



# BiteSize

“You don’t expect to be displaying an iconic aircraft at 22, but there I was,”



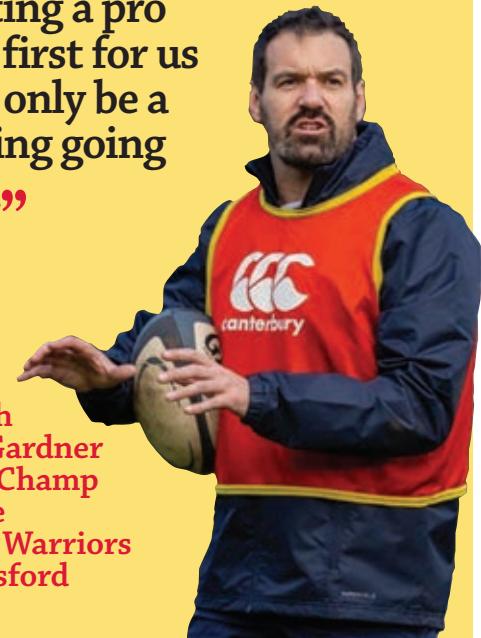
Former RAF Vulcan display pilot Kev Rumens  
See page 17

“Nothing beats being on stage and hearing people laugh,”



Comedian John Bishop prepares for new UK tour  
See R'n'R page 3

“Hosting a pro side is a first for us and can only be a good thing going forward,”



Head coach WO Tom Gardner welcomes Champ Rugby side Worcester Warriors to RAF Cosford  
See page 25



## ROYAL AIR FORCE RAF News

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# India training deal

THREE INDIAN Air Force instructors will train future RAF fast jet pilots at Valley following similar moves at Cranwell.

ACAS AVM Ian Townsend said: “Bringing Indian QFIs into UK Military Flying Training Systems deepens our cooperation, enhances interoperability and reinforces our shared commitment to excellence in aircrew training.”

An agreement on cooperation in military training was signed between the two countries last October.

Indian Air Force instructors will teach on the BAE Hawk T2 or Texan T1 aircraft.

In 2025, the UK and India conducted their largest ever maritime exercise involving the Carrier Strike Groups of both the navies.

In 2023, the Indian Air Force participated in Exercise Cobra Warrior for the first time and in 2024, the RAF was amongst the participants for IAF’s first multi-lateral air combat exercise Tarang Shakti.



FAST JET TUTORS:  
Indian pilots to join Valley training team

## This Week In History



### 1945 Berlin Blitz

MOSQUITOS WITH the Light Night Striking Force launch the first of a 36-day series of night attacks on Berlin.

### 1956 Javelin lands

THE JAVELIN delta-wing night fighter enters RAF service with 46 Sqn at Odiham in Hampshire.



### 1973 Herc relief mission

HERCULES CREWS begin the Operation Khana Cascade famine relief mission, dropping rice, wheat and grain to the people of western Nepal.

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

# £28m QRA boost for Coningsby



**A £28 MILLION project to upgrade the airfield at RAF Coningsby is underway to support the station's role defending UK air space.**

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation has contracted Volker Fitzpatrick to deliver improvements to the airfield's taxiways and apron areas.

Coningsby is one of two RAF Quick Reaction Alert stations – which houses

3 (F) Sqn and XI (F) Sqn, as well as 29 Sqn, which trains the next generation of Typhoon pilots. Construction work will be planned around the airfield's 24-hour alert commitment to UK security, a spokesman said.

DIO project manager Dan Wilmott said: "This is an important investment in one of the UK's most operationally significant air stations.

"Coningsby's role in defending UK airspace never stops, so delivering these improvements while maintaining the constant readiness of Quick Reaction Alert has required careful planning."

Station Commander Gp Capt Andy Hampshire added: "It's vitally important that there is no hindrance to QRA caused by this refurbishment.

"I'm grateful to Defence colleagues

and industry partners for the seamless way this project has been undertaken."

Volker Fitzpatrick operations director Keith Maplethorpe said: "This investment strengthens one of the UK's most strategically important air stations, ensuring that its teams can continue to protect our airspace around the clock."

The project is expected to be completed in October.

Pete, 91, full of bounce



A 91-YEAR-OLD Air Force veteran physical training instructor has netted two gold medals in a local trampoline event.

Peter Quinney (pictured) performed a 360 degree spin and a seat drop to claim victory in the team and individual categories at the contest for adults over 40 at the bounce-off in Portsmouth.

Peter won the British Men's Trampolining Championships in 1960 and represented the RAF in international events. He retired from the Service in 1975 and began working at a leisure centre where he organises coaching for special needs children and adults.

Leisure centre club coach Sue Burt said: "Pete has dedicated his entire life to trampolining. The fact that he's still actively coaching at 91 is incredible. To compete again, perform, and win, after more than 40 years away, is something truly special."

## Beneficiaries appeal

RELATIVES of Air Force personnel who died without naming someone to receive their pensions are being urged to come forward.

The Deceased Estates Office of the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre currently holds money due to the estates of seven ex-RAF personnel for their military service after 1975.

The amounts due can vary and occur where investigators are unable to trace the appropriate relative, particularly where the individual died many years after retiring from the Armed Forces.

# Fundraiser is a tribute to Lottie

£19,000 will help educate children in Kenya

## Simon Mander

CAMPAIGNERS FOR a charity in memory of the teenage daughter of an RAF officer who was killed in a road smash have raised almost £19,000.

The cash will be donated to the Lottie's Way charity set up by veteran Air Force fundraiser Wg Cdr Neil Hope in memory of his daughter Charlotte, who died in 2022.

The money will fund a Restart Centre in Gilgil, Kenya, which finances children and adults in education and feeding programmes worldwide.

The fundraising drive was supported by Shrewsbury-based company GLW Feeds, whose directors raised more than £10,000 during a 1,000-mile Tuk Tuk challenge.

"Keeping the memory of Charlotte alive is very important to us and we are so proud to be able to help children gain education," said GLW director George White.

Wg Cdr Hope (pictured left) added: "To all at GLW Feeds, your fantastic contribution is greatly appreciated. Thank you all for making this evening a fantastic success and with the combined donation and fundraising activities we have generated £18,850 into the charity's funds, which we will distribute to worthy causes."

Wg Cdr Hope, who also runs the Taking Football to Africa and Beyond Charitable



CARING: Charlotte Hope with children in Kenya

Appeal at Shawbury, was at an inaugural Charity Gala Dinner and Auction evening at Shrewsbury Town Football Club run by the charity.

The bidding saw items such as a framed signed Manchester United shirt, tickets to the Golf Open and framed Kevin Keegan Liverpool shirts sold and £8,500 raised.

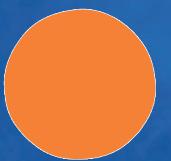
Former Wg Cdr Martin Evans and his wife Sara provided music with their band Top Bananas.

The event was attended by 150 people including the Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire Anna Turner, Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire AVM Bunny James, Patron of Lottie's Way AVM Marshal Tamara Jennings and Shrewsbury Town Manager Gavin Cowan.





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## Branching out

CONINGSBY PERSONNEL joined civic leaders to mark 85 years of community links with the station by planting an oak sapling at the nearby Allan Barker Sports Ground.

## Cadets net sim deal

TOP GUNS of tomorrow will get their first simulator flights after Lockheed Martin issued 700 licences to 20 ground schools and 500 cadet units across Britain.

All 881 RAFAC squadrons can now apply for high-fidelity training access which gives youngsters a realistic path to piloting, aerospace engineering and defence careers.

Simulation allows users to create a wide range of scenarios,

from civilian flight training to military operations.

Its aircraft models, real-time weather and fully functional virtual cockpit make it an ideal tool for cadets to learn and practise their flying skills.

Air Cadet Charity director Jess Gilbert said: "These licences will give thousands of cadets access to high-quality, immersive flight training and help inspire their future in aviation."



# Frontline pioneers unite for Cranwell conference



### Staff Reporter

A TRIO of pioneering frontline female fighters are joining forces at Cranwell to highlight issues facing women recruits in the combat zone.

The RAF's first female Typhoon pilot Helen Seymour, veteran fast jet pilot Mandy Hickson and the Service's longest-serving Chinook crew member Liz McConaghay are set to give their candid take on Forces life at the forthcoming Women in the Air conference at Cranwell next month.

The event will focus on health issues, family life and how to cope on the frontline in the male-dominated British military.

All three speakers draw on their hard-won Forces experiences as motivational speakers hoping to inspire women in the Services and on Civvy street.

Chinook veteran Liz served for more than 17 years in Iraq and

Afghanistan with the Medical Emergency Response Team, recovering wounded Service personnel from the battlefield, often under fire.

Her first flight was onboard the legendary Bravo November helicopter in the Falklands and at 21 she was the youngest aircrew member to deploy to Iraq and the only woman on the Flight for the first four years of her career.

Liz describes her experiences on board the Chinook as 'amazing' but they came at a cost – she had a breakdown in 2020 and was diagnosed with PTSD.

She published her no-holds-barred account of life in the military in her bestselling memoir *Chinook Crew Chick*.

Speaking ahead of the conference, she said: "I loved my career in the RAF.



HELEN SEYMORE

"It was a manly role but that doesn't mean only men can do it.

"There are so many great experiences. You come out with so many life skills and you will be a better person for it.

"You learn what 'hard' looks like and how to push past that. I think we need to learn to be a bit more austere sometimes, but maybe that's because I'm a helicopter girl.

"The RAF is such an inclusive employer – there are no gender pay gaps or problems with promotion. Boys don't wear blue and we don't wear pink. We all wear the same uniforms.

"If we spend all our time demanding equality we can't expect to have the red carpet rolled out for us every time we go anywhere.

"The biggest challenge was wearing a flying suit and trying to go to the loo – it's more the kit, it wasn't designed for females, but that's more of a budget issue.

"We can't really demand a large budget spend on female-only clothing and get everything we want in the current economic climate.

"I got credibility for getting on with my job and I was fiercely protective of my role as a crewman, rather than a crew 'person'.

"At the start of Operation Herrick we were flying just one female specialist a week, 10 years later that really changed; they were medics, interpreters, dog handlers and intelligence specialists.

"They would be running down to the back and jumping off in the same clothing, in the same war zone, with the same rations and living in the same conditions for two weeks until we picked them up.



FAST JET VETERAN: Mandy Hickson

"All the women I worked with were just getting on with the job and knocking it out of the park – they are the real warrior princesses."

● *The Women in the Air conference takes place at Daedalus Officers' Mess at RAF Cranwell on March 19-20.*

# Royal Air Force In Concert



**7.30pm Saturday 18 April**

**Lecture Theatre, Newark Academy**

**7.30pm Saturday 16 May**

**The Music of John Williams 'In Concert' (Compere Melvyn Prior)**

**Lincoln Cathedral**

**7.30pm Friday 29 May**

**Playhouse Theatre, Weston super Mare**

**7.30pm Saturday 26 September**

**Palace Theatre, Newark**

**7.30pm Sunday 27 September**

**Cast, Doncaster**

**7.30pm Friday 2 October**

**Epsom Playhouse**

**7.30pm Friday 16 October**

**Terry O'Toole Theatre, Lincoln**

**2026**

**[www.rafconcerts.uk](http://www.rafconcerts.uk)**

## In Brief



**CONNECTED:** Trainee and family accommodation to get free wi-fi

## Wi-fi win

### Simon Mander

FREE WI-FI in airbase communal areas, contact houses used by separated parents and trainee accommodation at Halton is to continue after a new deal between Wifinity and the RAF Association.

RAF Association director Rory O'Connor said: "We're delighted to continue our partnership with Wifinity to provide free Wi-Fi access across a growing number of RAF Stations."

Wifinity CEO Costas Demetriou said: "This partnership means that we can continue to provide free connectivity, so it's one less thing they need to worry about. We're continuing our talks to further our relationship and extend coverage to other areas."

Wifinity supports the Armed Forces' connectivity services at over 150 sites, along with broadband for Service Family Accommodation (SFA) homes.



**SPECIAL DAY:** Veteran WAAF Molly Gillon received hundreds of cards from well-wishers

# Radar ace Molly marks 103

### Simon Mander

A WARTIME radar operator who guided RAF aircrews home has marked her 103rd birthday.

Veteran Molly Gillon recalled speaking to a pilot whose aircraft had been hit. His final words to her were: "I'm on fire and I can see the sea."

He didn't survive but many others did thanks to her work on a top-secret Fighter Command radar system at Northstead, Northumberland monitoring the skies, warning pilots when enemy aircraft were



approaching and helping guide them back to safety during blackouts and after combat missions.

She said: "We were just girls doing a job that needed doing, and you didn't really think about it then. I'm very touched that people have remembered my service and helped make my birthday so special. I've been quite overwhelmed by the kindness."

