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ROYAL AIR FORCE

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RAF News



Full New Year Honours list



Sport
Air Cdre in call to arms



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Skeleton
Flt Lt is a golden girl



Sasha lands Reds top job



Tornado vet's historic first with Arrows

Tracey Allen
BATTLE-HARDENED combat pilot Wg Cdr Sasha Nash has made history as the first woman to command the Red Arrows.

The former Tornado flyer, who served in Afghanistan with 31 Sqn, takes over as the famous aerobatic aces begin preparations for the forthcoming display season.

She said: "I was six years old when I decided to join the RAF and fly fast jets. If someone had told me that one day I would be Officer Commanding of the Red Arrows I don't think that I would have believed them."

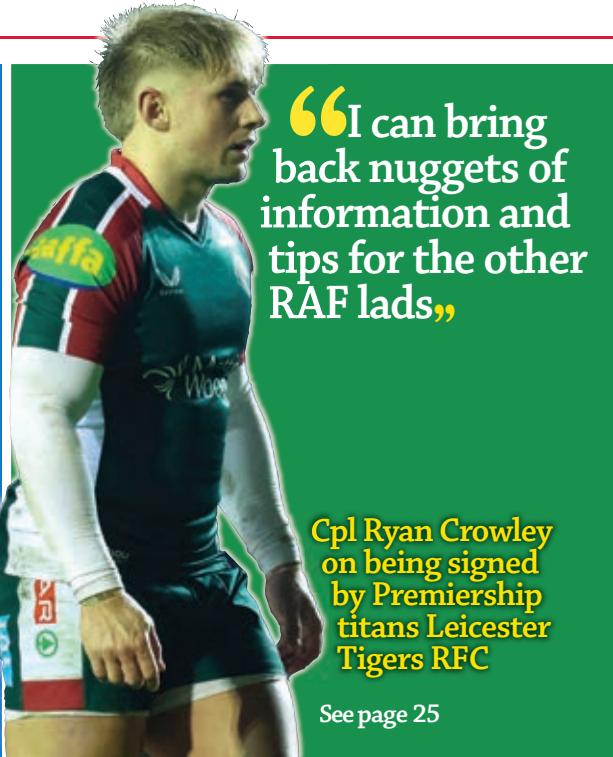
See p9 for full story

BiteSize

“It’s a great privilege. I look forward to working with our friends and neighbours in the local community,”



New RAF Wittering chief Wg Cdr Joan Ochuodho
See page 10



“I can bring back nuggets of information and tips for the other RAF lads,”

Cpl Ryan Crowley on being signed by Premiership titans Leicester Tigers RFC
See page 25

“I jumped at the chance to flex my musical comedy chops,”



Call The Midwife's Helen George stars in UK tour of Cole Porter classic *High Society*
See R'n'R page 5



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Homes for heroes vow

Simon Mander

MILITARY FAMILIES will benefit from new laws under the biggest renewal of Forces housing in a generation.

Tens of thousands of quarters will be renewed under a new, standalone Defence Housing Service.

The Armed Forces Bill will require central government, devolved governments and local authorities providing social care and employment support to consider the unique circumstances faced by military personnel and their families.

Nine out of 10 properties are expected to be renewed by the Service, which will also develop 100,000 homes on surplus Defence land, with personnel and veterans the first in line.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: “Our Armed Forces deserve homes fit for their families under the biggest improvement in Forces accommodation for a generation.”



This Week In History



1945 Long March

POWS AT Stalag Luft III camp in Sagan are given one hour to gather their belongings and evacuate as the Long March from Poland to Germany begins.

1971 Puma debut

THE FIRST Westland Puma is delivered to Air Support Command. Forty-eight are built and 33 Sqn is the first to be formed to operate the helicopter at Odham.



1991 Buccaneer breakthrough

BUCCANEERS USE laser designation for the first time in an attack on a bridge over the Euphrates during Operation Desert Storm.

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

Enter the Dragon

Welsh Typhoon display ace callsign tribute

Simon Mander

WELSH TYPHOON display ace Flt Lt Tom Nation will be storming this year's airshow season under the callsign Dragon 01 to pay tribute to the land of his birth.

The experienced 29 Sqn Qualified Flying Instructor takes over from his pal and predecessor Sqn Ldr Nathan Shawyer in the Typhoon display cockpit and will be showcasing the swing role fighter's combat capability across the UK and Europe.

Team manager Aidan Rae said: "Flt Lt Nation is looking forward to the 2026 season, representing his home nation as best he can while putting on a dynamic, entertaining display that shows his aircraft to its limits."

The announcement marks the beginning of the work-up season and the team shifting their efforts planning the display.

Born and raised in South Wales, Flt Lt Nation learned to fly with 634 Volunteer Gliding Sqn, where he became an instructor at the age of 16.

Growing up he was an air show regular before studying Aerospace Engineering at Swansea University and was a keen member of the Universities of Wales Air Squadron, where he flew the Grob Tutor.

Flt Lt Nation joined the RAF



PROUD: Typhoon display pilot Flt Lt Nation flying the flag for Wales this season

in 2015 and was streamed to fast jets, flying the Tucano T1 at Linton-on-Ouse.

After being awarded his wings, he completed the Tactics and Weapons course at Valley on the Hawk T2

with 25 Sqn and 4 Sqn respectively. Tom arrived on 29 Sqn to complete his operational conversion onto the Typhoon in early 2021.

Chosen to serve with Lossiemouth's 6 Sqn – known

as the 'The Flying Can Openers' – he flew on operations in the Middle East, Nato Air Policing in Eastern Europe, and deployed to the Falkland Islands, Australia and Germany.

He took part in the Platinum Jubilee celebrations, forming part of the '70' formation in the Royal flypast ahead of his current posting to 29 Sqn in September last year to begin his instructional tour.

Atlantic angels – turtle rescue delays RAF rower's ocean bid

Staff Reporter

A RAF rower's bid to cross the Atlantic was halted as her team changed course to rescue a turtle trapped in plastic netting.

Cadets Ambassador and Air Force veteran Emma Wolstenholme spotted the stricken sea creature as her Call to Earth crewmates, former Jaguar pilot John Hammond and marine scientist Stacey Rivers battled the high seas on the final section of the 3,000-mile World's Toughest Row event.

Emma said: "I spotted some plastic fishing nets on the water and saw something I thought was a barrel."

"I realised that it was a large turtle and knew we could get to it. I think it must have heard us as it



SHIP SHAPE: Emma (left), Stacey and John see in the New Year in style

raised a flipper like it was calling for help."

The team switched off the auto-helm navigation system and turned the boat around, fighting against the currents to reach it

and cut it free from the netting. Emma added: "The net was wrapped three times around its neck and it was really struggling – it would certainly have died a slow and painful death if we hadn't managed to get to it."

The rescue cost the team valuable time but the Call to Earth team resumed the fight ahead of RAF rivals Per Adua 21, crewed by a team of Regt veterans, and cadets Trio Three Flying Fish.

Emma and her crew saw in the New Year in traditional style, donning gowns and black tie and enjoying a glass of bubbly before hitting the oars.

As *RAF News* went to press Call to Earth were on target to reach the finish line in Antigua by the end of the month.

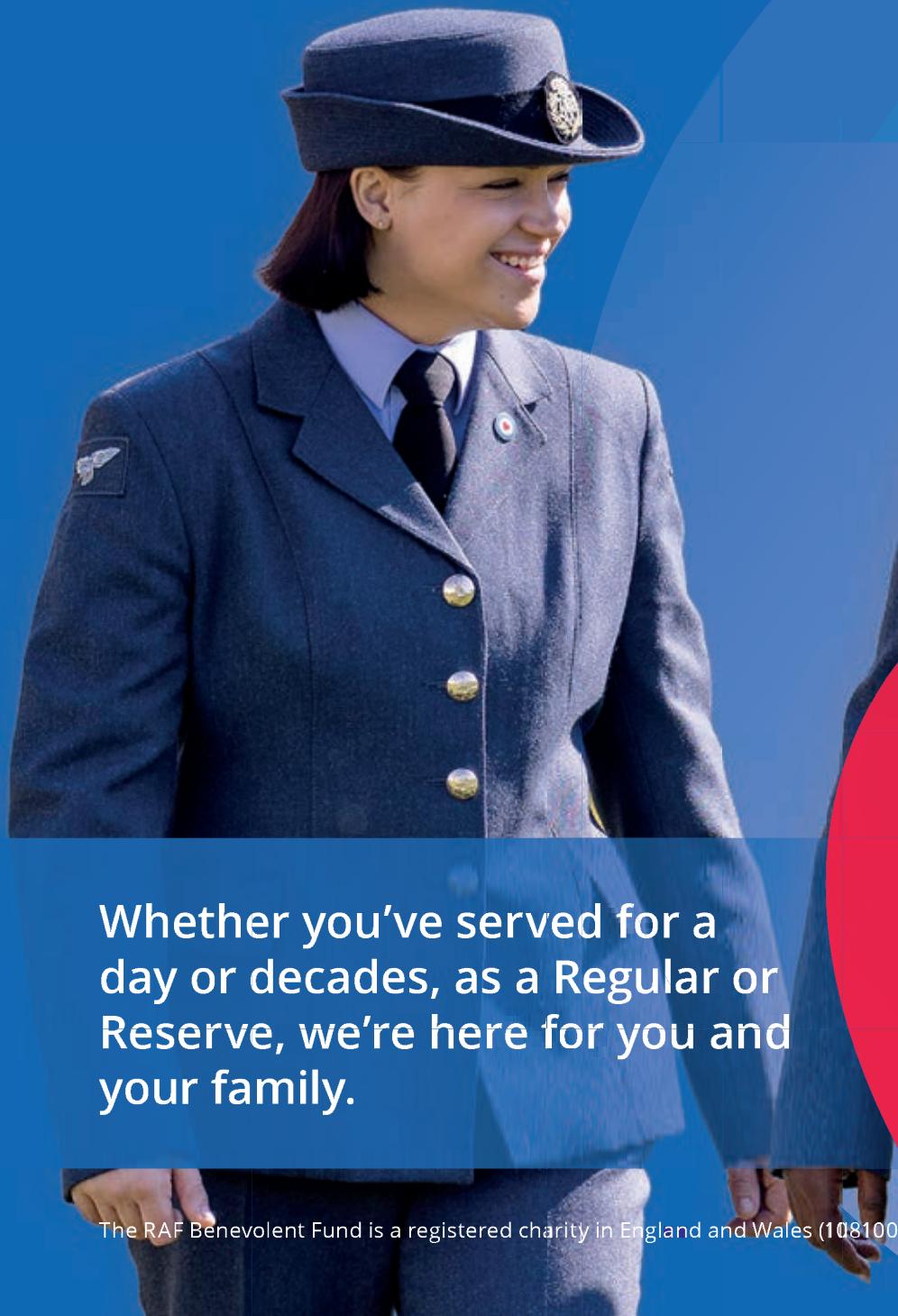


LIFE-SAVERS: The crew cut the stricken Atlantic turtle free from plastic netting before resuming race



Royal Air Force
Benevolent Fund

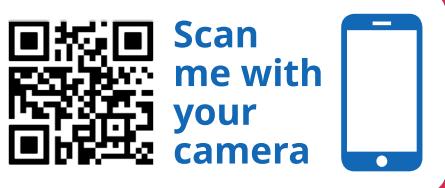
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The RAF Benevolent Fund is a registered charity in England and Wales (1081009) and Scotland (SC038109).

In Brief



MISSION: Charlotte, who died in 2022

Lotte gala

Tracey Allen

LOTTIE'S WAY, the charity set up in memory of retired Wg Cdr Neil Hope's 19-year-old daughter Charlotte, is hosting its first gala dinner to raise money for underprivileged young adults and children worldwide.

The gala – which includes a three-course meal, dance, star speakers and live music – will take place at Shrewsbury Town Football Club next month. The speakers are chair of the FA Debbie Hewitt, sports broadcaster and presenter Gary Newbon and former footballers Dave Edwards and Steve Biggins.

Lottie's Way – The Charlotte Hope Foundation, was established by ex RAF Shawbury-based Neil, who served in the RAF for 42 years, and his son Chris after Charlotte was tragically killed in a car crash in April 2022.

Her ambition was to become a primary schoolteacher and she hoped to teach in Kenya.

The Foundation was established in 2023 to continue Charlotte's legacy – she had a passion for learning and a belief that the power of education could transform lives.

Neil launched the Taking Football to Africa and Beyond Charitable Appeal in 2006 and Charlotte volunteered for it, often travelling to Africa on delivery visits.

The Appeal has delivered hundreds of thousands of items of sports equipment to more than 60 countries.

● Go to: lottiesway.com for more information and to buy gala tickets.



FAMILY FUNDRAISERS: Wg Cdr Neil Hope with his wife Helen and Charlotte in Kenya

U.S YouTuber's in the Loop



Staff Reporter

U.S YOUTUBE sensation Sam Eckholm hitched a ride with Brize Norton-based LXX and 30 Sqns as the UK crews launched training sorties across Britain.

The internet influencer captured stunning footage of the famous Mach Loop in Wales – used to hone pilots' low-level flying skills.

He'll be streaming the video on YouTube to his 2.5 million followers on the platform and his social media sites this month.

The 28-year-old former US Air Force Academy graduate added the RAF's transporter to his military aircraft portfolio after an invitation from squadron chiefs.

His channel has featured flights in a USAF C-17, F16 Viper, CV-22 Osprey and F-15 Eagle.



ON THE BALL: Fundraiser Hayley at last year's HMM gala fundraising event

Hayley sets sights on fundraising bullseye

Tracey Allen

FORCES MENTAL health crusader Cpl Hayley Court is hoping to hit the charity bullseye – by teaming up with Air Force darts aces.

