise what



UNDER WRAPS: The **Doublespeak** album is set for release at the end of May

incredible pieces of work they are."

Vince added: "I knew so little about some of these songs that they were like demos to me. They felt like brilliant new songs that you want to get your hands on. I've had people do cover versions of my songs and honestly there's no better tribute. So that's what we wanted to do here."

Bengé said: "For me it was the excitement of hearing these great songs resynthesized into new forms in the studio. It was such an honour to be part of it."