The ex-WAAF received over 500 birthday cards from the military community and the public with help from SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity.

Graham Critchlow, fellow RAF veteran and volunteer, said: "Celebrating Molly's 103rd birthday is a truly special moment. It's a privilege to recognise her RAF service and to help mark such a remarkable milestone in her life."

# Lightning alert



### Staff Reporter

F-35 STEALTH fighters took off for Akrotiri to boost security as regional tensions threaten to escalate.

The six Marham-based Lightning

combat jets left in two batches with a pair of Voyager refuelling aircraft from Brize Norton for the journey.

A Voyager tanker formed up with the F-35s over southern England before

travelling south over France, across Sicily to the Mediterranean base.

The jets operated out of 207 Sqn Operational Conversion Unit were flown by pilots from 617 'Dambusters' Sqn.

# Gunner chief appointed

### Simon Mander

A FORMER Iraq veteran has become the 35th Commandant-General of the RAF Regiment, a post established in 1942.

Air Cdre Paul Hamilton joined the RAF in November 1999, deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and commanded US troops in Baghdad in 2004.

He said: "My commitment to the Global Enablers mission remains unwavering, ensuring that our teams continue to deliver operational excellence and support wherever and whenever needed across the world."

"At the same time, as Commandant General, I will work to champion the interests and welfare of all Regiment personnel."

Air Cdre Hamilton commanded 7 Force Protection Wing at Coningsby and oversaw the UK's response to Covid on operations, the

Op Pitting evacuation of Kabul airport, and Ukraine.

He was selected to be Station Commander Leeming and is now Commander Global Enablement, which generates RAF capabilities worldwide.

He is married to Holly and has two children, Helena (13) and James (10), has represented the RAF at boxing and is now a keen middle-distance cyclist.



**COMMANDANT:** Air Cdre Paul Hamilton takes over command of the RAF Regt



## Lucky strike for medics

FORCES MEDICAL responders in Lincolnshire struck it lucky - after landing more than £2,700 from the Service's ten-pin bowlers.

The RAF Tenpin Bowling Association raised the funds over the last year from

collections at tournaments across the region. Since launching its charity drive the group has supported a range of good causes including Children in Need, the British Heart Foundation and Help for Heroes.



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## Bulletin



## Drone war

DRONES FLYING near key airbases could be shot down under new powers.

Defence personnel can defeat the devices under provisions being introduced in the Armed Forces Bill.

It comes as 266 rogue drone incidents were reported in 2025, more than double the 126 reported in 2024.

The Armed Forces Bill will also allow personnel to destroy land drones or those that can be operated on or under water, in addition to aerial drones, without police authorisation.

## Commando ski-lift



**ARCTIC ROLE:** 18 Sqn crew deliver frontline kit during training with UK Commandos. *Inset top*, Marine takes the plunge in an ice hole

PHOTOS: LEE BLEASE



## Staff Reporter

Bardufoss, Norway

AN 18 Sqn Chinook equipped with skis launched combat training sorties alongside the Commando Helicopter Force from Nato's most northern base - Bardufoss in Norway.

The annual Exercise Clockwork tests UK military personnel in demanding Arctic conditions where temperatures can plunge to below -40°C. The drill is part of Allied military operations to maintain security in the High North.

# 'Tricky 73' Chinook hero hits The Wall

## Simon Mander

A FORMER RAF pilot awarded the DFC for leading medical evacuation missions in Afghanistan has signed on at Cranwell's Wall of Honour.

Sqn Ldr Craig Wilson was awarded his medal by the late Queen for his courage and selfless devotion to duty while flying multiple medical evacuations, day and night, in Chinooks during Operation Herrick.

Flying under callsign 'Tricky 73' to hospital landing points designated 'Nightingale', he said MERT was the ultimate example of teamwork under pressure.

Sqn Ldr Wilson joined the RAF in 1998 serving on Operations Banner, Telic, and Herrick on the Tucano, Squirrel, Griffin Gazelle, Sea King and Chinook.

He went on to lead 1310 Flt on operations in Afghanistan and was honoured, like his father who won The Queen's Gallantry Medal for saving lives when the Herald of Free Enterprise ferry capsized in 1987.

Sqn Ldr Wilson also recounted that many years before his Northern Ireland service, he and his brother were blown off



**BATTLEFIELD EVAC:** MERT Chinook missions saved hundreds of lives during the conflict in Afghanistan. *Above*, crewman operates the helicopter's powerful minigun



**SQN LDR WILSON**

their bikes as children when the IRA bombed the Band of the Royal Marines in Deal.

After multiple operational tours, Craig left the RAF and now teaches flying for defence contractor Inzpire.

Sqn Ldr Wilson emphasised the importance of attitude and a 'can-do, just get on with it' approach.

He said: "Attitude is vital and operations are a team game. I envy the opportunities and excitement that today's graduates have ahead of them."

Aircrew SERE Training Centre Officer Commanding

Mark Fairhead said: "My favourite phrase of his talk, when discussing the merits of deciding to head into dangerous situations, was '\*\*\*\* it - we've got miniguns'."

"Craig advised the students of the importance of managing their mindset, and, when necessary, to have the courage to put their hand up and seek help."



## House call

AROUND 80,000 military personnel living in single and unaccompanied accommodation in the UK and overseas will see their living conditions transformed through a new independent review.

The survey, launched at Brize Norton, follows claims that some housing is outdated and no longer reflects modern Service life after years of chronic underinvestment.

Repair and improvement works are underway and over the past three years more than 614,000 maintenance calls have been completed, including over 38,000 heating and hot water repairs and £244 million of improvements.

Veterans Minister Louise Sandher-Jones said: "Years of underinvestment has meant our people are dealing with standards well below what those defending our nation deserve."

Military personnel across the UK will be invited to inspect sites and take part in forums as work continues, the MOD said.

The Review will cover UK accommodation by the summer and overseas sites by the end of the year.

**CENTRAL FUND**

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# Bomber hero Harry hits 108



**CELEBRATION:**  
At 108 Flt Lt Harry Richardson DFC is one of Britain's oldest WWII veterans

### Simon Mander

ONE OF Britain's oldest WWII veterans is being honoured at a special bash to mark his 108th birthday.

Pilot Flt Lt Harry Richardson DFC and his 82-year-old daughter Penny will enjoy 1930's music and dancing at the RAF Association Club in Prestwick, South Ayrshire, where he now lives.

International Bomber Command Centre representative Alistair Montgomery, who served in 44 Sqn during Operation Black Buck, will present him with a history in recognition of his outstanding service to the RAF.

It contains details of his wartime sorties between May 1941 and January 1945 in Europe with 149 Sqn and in South-East Asia with 59 Sqn, and photos of him as a young boy, pilot and with his two brothers, Ken and Stan, who served in the RAF and the Royal Navy.

Former CAS ACM Sir Michael Graydon said: "Harry Richardson represents a body of people whose contribution to victory in World War II was not recognised.

"The treatment of Bomber Command at the end of the war was shameful. It has been a privilege for us at the International Bomber Command Centre to help to rectify this failure."

Flt Lt Richardson was inspired by watching Hurricanes taking off and landing at Northolt during the summer of 1939.

He completed his pilot training in

Scotland before joining 149 Sqn at Mildenhall, where he took part in the first two 1,000-bomber raids.

After completing 30 operational sorties he took up an instructional role on the Avro Anson at Lichfield. He then moved to the Far East where he completed another 32 operational sorties on the B24 Liberator.

His longest mission was over 18 hours which, for a time, was the longest flown wartime mission.

After the war, he and his family moved to Prestwick, where he joined the National Air Traffic Service as an air traffic controller.

Among his many accolades are a Distinguished Flying Cross and Provost's Medal for national or international achievement at the highest level.

During the VE Day 80 celebrations, he was at the concert at Horse Guards Parade in London and sat next to King Charles III and Queen Camilla.

Current Chief of the Air Staff ACM Sir Harry Smyth said: "Happy 108th birthday – what an amazing achievement. Thank you for your service in the RAF."

"Flying Wellingtons and Liberators in South-East Asia must have been the experience of a lifetime, only to be outdone by the fact that you managed to sit next to the King during VE Day – right and proper too! From me and your RAF family, here's wishing you a happy birthday."



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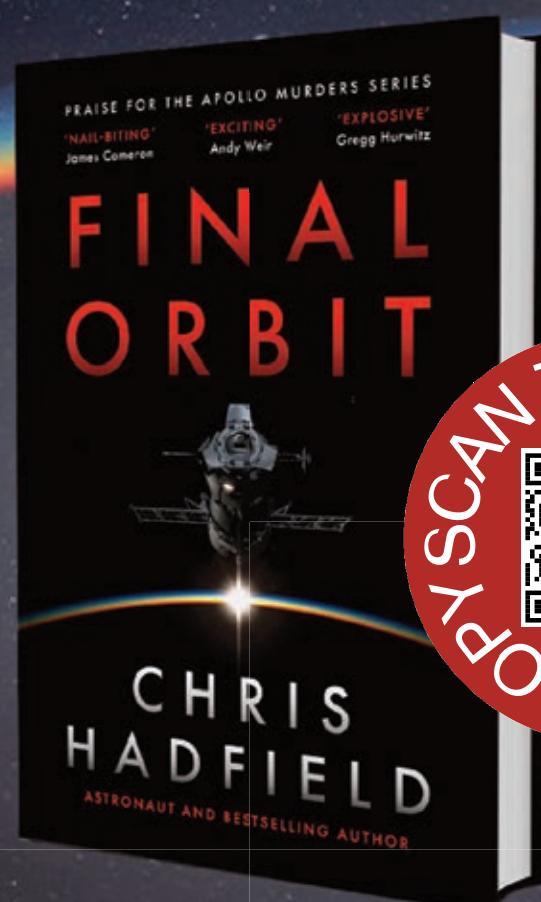
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# Bomber veteran Ken dies aged 102

Nav survived more than 40 missions

**Simon Mander**

**WARTIME NAVIGATOR** Sqn Ldr Ken Drury, who won the Distinguished Flying Medal and the Légion d'Honneur, has died aged 102.

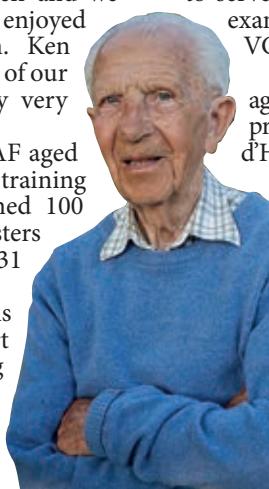
The great-grandfather's 42-year military career saw him amass 12,470 flying hours, complete 42 wartime operations and take part in the Berlin Airlift.

Daughter-in-law Sarah Drury said: "Ken was still living independently and looking after himself and his garden and we were grateful to have enjoyed Christmas with him. Ken was an important part of our family and is already very much missed."

Ken joined the RAF aged 18 in 1941 and, after training in South Africa, joined 100 Sqn operating Lancasters and completing 31 operations.

He flew 11 missions to Berlin and took part in the Nuremberg raid, during which 95 aircraft were lost.

Before and after the D-Day landings



**LANC HERO:**  
Sqn Ldr Ken Drury took part in bombing raids over Berlin and Nuremberg before joining the D-Day invasions in 1944

his crew marked key strategic targets including ammunition dumps, motor works, gun sites and a tank depot.

Sqn Ldr Drury continued to serve after the war and flew 264 flights during the Berlin Airlift with 51 Sqn.

He took part in the late Queen Elizabeth II's first Royal Review at Odiham in 1953, flying in a B29.

During his tour on Valetta aircraft in Singapore, from 1956-58, he flew 77 supply drops over Malaya with 52 Sqn. He went on to serve as an instructor and examiner on the Comet, VC10 and Britannia.

Ken retired in 1983, aged 60, and was presented with the Légion d'Honneur in September 2016.

## Special Ops delivery



**Simon Mander**

**COMMANDOS** WERE fast roped to the ground by Chinooks as they practised the frontline skills they will need on special operations in Europe.

Ranger Regiment soldiers and 42 Royal Marine Commandos were flown into a mock attack on an enemy position at Otterburn training camp in Northumberland.

Flying low over the moorland, two Chinooks supported a land attack by Jackal 2 assault vehicles before returning to their base at Leeming in North Yorkshire.

Exercise Hyperion Storm validates Task Groups under the command of the Special Operations Command Centre.

After two years of intensive preparation and training, including the building of a new Nato Joint Headquarters, the UK is set to lead the alliance's Reaction Force Special Operations troops.

## Typhoon Gulf drill

**Staff Reporter**

**TYPHOONS** ARE taking part in one of the largest multinational air exercises in the Middle East, hosted by Saudi Arabia.

UK personnel are operating alongside a 15-nation coalition to boost joint air power in the region.

Exercise Spears of Victory is run from the Saudi Ministry of Defence's Air Warfare Center in the kingdom's Eastern Province.