The Brize-based Reservist is joining forces with Air Force pal Cpl Zara Durrant, who set up Operation Bullseye to boost morale and reduce loneliness on stations through the power of darts.

Now the fundraising duo are to hold a charity darts event to help Hayley's Healing Military Minds group hit their £200,000 fundraising target.

The Service's top players will be stepping up to the oche this summer against some of the UK's best professionals, including three-time

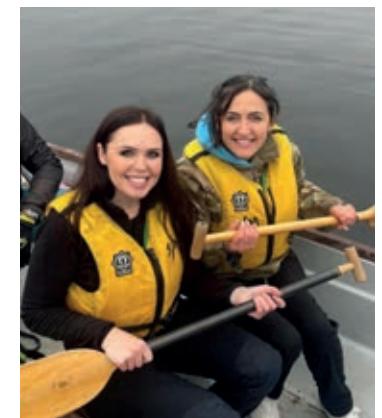
world champion Glen Durrant.

Hayley said: "We have two missions but one heart, and by uniting the HMM with Operation Bullseye we have a shared mission to improve military mental health.

"The collaboration uses darts-based events to encourage conversation, connection and a sense of belonging within the Armed Forces community."

622 Sqn Reservist Hayley set up HMM four years ago and it has become a major force in welfare financing, supporting the work of Combat Stress which delivers help and support to veterans battling the horrors of PTSD and depression.

The group has netted more than £180,000 and the team have their sights set on topping



ON TARGET: Pals Zara (left) and Hayley hit the water for another charity event. Inset left, Glen Durrant in action

£200,000 before their glitzy annual fundraising ball in September.

To swell the charity coffers HMM is also holding a fundraising trek up the Welsh peak Mount Snowdon in March.

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



Putin to face UK missiles

THE UK is to develop new tactical ballistic missiles to boost Ukraine's firepower and counter Putin's war machine.

Defence chiefs have launched a competition to develop ground-launched weapons under the Project Nightfall programme.

The system will boast a range of more than 500 kms and will be designed to operate in high-threat battlefields with heavy electromagnetic interference.

Missiles will be launched from a range of vehicles, firing multiple times in quick succession and withdrawing within minutes before Russian forces can respond.

Scand and deliver

C-17 Arctic mission



GIANT GLOBEMASTER transport aircraft delivered two Wildcat HMA Mk2 helicopters at Royal Norwegian Air Force Base Bardufoss.

The Brize-based C17s were offloaded by RAF engineers to take part in a Commando

Helicopter annual workout in the Arctic Circle codenamed Operation Clockwork.

Merlin and Wildcat crews tested themselves and their machines against the extreme cold on survival training, learning to navigate, ski and build shelters and

forage for food – before conducting sorties over Norway's fjords and mountains.

The deployment leads up to Exercise Cold Response – the largest military exercise in the country this year aimed at deterring threats in the High North.

Forces ISTAR network joins data war

Simon Mander

AIR FORCE intelligence units are to be merged into a new Tri-Service unit as hostile threats surge.

The MOD has launched Military Intelligence Services bringing all defence surveillance agencies under one organisation for the first time, to speed up how information is gathered, analysed, and shared.

The announcement comes as adversaries intensify cyber-attacks, disrupt satellites, threaten global shipping lanes, and spread disinformation driving up food prices, increasing economic uncertainty, and threatening energy security and national infrastructure.

A new Defence Counter-

Intelligence Unit has also been launched after hostile intelligence activity rose by more than half.

Both units were launched at one of the UK's key intelligence sites – Wyton in Cambridgeshire – which includes a football-pitch-sized intelligence fusion centre.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "Our intelligence work is usually unseen but always essential. Military Intelligence Services personnel keep the UK secure at home and strong abroad."

Under the Cyber and Specialist Operations Command the Service will be able to use data from land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace in real time, sharpening the nation's ability to deter adversaries before they act.

Commander Gen Sir Jim

Hockenhull said: "Intelligence sits at the heart of defence. Underpinning everything we do, it provides the insight and foresight we need and enables our operations."

The Dawn Sturgess Inquiry, published last week, made clear that foreign intelligence services are operating far beyond traditional espionage norms, targeting Defence personnel, technology programmes, supply chains, and wider defence industry both at home and overseas.

The Defence Counter-Intelligence Unit will give professionals the tools and structure needed to disrupt and deter hostile activity.

Their work will protect frontline defences, high-tech industry, and infrastructure.



INTEL WAR: UK data gathering units will support new intel network

Museum award win

THE RAF Museum London has achieved a national award for its autism-friendly environment.

The Colindale centre has worked closely with the National Autistic Society and consulted visitors and specialist advisors to improve its facilities, interpretation, signage, staff training, digital platforms and sensory experiences.

At least one in 100 people are autistic – or more than 700,000 people in the UK – but many still struggle to access essential community spaces, businesses, and shops.

RAF Museum head of learning Sarah Castle said: "We are incredibly proud to receive the Autism Friendly Award."

"By listening to visitors and working with experts, we've been able to make meaningful changes that enhance the experience for all."

National Autistic Society projects head Christine Flintoft-Smith said: "There are lots of small changes businesses can make to better support autistic people, and just a little understanding can go a long way."



Pilgrims funding

AIR FORCE children with disabilities are to join a pilgrimage to Lourdes following a £30,000 funding pledges from a welfare group RAFA.

A group of six youngsters will be joining the traditional Easter celebrations in the southern French town as part of a trip organised by Group 187 after the charity landed the funding to cover transport and accommodation costs.



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Reds letter day

Tonka vet Sasha lands Arrows post

“If you’d told me 20 years ago that one day I would command the Red Arrows, I wouldn’t have believed it...”



Andy Morton

A FORMER Tornado pilot has taken the hot seat as the latest boss of the Red Arrows.

Wg Cdr Sasha Nash, who joined the Service in 2005, heads up the Waddington-based unit replacing another ‘Tonka’ veteran.

She said: “If someone had told me, 20 years ago, that one day I’d be Officer Commanding of the Red Arrows, I don’t think I would have believed it.

“This is a team of dedicated, diligent and enthusiastic people – exemplifying the ethos and values found in units right across the RAF.”

Originally from Surrey, Wg Cdr Nash flew the Tornado GR4 with Marham’s 31 Sqn in Afghanistan and on exercises worldwide.

Prior to her latest posting she was Display Wing Headquarters Chief of Staff, working alongside the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight and the Red Arrows.

Wg Cdr Nash said attending airshows had sparked an early



HISTORIC HANDOVER: Outgoing CO Wg Cdr Collins welcomes Wg Cdr Nash

interest in aviation and led her to pursue a flying career.

She said: “I was a six-year-old girl when I decided to join the Royal Air Force and to fly fast jets – inspired by seeing the

speed and excitement of aircraft displaying at those events.

“That ambition stayed with me throughout school, where I achieved a sixth form scholarship and subsequent university

bursary to join the RAF.

“I’m incredibly proud and excited to now, as OC RAFAT, be commanding a team whose aim is to represent the UK and help inspire future generations of aviators from all backgrounds.

“This is a great time to be joining the Red Arrows, as we prepare for a busy season and plan for the future.”

Training for the new season is already underway and is managed by Red One – the pilot who leads the team in the air and designs the aerobatic show. The first public events of the summer are usually staged in late May or early June.

Paying tribute to her predecessor, Wg Cdr Nash said: “I’ve worked alongside Adam over the last couple of years and witnessed, first-hand, his utter dedication to both the team and the RAF as well as his immense wealth of display knowledge and commitment to all that the Red Arrows represent.

“He has earned deep respect

from those in the team and the wider display community, across the UK and far beyond.”

Outgoing OC Wg Cdr Adam Collins spent seven years with the team – first as Red 10, the safety supervisor and ground-based commentator, then as OC for the Red Arrows’ 60th diamond anniversary season, in 2024, and high-profile tour to Canada.

He said: “The challenges of maintaining and operating the Red Arrows’ Hawk T1 are quite different from that of an F-35 or an A400.

“Whether we are training or displaying we are routinely launching nine or more aircraft simultaneously, three or four times per day, often away from our home base.”

“As I hand over command to Sasha, I would like to wish her all the very best for the future and am confident that under her leadership, the Red Arrows will continue to demonstrate our recipe of precision, excellence and teamwork across the globe.”

News

Jupiter makes Benson debut

Simon Mander

BENSON IS to get six H145 helicopters under a two-year £33.6 million deal awarded to Airbus.

The battlefield workhorses – known as Jupiter HC2s in service – were ordered 18 months ago and are flown by 84 Sqn in Cyprus to support emergency response and aerial firefighting.

Two of the new aircraft were handed over to the MOD, bringing the total to three, with the first H145 transported to Cyprus in March. All aircraft will be 'in-theatre' by the end of June.

The facilities housing RAF personnel alongside their Airbus colleagues are currently undergoing refurbishment and preparation.

Gp Capt James Brooks said: "Delivering the first aircraft, in under two years, is a testament to the outstanding collaboration between the UK Armed Forces, DE&S and Airbus. This rapid acquisition programme will



deliver important capabilities to Cyprus. Operating Jupiter HC2 at RAF Benson is the first major step towards full delivery."

At 13.64m in length they have a maximum take-off weight of 3,800kg, meaning they're ideal for the tasks they will be deployed on.

All six aircraft are required to undergo modification at Airbus Helicopters UK as part of the original contract.

The fleet will fulfil the requirements previously carried out by the now-retired Puma HC2s.

APPOINTMENT:
Wg Cdr Ochuodho takes command at RAF Wittering



Soccer star nets post

AN AIR Force Women's soccer supremo has netted the top job at Wittering.

Wg Cdr Joan Ochuodho takes command of the Cambridgeshire base after joining up in 2003.

She deployed to Iraq, the Falklands Islands and Nigeria and is a member of the RAF

Football Association's Board of Trustees and the RAF's representative to the National FA Council.

She said: "It is a tremendous honour and privilege. I am looking forward to working closely with our friends and neighbours in the local community."



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Sqn Ldr Clare Thomas

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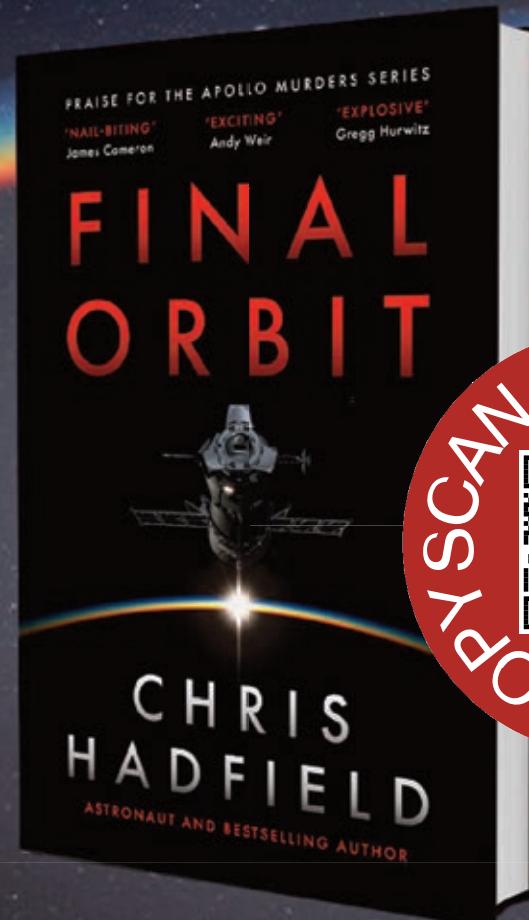
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Typhoons strike Daesh terror lair

Anglo-French raid destroys remote weapons bunker



ON TARGET:
Typhoon pilot carries out preflight checks ahead of Daesh strike in Syria

Staff reporter

TYPHOONS AND French Air Force Rafale combat jets destroyed an underground lair used by Daesh terrorists as a weapons store in a night-time raid in Syria.

The Anglo-French strike force, supported by a Voyager tanker, was called in after intelligence teams located the target, north of the ancient site of Palmyra in the centre of the country.

UK crews unleashed laser-guided Paveway IV bombs to destroy the target, hidden in the mountains in a remote area.

A spokesman said: "Careful intelligence analysis led officials to believe the facility was storing arms and explosives."

"Our aircraft used Paveway IV guided bombs to target a number of access tunnels down to the facility and initial indications

are that the target was engaged successfully."

"There is no indication of any risk having been posed to civilians by the strike, and all our aircraft returned safely."

UK Typhoons based at Akrotiri in Cyprus continue to mount patrols across the region tracking the movements of remaining terror cells to prevent a resurgence of the hardline Islamic group following its military defeat in Baghuz Fawqani by coalition forces in 2019.

Peak performance

A LEEMING Gunner is to tackle Britain's highest peaks in sub-zero temperatures to raise cash to help personnel living rough after being demobbed.

Howard Kniveton will take on the 500-mile Three Peaks challenge for the military charity SSAFA.

Typical temperatures at the summit of Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Yr Wyddfa in Snowdon in January are below freezing and even a mild breeze can send the mercury plummeting.

"Self-supported means just that," said Howard. "Starting at the summit of Ben Nevis, I'll be hiking to Scafell Pike and on to Yr Wyddfa wild camping each night, living out of my pack, and

surviving on ration packs, with the goal of completing the trek in just 20 days."

Howard has set a target of £5,000 and, so far, has raised around £1,000.

The cash will support people like Nick, who served for 11 years in the Army before being discharged and living in a tent in woods until SSAFA helped him make a new home and a new life.

Howard said: "I'm sleeping in the wild through choice, but Nick didn't have the luxury of choice when he was out in all weathers."

● To support Howard, visit justgiving.com/page/howard-kniveton-2.



MORE THAN 400 Forces veterans joined former Prime Minister Sir John Major to mark the 30th anniversary of the Bosnian war with a ceremony of remembrance at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire.