The training includes combined and joint air operations, advanced tactical

missions, and integrated planning activities.

The drill will test tactics, systems and command-and-control, while strengthening military partnerships and deterrence.

The manoeuvres will also focus on electronic and cyber operations, a spokesman said.

Alongside Saudi Arabia, participating nations include Bahrain, Bangladesh, France, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Türkiye, the United Kingdom and the United States.



**COALITION AIR POWER:**  
UK joins 15-nation air power exercise in Saudi Arabia

# Typhoon sees RED in

**T**HE UK'S Typhoon Top Guns have gone head to head with fifth-generation F-35s in the skies above the Nevada desert as Allies flex their combat muscle in the world's biggest air combat drill.

More than 400 UK personnel landed at Nellis Air Base in the shadow of Las Vegas to do battle on the high-stakes Exercise Red Flag.

Spearheading the RAF strike force are a dozen Typhoons from 1 Sqn – the world's oldest fighter unit – and XI Sqn, supported by a Voyager tanker, Rivet Joint reconnaissance aircraft and teams of engineers, communications, cyber and intelligence specialists.

Operating across the vast and austere 3 million-acre Nellis training range, Typhoon crews are honing their war-fighting skills against fifth-generation adversaries for the first time.

The use of the USAF stealth fighter in the Red 'aggressor' role is designed to replicate the air-to-air threat from adversaries' fifth-generation aircraft amid growing global tensions.

The big air-power ticket of the year, Red Flag is designed to plunge elite pilots into real war scenarios played out in real time.

For the UK pilots, it's a chance to test their fourth-generation swing role fighters against the world's most advanced combat aircraft – the Lockheed F-35.

The challenge is to seek and destroy 'enemy' command and control sites defended from the ground and in the air.

Red Flag may be an exercise but the stakes for pilots have never been higher – or more real.

Typhoon detachment commander Gp Capt Jack Holt said: "This is the biggest UK detachment deployed on Red Flag in living memory.

"The Exercise provides extraordinary training value and a rare opportunity to test the full span of RAF functions from the Whole Force of Regular, Reserves and contractors in executing their roles in modern warfare.

"It is always a privilege to train alongside allies and to do so in this environment is

particularly rewarding."

Fighting alongside the RAF crews are more than 3,000 military personnel from the Royal Australia Air Force and the USAF. Designed to replicate real world engagement in the air and on the ground, interoperability is crucial to success.

For the Voyager crews that means refuelling American and Australian F-35s along with their usual Typhoon customers.

Flying at 300mph during refuelling, the UK tanker is protected from above by a Typhoon escort. As in real combat, if enemy aircraft come within a 50-mile radius of the tanker, it is ready to disengage the fuel hoses and retreat.

During one sortie a rogue F-35 enters the restricted zone and is 'shot down' by a 1 Sqn Typhoon.

Gp Capt Holt added: "The level of technicality here, and the sheer space here, is absolutely invaluable. That's why we are so keen to train with partners and why training in this kind of environment is very important."

During the intense two-week drill, the flag of the winner of the day's battle flies from the Nellis command centre, where Blue and Red pilots and ground crews analyse the day's events, studying their opponents' tactics before preparing to do battle again when the desert sun rises the following day.

The exercise was established in 1975 after the Vietnam War showed that the first 10 combat missions flown are the most dangerous for aircrew.

Red Flag recreates the first 10 missions of a modern air campaign to provide pilots and crew with realistic combat scenarios

A RAF spokesman said: "Red Flag continues to evolve to reflect the threats and challenges of modern operations.

"It is renowned for its use of 'aggressor' forces, ground-based radars and simulated surface-to-air missiles and even cyber and space-based elements that simulate threats to each mission.

"It can provide thousands of targets, realistic threat systems and an opposing enemy force that cannot be replicated anywhere else in the world."



'RED: F-35 pilot'



1(F) SQN: RAF pilot prepares for familiarisation flight at Nellis Air Base

PHOTO: SGT SARAH BARSBY (RAF)



# Nevada showdown



## ALLIES FIGHT IT OUT OVER VEGAS: (From top)

Aggressor USAF F-35s line up for the Exercise; USAF Senior Airman Dasaundra Lui, an air traffic controller assigned to the 57th Operations Support Squadron, keeps an eye on proceedings; USAF Senior Airman Philip Stacey, a loadmaster assigned to the 79th Rescue Squadron; USAF Airman 1st Class Heather Amador Paulino, a public affairs specialist assigned to the 57th Wing Public Affairs, documents a RAF Eurofighter

Typhoon taking flight; and, below, Vegas skyline is captured as 1(P) Sqn Typhoon takes off from Nellis Air Base

PHOTOS: SENIOR AIRMAN LAUREN CLEVINGER (USAF); SGT SARAH BARSBY (RAF); AIRMAN 1ST CLASS JENNIFER NESBITT (USAF) & AIRMAN 1ST CLASS HEATHER AMADOR PAULINO (USAF)



# 'Unfair pension treatment' for pre-2015 reserve service



On 5 August 2024 an Employment Tribunal found in favour of Major Charles Milroy, judging that by (i) denying the claimant access to the Armed Forces Pension Scheme 1975 and successor schemes and (ii) using a divisor of 365.25 to calculate the claimant's daily rate of pay, the claimant was treated less favourably as a part-time worker than the respondent treated a comparable full-time worker in terms of the Part Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations (PTWR) 2000. The full judgement can be read [here](#).

The MOD submitted an appeal to the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) on the 17 September 2024. On 29 Jan, the Milroy Employment



**Neil Marshall, CEO of the Forces Pension Society**

Appeal Tribunal (EAT) refused the MOD's appeal against the original Employment Tribunal's decision on all 4 grounds, finding that the claimant was a part-time worker who had been treated less favourably than his regular counterparts in pension and pay



SCAN ME

terms. This is a significant outcome.

With the exception of the 2-year qualifying period, this decision appears to indicate that: non mobilised reserve service prior to 1 Apr 2015 should have been pensionable under AFPS 75 or 05; and that calculating the reserve rate of pay by an annual divisor of 365.25 (rather than a smaller number that took account of non-working days) was wrong.

Forces Pension Society CEO, Maj Gen Neil Marshall, commenting on the judgement, said: "We are in dialogue with the MOD on how it intends to remedy these wrongs; we have been informed that they are reviewing the judgement in detail and will provide an update once their assessment is complete. This is likely to be a complex and time-consuming process.

"In the meantime, if you believe this judgement affects you, visit: [forcespensionsociety.org](#)"

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

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ICON: Vulcan

**“Y**ou don't expect, at 22, to be displaying an iconic aircraft like the Vulcan... but there I was.”

From soaring over the North Sea in a Victor tanker to thrilling airshow crowds in Vulcan XH558, former RAF pilot Kev Rumens has lived a career most aviators can only imagine, flying three legendary aircraft: the Victor, the Tornado and, of course, the unforgettable Vulcan.

Kev began his RAF career in the 1980s, flying the Handley Page Victor K2 with 55 Squadron at RAF Marham.

“Flying the Victor wasn't easy. It had its quirks, especially after the wingtip modifications, but it was our job, and we got the work done,” he said.

Originally designed as a bomber, the Victor had since been converted to a tanker. Its unique crescent-shaped wing and added fuel tanks made it a challenging aircraft to handle.

The squadron's role focused heavily on air-to-air refuelling, supporting the RAF's fast jets – Harriers, Jaguars, Tornados, Buccaneers – and more often over the North Sea. Deployments were global, including Cyprus, the United States, and long-range missions via Ascension Island to the Falklands.

Joining 55 Sqn aged just 22, Kev was the youngest member on the crew. He said: “On my first flight, the next youngest was 55. It was an old-school, gentlemanly squadron, mostly made up of ex-Vulcan aircrew.”

Despite the age gap, the squadron culture was rich in experience and professionalism, and it paved the way for something extraordinary.

Kev's big break came when he was offered a rare opportunity to join the Vulcan Display Flight (VDF). At the time, XH558 was the RAF's sole display Vulcan, and only pilots with four-jet experience were eligible.

“I jumped at the chance. There was no conversion unit, just manuals on Friday and flight on

# My 10 years of flying the

# Vulcan

Monday,” he explained.

He flew the Vulcan on weekends while continuing with the Victor during the week. Over two display seasons, Kev performed at airshows around the UK, rubbing shoulders with display teams like the Red Arrows and the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight.

## Vulcan to the Sky Trust

Years later, when XH558 was restored for civilian displays under the Vulcan to the Sky Trust (VTST), Kev was once again in the cockpit. This time, it would be an eight-year run.

He added: “I loved it. But eight summers without a family holiday did wear thin.”

The schedule was demanding, but Kev's connection to the Vulcan never faded. In 2015, during what

would be one of XH558's final public displays, he performed a now-legendary take-off manoeuvre at RAF Fairford.

He remembered: “The wind was perfect. I climbed to 110 feet before banking. It was legal, dramatic and unforgettable.”

That moment became etched in aviation lore, symbolising the Vulcan's powerful farewell.

After his Victor and display years, Kev pushed hard for a fast jet crossover, a long-held ambition. The RAF granted his request, beginning with an instructor tour on the Jet Provost, followed by conversion training on the Hawk and then the Tornado GR1.

He served with the Tri-National Tornado Training Establishment at RAF Cottesmore, the Tornado Weapons Conversion Unit at Lossiemouth and 14 Sqn at RAF Brüggen. His operations spanned the globe, from Goose Bay to Red Flag, Cold Lake, and active service in Operation Southern and Northern Watch over Iraq.

“Even between the Gulf Wars, we were flying daily missions. I logged 144 combat



sorties during my time on Tornado,” he said.

Kev also had a brief but notable stint with 617 Sqn, the legendary Dambusters.

“I joined them for Red Flag and later supported their Gulf detachment, just doing my part to keep their operations running.”

Flying the Tornado was nothing like the Hawk or the Victor.

“It's a heavy, powerful aircraft. You couldn't just pull Gs and hope for the best. You had to respect it, especially close to the ground,” he explained.

Its combination of speed, thrust, and tactical versatility made it one of the RAF's most formidable platforms, and a defining chapter in Kev's career.

## Privileged

His final RAF role was as a Standards and Evaluation Pilot, flying with every squadron to maintain operational consistency. He left the RAF in 2004 and went on to a career in commercial aviation.

He said: “I do miss it. You can't fly the Vulcan for a decade and not leave a part of your soul in the cockpit.”

With 10 years of Vulcan displays, two with the RAF and eight with VTST, Kev Rumens remains one of the most recognised names among British aviation fans.

He added: “I feel so privileged... and I miss it badly. If I could do it all over again, I would. When you fly the only airworthy Vulcan in the world... you don't just fly an aircraft. You carry history.”

By Chris Cannon ([simplyplanes.co.uk](http://simplyplanes.co.uk))



**KEV RUMENS:**  
Has flown Victor,  
Tornado and Vulcan

# 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.

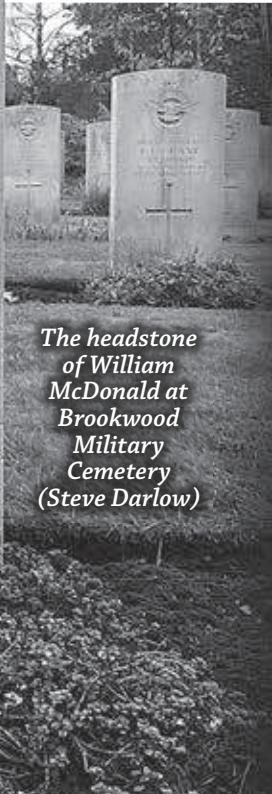
"I still struggle sometimes. But now, I can be the person I needed back then."

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."

# Words from beyond the grave



The headstone of William McDonald at Brookwood Military Cemetery (Steve Darlow)

Discovering the poignant messages from headstones of the lost souls of Bomber Command



IWGC headstone sample design, International Bomber Command Centre Digital Archive

SOMETIMES IT takes but a few words to stop the curious and spark the imagination. This was the case for Dave Gilbert who was stopped by the words 'Mother, I've weighed the risks which I prefer to living in a world dominated by Nazis, Bill' inscribed on the headstone of Sgt William McDonald, who was killed on October 25, 1942. These words would spark the project that added known epitaphs to the Losses Database on the International Bomber Command Centre's (IBCC) website.

*Epitaphs of Bomber Command* by Steve Darlow and Dave Gilbert (Fighting High Limited, fightinghigh.com £25) is an extension of that project and the emotion behind it.

## Remembered

At the end of the war, next-of-kin were allowed to add a personal inscription to the bottom of the Imperial War Graves Commission (later the Commonwealth War Graves Commission) headstones; four lines in length and no more than 60 letters (although the IWGC often allowed exceptions to this). It was a chance for the bereaved to personalise the standard headstone and make sure their loved ones were remembered in a way that reflected the individual.

This could be in the form of the

words of the casualty, such as the example given at the start of this review, or the words from a famous poem such as *In Flanders Field*. Whilst the words can easily be found either from a visit to the headstone or through a search of the IBCC's database, where the inspiration came from and the meaning behind the words are not as easily established.

Between them, Dave Gilbert and Steve Darlow have selected 100 examples of epitaphs from those lost whilst serving in Bomber Command in World War II and provide the human story behind the tragedy and the reason behind the inscription. The selections are presented in chronological order, giving a broad picture of the losses and operations in which Bomber Command members lost their lives.

Ground incidents and groundcrew are also included, such as the tragedy of Aircraftman Second Class Royal Potter, who was killed at home on leave with his wife and two children when their house was destroyed by German bombing.

Each epitaph example follows the same broad template. The epitaph and details of the casualty are at the top of the page followed by any translations necessary (some epitaphs contain Latin or other languages such as Ukrainian). The authors then present their reasoning as to where the epitaph



The headstone of Israel Jacobovitch is one of an arc of ten at Veendam General Cemetery, Netherlands (Fighting High)

came from, be it a poem, line from the Bible or even a personal inscription from surviving crew members such as that of Warrant Officer Donal Anthony Gee's 'We all thank you Tony. Your wife Irene and parents. 'A good friend and a grand captain' your crew.'

It is made clear to the reader at the start of the book though that the authors make no claim that their interpretations are definitive and in fact they encourage the reader to engage with the epitaphs themselves and come to their own conclusions. Thus, for the most part, the reasoning is actually not the main focus. Rather, the life and nature of each individual's death is briefly summarised in a clear and concise manner and takes up most of the section. In many of the examples, this includes personal letters and extracts from official documents, all of which are clearly referenced with the source material for those readers who would wish to look themselves and learn more.

As is to be expected with cases in Bomber Command, it is very common

that more than one airman was lost from a crew. In a poignant touch, Gilbert and Darlow include other crew members' details and epitaphs along with their fallen comrade, honouring the tradition of keeping the names together in their own way.

## Cost of war

*Epitaphs of Bomber Command* is a moving book that reminds the reader of the human cost of war – not only by looking specifically at the loss of 100 individuals, but more poignantly by looking at the words their loved ones chose to have them associated with for eternity. It is a good reminder for us all of the personal stories behind the wartime statistics and the loss they left behind.

The essence of the book can perhaps best be summarised by the words forever engraved on Sgt Leslie Alfred Taylor's headstone, 'to the world an airman, to me the world'.

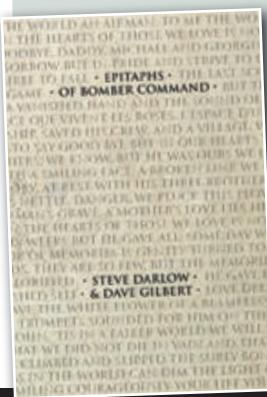
Review by Emily Walton

## Copies of the book up for grabs

YOU COULD win a copy of *Epitaphs of Bomber Command*. For your chance to own one, tell us:

What was the original name of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission?

Email your answer, marked Epitaphs book competition, to: [tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk](mailto:tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk) or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by March 6. Remember to include your full postal address.



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# AVM was engineer and missiles expert

## Armaments chief oversaw handling of nuclear weapons

**A**IR VICE-MARSHAL Robert Hooks, who has died aged 96, was an RAF engineer officer closely involved in the introduction of guided missiles into RAF service and trials and development of the Skybolt air-launched nuclear missile.

After graduating from university with a degree in engineering, he began his deferred National Service in September 1951 and was commissioned into the RAF Technical Branch to specialise in armaments. He was posted to RAF West Malling in Kent, the home of Meteor day and night fighter squadrons.

Having elected to remain in the RAF, he was granted a permanent commission and served in Germany on fighter bases. In 1955 he was selected to attend one of the first year-long guided weapons courses at the RAF Technical College at Henlow. It was during his time on the course that the controversial Sandys Defence White Paper of 1956 stated that the day of the manned fighter was over and missiles would replace them.

Hooks soon felt the impact of this decision as he was seconded to Fairey Aviation at Heston for guided weapons trials and development. This included the Fireflash air-to-air missile, which had a short life and was replaced by Firestreak. At the end of his appointment, he moved to the MOD to deal with guided weapons trials and reliability before turning his attention to a very different type of missile.

### V-bombers

During the 1950s, the RAF's fleet of V-bombers provided the core of the United Kingdom's strategic nuclear deterrent. The British-developed Blue Streak intermediate range ballistic missile designed to replace the V-bombers was cancelled in 1960. To offset this loss, the then Prime Minister, Harold

Macmillan, met with President Eisenhower in March 1960 and obtained an agreement to acquire Skybolt for the RAF.

Hooks was given the task of planning a programme for a RAF Trials Unit to go to the USA to test the 1,000-mile range missile. At the beginning of 1961 he joined the 200-man RAF detachment at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida for the advanced testing of Skybolt with the Vulcan Mark 2.

### Skybolt

It soon became clear that several failures of the missile were giving concerns to the US Government, not least because trials of the submarine-launched Polaris missile were making good progress. On November 11, 1962 the US informed the British Government that Skybolt was to be cancelled. Ironically, three days before Christmas 1962, the sixth Skybolt was launched and it worked perfectly, but too late to save the programme for the RAF's V-force.

In early 1963 Hooks returned to England to join the staff of the Bomber Command Armament School at RAF Wittering. This included custody, storage, servicing and use of nuclear weapons with the responsibility for training, standardisation and evaluation of procedures for all RAF personnel involved in handling the weapon.

In 1967, on promotion to Wg Cdr, he returned to more traditional engineering matters when he was appointed to command the Engineering Wing at the RAF College Cranwell. Spread over two airfields were more than 60 aircraft for training aircrew, in addition to a large ground engineering organisation.

At Cranwell, Hooks took advantage of the College Flying Club and he learnt to fly and gained his private pilot's licence. In later years he qualified as a flying instructor.



CBE:  
AVM  
Robert  
Hooks

In 1969 he headed for Singapore and the HQ of the RAF's Far East Air Force. During his two years he had to maintain the efficiency of the remaining squadrons and support in the period that the RAF was running down the three airfields before final withdrawal from the area on October 31, 1971.

Hooks spent the next three years as the Superintendent of Armament at the Aircraft and Armament Experimental Establishment at Boscombe Down. A wide range of weapons were being evaluated and their

integration for carriage and release by aircraft was a major task.

After a period in MOD responsible for ground training, he returned to the armament world in 1976 when he was appointed Director of Air Armaments in the MOD's Procurement Executive. This was a period of significant developments with the introduction of new weapons including laser-guided bombs, new air-to-air missiles and the airfield denial weapon JP 233. RAF aircraft still carried nuclear weapons from bases in Germany

and in the UK and new stand-off weapons were in development. At the end of his tour in 1980, Hooks was appointed CBE.

In 1980 he was appointed Vice President (Air) of the Ordnance Board and his final appointment before retiring in May 1994 was as a Director General of Aircraft in the Procurement Executive.

Hooks was a chartered engineer and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society. After leaving the RAF he joined Westland Helicopters and became the Deputy Managing Director of European Helicopters Industry (EHI).

## Motoring

Cupra Tavascan (£54,840 otr)

Tim Morris



AUTOMOTIVE DESIGNERS create cars that, they hope, will grab the world's attention, but finding a fitting name can be just as important.

Tavascan is a small Spanish village, nestled in the Pyrenees. Not as well known as places like Capri, or Cortina, chosen by Ford, back in the day, to make its models feel more glamorous, but very apt. You see, this mountain retreat is best known in Spain for using its lakes to produce green energy – a jolly good fit with Cupra's first electric SUV.

The car's not built in the Pyrenees, unfortunately, it's bolted together in China, but let's not let facts get in the way of a good story. What matters is that it is a thing of beauty. The silhouette flows and the panels are impeccably creased in all the right places to make it look more muscular. It looks particularly pretty in Tavascan Blue.

The grilles, the alloys, the funky light bars, it's a package that's surprisingly pleasing to look at. It also remains close to its concept car genesis, a car that Cupra first unveiled in 2019.

**Interior**

The cabin has a distinctive design, with a large central spar that runs between the centre console and dashboard. This instantly draws the eye and makes quite a statement. It's not massively plush, by class standards, but there are plenty of soft materials dotted about and, while other plastics may be hard, they're pleasantly textured and feel solidly built.

There's also plenty of ambient lighting to give it added wow factor at night, with V2 models and above getting an additional glow through perforations in the door panels. It is, overall, an aggressive, clean design, enhanced by a raft of carefully-crafted details. The Dark Night bucket seats really stand out and give the cabin a racing machine feel, in a subtle way.

Not so great is VW's touch-sensitive steering wheel. It places buttons right where you rest your hands during steering and you ARE going to activate things multiple times during a journey.

The 5.3in digital instrument panel is compact, but does what



**FLARES AND FLAIR:**  
Tavascan's sweeping lines and flowing curves give it a stylish, low, muscular profile for an electric SUV

# Bags of Spanish flair

it says on the tin, and the 15in centre screen works well. It's quick to respond and features sharp graphics. The fiddly menu lay-out makes it more distracting to use than many rivals and touch-sensitive sliders, below the screen, that operate the stereo volume and climate controls are just as awkward.

The Sat-Nav is a plus, because you get additional route instructions in the instrument binnacle. You also get arrows that float around the windscreen, thanks to the augmented reality head-up display. It is very difficult to get lost in a Tavascan!

**On the road**

This is an EV, so you would expect it to have the usual 'flick of a switch' style acceleration, but Cupra has tempered its bite. It's brisk, but not neck-snappingly fast, to make it feel more like a powerful family wagon, rather

than a racing machine with a crossover body bolted on top.

It certainly feels spirited enough off the mark and there's plenty of mid-range welly for safe overtaking. There's also enough power to leave the tyres scrabbling, in just the right way, as you exit open road corners.

A quick look at the stats. Our test car was the 77kWh, 286 PS variant, priced, as driven, at £54,840. In this variant, 6.8 seconds will take you from 0-62mph and on to 112mph. It feels more lively than that though.

The steering is precise and well weighted. The brake pedal is a bit soft, but all EVs suffer with this gripe. It weighs a hefty 2.3 tonnes, thanks to the batteries, but body lean is mostly kept in check. The car feels rear driven, with a well-planted, sure-footed grip. In Cupra mode, the dampers tighten further. The Tavascan is, therefore, more amusing to drive

**Pros**

- Handles well for class
- Well-equipped
- Good interior space
- Solidly built

**Cons**

- Fiddly menu controls
- Steering wheel controls annoying placed
- Not the fastest recharge times

**Verdict**

THE CUPRA Tavascan is a striking motor car, that

**Cupra Tavascan**

offers buyers something different. It's been lovingly styled and has bags of Spanish flare. It comes with plenty of kit and is sharper to drive than many competitors. The best-in-class rival electric SUVs are more refined and more comfortable, but the Tavascan has carved out a niche for itself. It's a charismatic character that you'll probably like.

than many of its rivals.

You can adjust the driving modes and the car is particularly light in 'Comfort', making life easy around town. The battery range is pretty good too. Even driving as I do, the car delivered around 280 miles on a single charge, so you're unlikely to

suffer from range anxiety.

My favourite feature is that there's a useful screen shortcut that turns off all the annoying electronic assistance features. Just as well, in a world where lane keep assist often yanks the wheel and speed limit warnings constantly bong.

## Sport

## FOOTBALL

Footy stalwart  
Unwin passes

RAF FOOTBALL paid tribute to one of its favourite sons after the passing of Flt Lt Roger Unwin MBE (Ret'd) following a short illness.

Unwin (pictured), whose career pre-Service included playing for Football League side Chesterfield FC and representing England Universities, joined the RAF as a Physical Fitness Officer (PFO) in 1965.

Having graduated as a PE teacher from St Luke's College, Unwin, who held an A-licence coaching badge, would go on to represent the Senior men's football team for several years.

Winner of the RAF FA Outstanding Contribution Award in 2020, Unwin assisted Sqn Ldr Craig Gill (Ret'd) in coaching the RAF Cyprus team to a hat-trick of Inter-Services wins over Army Cyprus in 2007, 2008 and 2009.

Gill said: "Roger was a wonderful gentleman. We shared a great passion for football. His unwavering commitment to RAF Football is well highlighted in the fact that, as an octogenarian, he still travelled from his Lyneham home to avidly attend the annual Inter-Services matches.

"He will be sorely missed and very fondly remembered."

## FOOTBALL

# Rare taste of IS victory for U23s



U23s: Next up, the Army

THE INTER-SERVICE title is "in our hands" said head coach FS Tom Richardson after the U23s recorded their first Inter-Services win since 2020, beating the Royal Navy 1-0.