YOUR SHOUT: The UK Census is seeking the views of the serving and veteran communities

Count us in

Simon Mander

VETERANS AND Armed Forces personnel are being asked what issues should be included in the 2031 Census.

Census 2021 was the first to include questions about veterans, and the continued inclusion of the views of the Forces community depends on feedback before the February deadline, the ONS said.

Survey spokesman Adam Allen-Benton said: "We're keen to hear from veterans and serving personnel about whether this data matters to them and what information would be most valuable."

"We know how vital Census data is for understanding the needs of the Armed Forces community, from healthcare provision to employment support, and that priorities can change."

"We want to ensure your audience know they can help shape the process and secure the data that supports veterans and Service personnel in the future."

News

RAF New Year Honours, 2026

**PROMOTIONS IN AND
APPOINTMENTS TO THE
MILITARY DIVISION OF THE
MOST HONOURABLE ORDER
OF THE BATH**

As Knight Commander (KCB)
Air Marshal (Now Air Chief
Marshal) H. Smyth CB OBE DFC



KCB: CAS, ACM Sir Harvey Smyth

As Companions (CB)

AVM D.S. Arthurton OBE
AVM T.D. Neal-Hopes OBE

**PROMOTIONS IN AND
APPOINTMENTS TO THE
MILITARY DIVISION OF THE
MOST EXCELLENT ORDER
OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE**

As Commanders (CBE)

Air Vice-Marshal A.S. Burns
Air Vice-Marshal P.T.G. Lester
Air Commodore P.N. Cracroft
Air Commodore N.M. Worrall

As Officers (OBE)

Gp Capt A.P. March
Gp Capt J.P. Radley
Wg Cdr (now Gp Capt) P.A.
Hanson
Wg Cdr F.Y. Gagnon
Wg Cdr R. Podmore
Acting Wg Cdr (now Sqn Ldr)
A.F. McDowell
As Members (MBE)

Wg Cdr C.W. Berryman
Wg Cdr L.K. Frown
Sqn Ldr C. Bowen
Sqn Ldr R.G. Causer
Flt Lt (now Sqn Ldr) M.R. Dennett
Flying Officer (now Flt Lt)
J.J. Bentley
Flying Officer (now Flt Lt)
R.G. Micklethwaite
WO M. Willis
Sgt G.A. Roberts
Cpl D. Jameson

**KING'S VOLUNTEER
RESERVES MEDAL**

Wg Cdr R.B. Williams
Flt Lt (now Sqn Ldr) G.C. Hymers
WO G.L. Churchward

**ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF THE
ROYAL RED CROSS**

Sqn Ldr S.J. Tippett
WO L.L. Gardner

**CIVILIAN DIVISION
PROMOTIONS IN AND
APPOINTMENTS TO THE
CIVILIAN DIVISION OF THE
MOST EXCELLENT ORDER
OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE**

As Officer (OBE)

Prof E M Molloy

**MERITORIOUS
SERVICE MEDAL**

WO (now Flt Lt)
N.E. Illingworth (formerly known
as Lashbrook)
WO M.C. Allen
WO M.A. Booth
WO D.S.J. Bull
WO M.A. Cox
WO P.D. Cunningham
MAcr D.S. Folkard
WO R. Graham
WO B. Hagan MBE
MAcr K.G. Hayward
MAcr M.G. Lingham
WO A. McDonald
MAcr N.M. Stanbury
MAcr J.J. Woolley
Acting WO S. Hardie
Acting WO N.A. Owen
WO 2 F.P. Lyness (British Army)
Flt Sgt J.R. Milner



AOC 1 GP COMMENDATION: UK Lightning Force training team

Flt Sgt J.W.G. Pickett
Sgt P.J. Womersley

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COMMENDATIONS**

Air Cdre F.M. Bradley
Gp Capt J.D. Heeps
Sqn Ldr J.E. Fordham
Flt Lt (now Acting Sqn Ldr)
H. Brown
Flt Lt R.A. Stokes
WO T.I.R. Cherrington
MAcr M.J. Fellows
WO A.J. Gasson
Flt Sgt J.R. France
Sgt (now Staff Sgt)
K.D. Rogers (British Army)
AS1 A.M-A. Harris
AS1 K.L. Oldham

Team Commendations

- Catering Flight, Royal Air Force Marham
- Number 32 (The Royal) Squadron 'B' Flight, RAF Northolt

- Programme ROCKHOPPER,
Falkland Islands
- Project CORAX Strategic and
Digital Team, RAF Henlow
- RAF Inclusion Restorative
Action Team, HQ Air Command

**DEPUTY CHIEF OF THE
AIR STAFF & AIR AND
SPACE COMMANDER
COMMENDATIONS**

**DEPUTY CHIEF OF THE AIR
STAFF COMMENDATIONS**

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Sqn Ldr J.A. Munro
Sqn Ldr L.R.W. Wood-Smith
Mr O. Cowey
Mrs V. Porteus
Mr A. Trinick

Team Commendations

- Air Infrastructure, HQ AIR
- People Campaign Programme
Office, HQ AIR
- RAF Recruiting & Selection
Direct Entry Cyber Recruitment
Team, RAF Cranwell

**AIR AND SPACE
COMMANDER
COMMENDATIONS**

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Cdr J.J. Hughes (Royal Navy)
Wg Cdr S.E. Reade MBE
Sqn Ldr A.W.J. Barber
Sqn Ldr J. Bell
Sqn Ldr S.D. Clarkson
Sqn Ldr A.E. Drummond
Sqn Ldr R.G. Hunter
Sqn Ldr M.J. Lewis
Sqn Ldr C.T. Mitchell
Flt Lt R. Darroch
Flt Lt A.J. Hutchison
Flt Lt J.J. Pickard
Capt R.J. Smith (British Army)
WO S. Webster
WO 1 (now Captain)
J.T. Williams (British Army)
Acting WO M.J. Wilson
Flt Sgt (now WO) A.J. Barnes
Flt Sgt (now Acting WO)
G.S. Purnell
Flt Sgt M.J. Bridge
Sgt C.L. Dickinson
Sgt L.R.M. Murchison



AIR AND SPACE COMMANDER COMMENDATION: Poseidon Survive, Evade, Resist, Extract (SERE) Team, RAF Lossiemouth

- Sgt L. Oliver
- Cpl J.J. Kay West
- AS1 (T) A.S.D. McGregor
- AS1 (T) (now Acting Cpl)
C.A.D. Sims
- Mrs K.A. Ginger
- Mr V.A. Patel
- Mrs K.S.J. Sharp

Team Commendations

- Air and Space Intelligence
Centre, RAF Wyton
- Air Support MT, HQ AIR
- Explosives Safety Team,
HQ AIR
- Poseidon Survive, Evade,
Resist, Extract (SERE) Team, RAF
Lossiemouth
- Combat Service Support
Section, 34 Squadron RAF
Regiment, RAF Leeming
- NATO Secure Recognised Air
Picture Implementation Team,
RAF Boulmer
- Op HIGHMAST Phase 2:
Medical Force and Hospital
Staging Unit
- Halli Airbase Detachment, 41
Squadron, RAF Coningsby
- John Collier Exercise Control
Facility Team, RAF Waddington
- Threat Operator Flight,
Aggressor Squadron, RAF
Spadeadam

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STAFF COMMENDATION**

Sqn Ldr A.V. Claber-Aikman

**DEPARTMENT OF STATE
COMMENDATIONS**

Rev (Wg Cdr) D.J. Norfield

Flt Sgt M. Hollow

**COMMANDER
CYBER & SPECIALIST
OPERATIONS COMMAND
COMMENDATION**

Flt Sgt D.J. Milward

**CHIEF OF THE GENERAL
STAFF COMMENDATION**

Sgt D.P. Saunders

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COMMANDING COMMENDATIONS**AIR OFFICER COMMANDING NO. 1 GROUP COMMENDATIONS**

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Sqn Ldr T.I. Finlow
Sqn Ldr M. Pickles
Acting Lt Cdr R. Parker (Royal Navy)
Lt D. Chowdhury (Royal Navy)
Flt Lt M. Aylmer
Flt Lt A. Bowyer
Flt Lt S. Day
Flt Lt S.L. Nassiri
Flt Lt S.A. Ostler
Flt Lt J.A. Phillips
Flt Lt J.W.M. Poole
Flt Lt D.J.C. Sharpe
Flt Sgt J.Q. Barnard
Flt Sgt A. Campion
Flt Sgt M.D. Hobbs
CPO K. Norrish (Royal Navy)
Chf Tech S.C. Begley
Sgt J.S. Lewis
Sgt A.D. McMillan
Acting Sgt M.C. Chandler
Acting Sgt L.R. Johnson
LH D. Akroyd (Royal Navy)
Cpl S.W. Besford
Acting Cpl T. McConkey
Dr S. Ahmed

Team Commendations

- Exercise MAPLE HAWK Engineering & Logistics
- Air Mobility Force, Air Safety Cell, Error Management Section
- Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team Dye Team
- Operational Communications Information Systems Flight
- Number 120 Squadron Training Team
- Project Hyacinthus, Typhoon Mission Support Centre
- Number 617 Squadron Weapon Trade
- Number 51 Squadron Op HIGHMAST UMO team
- UK Lightning Force Training Flight
- BBMF Lancaster Maintenance Team

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Sqn Ldr P. Bolton

Sqn Ldr S.L. Medcalf RAAF
Flt Lt I.T. Donnison
Flt Lt W. Horstwood
Acting Flt Lt D.M. Novakovic
Fg Off H. Briggs
WO D.C.W. Gill
WO S. Poulton
Flt Sgt S. Ash
Flt Sgt M. Cockett
Flt Sgt P.A. Hall
Flt Sgt J.W. Reeve
Flt Sgt D. Sandilands
Chf Tech J. Holland
Chf Tech P. Lynch
Sgt S. Boothby
Sgt A. Dillon
Sgt A. Glencross
Sgt A. Harris
Sgt N.J.H. Jackson
Sgt J. Martin
Sgt D. Morrow
Sgt K. Richardson
Sgt R. Spencer
Cpl D.A. Beresford
Cpl T.J. Crainie
Cpl T.J. Kelly
Cpl S.V. Staniforth
Acting Cpl S.J. Fisher
AS1 B.R.W. Hutchison
AS1 E.R. Storey
Mrs D. Bird
Mr P. Brown
Mr J. Giddings
Ms G. Harvey
Ms J. McMillan

Team Commendations

- People and Families Support Team, RAF St Mawgan
- Academic Air Weapons Range Controllers
- East Terminal Air Traffic Control Centre (East TATCC)
- II Squadron RAF Regiment
- 2 CUAS Wg Op WORMPROOF Eng Spt
- RAF Boulmer Beekeeping Group
- Survival Equipment Section (SES), RAF St Mawgan
- Operations and Maintenance Team, RAF Menwith Hill
- Air Land Integration Squadron, RAF Coningsby
- USVF Support Group Utilities Recovery Team
- Community Support Team, RAF Lossiemouth
- RAF Waddington Clothing Stores
- Cyber Security Team, RAF

Valley
● RAF Waddington Holiday Home Committee
● Air Weapons Ordnance Munitions and Explosives (WOME) Incident Support Team (AWIST)
● Royal Air Force Police Counter Surveillance Team
● Alternative Mission Equipment Section, RAF Marham
● Personal Support Section, RAF Brize Norton
● Technical Surveillance Counter Measures, RAF Digby
● 15 Squadron RAF Regiment, Engineering Section
● Accounts Reconciliation Team, RAF Cosford

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Sqn Ldr K. Stamatakis
Sqn Ldr N.S. Wheeler
Sqn Ldr K. Zid
Flt Lt S. Day
Flt Lt A. Hermann
Flt Lt R.C. Muscroft-Bloomfield
Flt Lt M. Wintermeyer
WO D. McWilliam
Flt Sgt J. Reacher
Sgt S.J. May
Cpl R. Harness

Team Commendations

- 140 Expeditionary Air Wing Police and Security Team
- 90 Signals Unit Detachment, Operation CHESSMAN 25
- Typhoon vs KC-46A Air to Air Refuelling Operational Emergency Clearance Team

AIR OFFICER COMMANDING NO. 22 GROUP COMMENDATIONS

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Capt R.S. Pryce (British Army)
Flt Lt N. Johnson
Flg Off T.C. Ray
WO 1 R.J. Lord (British Army)
Sgt E. Callow
Sgt D. Ledden
Mrs K. O'Halloran
Mr M. Quainton
Mrs S. Roberts
Mrs K. Spence

Team Commendations**AOC 1 GP COMMENDATION:** Royal Air Force Acrobatic Team Dye Team

● Requirements Analysis Wing Engineering and Cyberspace Squadron – Lightning Task Team
● Royal Air Force Specific Learning Differences Team
● MOD Lyneham Chaplaincy Centre
● Training Design and Standards Organisation (Lyneham)
● Cadet Training Team - North Region

COMMENDATION
G. Thomson**DIRECTOR SUPPORT COMMENDATIONS**

Sqn Ldr M. Aopare
Sqn Ldr B.N. Convery
Sqn Ldr S. Whiteman
Flt Sgt E. Coleridge
Sgt J.L. Craven
Cpl Y. Hylton
Mrs C. Cheetham

Team Commendations

- Occupational Hygiene Flight
- Graduated Equipment Capability Team
- Project Fulmination ePES Team
- Defence Fire and Rescue HQ

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Wg Cdr S. English MBE
Mrs C. Bennett
Mr W. Lockyear**JOINT COMMANDER'S COMMENDATIONS**

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Sqn Ldr S.R. Wain
Flt Lt (now Sqn Ldr) A.P. Blakeborough
Sgt I. Cross
Sgt C.L. Gagetta
Sgt M.D. Ryan

Team Commendation
RAF Digital, Operations Support, Air Radio Reserve and Battlespace Spectrum Management Flight**DIRECTOR PEOPLE COMMENDATIONS**
Wg Cdr S. English MBE
Mrs C. Bennett
Mr W. Lockyear**DIRECTOR RESERVES COMMENDATIONS**
Sqn Ldr A.L. Watts
Sgt P.L. Lancaster**Team Commendations**
● RAuxAF Inspectorate, RAF Cranwell
● Northern Reserve Support Wing, RAF Leeming
DIRECTOR RESOURCES**AOC NO. 11 GROUP COMMENDATION:** 90 Signals Unit Detachment, Operation CHESSMAN 25

It's time RSS roll-out plan was given realistic timeline



The Forces Pension Society has continuously urged the MoD to fully resource the Remediable Service Statement (RSS) roll-out plan and to provide timely communications to affected members.