The 43rd-minute goal, courtesy of a rebounded strike from AS1 Rio Ward, broke the deadlock at Havant and Waterloo's Westleigh Park ground and was enough for a deserved victory for the aviators.

Richardson said: "We didn't want to lose the first game, but we set out to win. We will be going to win it in the next game as well and not rely on other results.

"There is one more game to come, it's in our hands, but we aim to be deserved winners."

The goal came courtesy of a superb break on the Navy right by AS1(T) George McCowie, who having cut inside and beaten four defenders, saw his shot parried by RN keeper Josh Grant, only for the on-rushing Ward to strike home.

The aviators settled first during the opening clash, showing some excellent passing, breaking in the seventh minute after AS1 Callum Calveley and AS1 Bobbie London combined superbly to set McCowie away on the right. A minute later, AS1 Jake Staunton saw an effort well cleared.

AS1 Matthew Laycock then produced a great save to deny the hosts, and on 14 minutes his agility was called upon again producing a stunning flying save.

The action remained end to end and on 26 minutes the aviators went closest to breaking the deadlock as Ward struck the angle of bar and post with a superb 20-yard freekick.

A solid second half, which saw the hosts resort

to longer balls into the RAF half and penalty area, culminated in a nervous last 10 minutes. The RAF held out for a vital win, and now begin their build up to facing the Army in the second match of the championships.

Hutchinson added: "We meet at Cosford, we have two days to get things together and go over what we want to improve and praise what was good, things will have to be relatively low key. We have analysed what we want at start of the season – the lads know their roles, they know what the structure is, then it's up to them."

## Challenge Cup draw

THE DRAW has been made for the semi-finals of the 2026 RAF football Challenge Cup, with last year's Plate-winners Odiham facing Brize Norton if they can beat Leeming in their still-to-be-played quarter-final.

Wittering will play either Marham or Waddington for a place in the final, that is scheduled for May 21.

All semi-final matches are to be played at still-to-be-determined neutral venues.

Last year's RAF Cup final saw Boulmer beat Lossiemouth in a five-goal thriller to win the trophy for the third time.

The Plate quarter-finals draw sees Lossiemouth given a home tie against Digby. RAF Akrotiri will travel to face Wyton, while Cranwell host Valley.

RAF Benson take on RAF Coningsby in the final quarter-final, with all ties set to be played on March 25.

## TENNIS

# Courting new talent

SERVICE TENNIS is aiming for extra juice this year with the introduction of padel and pickleball and the publication of its season diary of training and matches.

Having already kicked off with the ever-popular T4ALL series and the first pickleball training and RAFTA winter champs, the sport will see the UKAF ladies' event on March 26, at Aldershot, open its doors to all abilities.

A RAF tennis spokesperson said: "We have launched our programme for the year, with renewed energy and ambition, marking a landmark season with the official introduction of padel and pickleball alongside our traditional tennis programme.

"This expansion reflects our commitment to evolving the sport, increasing participation, and offering more opportunities for personnel and families to get involved at every level."

The association will hold further pickleball and padel training and coaching on April 8, with the Novice Championships event held from April 9-10, before May's (7-8) T4ALL event and June's RAF Championships (15-19).

Acting RAF Tennis chair FS Martyn Ledbury said: "This is an exciting year for the association. The addition of padel and pickleball opens new doors for our community, bringing fresh enthusiasm while strengthening our existing tennis pathway. We are proud to broaden our sporting offer and look forward to seeing these disciplines thrive across the RAF.

"With competitions, development events and social fixtures planned throughout the year, the 2026 season promises to be one of the most dynamic yet."

Of the UKAF event, a RAF Tennis spokesperson said: "Last October's event saw several new players from across the three Services in attendance; this event provides another opportunity to reach others and develop grass roots tennis."

Follow RAF Tennis on Facebook @RAFLTA and @RAF Tennis, Padel and Pickleball.

## FOOTBALL

# Seniors are out to shine

SUN AND success is the aim of the game for the Service's senior men's footballers as they head off to Cyprus for their last training camp before the Inter-Services.

In his second year at the helm, head coach Sgt Chris Hamilton said: "We have a fixture and then it's off to Cyprus for a final week before Shrewsbury and kicking off the IS.

"We are a different prospect from last season, this really is a fresh start for all involved."

"The under-23s did well in the week (see above) so we will have a few players who will be invited to the camp. If they take things

further, it is up to them if they are offered an Inter-Services place.

"We have a great relationship with the U23s, which is really important."

The SRT recently lost 5-0 to Northern Premier League Division One West set-up Sporting Khalsa, a game which, despite the result, Hamilton learned a lot about his charges from.

"I saw plenty of things in that game that were good and that we could build on," he said. "They are one of the best teams in the cup, but the way the players handled the set-backs and adapted has been impressive."

"We are all working towards victory, it then falls to whether we turn up on the night, which is the way Inter-Services matches are, but we are building towards being in the best place to make sure that we do."

Team captain FS Mike Campbell added: "I'm excited to start the IS campaign. I feel like we are strong this year with competition for places bringing out the best in us."

"I feel we are well balanced with experience and new energy from the young lads who have joined the squad."

"We are positive and confident – hopefully that shows in the two games."

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: [rafnewssport@gmail.com](mailto:rafnewssport@gmail.com)

## Sport

## ALPINE

# Captains lead by example at Championships

**Daniel Abrahams**

TWO-WEEKS OF high-speed drama with personnel battling for 16 awards in ski, snowboard and telemark set the tone for a bumper RAF Championships in Saalbach-Hinterglemm, Austria.

The Championships – the proving ground for Inter-Service team selection – also act as a tester opportunity for personnel into the wild world of Alpine sports.

The event saw women's snowboard captain Cpl Natalie Fields produce a clean-sweep of title wins; Slopestyle, Parallel GS and Boarder-Cross, on her way to becoming overall champion, with her Station team Nato taking the Inter-Stations Board trophy.

She said: "The Champs were a great success for squad and development riders. We had a couple of injuries, but got to see some new faces develop and push themselves."

Men's team captain Cpl Daz Manning also took the overall title, winning Boarder-Cross and Slopestyle, with Fg Off Sam Brown winning Parallel GS.

He said: "The Champs delivered photo-finishes, dramatic crashes and big airs. With such a strong group coming through, we are well-positioned heading into the Inters."

Amy Isaac (Shawbury) and Adam Fieldsend (Halton) won the women's and men's Board Improver race respectively, with LCpl Matthew Kemaan (Honington) awarded most improved snowboarder title.

Women's ski team captain



RAF CHAMPS:  
Action packed

Flt Lt Kirsty Guest won three of the four titles on offer; Super Giant Slalom – one and two, Individual Slalom and helped Halton to the Inter-Station title before claiming the overall champion title, with Sgt Rachel Hughes taking the GS.

Fg Off Olly Weeks took three in Individual Slalom, Super Giant Slalom one and two, with AS1 John Erskine taking GS and the overall crown.

Guest said: "The Championships ended an excellent development year for the RAF ski team.

"We had great competition at the Championships and as we head to the Inters, both teams are eager to bring this experience to Meribel."

Jessica Bromley (Shawbury) and Alexander Gledhill (Corsham) won the women's and men's ski improver titles respectively, with Melisa Lawson

(Lossiemouth) Alexander Street (Coningsby) winning the Intermediate GS ski women's and men's respectively.

Flt Lt Hannah Witchalls completed a rout of the women's Telemark titles with a brace of wins in Sprint and Individual Giant Slalom and the overall title, followed by AS1 Dean Gillon in the men's discipline.

Telemark team captain Sgt Steve Fryer said: "We've had a fantastic off season with a huge increase in beginner interest.

"Our winter training camp in Holland brought even more beginners to our sport.

"We had our first full Telemark race including a jump and skate, which has helped our confidence no end."

● **RAF women skiers dominate at the Alpine Inter-Services, see page 27.**



TRAINING:  
Tips for all



REMEMBERING GEOFF: Tandem flight at the RAF Champs in honour of Flt Lt Corser, pictured left with partner Wg Cdr Caitlin Wroe and daughter Tilly

## Tribute to Flt Lt Corser

RAF PARAGLIDING marked its second year above the RAF Alpine Championships at Saalbach-Hinterglemm and paid tribute to the memory of the late Flt Lt Geoff Corser.

Corser, who kickstarted the appearance of tandem paragliding flights above the blue riband event in 2025 as a way of integrating the two associations, died in a high-speed flying accident last year.

To continue the association's relationship, the RAF Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association (RAFHGA) was invited to attend this year's event by Chair of RAF Winter Sports and Alpine Association Air Cdr Martin Cunningham, to provide tandem paragliding flights for competitors, ambassadors and sponsors.

Deputy chair of RAPHGA Wg Cdr Matt Tandy said: "Sadly, we lost Geoff last August in a tragic speed flying accident in North Wales. However, at his funeral, his partner Wg Cdr Caitlin Wroe requested that we keep the initiative going in Geoff's honour and so I am pleased to report that our chief coach and team captain did just that."

"The team of Flt Lt Leigh Joyce and WO Ret'd Sean Simmons, supported by Flt Lt Rich Bradley, carried out 44 flights during the second week of the championships, with take-offs from the 6,200ft sites on the upper slopes of the Zwölferkogel and Schattberg West mountains."

Each sortie comprised a breathtaking 3,500ft descent down the mountain, following the race line of the piste and concluding with a circuit of Hinterglemm and then to the landing field adjacent to the town.

Tandy added: "Each flight took place under the distinctive canopies of the RAF-branded tandem paragliders. Fortunately, we were blessed with extraordinarily good weather, which allowed for flying every day."

"We were honoured to fly the RAF Ensign in memory of Flt Lt Geoff Corser who, inspired by his Caitlin, had provided the very first RAF tandem paragliding flights at the Champs in 2025. What Geoff began has paved the way for the continuing successful cooperation between these two sports for the benefit of Service personnel and their supporters."



PLEASED: Coach Flt Lt Dave Manning

## Six of best on Wirral

Caldy RFC	12
RAF Senior Men	40

FOLLOWING THE 28-21 Cardiff Met Uni win, with scorers AS1(T) Ben Collins, AS1(T) Kieron Prescott, Cpl Callum Cload and Player of the Match AS1 Dan Gilbert, RAFRU took to Paton Field, home of Caldy RFC, on the Wirral.

The aviators opened the scoring after 10 minutes following a creative lineout with Flt Lt Jacob Seddon then breaking through the middle, before a neat offload saw Sgt Joe Parkin touch down.

A RAF penalty then saw them kick to touch from the resultant lineout maul and hooker Cpl James Roberts scored.

A similarly-placed maul then saw team captain Cpl Mark Williams put AS1(T) AJ McCoubrey under the posts for a 19-5 half-time lead.

An early try from Cpl Callum Cload in the corner kicked off the scoring in the second half and was followed up, then a kicking battle between the sides ended with Cpl Ryan Pugh running the ball, before scrum-half Cpl Sam Boxhall touched down.

Later, the RAF's No.12 AS1 Keiran Jenkins capitalised on an overthrow from the opposition hooker to touch down the aviators' sixth and final try. It was 40-12 to the RAF at the final whistle.

Forwards coach Flt Lt Dave Manning, pleased with how the squad delivered, said: "The performance was good and we saw improvements in the areas we had targeted in training, which is pleasing to see. At times the physicality and intent were exactly what we're getting after."

With momentum building, the focus now turns forward. "Two victories make it a good January, but there's plenty more to be done," he added.

### RUGBY UNION

# Warriors on and off the pitch

LESSONS LEARNED: Victory against Cardiff Met University



Cardiff Uni students put to sword before aviators test their mettle against Worcester professionals

#### Daniel Abrahams

SERVICE RUGBY secured back-to-back wins, built bridges to boost this year's Inter-Service campaign and raised its profile to kick off its year in style.

They started in incredible fashion with the senior men team's second annual training camp and match with Cardiff Met University, which the aviators won 28-21, before hosting a professional rugby union team at RAF Cosford for the first time as they entertained Worcester Warriors, before beating Champ side Caldy RFC 40-12.

Head coach WO Tom Gardner

(pictured below) said: "We're well embedded in our Inter-Services preparation for 2026 and the year has started in a very positive way.

"Player availability has been strong and the squad has been tested early against quality opposition in Cardiff Uni and Worcester Warriors.

"We've built relationships and hosting Worcester is breaking new ground for RAF Rugby Union and can only be positive for both community rugby and RAF rugby moving forward.

"The growth of the group from last year to this year has been clear, and the belief in what this squad can achieve is now firmly embedded within the players.



A FIRST FOR RAF: Hosting professional rugby side Worcester Warriors at Cosford

"We know we can play, we know we can score, and now the focus is on refining and maturing our game so we can put the right scores on the board and protect them with a robust defensive effort.

"With continued investment in youth and outstanding energy across the group, we are in a stronger position now than we were last year, despite me only

being eight or nine games into the role.

"The trip to Caldy RFC (see left), against an extended squad/second team unbeaten in 120 home games and featuring Championship-level players, represented another real test, and one the squad was excited to embrace."

Follow RAF Rugby on Instagram @rafrugby.

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: [rafnewssport@gmail.com](mailto:rafnewssport@gmail.com)

## Sport

## ATHLETICS

# RAF treble in cross-country



**FIRST LADY:**  
Cpl Chloe  
Richardson  
**PHOTO:**  
HALTON  
SERCO

## Daniel Abrahams

THREE TEAM victories was the fantastic return for the Service from this year's Sir Sefton Brancker Cross Country Championships at Halton.

The wins in the senior ladies, senior men and veterans disciplines meant the women's team regained the title for the first time since 2023, with the men securing their first title since 2022.

A field of 81 runners from the RAF, Civil Service and Police battled it out for glory at the annual event which dates back to 1931.

In a closely-fought contest, the RAF Ladies edged out the Civil Service team by just one point.

Cpl Chloe Richardson delivered an exceptional performance to take the overall race win, followed by AS1 Lucy Rycroft in third and Cpl Grace Rowland in sixth.

The aviators dominated in the men's competition, taking victory

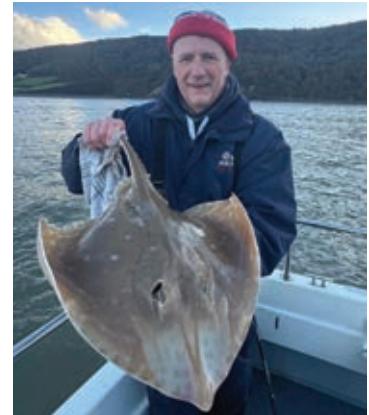
in both the Senior and Veterans contests. In the Senior race, Flt Lt Michael Kallenberg led the team home with an excellent second-place finish, followed by Cpl Adam Baker third, Sgt Rob Wood in fifth, Wg Cdr Ben Livesey in sixth, AR Bruce Evans in eighth, and AS1 Drew Clark securing 10th place.

In the Veterans, Cpl Adam Baker, Wg Cdr Ben Livesey, and Cpl Kieran White, who finished 14th overall, combined to secure another well-deserved victory.

Cpl Carl Tucker said: "With wins across all major categories, the championships marked an excellent start to the year for RAF cross-country running. The performances at RAF Halton showcased the depth, determination and sporting spirit of RAF athletes competing against longstanding rivals."

Follow RAF Cross Country on Facebook @RAFAthletics.

## SEA ANGLING



**SECOND:** WO Daz Rose with small-eyed ray

## WO Rose Dazzles at Minehead

SERVICE FISHERMEN didn't rest on their frozen laurels, as five of them took part in the Minehead Specimen Boat Angling Competition, with WO Daz Rose coming second.

The aviator, who shone on both days of the two-day event, was just five points off the top spot, holding onto joint second with 100 points, closely followed by three anglers on 95 and FS Scott Rennie on 90.

The event, fished over mixed grounds north of Porlock Bay, tested competitors with deep water, fast tides and powerful species.

Nominated target fish included conger eels, spurdog, huss, rays and smooth hounds, with the highly-elusive Bristol Channel cod and haddock added as cash prize bonuses.

A slow start was broken when WO Taff East landed a cod.

Anglers were soon locked into personal battles, with top rods landing seven to eight fish in a three-hour window, many weighing 10-14lb. RAF anglers worked tirelessly to maximise scoring opportunities.

At the end of the opening day's action, with each fish scoring five points, the top score was an impressive 80 points, with all the Service's anglers placing in the top half of a tightly-contested field. The second day began in cold but dry conditions with a delay to deeper waters caused by strong tides, meaning scoring was slower overall and the heaviest fish of the competition – a conger – was a modest 4lb.

Rose hung on to joint-second place, with the remainder of the RAF team firmly in contention with final tallies of 80, 80 and 75 points.

Follow RAF sea fishing on Facebook @Royal-Air-Force-Angling.

## Reserve Rowan earns her Sporting Colours



### EQUESTRIAN

#### Simon Mander

AIR FORCE rider Rowan Duke earned her Sporting Colours at the RAF Championships on her horse King's Silver, when they won the Medium Dressage class.

The reservist AS2 driver serves with St Mawgan's 505 Sqn, commuting to Bristol where she works for HMRC. And despite a year-long injury delay to her training, she is on the final stretch to achieving AS1 rank at the Cornish station.

A highly-skilled rider, her expertise in showjumping and dressage is so respected senior officers regularly seek her advice on technique.

"Sport is brilliant because I ride on a team where a Wing Commander might ask me the best way to ride a course," she says.



**MAKING THE GRADE:** Reservist AS2 Rowan Duke is presented with her Sport Colours by AVM Jason Appleton

Competing in the Royal Windsor Forces Show Jumping in 2023 in full No.1 dress uniform and taking the Royal Salute from the Duke of Edinburgh was a moment she describes as unforgettable.

AS2 Duke said: "My civilian job is intense and very desk-based. I really enjoy driving, so I treat the reserves as downtime for my brain. The prospect of taking a week off work to just

go driving is a welcome break."

After having her second son, she returned to education and earned a BA in Law (2:1) as a mature student.

Now qualified with both truck and coach licences, she's often found in the horsebox park helping others manoeuvre their vehicles, usually with a grin and a comment that, "you could get a bus through there."

**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: [rafnewssport@gmail.com](mailto:rafnewssport@gmail.com)**

# 5 pages of RAF Sport

ALPINE



## Rugby stars warm up for IS with win over Cardiff

See page 25

# Guest of honour

**Daniel Abrahams**

A STORMING hat-trick of podium one, two, threes was the highlight of this year's Inter-Services Alpine championships, as the women's skiers dominated an otherwise tough going event.

The slopes of Meribel fell under the female aviators' spell at the 75th IS championship as team captain Flt Lt Kirsty Guest, Sgt Rachel Hughes, Fg Off Ella Johnson and Sqn Ldr Claire Nixon rotated finishing places in no less than four of the five events, with Johnson coming first in the Parallel Giant Slalom to seal a podium spot in every event for the RAF women.

On the way to team and individual domination, Guest took first in Super G, Slalom and Giant Slalom, with second in Downhill behind Hughes, who came runner-up in the other three with Johnson third in Slalom, Downhill and Giant Slalom (GS) and former captain Nixon not missing out on the medals, coming third in Super G.

The men saw team captain AS1(T) Ricky Santamaria second in the Downhill, with Fg Off Jed McNab first in Super G and Slalom and second in Parallel Giant Slalom (PGS), with AS1(T) John Erskine third in GS.

The snowboarders kicked the championships off in style with Sqn Ldr Paddy Morris and Cpl Nat Fields coming first and second respectively in the Boarder Cross. Fields, who also came first in the Parallel GS and second in the Slopestyle, would take the individual championship title, with Morris securing a



TELEMARK DOUBLE: Flt Lt Hannah Witchells

## Kirsty and women skiers dominate Inters



CLEANSLEEP: RAF Giant Slalom 1, 2, 3

SLALOM GIANTS:  
Aviators weaved their way to victoryBOARDER CROSS:  
First place for Sqn Ldr Paddy Morris

THAT WINNING FEELING: RAF women skiers celebrate team triumph at Meribel

bronze in the Slopestyle.

With the Army taking both men's and women's team titles, the aviator captains satisfied themselves with another year of progress and podiums.

Fields said: "The squad proved themselves to be strong contenders once again, with both teams having veteran riders and fresh faces competing.

"Sqn Ldr Paddy Morris showed his prowess with two podiums, and I was delighted with my three and gaining individual female

for the second year in a row.

"Cpl Charlotte Wolverson smashed the PGS qualifier out of the park, seeding first out of the 18 riders."

Men's captain Cpl Darrell Manning said: "The standard this year was nothing short of exceptional. The team rose to every challenge, pushing hard against strong opposition. I couldn't be prouder."

In the Telemark a double podium finish for Flt Lt Hannah Witchells lifted the team's battling championships, with overall captain Cpl Steve Fryer saying: "We had a mixed IS with two podiums from Hannah in the Classic and the Sprint, that was absolutely amazing."

● See p24 for RAF Alpine Championships round-up.



# READY FOR CIVVY STREET?

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You've pushed yourself.  
You've got the job done.**

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into civvy life?  
Not everyone's  
got a plan for it.**

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anyone who's worn the uniform**  
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SCAN ME

# R'n'R



**Fashion  
forward –  
Westwood  
show**

• See  
page 5



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

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



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

# Chalke Festival is a family affair for author Beard

**B**ESTSELLING AUTHOR and celebrated classicist Mary Beard makes her debut this summer at the Chalke History Festival which promises something for everyone – from lifelong history enthusiasts to curious newcomers.

She will be chatting to her son Raphael Cormack about family histories and why the deep past affects us all, at the popular annual festival running this year from June 22-28.

A spokesperson for the event, set in the heart of the Wiltshire countryside, said: "Chalke is a celebration of curiosity, critical thinking and the power of storytelling, bringing together many of the world's most respected historians, authors and thinkers to explore the people, events and ideas that have shaped our world.



**BEEVOR:** Will be discussing Rasputin

"From ancient civilisations to modern global history, the festival offers audiences of all

ages the chance to engage directly with history's biggest stories, the debates they continue to inspire today, and an opportunity to meet expert historians face to face in an informal, festival atmosphere."

The festival will also be marking the 250th anniversary of the US Declaration of Independence with a series of events including renowned American journalist and commentator Anne Applebaum with radio presenter and journalist James Naughtie and author and columnist Simon Jenkins presenting his latest book *A Short History of America: From Tea Party to Trump*.

And Former White House Communications Director and financier



**PASTORAL SETTING:**  
Chalke History Festival

Anthony Scaramucci returns to the festival to discuss the road to war in the 1920s and 30s with James Holland.



**MARY BEARD**

Author Kate Mosse will be talking about feminist history and Kate Vigurs will tell the story of legendary war correspondent Lee Miller.

Other headline speakers announced are Anthony Beevor, who will be discussing Rasputin, the wild mystic who laid the ground for the Russian Revolution; Kate Williams on her highly-anticipated book *Regina: A New History of Women and Power*; Alan Allport on how World War II reshaped the world; Lawrence Freedman on strategists and strategy; Gordon Corera and John Tregoning on biological warfare and Tracy Borman on her new historical novel *The House of Boleyn*.

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



## Comedy

John Bishop  
UK & Ireland tour

# Comic Bishop set to tour again



JOHN BISHOP has announced a major UK and Ireland tour for spring 2027 with a new show, *Let's Go Round Again*.

Hot on the heels of his sold-out critically acclaimed international '25' tour last year – which celebrated his quarter of a century career as a comedian – the stand-up will play some of the biggest venues in the UK and Ireland in April and May next year.

John said: "After my 25 tour last year I thought I would take time off, but I loved it so much I am itching to get on the road again. So, I'll be going out in the spring of 2027 with my new show, *Let's Go Round Again*.

"Nothing beats being on a stage and hearing people laugh. I

am looking forward to spending this year working on the show and developing new material because I know 2027 will come round fast. And if my last tour was anything to go by, people are really ready for a good laugh."

The new film *Is This Thing On?* (see review opposite) inspired by John's life and directed by Bradley Cooper, is now in cinemas nationwide. It stars Cooper, Will Arnett and Laura Dern.

*Let's Go Round Again* kicks off on April 29, 2027, in Leeds at the First Direct Bank Arena and then travels around the UK, before culminating at Dublin's 3Arena on May 16.

● Go to: [johnbishoponline.com](http://johnbishoponline.com) for full details.



## Film Review

**Is This Thing On? (15)**

In cinemas now

# A soon-to-be-divorced Scouser walks into a bar...

**I**N THE midst of a divorce, Alex (Will Arnett) vents his feelings at a comedy club open mic, finding humour in his pain and a new, exhilarating pursuit in Bradley Cooper's latest as director.

Alex works in finance. Doing what exactly doesn't seem to matter. The story is loosely based on Scouse comedian John Bishop, and how he first got on stage to avoid paying a cover charge for a bar. What we do know is that Alex is successful enough to afford the luxuries in life: a beautiful home with his two teenage sons and his soon to be ex-wife Tess (Laura Dern).

But while his marriage is crumbling, not so much amicable but inevitable, Alex will find himself falling upwards into the world of ball-breaking stand-up comics.

*Is This Thing On?* rests on the natural charm and charisma of Arnett. He has stage presence and is naturally funny – which is to say that he has weak material but you warm to him anyway. There's no arc in which he has ups and downs, or ever really has a bad show. He is just a funny kind of guy in front of very receptive audiences.