The MoD update published last July extended the previous delivery date to no later than 31 December 2025 for so called 'non-complex cases' and 31 March 2026 for 'complex cases'. All outstanding cases are now classified as 'complex'.

The Society has received a reply to a Freedom of Information request that demonstrates the MoD will not achieve the 31 March 2026 deadline for all complex RSSs to be issued.

From the outset, given the large numbers of servicepeople involved, we have expressed doubt about the MoD's ability to meet its targets. We take no pleasure in this being the case. But



Neil Marshall, CEO of the Forces Pension Society

we do need to keep the issue in the spotlight for the sake of all those who need answers in order to plan their future.

The latest MoD announcement issued in December stated this: "At this stage, we are unable to provide a specific completion date



SCAN ME

for all outstanding RSSs. However, we are committed to keeping you informed. Our next update will be provided in January 2026, and we will continue to share regular updates on gov.uk on our progress thereafter."

Forces Pension Society Chief Executive, Maj Gen Neil Marshall, commented: "Simple arithmetic calculations showed it would take longer to complete this process than the MoD had published. However,

despite some progress made, many still have no idea when they will receive their vital RSS.

"We trust the promised MoD announcement this month (January) will bring clarity and a realistic timeline. Sitrep updates will be posted on our website – forcespensionsociety.org

"You can also join our growing 65,000+ Members via our website and consult our expert Forces Pensions Consultants about your AFPS15 Remedy options"

**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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The club nobody wants to join

AMONG THE many quiet traditions of military aviation, few are as understated – or as hard-won – as membership of the Caterpillar Club. It is a club that no one ever sets out to join, yet for thousands of aircrew it came to symbolise survival at the very edge of catastrophe.

The Caterpillar Club was founded in 1922 following a conversation between parachute designer Leslie Irvin and two American airmen who owed their lives to his equipment. One of them remarked that there should be a club for men who survived by parachute. Its name was drawn from the silkworm whose thread was used in early parachutes, and its enduring motto captured the brutal simplicity of aircrew survival: Life Depends on a Silken Thread.

Membership was strictly limited. Only those who had escaped from a stricken aircraft using an Irvin parachute were eligible. Civilian and military aircrew alike could apply, but each case had to be verified. Successful applicants were issued with a small engraved gold caterpillar pin (top), a membership card and a certificate bearing their name and rank. No ceremony. No fanfare. Just quiet recognition.

During World War II, the Caterpillar Club grew rapidly. Bomber Command losses were severe, and for many airmen a parachute descent was the final act of a mission gone disastrously wrong. To bale out was to accept

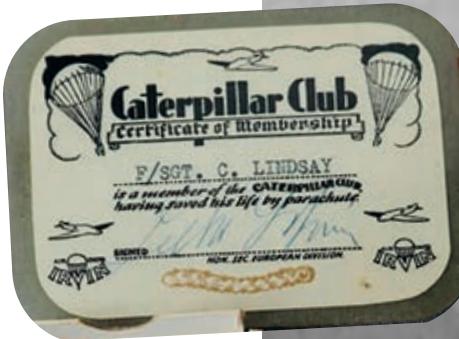
the unknown: fire, flak, night skies, burning aircraft, and often captivity – if one survived at all.

One such airman was Sergeant Albert A. Walton, a wireless operator with 101 Squadron, based at RAF Ludford Magna in Lincolnshire. Walton's wartime experience was extraordinary, even by Bomber Command standards. On the night of December 16, 1943 – later known as Black Thursday – his Lancaster was returning from a bombing mission to Berlin when, due to horrendous fog over Lincolnshire, the crew was unable to land at base. Eventually having run out of fuel mid-air, all eight crew members were forced to abandon the aircraft, parachuting to the ground. All survived.

Just weeks later, on the night of January 3, 1944, Walton's aircraft was hit by flak over Berlin. This time the outcome was far worse. The crew of DV269 were forced to bale out over enemy territory; tragically, four did not survive.

After the war, Walton applied for Caterpillar Club membership. His handwritten letter, dated August 10, 1945, still survives and remains held in the archive of Irvin – the aerospace and defence company famous for designing and manufacturing parachutes. In it, he matter-of-factly describes events that were anything but ordinary:

*Dear Sir or Madam,
I wish to apply for membership
in the Caterpillar Club. Returning
from a raid on Berlin on the 16th*



MEMBERS: W/O Albert Walton, above, and certificate of crewmate F/Sgt Charles Lindsay, inset



BALED OUT: F/Sgt Charles Lindsay



SURVIVED: Flt Lt James McClure

*of December 1943 all the members of our aircraft (Lancaster) had to bale out over England and again on the night of the 2nd of January 1944 we were hit by 'flak' over Berlin and had to abandon the aircraft by chutes. 4 of the crew were killed. I might add that the chute I used over Berlin opened in the aircraft and had two holes, one three foot and 18 inches in diameter, burnt in it – even so I reached earth without injury. You will be able to get verification of these two jumps from my old Squadron – RAF Ludford Magnor, 101 Sqn, Market Raisen, Lincs: The Pilot of the aircraft was F/LT. A. Lazenby. I remain Sir.
Yours Sincerely
1496639 W.O. Walton A.A.*

Those few lines convey the reality of parachute escapes better than any official citation. Walton's parachute had partially deployed inside the burning aircraft, been damaged by fire, and yet still carried him safely to the ground. It is difficult to imagine a clearer example of the fragile margin between life and death that Caterpillar Club membership represents.

Walton's application was approved, and he was issued with his engraved gold caterpillar pin. Like many members, he wore it sparingly but proudly. Family members recall that whenever he



put on a suit for a special occasion, the small gold caterpillar was always fixed to his lapel. On its reverse were engraved the words: W/O A.A. Walton, (reflecting his promotion after the war). No explanation was required.

What makes Walton's story particularly compelling is that it is not unique. Surviving Caterpillar Club artefacts from across Bomber Command tell similar tales. The

membership card of Flt Lt James McClure, Walton's crewmate, records his own escape by parachute. Another card and pin issued to FS Charles Lindsay, the Flight Engineer from Walton's crew, echo the same experience. The same silken thread had saved them all.

The Caterpillar Club has often been described as "the club nobody wants to join". Yet for those who did, it represented survival, remembrance, and a quiet bond shared with others who had stepped into empty air and lived. There were no reunions

in uniform, no public marches, no medals specifically for baling out. Just a small gold pin, worn discreetly, carrying an immense weight of memory.

Today, nearly a century after its founding, the Caterpillar Club remains one of aviation's most poignant symbols. Each pin represents a moment when everything else had failed – and a parachute did not.

In the end, the Caterpillar Club reminds us that survival in war is rarely glorious, often random, and sometimes hangs by nothing more than a length of silk – and the courage to step into the dark.

By Ingrid Shepherd and Dawn Woodward

Albert Walton's story, and those of his fellow crewmen, are explored in greater detail in the book *From Bomber County to Berlin – An RAF Airman's Wartime Story* by Ingrid Shepherd and Dawn Woodward (inset left) which draws on original letters, logbooks and personal artefacts to tell the human story behind Bomber Command operations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"There were too many bad memories of previous tours. I didn't tell anyone and kept it hidden."

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

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

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

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

She was airlifted to a UK mental health facility.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Her message to other veterans still fighting for peace?

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

"When you do – you'll feel it. That moment of pride. That freedom. That growth. And that's everything."

Win!



UK F-35 BK-2: Lightning flown by Cdr Ian Tidball and a US Marine F-35 flown by Maj Jason "SMYRF" O'Neil perform a two-ship formation flight over Edwards Air Force Base after air intercept training mission ©Lockheed Martin



BLUE DIAMONDS: Hawker Hunter F6 aircraft of the 92 Sqn display team based at Middleton St George, April 1961 ©AHB (RAF)

V/STOL: Hawker Siddeley Harrier GR.1s of No 20 Sqn, based at Wildenrath, Germany, pictured during Exercise Grimm Charade, July to August 1973. XV808/T is pictured in the hover, preparing to land, as a second aircraft is recovered to its hide in the trees © AHB (RAF)

Harrier... gone too soon

"THERE IS only one replacement for a Harrier – another Harrier!" says author Philip Birtles at the start of one of two new books by him, just released.

And after a cursory look at the legendary jump jet's war record, it's hard to disagree.

From protecting Kurdish safe areas in northern Iraq to relieving the siege of Sarajevo in 1995 and attacking Serb targets around Kosovo in 1999, from Giola del Colle in southern Italy, the flying 'four poster' had proved its worth long before the Gulf Wars.

Why it was retired then is still a mystery, especially since the AV-8B Harrier II Plus is still operated by the US Marine Corps, which is expected to carry on flying it into 2027.

In *Harrier – The World's First V/STOL Jet Combat Aircraft* (pen-and-sword.co.uk) Birtles says: "Britain retired their Harrier force prematurely due to budget restraints, in favour of the less flexible Tornado. This was just as the Harrier was completing a major systems development update to significantly improve its potential."

Indeed, he says without American support, the Harrier concept – which revolutionised combat aviation with its ability to take off vertically, attack and return to concealed bases like forest clearings – would have been confined to

history. It was perceived to be, by British military planners, "more an airshow performer, rather than an effective combat aircraft."

And he's scathing about its replacement – the F-35B Lightning – whose unit cost, he points out – would buy a squadron of Harriers.

"The F-35B is a stealth combat aircraft, which is a feature totally unnecessary in close air support operations," he adds.

"All its weapons have to be contained within the airframe to maintain stealth, and with its limited endurance, underwing fuel tanks are definitely not the answer."

And, of course, its combat capability is yet to be proven with only one British Lightning lost so far – falling off the bow of the carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth during take-off.

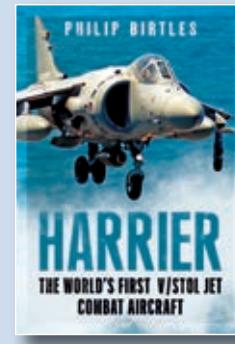
Impartial

Controversy is not however the main point of Birtles' work – whose career has so far seen him produce more than 50 aviation titles.

As a rule, both accounts are rigorously impartial and show the author's deep knowledge of the history and development of each airframe.

Harrier tells the story of the jet, with black and white imagery, which, as the RAF GR.9 and the Fleet Air Arm Sea Harrier, was the key British aircraft of the

Win a great new aviation book

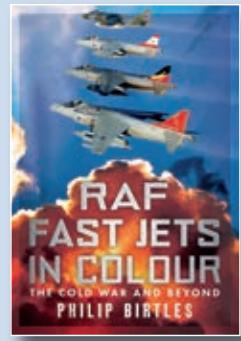


WE HAVE copies of both *Harrier* and *RAF Fast Jets In Colour* by Philip Birtles to win. For your chance to own a copy, answer this question correctly:

How many aviation titles has Philip Birtles produced?

Email your answer, marked Birtles book competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by February 6.

Please mark on your entry whether you wish to win the Harrier or the RAF Fast Jets In Colour title.



Falklands War. The book also includes an account by AVM Gary Waterfall of what it was like to fly operationally.

And it features Wittering's gate guardian 'Christine,' which was named after a visit by a Sun model to Afghanistan, where it became the first Harrier to drop a Paveway laser-guided bomb.

Birtles' other new title *RAF Fast Jets In Colour – The Cold War and Beyond* (pen-and-sword.co.uk) is, as the name suggests, more of a vehicle for the author's extensive picture archive and features airframes from the Gloster Meteor – which entered service with the RAF in July 1944 – to the contemporary American-made F-35B

Lightning. Featuring 290 colour images, almost all previously unpublished, the book illustrates the evolution of one of the most technologically advanced air forces in the world. It provides essential facts and descriptions of the designs, capabilities and operations of household names such as Hunter, Phantom, Typhoon and many more, highlighting uncommon details including variants in camouflage, squadron markings and special anniversary colours.

The title is a richly-illustrated guide to the RAF's most prominent fighter and reconnaissance aircraft since the start of the Cold War.

Simon Mander



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Only tanker pilot DFC dies aged 64

SQN LDR STUART MITCHELL, who has died aged 64, was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross during the Kosovo air campaign when he flew his tanker aircraft over hostile territory.

Whilst at school in Kent, he joined the RAF section of the Combined Cadet Force and always claimed that it "made him." He became a cadet flight sergeant, gained his private pilot's licence and glider pilot wings, and continued as a staff cadet at weekends with 618 Volunteer Gliding School in Kent.

He joined the RAF after leaving school then decided to leave to work as a city trader but his love of flying drew him back to the RAF and he started his training as a pilot in 1984.

After gaining his "wings" he converted to the Victor tanker and joined 55 Squadron at RAF Marham as a co-pilot. He later became a captain with 57 Sqn. During this time, he flew operations during the First Gulf War in 1991. Based in Bahrain, he refuelled Tornados, Buccaneers and Jaguar aircraft to enable them to complete long-range attack missions into Iraq.