Spending time at Manhattan hotspot the Comedy Cellar, we do find ourselves in the company of legitimate comedians Jordan Jensen and the legendary Dave Attell, lending some authenticity to this world.

Combining Alex's newfound successes with Tess's own mission of self-discovery, returning to



**CHARISMA:** Will Arnett as Alex, based on Brit comic John Bishop

her forgotten passion of netball, a spark appears to reignite between them once again, leaving the film miraculously without real conflict for the most part.

It wouldn't be a Bradley Cooper film if he wasn't in there somewhere, but this time he takes an uncharacteristic supporting role as airhead actor Balls, managing to have all of the funniest moments, which, for a film about stand-up comedians, probably isn't a good thing.

Three roundels out of five   
Review by Sam Cooney



## Theatre

**Shawshank Redemption**  
UK tour



## Music

**Police Dog Hogan**  
New music and UK tour

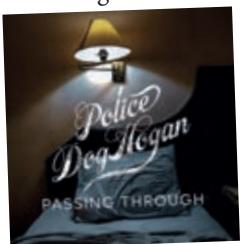
# Police Dog Hogan are tripping *Light* fantastic

**P**OICE DOG Hogan's adroit bluegrass/country-pop has made them unlikely cult favourites.

The band's ferociously loyal live following has seen them sell out the O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire, support the legendary Brian Wilson, and perform at Glastonbury, while their song *Devon Brigade* was nominated for Best Original Song at the UK Americana Awards.

The band will release their new album, *The Light at the Top of the Stairs*, on April 10 – featuring their latest single *Passing Through*. And they'll be heading out on tour in April, May and June.

Vocalist/guitarist James Studholme said: "The *Light* is the record I've always hoped we would one day make. We've tried to put into the songs all the



multi-variegated wisdom, joy, disappointment, defiance, grief and stoicism that the rollercoaster of our life experience has granted us.

"It's the most emotionally powerful LP we've made and we couldn't be prouder of it."

The single *Passing Through* follows a Wim Wenders-style protagonist as he glides through the American heartland, present yet somehow detached.

James added: "It's quite cinematic, one of those songs that opens with a single image: a motel pool on the edge of a highway.

"But it's really about isolation, about being an observer, forever stuck on the other side of the glass."

*The Light at the Top of the Stairs* will be released on digital, vinyl and CD formats.

● Go to: [pdhogan.com](http://pdhogan.com) for tour dates and venues.



**POLICE DOG HOGAN:** Bluegrass country with a touch of pop

**J**OE MCFADDEN is currently leading the cast in the acclaimed touring production of *The Shawshank Redemption* and he's loving it – and so are audiences around the country.

Well-known for playing PC Joe Mason in the long-running ITV show *Heartbeat* and Italian doctor Raf di Lucca in BBC One drama *Holby City*, McFadden stars as Andy Dufresne, who, despite protesting his innocence, is given a double life sentence for the brutal murders of his wife and her lover.

The play is based on Stephen King's 1982 novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*. The 1994 feature film, starring Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman, was nominated for seven Academy Awards.

The theatre tour finishes in Richmond on June 6, taking in dates including the Wycombe Swan (March 10-14), Glasgow Theatre Royal (March 24-28), Fareham Live (April 14-18) and Birmingham's Alexandra Theatre (May 25-30).

The cast also features Ben Onwukwe (Jason Donckers in *Professor T*) as fellow inmate Ellis 'Red' Redding and Bill Ward (*Coronation Street's* Charlie Stubbs and *Emmerdale's* James Barton) as the corrupt prison warden Stamas.

Joe (inset above) said: "The response [to the tour] has been

phenomenal so far – we had a sold-out week in Edinburgh last month.

"It's such a pleasure the reaction to the show is getting up and down the country and we're all really proud of the production that we get to share with people."

Joe, who is in the tour for its whole run, explained: "I love visiting new venues I've never been to before and getting to return to lovely theatres like the Wycombe Swan, where I did the pantomime *Beauty And The Beast* a few years ago.

"It's so interesting to me how varied the personalities of the audience can be. Somewhere like Belfast was so vocal and loved the funny parts of the show and Edinburgh was slightly more reserved but it's always lovely when we usually get a warm reception



at the end with so many standing ovations."

Incarcerated in the notorious Shawshank facility, former banker Andy quickly learns that no one can survive alone. He strikes up an unlikely friendship with prison fixer Red and things start to take a slight turn for the better. However, when Warden Stamas decides to bully Andy into subservience and exploit his talents for accountancy, a desperate plan is quietly hatched...

What attracted Joe to the role of Andy?

"I just love Stephen King's writing and Andy struck me as such an interesting character," he said. "He's in this very challenging world – using his wits to survive – yet he manages to hold onto his humanity and kindness and not just look out for himself. He's really admirable in that way."

"Andy is intelligent, methodical and has a strong moral compass and manages to hold onto his



Whworth. Top left, soap star Bill Ward as corrupt prison warder Stammes

# Men's ling

hopefulness in a situation where most of the rest of us would crumble," he added.

The role requires a certain amount of stage-fighting.

Joe explained: "I had to do lots of stunt-fighting on *Heartbeat* as my character was constantly apprehending criminals and it's something I enjoy, though in some ways it's easier on television as you control the angle the audience see the fighting from."

"The repetition on a long run is the hard part, sticking to what was decided was safe in rehearsals, but fingers crossed I've had no major injuries so far!"

The Scottish actor revealed that he's a big fan of both *The Shawshank Redemption* film and Stephen King's book.

Joe said: "Stephen King is just a master at creating these extraordinary characters in these outlandish situations that are just within the realms of possibility."

"We do hear about these

horrendous miscarriages of justice that unfortunately happen and can obviously empathise with how awful it would be to lose your freedom for a crime that you potentially didn't commit."

Why does he think audiences who have seen the film should go to see the play? The stage version is said to have some surprises as it's based more on King's novella and 'digs deeper'.

Joe explained: "If you love the movie or the novella then it's all the more visceral and exciting to see these brilliant characters in the flesh telling this hard-hitting story in real time."

A very youthful-looking 50, Joe, who announced his engagement to artist Rob Smales last September, started acting aged 12 on the fondly remembered Scottish police drama *Taggart*.

He won *Strictly Come Dancing* back in 2017 with professional dance partner Katya Jones – does he still like to dance?

He said: "The extent of my dancing these days is on TikTok with some of the ensemble from the panto I did in Aberdeen last Christmas, though I am hoping to start a tap class when I finish the tour."

"After the tour ends I'll be going on a nice long holiday somewhere hot hopefully. I'm like Andy in the way we both dream about tropical climes..."

● Go to: [kenwright.com/productions/shawshank-redemption-2025-2026-tour](http://kenwright.com/productions/shawshank-redemption-2025-2026-tour) for more information.

By Tracey Allen



## Exhibitions

### Vivienne Westwood: Rebel – Storyteller – Visionary

The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle (March 28 to September 6)

## Punk Westwood still in vogue

THIS SPRING, The Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle will host a major retrospective dedicated to the fashion designer and punk pioneer Dame Vivienne Westwood.

Focusing on her iconic designs from the early 1980s to the 2000s, *Vivienne Westwood: Rebel – Storyteller – Visionary*, running from March 28 to September 6, celebrates the legacy of the provocative and imaginative designer, whose influence continues to shape global fashion.

More than 40 ensembles, along with individual garments, accessories, jewellery and ephemera from the collection of Peter Smithson, will be joined by never-before-seen garments from private collections, as well as loans from Manchester Art Gallery and the Fashion Museum Bath, said a spokesperson for The Bowes Museum.

They added: "Westwood's designs will be laid out chronologically from her iconic mid-1980s looks to the early 2000s protest T-shirts. The exhibition will chronicle how the Vivienne Westwood label evolved over time, framing its history through the Worlds End years, the Westwood years and the Kronthaler years.

"Key milestones include the introduction of the orb synonymous with the brand, winning British fashion designer of the year in 1990 and 1991, Westwood's marriage to Andreas Kronthaler and the restructure of the company into Gold and Red labels, marking a different approach to design and manufacture."

Westwood was a dedicated researcher of historical dress and visited The Bowes Museum in 2006. Reflecting this connection, the exhibition will juxtapose more than 80 historic objects from the museum's collection with her designs, emphasising shared themes and artistic references.

Vicky Sturrs, the museum's Director of Programmes and Collections, said:



FASHION ROYALTY: British Fashion designer Vivienne Westwood at her Worlds End Chelsea store, London, 1987

"This exhibition celebrates one of the most daring British designers in fashion history and marks a significant moment for The Bowes Museum as we continue to champion bold voices in fashion."

"Despite moving to London at 17, Vivienne never lost her Northern roots, and her fearless creativity still resonates powerfully with this region."

"As the North continues to nurture extraordinary emerging designers, we hope this exhibition inspires them to see fashion as both craft and activism. It stands as a reminder of how influential Northern creativity has been, and continues to be, in shaping British fashion."

Curator Rachel Whitworth added: "The exhibition highlights Westwood's eccentric, innovative approach and the extraordinary imagination that transformed her into one of Britain's most influential designers."

● Go to: [thebowesmuseum.org.uk](http://thebowesmuseum.org.uk) for more information.



BOLD AND CHIC: MacAndreas pink mohair wraparound jacket with matching skirt, tie and college cap, and Hals blouse. Anglomania, AW 1993/94. Mohair, wool, cotton



## Theatre

### You're Dead To Me

Live dates

## Jenner's Dead cert

HIT BBC Radio 4 comedy podcast *You're Dead to Me* is heading out on tour this spring.

Hosted by *You're Dead to Me* presenter Greg Jenner, the popular show will be transferring to the stage for a special live run.

A spokesperson said: "Each performance follows the show's much-loved format, pairing an expert historian with a comedy guest to uncover the past through rigorous scholarship and laugh-out-loud humour."

Greg said: "I'm absolutely

thrilled to take our podcast on the road. I cannot wait to step onto the stage to say thank you to all those lovely, loyal listeners who've been with us over these seven years – it's going to be a blast!"

Described as blending expert knowledge with comedic flair, *You're Dead to Me* has become a standout in the podcast world.

The tour kicks off on March 24 at London's Adelphi Theatre and will also visit Cardiff, Edinburgh and Manchester.

● Go to: [YoureDeadToMeLive.com](http://YoureDeadToMeLive.com) for full tour details.



PRESENTER: Greg Jenner



## Your Announcements

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

### Associations

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

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

IF you trained as an RAF Administrative Apprentice (or you are related to one) we would be delighted to welcome you to the RAFAA Association. Please see: [rafadappassn.org](http://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](http://arafwo.co.uk) and discover the benefits of membership, plus see what activities and events we offer all over the world.

THE RAF Air Loadmaster Association (ALMA) 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.

### How to use our service

There is no charge for conventionally-worded **birth, engagement, marriage, anniversary, death, in memoriam** seeking and **reunion** notices. For commercial small ads contact Edwin Rodrigues on: 07482 571535.

We cannot, under any circumstances, take announcements over the telephone. They can be sent by email to: [tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk](mailto:tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk) or by post to: Announcements, RAF News, Room 68, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE.

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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](mailto:lesalma9001@gmail.com) or you can call on the following number: 0753 1523456.

### Reunions

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

**ALL** ex Clk Secs who were trained on the Apprentice Wing at RAF Credenhill in the 1960s and 1970s are cordially invited to contact the undersigned with a view to arranging a reunion this year.

Please email: [David.tibbett@ntlworld.com](mailto:David.tibbett@ntlworld.com)

**CALLING** all former TG11 comms personnel, T/phonists, TPOs, Tels, Wop Spec, TCOs, TCCs, TRCs and any comms titles that may have superseded the aforementioned.

All are welcome to attend the Trade Group 11 Association reunion on Friday, March 20 to Sunday, March 22.

The venue will be The Marriott Delta Hotels, Mellors Way, off Woodhouse Way, Nottingham Belfry, Nottingham NG8 6PY.

Further details are available on the website: [tg11association.com](http://tg11association.com)

# RAF musicians on tour

THE ROYAL Air Force Music Charitable Trust has announced a fundraising concert tour for 2026.