Tristar

He trained as a flying instructor and from late 1991 to August 1995 he instructed student pilots at RAF Cranwell on the Tucano aircraft.

In 1995 he returned to the air tanker role when he joined 216 Sqn at RAF Brize Norton, initially as a co-pilot but later promoted to flight commander. In addition to long-range route flying, which included sorties to the Falklands via Ascension Island, he was responsible for the training and standardisation of Tristar crews.

In 1999 he deployed to the Italian base at Ancona on the eastern coast of Italy. The squadron's task was to provide air-to-air refuelling support to NATO aircraft including RAF Harriers and Tornados and to US Navy attack aircraft conducting offensive operations over Kosovo. This crucial support allowed the combat aircraft to fly longer missions against Serbian forces.

Air-to-air refuelling was normally conducted over the Adriatic Sea but on one occasion Mitchell had to penetrate hostile



HONOUR: Officer Stuart Mitchell at his investiture with Queen Elizabeth II; and as a younger aviator during the Gulf War when he was on Victor tankers, below

airspace to provide crucial support to two carrier-based US Navy EA-6 Prowler aircraft critically short of fuel.

He flew his large aircraft to near the Serbian border to rendezvous with the Prowlers. After making contact, poor weather was encountered and the formation had to descend to low level where they were illuminated by surface-to-air missile systems. The Tristar had no self-defence aids, and he was no longer receiving support from an airborne early warning aircraft, but Mitchell decided to complete the transfer of fuel so that the US Navy aircraft could return safely.

Courageous

On another sortie, he flew so close to enemy airspace that he drew effusive praise of the fighter aircraft crews for his courageous flying and for remaining on station to complete his task regardless of the danger to his aircraft. During the campaign he flew the most missions by any Tristar pilot. He was awarded the DFC, the only one ever awarded to the RAF's air tanker squadrons.

The citation concluded: "His performance over 30

missions in support of combat aircraft was outstanding." Mitchell described the award as "brilliant" but added, "even more so for 216 Sqn and the RAF tanker fleet."

In June 2000 he worked in MOD as the project manager for the procurement and the introduction into service of the Voyager transport/air refuelling aircraft, now the RAF's standard airborne tanker.

He left the RAF two years later to pursue a long career in civil aviation, which included flying the Boeing 747 for Cathay Pacific and British Airways before spending 13 years with FlyBe, where he became the chief pilot in 2017.

A humble mentor to many, his friends remember him for his steady guidance and irrepressible sense of humour.

Motoring

VW Touareg R 2026 (£83,260 otr)

Tim Morris

TOUAREG R:
Good, powerful,
long-distance
cruiser

VW Touareg R

Pros

- Plenty of power
- Well-equipped
- Spacious interior
- Quiet

Cons

- Expensive
- No seven-seat version
- Lacks driving 'wow' factor

Verdict

The VW Touareg R is an excellent machine, in many ways. It's comfortable, well-equipped and effortless to drive. There are more lunatic SUVs on the market, if you want to make a statement, but the R is the grown-up in the room, the sensible option. It is, putting it simply, a more stylish and more powerful version of an already very successful VW model. The only problem is whether buyers will want to shell out £83,260 for the upgrade.

VW's sensible 'hot' SUV

THE GOLF Type R has set a place in history for Volkswagen because, quite frankly, it's stonkingly good fun. The problem there is that anything else fitted with an R badge, has a lot to live up to.

Take the Touareg R, VW's hot SUV. It's closely related to the Audi Q7 and the Bentley Bentayga. Some may even see it as a rival for the Porsche Cayenne. The problem is that it's not an action packed adventure like a Golf and its best-in-class SUV rivals are very, very hard to beat. The Touareg R is, therefore, an odd beast.

It's the first R model to boast plug-in hybrid credentials as part of its powertrain and the figures are impressive. VW has paired a turbocharged 3.0-litre V6 petrol engine with an electric motor to deliver 462bhp. We're talking about 0-62mph in 5.1 secs and (up to) 28 miles of zero-emission range.

We're used to hearing performance figures banded about

but, interestingly, VW makes the strong point here that the R can and, in all likelihood will, allow you to tow 3.5 tonnes. That seems to be the flavour of the day. It's not pretentious and flashy like other fast SUVs, it's a practical 4x4 that happens to have an extra turn of speed.

Inside

The cabin is a comfortable environment that will feel familiar to any VW driver. The standard Touareg lay-out remains, with a few additional R badges and some nicely added blue contrast stitching on the seats/dashboard to give it flair. The majority of surfaces are covered in materials that are soft to the touch, or glossy plastics, with the few cheaper materials hidden lower down, out of sight.

The seats remain largely unaltered, so you'll have no trouble getting comfortable for long runs. Again, the balance is set more towards comfort than racing, so you won't find the kind

of bolstering you'd get in a Porsche Cayenne. That's in keeping with the Touareg's less flashy style.

Visibility is great, thanks to big windows and slim front pillars. Front and rear parking sensors, combined with a 360-degree camera (standard) also help. There's even a system that allows the car to steer itself into a parking space. If that's not enough, an item on the options list allows you to remotely park the car via a smartphone app. It is very difficult to crash this car whilst parking!

The Touareg R gets VW's Innovision Cockpit, with a 12-inch digital driver's display. You can configure it to your own preference and control it via physical buttons on the steering wheel. A bit of sanity.

The infotainment system delivers crisp graphics and it's quick to respond. Physical knobs and dials for the climate control would have been a nice addition, but we can't have everything. An eight-speaker sound system is standard

and certainly loud enough, but the optional 13-speaker Dynaudio upgrade will stun you with the amount of bass it delivers.

On The Road

With a total of 465bhp under your right foot, there's no doubt that the Touareg R is a powerful beast. Thanks to electric power delivery, it gets off the mark with surprising rapidity, before the 3.0-litre turbocharged V6 even kicks in. Here's the problem though, you expect that level of energy to continue and it doesn't.

There's no dedicated 'R' mode and, even in 'Sport' it lacks the lunacy of other 'R' cars. Thread it through a winding road in the Welsh valleys and you'll find plenty of grip but, exit a corner with a bit of enthusiasm and the Touareg R will simply push wide at the nose. Let's be clear, weighing more than 2.5 tonnes, it exhibits impressive body control, but there are definitely more dynamic fast SUVs

to be had if you want a fun drive.

I go back to my original point, which is this. If you're expecting the 'fruit-loop' insanity of the Golf R to have migrated across to a big SUV, you'll be disappointed. The eight-speed automatic gearbox is less responsive than you'd like and the exhaust note is far too subdued. Even when you're giving it large and nudging the mighty 3.0-litre turbocharged V6 to the red line, it sounds flat. A couple of details that could easily have been fixed, in my book.

The Touareg R is, therefore, not a car that I'd put in a fight with a Cayenne, or a Bentayga. It's more subtle than those, it's a sensible, comfortable SUV that excels at long distance runs. It just has plenty of power under the hood, should you ever need it. The air suspension ensures serenity on the motorway and the V6 rumbles into life seamlessly in the background. It does comfort, towing and everyday life well.

Sports chief: We're on crest of a wave

...and now we must accelerate and drive on to be even better

Daniel Abrahams

“ACCELERATION” IS the name of the game for Director of RAF Sport, Air Cdre Rich Fogden, as he spoke with *RAF News* about the year ahead.

In 2025 he had asked everyone to “give more”; in 2026, he wants RAF Sport to mirror the Olympic motto of *Citius, Altius, Fortius* – Faster, Higher, Stronger.

He said: “What a great year it’s been again, but this year it has felt different, a better different.

“From the outset, on the slopes and ice tracks, we saw terrific achievements, with several of our brilliant athletes competing for Olympic selection now.

Fit for Service

“I think our mantra of ‘Fit for Service and Fit for Life’ through RAF Sport chimes completely with the operational mindset the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Harvey Smyth, is keen that we all embody, making us more Agile, Integrated and Ready to fly and fight – bottom line, sport is mission rehearsal for whatever we face, on duty or at home.”

The Air Cdre felt key to the success was how the service “played smarter and trained smarter,” adding “as is the way we work across the Service”.

“Innovation on the fields of play has been accompanied by lateral thinking in how sport is delivered, and its use as an engagement tool too, at home and abroad.”

He felt the message of opportunity for all in sport had sunk in more, across the Whole Force, with “many people being empowered beyond their normal bounds, thriving and being rewarded as a result.”

From this, Fogden hopes that 2026 is the year to “push things on again, to great effect for the



BOSS: Air Cdre Fogden in uniform and on the water, *main photograph*

Service and all our people.”

Off the fields of play, greater international defence engagement was evident in the hosting of Aircom, a partnership with Loughborough University, to personnel spreading the sporting word at the Royal International Air Tattoo at RAF Fairford.

Newer sports such as E-sports, with a Code Bowl victory in Las Vegas, meant the sporting tentacles have spread into different areas, “developing and demonstrating the transferable mental and physical skills and capacities from sport to our people’s primary duties.”

RAF Central Fund

The Air Cdre added: “This showed how all sport can provide much of the glue of our community, across the Whole Force and beyond, a community that sets us apart from many other walks of life.”

Of the ongoing ties with the RAF Central Fund, he said: “The Fund is integral and integrated in what we do. Ross Perriam and his team have been on the front foot with us throughout the journey of what could be considered a



quiet revolution – RAF Sport powered by the Central Fund or all.”

Evidence of this year’s success was demonstrated at the annual RAF Sport Awards, with more than 24,000 views on the BFBS coverage. And to have AVM Ian ‘Cab’ Townsend and his team in UKAF Rugby

Union deliver the IDRC in the summer showed the power of sport, added the Air Cdre.

World Cup

“Not forgetting our two international rugby players, Flt Lts Sarah Bonar and Amy Cokayne, with Amy being a World Cup winner now – how

great is that? In building on the immense efforts of all our sports people, the organisers and supporters in 2025, I have to say thank you, now let’s drive on and accelerate toward being better again, to where we know we can be, toward what we can really achieve.”

Sport**FLYING**

100 not out for aero club

A century of soaraway success for Halton AC

Daniel Abrahams

IN ITS 100th year, Halton Aero Club achieved a perfect 10 of trained scholarships as it continues to prove the value of the flying school.

Beyond flying training, the club commemorated its anniversary with numerous UK fly-outs, a six-aircraft overseas expedition to Poland and participation in the RAF Cosford Air Show and Royal International Air Tattoo.

Air Cdre Mark Manwaring, Officer in Charge Halton Aero Club, said: "The club provided flying training for its RAF Apprentice members – 100 years later, assisted by the RAF Charitable Trust, this concept continues. In 2025, we trained 10 Scholars on a mix of initial scholarships (to first solo) and advanced scholarships (to award of Private Pilot's Licence)."

With a mission statement 'To afford Servicemen and Women,



irrespective of rank or profession, the ability to learn to fly at the minimum practical cost', the club's rich history has seen it build and race its own aircraft and have ties to a potential escape from Colditz Castle.

Having built an aircraft known as the Mayfly, the club participated in the 1929 King's Cup Air Race, while one of the founding members, Cecil Hugh Lattimer-Needham, went on to write two books on aircraft design – one of which found its way into the Colditz Castle library in the



HIGH-FLYER: A successful first solo flight completed by Junior Ranks & Officers Pilot Scholarship Scheme pupil

mid-1930s. During its time as a prisoner of war camp, it's believed one of the prison guards loaned the book out to RAF captives Flt Lts Bill Goldfinch and Jack Best, who used it to design the glider that was secretly built in the loft for an escape attempt.

The war ended before the daring duo had a chance to fly to freedom, but successful modern-

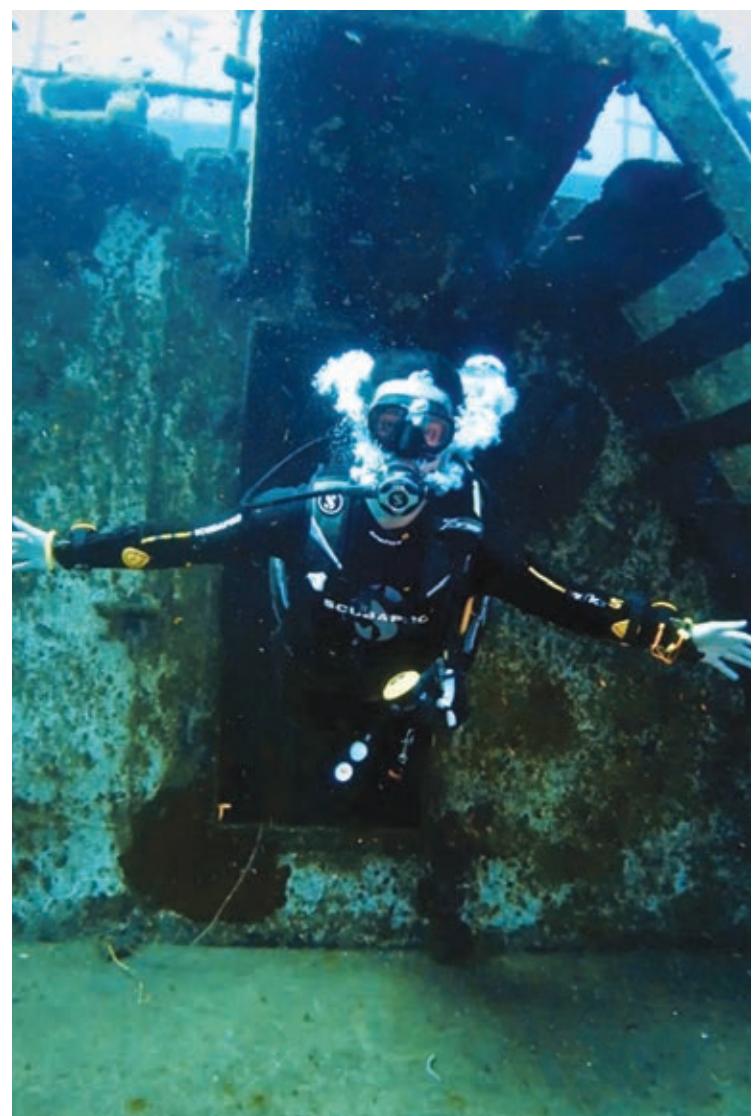
day applicants to the RAFSA Junior Ranks & Officers Pilot Scholarship Scheme (JROPSS) can learn to fly for free under the RAF Charitable Trust initiative.