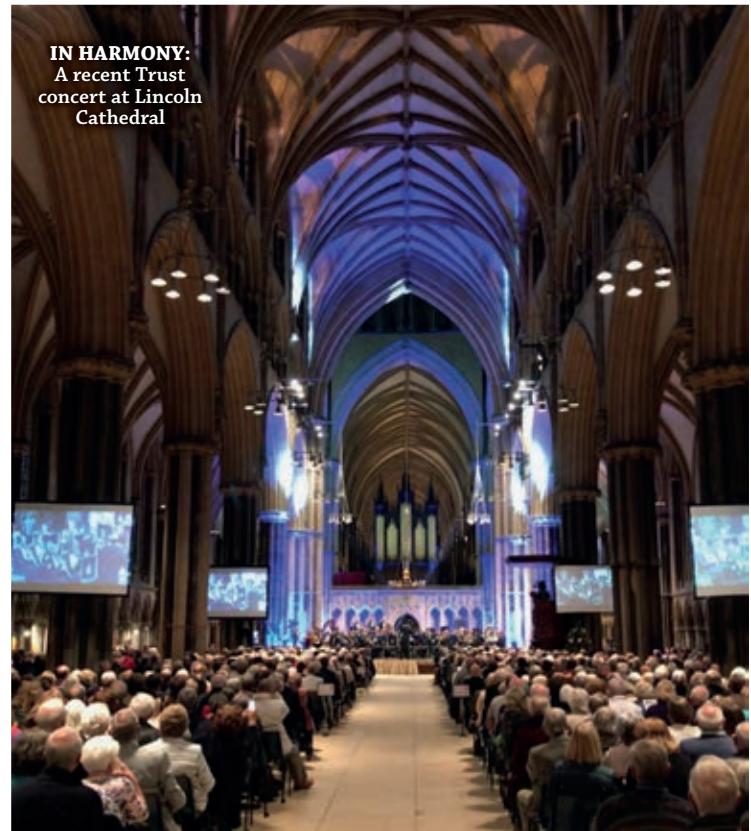
The tour starts on April 18 with a special big band concert held in the Lecture Theatre of Newark Academy featuring Royal Air Force Swing Wing with guest jazz trumpet soloist Nathan Bray – well known for playing with Ronnie Scott's Big Band and The Benny Goodman Show.

On May 16 the charity presents a concert in Lincoln Cathedral performed by the Band of the Royal Air Force College with compere Melvyn Prior, featuring music from renowned composer John Williams, including film favourites such as *Star Wars* and *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*.

Concerts will follow with the Central Band of the RAF and the Band of the RAF College in Weston-super-Mare, Epsom, Newark and Doncaster. The 2026 tour will end with another RAF Swing Wing big band concert at the Terry O'Toole Theatre in Lincoln on October 16.

The Trust's founder, former RAF musician Malcolm Goodman, said: "Although possibly the smallest of the RAF charities, I am immensely proud that as a voluntary organisation

**IN HARMONY:**  
A recent Trust concert at Lincoln Cathedral



the RAF Music Charitable Trust plays a vital role in ensuring RAF music continues to support the welfare fundraising of more than 20 Service charities.

"Join us for an unforgettable

musical journey celebrating the power of music, whilst also raising funds to support the wider Armed Forces community."

● Go to: [rafconcerts.uk](http://rafconcerts.uk) for further information.

# Canberra to get a makeover

**VOLUNTEERS** AT Newark Air Museum have been working on a major project – repainting the museum's Canberra B2 WV787 (pictured right).

A spokesman for the museum said: "WV787, NAM's distinctive all black trials and development airframe, has seen the first work undertaken on its much-modified nose. Over the coming weeks and months, as the weather conditions permit, a lot



more work will be undertaken on this unique British airframe."

● Go to: [newarkairmuseum.org](http://newarkairmuseum.org) for more details.

# Grant for Brize kitchen

THE SERCO Foundation has awarded the RAF Benevolent Fund a £20,000 grant towards upgrading the kitchen facility at RAF Brize Norton's Millennium Amenities Centre.

A spokesperson for the charity said: "The new and improved facilities will support the 185 children and young people who attend Airplay – the Fund's national youth programme."

"The grant will enable Brize Norton to update its kitchen – maximising space and enabling Airplay staff to deliver meaningful activities for the children and young people who attend."

The spokesperson added: "With cookery one of the programme's most popular activities, Airplay Youth Workers will be able to use the space to teach cookery and nutrition skills, encouraging healthy eating habits. The kitchen will also serve as a hub for the wider RAF community."

# Yvonne's perfect love story

A 90-YEAR-OLD has revealed how she met her husband 75 years ago – at offices located on the same site of the care home where she now lives.

Yvonne Martin, a resident at the Royal Star & Garter's home in High Wycombe, was a 15-year-old filing room clerk at engineering company Broome & Wade in 1951 when she met Keith, who was 17.

She reminisced: "He was an engineering draftsman, and I used to walk through the drawing office with all the files."

Keith took a liking to Yvonne, and when the company held its Christmas party that year, he asked her for a dance.

She explained: "My mother worked for furniture manufacturers Parker Knoll, and they had their Christmas dance the night after my firm's party. Keith must have heard that I was going, because he gatecrashed the Parker Knoll event and asked me to dance again. And from then on, we were together."

The couple married in September 1956. Keith went on



**BRIDE AND GROOM:** Yvonne with a photo of herself and Keith on their wedding day

to complete two years' National Service in the RAF.

He died in 2023, and following a decline in health, Yvonne moved to the Royal Star & Garter home.

She added: "I miss my husband so much. But being here at Royal Star & Garter, on the very spot where I met my Keith, it makes me very happy."

"It brings back such joyful memories and I feel a special link to him."

The charity provides care and support to veterans and their families, living with disability or dementia, through its care homes in Solihull, Surbiton, High Wycombe and Worthing. It also delivers services in the community, including Lunch Clubs, Day Care and a national Telephone Friendship Service.

● Royal Star & Garter in High Wycombe is welcoming new residents. Go to: [starandgarter.org/hw](http://starandgarter.org/hw) for more information.



**ON THEIR BIKES:**  
Taking part in RAFAV50 in 2025

## Sign up for virtual challenge

NOW IN its sixth year, the RAFA V50 challenge has grown into an event that sees more than 2,500 people take part, netting a staggering £142,000 for the charity to date.

Organiser Flt Lt Victoria Young said: "The 'V' stands for virtual, because wherever you are in the world, you can take part. How you complete your 50 miles is up to you – walk, run, cycle, hike or even roller skate. You can mix and match activities to fit around your lifestyle, making it

truly your challenge, your way."

She added: "This year's challenge runs from April 27 to May 3. Go solo or team up with friends, family or colleagues for extra motivation. However you choose to take part, the Association will support you every step of the way with fundraising tips, advice and your very own RAFA V50 T-shirt to wear with pride."

● Go to: [rafa.org.uk](http://rafa.org.uk) to sign up and find out more or search RAFA V50.



To discuss your advertising in **RAF News** please call or email:  
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## RAF News

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## Prize Crossword

No. 403

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

Across

7. Stand for snappers (6)
8. Give international recognition to singular crook (6)
10. Let heat cook runner (7)
11. Company support hooded danger (5)
12. Pop group from a long, long time ago (1,3)
13. Flower found near Notre Dame (5)
17. Ashen-faced, we swallow punch (5)
18. Accountant without tedious animals (4)
22. Consumed eggs and toast every night, originally (5)
23. Wow on the streets of Paris? (3,2,2)
24. Franklin's working at RAF station (6)
25. Hundred Light Infantry join revolutionary: they're over the moon! (6)

Down

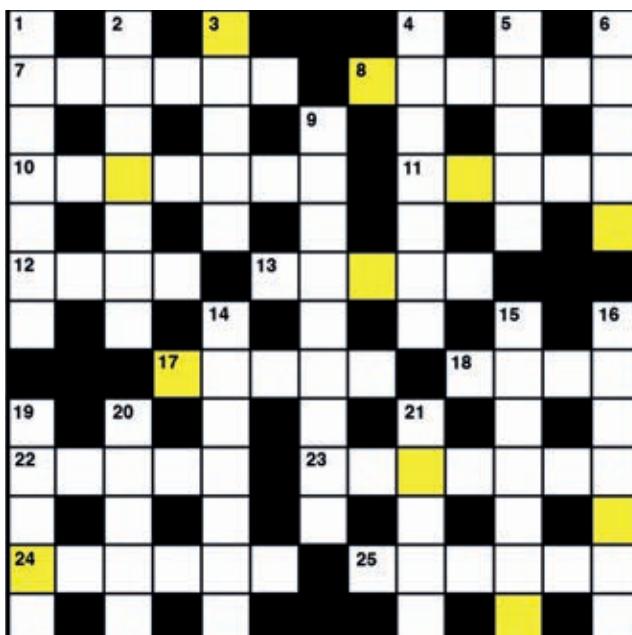
1. And 2 Down. Lightest father upsets RAF plane (7,7)
2. See 1 Down
3. Be embarrassed when bull attacked (5)
4. RAF personnel making a spectacle of themselves on way down (7)
5. Robert's got 1000 RAF weapons (5)
6. In 24 hours, the Spanish procrastinate (5)
9. RAF Operation against Rommel? (6,3)
14. Cotton fabric is fine on RAF aircraft (7)
15. Graduate uses weapon with composure (7)
16. A pity first defendant was sheepish (7)
19. Horse-race for bowlers? (5)
20. In agreement to pay penalty (5)
21. Sounds like a cold country but the opposite can be true (5)

Name: .....

Address: .....

RAF station: .....Crossword No. 403

The winners of our Prize Crossword and Prize Su Doku puzzles will receive a recent top aviation title – please send your entries to the address printed in the adjacent Su Doku panel, to arrive by March 6, 2026.



Solution to Crossword No. 402

Across – 1. Alas 8. Parmigiana 9. Star Wars 10. High 12. Vulcan 14. Enacts 15. Drones 17. Sit-ups 18. Thor 19. Lorraine 21. Adrenaline 22. Loop Down – 2. Last Hurrah 3. Spur 4. Ordain 5. Tissue 6. Highmast 7. Mach 11. Get-up-and-go 13. Canaries 16. Sultan 17. Sortie 18. Teak 20. Abel RAF job – Engineer

Prize Crossword No. 402 winner is: A Coxon, Surrey



## Prize Su Doku

No. 413

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  
March 6, 2026.  
The winner of Su  
Doku No. 411 is:  
Michael  
Hardyman,  
Skipton.



Solution to Su Doku No. 412



## Dance

Strictly The Professionals

UK tour



## No place for gutsy amateurs

Due to demand, the official Strictly The Professionals UK Tour 2026 has announced six extra performances for the production that promises to be bigger, bolder and more breathtaking than ever before, with a line-up of 11 pro dancers from the BBC One show.

The Strictly extravaganza will now open one night earlier at Stockton's Globe Theatre on April 29, with extra shows in Edinburgh, Swansea and Liverpool, plus a new date at Bradford Live, and a final added performance at 7.30pm at Blackpool Opera House on May 30.

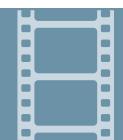
"Theatre audiences across the country will enjoy an evening of world-class dance,

stunning choreography and glamorous costumes, live and up-close," said a spokesperson.

The pros include Australian *Dancing With The Stars* favourite and new Strictly dancer Julian Caillon, three-time Strictly finalist Gorka Márquez, Polish Open Latin Champion and 2022 Strictly winner Jowita Przystał and 10-times Cyprus National Dance Champion Michelle Tsiakkas.

The 37-date tour includes two dates at Oxford's New Theatre, five at The London Palladium and three at Birmingham's Symphony Hall.

Go to: [StrictlyTheProfessionals.com](http://StrictlyTheProfessionals.com) for ticket and venue information.



## Film Review

The Chronology of Water (18)

In cinemas now

# Stewart in gritty debut as director

DEFINING MOMENTS of poet Lidia Yuknavitch's life are presented as fragmented memories in Kristen Stewart's bold and ambitious directorial debut.

Based on Yuknavitch's 2011 'anti-memoir', the film recounts a disturbing relationship of abuse with her father and the destructive ripples that followed through her sexuality, relationships and art.

Lidia (a phenomenal Imogen Poots) channels her energy into swimming – an escape discovered in childhood and since maintained at a competitive level. As she matures, eventually moving away to college, she is confronted by her developing sexuality, starting a relationship with a meek and sensitive boy (Earl Cave) who finds himself at the mercy of her capricious turns. Writing soon replaces the pool, and Lidia begins to excel creatively, eventually invited by counterculture figure Ken Kesey (Jim Belushi) to take part in an experimental collaborative novel.

The film hones in on the texture of memories through macro detail. Editing and sound design are central to creating something experiential, with the poetic form mirroring its subject. The score – scratchy, percussive and avant-garde – keeps you off balance. Pervasive abuse



IMOGEN POOTS: 'Phenomenal' performance

manifests as surrounding whispers. Sex, death and trauma are explored through suggestive edits and symbolism, where the ghosts of the past bleed into the present – the film thrives in this ambiguity, though it may prove a little too much for the casual viewer. Stewart shows little interest in softening the material, instead committing fully to its emotional messiness and fractured perspective.

At its centre is Lidia and her story of struggle and success, but amplified by Stewart's daring direction and Poots, whose performance gives the film its emotional weight. Her occasional voiceover acts as a loose guide, never to spell out the story, but to add vital colour and texture.

Four roundels out of five

Review by Sam Cooney