Running for a decade, the scheme has trained nearly 200 RAF personnel – with HAC responsible for training more than a third of that number.

Manwaring added: "A century

after its formation, the club continues to reflect the ideas of those who had a vision for enhanced 'air awareness' in the RAF ranks. 2025 was a fantastic year – helped by the excellent summer weather – and a full programme is planned for 2026."

For further details search haltonaeroclub.co.uk and rafsas.co.uk.



WRECK'N'ROLL LIFESTYLE: Malta's seabed is scattered with relics from WWII

SCUBA DIVING

Where Eagles dare

"I WOULD certainly recommend it," said AS1(T) Henry Hesketh speaking to *RAF News* after taking part in the Maltese Eagle scuba diving adventure training course.

Coningsby-based cyber engineer Hesketh, who gained a BSAC sports diving qualification from the week, added: "Across the board from the social aspect of meeting new people and buddying up with them and sharing accommodation, the course offered so much value."

"I feel competent now in multiple roles, and that makes you confident – I found out I can stay calm in various environments – for example diving to 30 metres and taking my mask off."

"I'd like to find a better way of putting it, but you really have to swim, or you will sink."

Maltese Eagle is one of two adventurous diving training courses available to personnel. Held annually, it is open to beginners and divers with some experience, while Gibraltar Eagle, also held annually, is for more advanced divers looking to become instructors or supervisors.

The project began in 2016 and is run on behalf of No. 22 Group



COME ON IN: The azure waters of the Mediterranean make the island a diver's paradise

by a team of volunteer trainers. Personnel taking part also have the opportunity to learn more about the role of the RAF in the Siege of Malta in 1942.

OIC of the Eagles diving project, Sgt Kev Ford, said: "I've been involved since day one and we have seen the course grow in popularity. We're looking to expand from 40 places to 60 annually as we are over-subscribed. We had 150 applications for the 20 places on our last course."

Maltese Eagle has seen 500 students pass through its doors

in nine years, making it the most popular of the schemes.

Ford added: "Personnel who take part go back and look to re-engage with extra service and want to give back. That aspect of it cannot be bought. It's gold."

"Through adventure training we are trying to replicate operational stresses and demands so, yes, personnel find it challenging."

"We had some recent attendees who were very emotional during the course, but they succeeded and have a new reflection of who they are."

ALPINE

All aboard

Gearing up for Alpine Challenge

Daniel Abrahams

"WE AIM to deliver a professional, inclusive Alpine Challenge worthy of the RAF," said Air Cdre Martin Cunningham speaking to *RAF News* as personnel prepare to hit the slopes of Austria for the two-week winter sports championships.

The RAFWSAA chair added: "We want to stretch Service personnel, veterans and families in a demanding alpine environment. We are proud that the event provides clear, progressive coaching for all abilities, and develops leadership and teamwork."

The action-packed fortnight signals the start of the RAF's alpine sports season with selection for the forthcoming Inter-Services made once it reaches its conclusion.

Cunningham (*inset below*) added: "Both on and off the slopes the champs build resilience, adaptability, and strengthen RAF esprit de corps and lifelong Service connection."

The skiers are looking to build on a hugely successful 2025 IS, which saw the men's team win and individual champions in Fg Off Ollie Weeks, who secured golds in Super

G, Combined, GS and Slalom, and AS1 Georgina Davis, who took the women's ski title and GS gold.

Women's captain Flt Lt Kirsty Guest said: "We are very excited to build on the successes from last year."

"The team have been training through the off-season on the Kitzsteinhorn glacier and have made significant progress."

"For the women's team we have a mix of returning team members as well as some exciting talent from people trying racing for the first time who are aiming to be selected for the Inter-Services team. The men are also looking strong, with lots of the winning squad returning this year."

Securing the women's team snowboard title in 2025, while the men missed out by just one point, means the boarding fraternity are chomping at the bit for 2026 glory.

Men's team captain Cpl Darrell Manning said: "We've had outstanding summer and winter camps. The standard has been exceptionally high, the team is looking strong with some exciting new prospects pushing squad selection. The coaching has been nothing short of 10/10. I'm very excited on behalf of the team for Alpine Champs 26."



BOARDER: Women's team captain Cpl Natalie Fields

Women's team captain Cpl Nat Fields said: "Coming into my second season as team captain, I'm really excited to see some new faces getting involved in snowboarding and looking to be a part of the team/development squad."

"We're keeping our fingers crossed that we get great conditions at the Championships, and that everyone involved gets to have the best experience of racing and support from the Association and our sponsors."

● Follow RAF Alpine Sports on Instagram @rafwsaa and the RAF ski and boarder teams @rafskiteam and @raf_snowboarding.



UP FOR THE CHALLENGE: RAF skiers at last year's event

RUGBY UNION

Cpl's got a Tiger in the tank

Leicester slot for RAF ambassador Ryan

Daniel Abrahams

CPL RYAN CROWLEY feels his recent season-long signing to Leicester Tigers can only bolster the Service game and is a great advert for RAF rugby.

Avionics engineer Crowley, 27, was signed by Tigers head coach Geoff Parling to the Gallagher Premiership side from Championship Chinnor, initially for just a trial period.

Crowley (*right*) said: "I feel this signing makes me an advert for what can be achieved in Service rugby. I am aware, and always have been, of the role that playing for the RAF entails. I am happy to tell anyone who asks



about what the RAF can offer and being seen in a Tigers shirt means that happens a fair bit now."

"I am aware of two lads who have approached the Service after speaking to me, and that is great."

"It is all about building bridges. We didn't want Cpl Josh McNally (Bath, Cardiff Blues) to be seen as a one-off signing, so I am delighted to further enhance RAF rugby by being signed by Tigers."

Wing Crowley, who will be used in the Premier Rugby Cup clashes for the 11-time premiership winning Tigers, has already scored a try in the competition after

featuring twice. Speaking to *RAF News* after picking up a slight training injury, the Cpl was looking to return to action within the next month, saying: "I like playing at this level, it suits me. I was initially told to go and train with the team to get exposure at this level and found myself at home with it."

"I feel I can bring back nuggets of information or experience to pass on to the RAF lads, which is brilliant. I have been coaching alongside FS Justin Coleman with the Academy team after he brought me in and that's been great."

On the coming Inter-Services championship, which begins on April 18 at the Cinch Stadium, Franklin's Gardens, Northampton against the Royal



PREMIERSHIP: Cpl Ryan Crowley (*right*) in action PHOTOS: LEICESTER TIGERS

Navy, Crowley said: "I have been in RAF rugby for a decade and not experienced an IS win, I want to change that this year."

● Follow RAF Rugby Union on Facebook @RAFRugbyUnion, and Leicester Tigers leicestertigers.

Sport**FOOTBALL**

Irish to join the Kentish Cup



SUPPORT: UKAF's Chf Tech Brownhill

Daniel Abrahams

EUROPE'S OLDEST knockout football competition the Kentish Cup is about to go one better this year with the Irish Defence Force joining the annual tournament.

UKAF assistant coach Chf Tech Lewis Brownhill welcomed the move – which will see Ireland joining the UK, France and Holland in the competition – with the new format featuring three games in five days.

Brownhill said: "The Kentish has a proud history but like everything it can always evolve. With the Irish joining this year it will certainly add more competition."

"Although we have had the better of them in the Friendship Trophy over the last few years, anyone that has watched the games will know it shows how strong they are as a group and every win has been hard fought."

UKAF won last year's Perpetual Friendships Trophy, played in December in Ireland on sudden-death penalties following a 1-1 draw, while UKAF's women won their clash 2-0 over a much-improved Irish side.

In a jam-packed close to the year UKAF beat Holland 3-1 in its Kentish Cup opener, before losing 2-0 to France, who had beaten Holland 2-1.

Brownhill added: "Going to a format of three games in five days will bring its own obstacles but

with the help of the single Services with maximum availability, we're confident within the group, staff and players included that we have enough quality to bring the trophy back to the UK."

Irish head coach, Commandant OF3 Richie Barber, said: "For us, it's a huge honour to be invited to take part in the Kentish Cup. The history of it

is unique and we are extremely proud to take part in 2026. The players and staff are very excited."

"We see what it means to all teams to win it when we watch the games and we hope we can add some passion from our side also."

Follow UKAFFC on Instagram @ukaffootball.



KNOWN ENTITY: UKAF and the Irish Defence Force already play each other in the Friendship Trophy

ORIENTEERING

City Race athletes are triumphant in Toledo

Staff Reporter

A HAT-TRICK of podium places in Toledo, Spain, was the reward for the Service's orienteers as they completed the nine-leg City Race European Tour.

Speaking after the final race, Air Cdre Rob Woods said: "I'm delighted to report we secured a brace of overall podium positions in our respective categories – a notable achievement on a fiercely contested international circuit and a real showcase of RAF sport on the European stage."

The CRET series, one of the most competitive urban orienteering circuits, sees athletes contest fast-paced, technically demanding courses through

historic city centres, with their best five results counting towards the overall standings.

The duo of Cpl Tom Jarvis and Woods were joined by the Air Cdre's daughter Esther, a long-time Associate RAF runner who is hoping to join the Service this year. They travelled to Toledo knowing that strong performances in the final event could secure overall podium places.

In the Men's Elite category, Jarvis delivered a composed and technically assured run to finish the season in an excellent third place overall, with Esther coming third in the Women's Elite category, also securing third place overall to close out a consistent season.

Completing the RAF trio's success, the Air Cdre claimed second place overall in the Men's Supervet category.

Toledo provided a fitting backdrop to the season's conclusion, with intricate streets, steep climbs and intense competition testing athletes to the limit, with celebrations beginning with the three competitors holding the RAF ensign aloft.

An association spokesperson said: "Their collective success highlights the strength of RAF orienteering on the European stage and serves as inspiration for future competitors. Congratulations to all three on a superb season and a true triumph in Toledo."



FLYING THE FLAG: (l-r) Cpl Tom Jarvis, Esther Woods and Air Cdre Rob Woods

5 pages of RAF Sport



Cpl 'building bridges' for RAF's young rugby stars

See page 25

ALPINE

Ice stars chase glory

Daniel Abrahams

RAF ICE sport is on the final run-in for Inter-Service and winter Olympic glory in 2026 with personnel being put through their paces on tracks across the globe.

The coming months will see the Service's skeleton stars go for 20 years of IS team wins in a row, and luge seven, with bobsleighers looking to better their second overall 2025 finish on the newly-selected track of Lillehammer in Norway.

On the international stage Flt Lt Nicole Burger (South Africa) and Cpl Alex Cartagena (GB) are aiming to seal spots in next month's 25th Winter Games in Milan Cortina, Italy in skeleton and bobsleigh respectively.

The potential for glory has left team captains purring, with skeleton/bobsleigh holding a successful combined development camp in Sigulda, Latvia and luge its novice championships in Bludenz, Austria to seal Inters spots and finalise planning.

Skeleton OIC Flt Lt Rhys Thornbury said: "With the sliding talent and coaching we have available to us we are turning up to win and build squad experience for the next 20 years for men's and women's skeleton."

"We are disappointed with the change of venue from Igls, Austria to Lillehammer after the track was deemed unsafe by international governing bodies IBSF and FIL, but the change of location does not affect team selection and preparations



GOING FOR A SCORE: RAF bobsleigh victorious team from 2024, from left, Cpl Sam Jones, Cpl Robert Vickerman, AS1 Adam Carballo, AS1(T) Toby Edghill and Flt Lt Rhys Thornbury

remain the same, with strong depth to pick from for both men's and women's teams.

"Our goal is to once again take the cleansweep for both the men's and women's teams and the men's and women's individual titles."

Luge team manager Sgt John-Paul Kibble said: "Following the successful novice championships, we now turn our attention to the Inters. We were looking forward to going back to Austria, but we will deal with the change to

Lillehammer, which is a difficult technical track that, as always, will test both the experienced and development athletes and should make for an interesting race."

Having held its novice and championships events in Sigulda alongside the skeleton team, bobsleigh has been introducing new sliders, with four debutant pilots being run under the watchful eye of team manager Flt Lt Keith McLaughlin and team spokesperson Cpl John Stanbridge.

Stanbridge, who is coaching the team alongside former winter Olympian L/Cpl Shanwayne Stephens, said: "This season has also seen a transition for us, with experienced athletes stepping into staff roles, allowing for the development of new drivers and pilots."

"Two trial events at the Bath University push track last year saw 50 attendees, with several promising individuals selected for the novice camp, with their performances boding well for the upcoming Inter-Services."

Follow RAF Ice Sports on Instagram @raficesports.



TRAINER: RAF bobsleigh coach Cpl John Stanbridge, right



GAMES DREAM: Cpl Alex Cartagena



SOUTH AFRICAN: Flt Lt Nicole Burger

Olympic hopefuls

OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION and selection was the only thing on the minds of Service speedsters Cpl Alex Cartagena and Flt Lt Nicole Burger.

Speaking to RAF News after securing a 14th place World Cup race finish in the two-man GB bobsleigh with driver Brad Hall in Winterberg, Cartagena said: "To be in the mix for Games selection after being brought in to bolster the team last year is an amazing feeling.

"The team's priority is the four-man, but we need to keep racing and produce the goods in both disciplines, which I am helping to do. I have been mucking in anywhere I am needed."

Cartagena, who has helped the team secure top-six finishes in the four-man and top-20 in the two, added: "Brad's [Hall] drive today was amazing, the team have more than qualified and to keep the team in the top 10 finish-wise means a better draw at the Olympics. It's both pleasing and exciting."

In what is proving to be a sensational second season performing for her country, Flt Lt Burger has made North American Cup history as South Africa's first podium medal winner and first gold in any form of sliding sport, after coming first and third in Salt Lake, with fifth and second places in Whistler.

She said: "It definitely has been a long start to the season with being on

the road for nine weeks with only a handful of rest days.

"I've also taken some big hits and crashes already, one even broke my sled's bumper and a set of runners in Whistler, which is notorious for being difficult and fast. with me achieving 133km."

"Despite this the start of the season has been amazing and achieving podium finishes was completely unexpected – it's incredible to be the first person for my country to do so in the sport. I can't thank the RAF enough for allowing me to chase my potential and giving me the means to do so."

The RAF Benson slider has also recorded a ninth and 13th in the Asian Cup in South Korea. She added: "I now have to focus on the last two rounds in New York (Lake Placid) and Winterberg, Germany to finish off the Olympic qualification cycle and hopefully I will have qualified for Italy."

Follow Team GB on Instagram @britishbobsleighandskeleton and Flt Lt Burger @nicoleburger.skeleton



SKELETON STAR: Flt Lt Nicole Burger hopes to represent South Africa at the Winter Olympics

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● See
pages
4-5



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delicious brew and some baked goodies.



Events

Day Fever
UK dates

THINK YOUR clubbing days are behind you? Think again. Day Fever is igniting the party scene as it travels around the country this month and next.

What started as a simple idea between *Line of Duty* and *Trigger Point* star Vicky McClure, her husband Jonny Owen and their friend Jon McClure, has exploded into a nationwide phenomenon, taking day clubs to new heights with packed venues and festivals (including its very own marquee event) and spreading the fever to new towns and cities.

Launched in early 2024 by Vicky, filmmaker and broadcaster Jonny, and Jon, frontman of Reverend & The Makers, brother Chris McClure and Sheffield businessman James O'Hara, Day Fever has become a cultural sensation.

Sheffield City Hall

From its debut in Sheffield's City Hall ballroom to a tour that's seen thousands around the UK hit the dancefloor each month, the message is clear: people everywhere are craving a space to let loose, laugh, and dance, all before 8pm. "It started as a WhatsApp idea," said Jon. "Jonny just said, 'A daytime disco, how good would that be?' We're all a bit nuts, so we just said, 'Come on then!'"

"It feels like a massive house party at your nan's," laughed Vicky. "No drama, no egos, just people acting daft, getting dressed up, and having the best time." Running from 3pm to 8pm, Day Fever has been described as offering

Vicky does her Duty



DANCE QUEEN: Vicky is carried by fellow promoters, left; and one of the Day Fever events in full swing, above

the perfect balance: a proper night out that doesn't wreck your weekend. There's no dress code, no pressure, just wall-to-wall feel-good tunes and an open

invitation to dance like nobody's watching. From Nottingham to Newcastle, Glasgow to Gloucester, every Day Fever event has its own flavour. Local DJs who know their

crowds keep the energy high with a nostalgic mix of Northern Soul, disco and 90s classics.

"Manchester goes mad for Oasis," said Jon, "and if Vicky's there, we have to play Whitney, it's non-negotiable!" Day Fever is also giving back to local venues and communities. "Clubs double their takings," explained Vicky. "We're out by 8pm, and then they've got a full night to run. It's been a game-changer." And it's striking a chord far beyond the dancefloor. "We've had people in remission, people grieving, people celebrating life," Jon added. "It's mothers and daughters, old mates, and whole families dancing together. That's powerful."

"It's like a wedding party where everyone actually wants to be there, and that's magic."

● Go to: day-fever.com for full tour details.

**Film Review**Hamnet (12A)
In cinemas now

Mescal masters new take on Shakespeare

A YOUNG couple are devastated by the loss of a child, each retreating into their own way of surviving grief. For Agnes Hathaway, she will turn inward, anchoring herself in her body and the land, while playwright Bill Shakespeare will channel his feelings into a new play by the name of *Hamlet*.

Adapted from Maggie O'Farrell's celebrated 2020 novel, a fictionalised account of the inspiration behind Shakespeare's renowned tragedy, director Chloé Zhao roots the story firmly in a sense of place. When we first meet Agnes (Jessie Buckley), she is in the woods, toiling away, making tinctures within the large expanse of trees and rolling green hills – reinforcing the locals' belief that she is the offspring of a forest witch.

A great deal of the film is captured in expansive wide shots, photographed by Łukasz Żal, following his striking work on *The Zone of Interest*. Long takes and restrained camera work allow us to bask in the connection that outcast Agnes has for the natural world as well as the romance she happens upon with local Latin tutor William (Paul Mescal). Their bond is immediate and magnetic.

They soon form a family: three children, who



SHARED GRIEF: Bill and Agnes (Mescal and Buckley)

will live in each other's pockets, at one point seen playing as the witches of *Macbeth*. Jacobi Jupe gives a phenomenal performance as only son Hamnet, whose death looms large over the film. Mescal uses fragments of the Bard's plays to articulate his emotions, where Buckley gives a more internalised performance that is frequently staggering.

When Bill's work takes him to London, and even when his success secures a house in Stratford-Upon-Avon, Agnes will remain here in the wilderness, with their children, and the memory of her lost child. The film builds to a powerful climax that explores the ways in which art can be used to process and express feelings of loss.

Hamnet is a quiet, patient film that mines the emotional weight of loss through performance and restraint.

Four roundels out of five

Review by Sam Cooney

**DVDs**The Ballad of Wallis Island (12)
Out now on 4K Ultra HD, Blu-ray and DVD (Dazzler Media)

Fantasy island for Charles

IT'S BEEN hailed as one of the most heart-warming films of the year – *The Ballad of Wallis Island* stars Tim Key (*The Paper*, *Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa*), Tom Basden (*After Life*, *Here We Go*) and Carey Mulligan (*Promising Young Woman*, *Maestro*) and is described as a sweet, funny and uplifting story.

Key plays Charles, an eccentric lottery winner who lives alone on a remote island. Dreaming of getting his favourite musicians, the folk duo McGwyer Mortimer (Basden and Mulligan) back together, his fantasy turns into reality when the bandmates and former lovers accept his invitation to play a private show at his home on Wallis Island. Old tensions resurface as Charles tries desperately to salvage his dream gig.

The screenplay was written by Basden and Key, who have worked

together for more than 20 years, including in the comedy troupe Cowards and the ITV sitcom *Plebs*. Directed by James Griffiths, the film is a reworking of *The One and Only Herb McGwyer Plays Wallis Island*, a BAFTA-winning short film the stars made in 2007.

We have copies of *The Ballad of Wallis Island* on DVD up for grabs. To be in with a chance of winning one, simply answer this question correctly:

What is the name of the character Tim Key plays in the film?



Email your answer, marked *Ballad of Wallis Island* DVD competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by February 6. Please include your postal address with your answer.

**Theatre**

Justin Time To Rock!
UK tour

Rock'n'roll with Justin

Mr CBeebies is up for a party

CEEBIES STAR Justin Fletcher is touring the country this spring with his first live theatre show since 2022 - *Justin Time To Rock!*

Famous for his BAFTA award-winning appearances in hit TV programmes including *Something Special*, *Justin's House*, *Gigglebiz* and *Gigglequiz*, Justin and his friends are back in a show for all the family.

Written by Justin himself, he said: "I'm so excited to be on tour. We really enjoy travelling around the country, performing our shows and meeting so many friends.

"*Justin Time to Rock!* is a brand new story about how me and my friends formed our own band. You'll hear lots of well-known songs and some new ones too, written especially for the show. Amongst all the fun and laughter, we will need to keep an eye out for the mischievous 'Rock Lord' and his sidekick



'Vulture', who are out to steal the band's favourite tunes!"

Justin (below) has entertained generations of children on stage - what's his favourite part?

"Performing live to an excited family audience is such an uplifting and rewarding experience," he said. "The moment we run out on the stage, there is a great atmosphere, and the party begins."

He added: "I've always loved music, it's a very powerful way to express yourself. We wanted to create a show that features lots of different styles of music. I like rock and roll music in particular,

because it is great to dance to and has a feel-good factor.

"When we were writing the story about the band, we wanted to include some brand new songs that have never been heard before.

"One of my favourites is a song called *Share a Little Sunshine*, which is all about sharing happiness, kindness and friendship. Sharing these feelings can create a ripple effect through the audience, which in turn creates a great atmosphere."

Justin's shows are famously very interactive - he explained how audiences will be involved this time: "There will be lots of well-known action

songs to get the party started, so everyone should practise their *Hokey Cokey*, *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* and an audience favourite *Hands Up*. There will also be some new songs to dance to including the *Bubble Pop Bop*."

The tour takes in dates around the country up to May 31 and



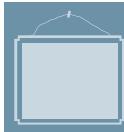
visits venues at Crewe, Nottingham, Blackpool, High Wycombe, Basingstoke, Birmingham and Glasgow, among others.

Justin said that he loves touring. "The opportunity to meet so many of our friends all around the UK and to perform our show to them is pure joy," he revealed.

"No two shows are ever the same,

There is always plenty of fun and laughter and we have had some wonderful things happen, especially when our audiences are sharing their birthday with us or celebrating life events. Those are the really special moments."

And he has some advice for young fans who dream of being on stage or even becoming rock stars:

**Exhibitions**

A Call to Art: William Morris & the Pre-Raphaelites
October 23, 2026 to May 3, 2027, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

William Morris still Fitz the bill

THE FITZWILLIAM Museum, Cambridge will stage a major exhibition later this year about the celebrated designer, artist, poet and writer William Morris.

A Call to Art: William Morris & the Pre-Raphaelites runs from October 23 to May 3, 2027 and will re-examine Morris and his circle including artists and designers Kate Faulkner, May Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal.

A spokesperson for the exhibition said: "Morris was one of the great visionaries in the history of art, changing attitudes to art and design, both in Britain and beyond.

"The exhibition looks at Morris and his circle's radical quest to change society by transforming ideas of beauty and how we might live through a romantic interpretation of the past and an idealistic vision of the future. Morris's belief in the power of art and nature as antidotes to industrialisation, pollution and mass production anticipated many of today's concerns."

The spokesperson added: "Through a wide selection of both well-known and rarely seen paintings, designs, and art objects drawn from the Fitzwilliam's collection, along with key loans from major UK institutions, this exhibition will explore

how and why Morris and his circle looked backward in time to reimagine a new future - and how, in our own digital age, their ideals, challenges and contradictions feel newly relevant."

The Fitzwilliam will also host War Craft, revealing stories of ingenuity, hope, survival and loss amid the devastation of war, from February 24 to August 23.

Featuring a diverse collection of objects and artefacts made and collected by soldiers, civilians and prisoners of war, the display will present their experiences across centuries and continents - from the Napoleonic Wars to the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The display will also present drawings and prints by major artists including J.M.W. Turner, Paul Nash, C.R.W. Nevinson and John Singer Sargent, as well as poetry by Siegfried Sassoon.

And from March 27 to January 17, 2027, you can see *Frank Bowling: Seeking the Sublime* at the Fitzwilliam. The museum will present a career-spanning survey of the work of the 91-year-old artist, who did National Service in the RAF, described as one of the most important British artists working today.

Go to: fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk for further details.

Win!

Win family ticket prize

WE HAVE a family ticket* up for grabs to see *Justin Time to Rock!* at the Swan Theatre, High Wycombe at 11am on Saturday, February 14.

For your chance to win this great prize, answer this question correctly:

Name a hit TV programme in which Justin Fletcher has starred.

Email your answer, marked Justin Fletcher show competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe HP14 4UE, to arrive by February 6.

(* Family ticket is for 2 adults and 2 children or 1 adult and 3 children.)

Always follow your dreams and be yourself. You never know, some of our songs in the show might encourage you to learn a musical instrument, or to sing, or dance, or to write a song. Surround yourself with good people who care for you and have a go."



ard Burne-Jones, *Theseus and Ariadne*. Watercolour, colour and gum arabic on paper, laid on canvas, 1892. © Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge



Theatre

High Society
UK & Ireland tour

Helen to Lord it up for UK tour

AFTER A summer season at London's Barbican Theatre, Helen George – known to millions over the past decade as Trixie in the hit BBC series *Call The Midwife* – will star as Tracy Lord in a new six-month UK and Ireland tour of Cole Porter's musical *High Society*, beginning at High Wycombe's Swan Theatre on July 14.

Helen said: "I am delighted to be returning to the stage in Cole Porter's musical comedy masterpiece to play Tracy Samantha Lord in a brand-new production directed by Rachel Kavanaugh next year.

"Theatre is my first love and I adored playing the iconic role of Anna in *The King and I*, so I jumped at the chance to flex my musical comedy chops and play Tracy. Cole Porter's musicals are packed with his signature wit, glamour and unforgettable tunes and *High Society* is no exception.

"I am thrilled to take the show on tour and can't wait for audiences up and down the country to enjoy a sparkling evening of comedy, romance and sheer musical joy."

The production, also starring Felicity Kendal, reprising her role



GLAMOUR: Helen George stars as Tracy Lord

PHOTO: MICHAEL WHARLEY

(The King and I, Anything Goes) leading a full orchestra.

The show promises a heady cocktail of romance, wit, mistaken identity and irresistible musical charm, featuring Porter classics such as *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*, *I Love Paris*, *Well Did You Evah?*, *Just One Of Those Things*, *Let's Misbehave*, *You're Sensational* and *True Love*.

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

Further casting for the tour will be announced soon, said a spokesperson.

Go to: HighSocietyMusical.com for tickets and more dates.



RETURN: Felicity Kendal reprises role

from the West End run, is brought to life by a multi-award-winning creative team, including director Rachel Kavanaugh (currently directing *Hugh Bonneville* in *Shadowlands* at the Aldwych Theatre) and choreographer Anthony Van Laast (*Mamma Mia*, *Kiss Me, Kate*) with musical supervision by Stephen Ridley



EVIL: Young women were coerced by Hitler and his acolytes

must confess that, as a viewer, I often feel a sense of artificiality, of fiction – struggling to believe in the characters and situations as much as I would like.

"Sometimes, this feeling may come from just one of the film's elements – the sets, the

cinematography, the costumes, the acting... And now I realise that while preparing *The Tasters*, this was my primary concern: being able to believe in the life and truth of these young women who, 80 years ago, truly lived through this tragedy."

Cinema

The Tasters

From March 13

Hitler's human guinea pigs

BASED ON the award-winning, bestselling book *At the Wolf's Table* by Rosella Postorino, *The Tasters*, inspired by real events in Nazi Germany, comes to UK and Irish cinemas from March 13.

The film reconstructs the true story of the women coerced into being food tasters for Adolf Hitler towards the end of World War II.

In 2012, at the age of 95, a woman named Margot Wölk revealed, shortly before she died, a secret she had kept for her whole life: that she had been one of the young German women forced to taste Hitler's meals at his hiding spot known as the 'Wolf's

Lair'. Until then, no one had ever known about the existence of the food tasters and Margot was the only one among them to survive the end of the war.

Her story inspired Postorino to write *At the Wolf's Table*, which in turn inspired the script for *The Tasters*, directed by Silvio Soldini (*Days and Clouds, Two Lives*).

The film stars Elisa Schlott (*Our Miracle Years, The Empress*), Max Riemelt (*Sense8, Two To One, Berlin Syndrome*) and Alma Hasan (*The Glory of Life, Corsage*).

Soldini said: "I had never made a period film before, and I

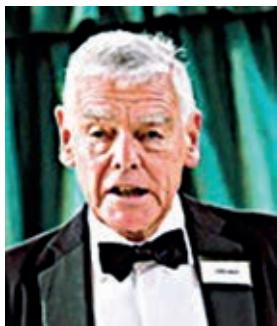


Your Announcements

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

Death

WEST Gary Flt Lt, Victor bomber pilot with 55 Squadron during the Cold War and Confrontation with Indonesia, passed away shortly before his 87th birthday in early December 2025. Following RAF service, he forged a successful career as a pilot with civil airlines. A true Scot and with a wonderful sense of humour, he will be sadly missed by his family and many friends. Blue Skies, Gary. Enquiries to Alan Mudge & Lesley Hayward-Mudge: 01760 337514 or: bombhead055@gmail.com



Flt Lt Gary West

Associations

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

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

with other upcoming events for 2026.

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

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

Reunions

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

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

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

All 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 on the website: tg11association.com where information can also be found on how to join.

THE RAF Air Loadmaster Association (ALMA) will be marking its 25th anniversary in May with a weekend of special events.

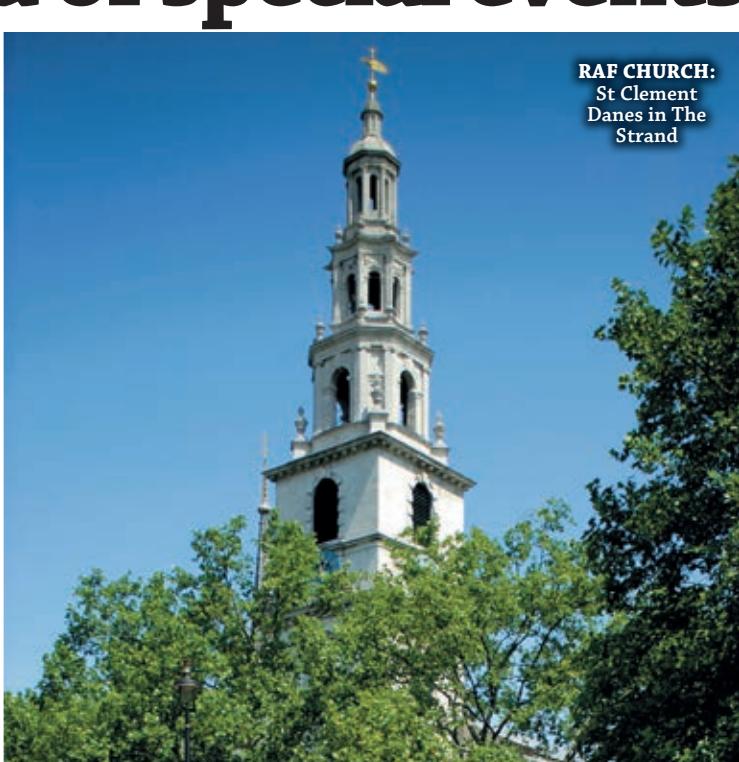
The Association will be holding a Gala Dinner at the RAF Club on Saturday, May 9 followed by a service of commemoration at the RAF church, St Clement Danes in The Strand, central London, on Sunday, May 10, followed by lunch.

Both events will be attended by the ALMA's patron, former Chief of the Air Staff ACM Sir Andy Pulford. During the service, a commemorative Association crest floor tile will be unveiled.

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

ALMA treasurer Les Weston said: "People can attend any of the events they choose to, it is not mandatory to attend all."

The Association is looking to



RAF CHURCH:
St Clement
Danes in The
Strand

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

Fine dining for Benson



GRUB'S UP:
Hungry customers
at the refurbished
Junior Ranks' Mess

RAF BENSON personnel are now enjoying a completely transformed Junior Ranks' Mess following a significant refurbishment delivered under the Army Restaurant Programme.

A spokesperson for the Oxfordshire station said: "The project has created a bright, welcoming environment which includes a range of seating options for an improved dining experience, better lighting with acoustic ceiling panelling, new flooring and a redesigned servery with new catering equipment and a unique tiling finish on the surrounding walls."

How to use our service

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

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

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Students walk for vets

PUPILS FROM a Surbiton school are taking part in a fundraising walk in aid of their local Royal Star & Garter home.

Boys from Southborough High School will tread the 10km Winter Walk route through London on January 24 for the charity, which cares for veterans and their families living with disability or dementia.

The students, regular visitors to the care home, raised over £2,800 on the 2025 Winter Walk.

Senior assistant headteacher Dan Edwards said: "It's a pleasure to once again be raising money for our friends at Royal Star & Garter. Our students say their visits to the Home are the highlight of their week, and residents have said how much joy they get from it too. It's inspiring to see compassion and mutual respect develop between the young and old."

Go to: justgiving.com/page/young-leaders-charity-ambassadors-4 to donate.



FEARLESS FOUR: The Project Fire and Ice team

PHOTO: ©SSAFA

Sell-out success for SSAFA

THE LATEST in Armed Forces charity SSAFA's popular series of *An Evening With...* events held at London Scottish House in the capital was a sell-out success.

It was attended by 200 people eager to hear about the exploits of four men who took on the fundraising challenge of an unsupported 500km ultra-trek through the wintry snows of Swedish Lapland while pulling their kits on sleds.

An Evening with Project Fire and Ice featuring Karl Hinett, Jason Fox, Brian Wood MC and Aldo Kane helped bring the total raised for SSAFA to £190,000.

The evening was hosted by Army veteran and comedian Pat Smith, who chaired a panel discussion with the intrepid quartet followed by a Q&A session with the audience.

Charity extends holiday help

THE RAF Benevolent Fund has confirmed that its new Holiday Provision, piloted last summer, will be extended and expanded across more RAF units in 2026 after receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback from stations and families.

The pilot helped serving personnel and their families access affordable, high-quality activities during the school holidays, said an RAFBF spokesperson.

Five RAF stations took part in the initial programme – Odiham, Valley, Lossiemouth, Coningsby and High Wycombe. Across these locations, 255 children from 139 families were supported, using a range of local, flexible provision.

At RAF Odiham, the King's Camp programme benefited 42 children from RAF families. A £5,000 grant from the Fund eased the financial burden on families, making the two-week programme more accessible to those who might otherwise have struggled to afford it.

The spokesperson added: "The funding supported



MAKING A SPLASH: Family fun at King's Camp, Odiham

increased social engagement, improved mental wellbeing and stronger family relationships. Parents reported reduced stress, better routines for children and more opportunities to connect with other families on station. The provision was particularly

valuable for families experiencing deployment, limited local support networks or financial pressure."

Maria Lyle, the Fund's Associate Director of Operations, said: "The pilot highlighted the real difference accessible holiday provision can make to RAF families."

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The official voice of the Royal Air Force



Prize Crossword

No. 401

Solve the crossword, then rearrange the 8 letters in yellow squares to find an RAF word

Across

7. Wife bearing Member, the first spared (6)
8. Pound for Joe Root (6)
10. Former RAF worker muddled Eastern tavern (7)
11. Genuine Frenchman of the kingdom (5)
12. RAF trainer a little touch awkward (4)
13. Hat that sounds fruity (5)
17. First letter from Ancient Greece (5)
18. The German embraces first letter from sweetheart (4)
22. A bout thrown up on vessel (1-4)
23. Station where US General meets Chinese dynasty (7)
24. Islands where north-east joins York, maybe (6)
25. RAF station for Affleck and his boy (6)

Down

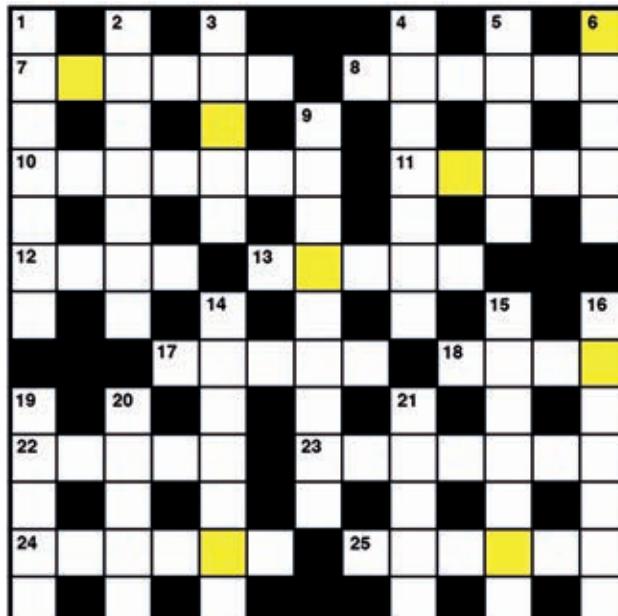
1. What sacked sailor is given (5-2)
2. Grants football legend George nothing outside Widnes (7)
3. Original Scots people immediately rebuilt endangered part of church (5)
4. Almost royal prince that is right on RAF plane (7)
5. After first letter, condiment returns on RAF plane (5)
6. Russian-occupied region without a transgression (5)
9. RAF operation below mountain? (9)
14. Elizabeth Best subject to German attacks (7)
15. Spice Girl is South African girl (7)
16. The Beatles embrace outfit of bandit (7)
19. Cook trout on RAF plane (5)
20. How RAF personnel term Chinook (5)
21. Female always has high temperature (5)

Name:

Address:

RAF word: Crossword No. 401

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



Prize Crossword No. 399 winner is: D Bellamy, Lincoln and Prize Crossword No. 400 winner is: Andrew Bunting, Fareham.

Solution to Crossword No. 400

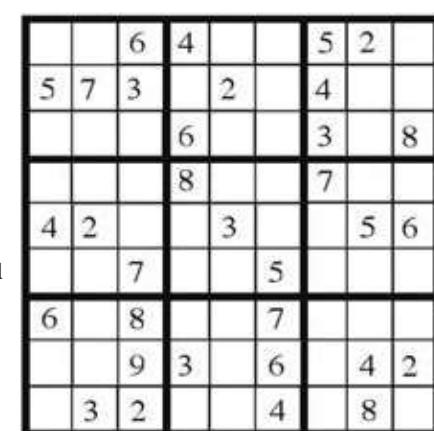
Across - 6. Aviator 7. Daily 9. Drone 10. Air Crew 12. Helicopters 14. Curious Cats 18. Boulder 19. Acorn 21. Crane 22. Kinloss Down - 1. Overt 2. Marnie 3. Job 4. Mascot 5. Algebra 8. Divorce 11. Minutes 13. Rumours 15. Island 16. Tackle 17. Press 20. Hid RAF station: Lossiemouth



Prize Su Doku

No. 411

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
February 6,
2025.

The winner of
Su Doku No. 408
is: J Mandall,
Lincoln and the
No: 409 winner
is David Read,
Dunstable.

Solution to Su Doku No. 410



Film

The Ice Tower (15)

In cinemas now



The War through eyes of De Gaulle

FILM COMPANY Pathé has released a first-look image from what it calls one of its most ambitious undertakings to date: a sweeping two-part historical saga and geopolitical thriller that plunges audiences into the decisive hours of World War II through the eyes of General Charles de Gaulle and the men and women who refused to surrender as the French nation fell apart.

Based on the book *De Gaulle: A Certain Idea of France* by Julian Jackson, *De Gaulle: Tilting Iron* and *De Gaulle: The Sovereign Edge* stars Simon Abkarian as De Gaulle and Simon Russell Beale as Sir Winston Churchill.

It is June, 1940. France collapses and signs the armistice. In the midst of the chaos, one man refuses to give up. Alone against the odds, this unknown general flees to London to save what remains of freedom. Without an army, without backing, without hope, but with one irrational conviction – France, his France, has not laid down arms.

Taking the ultimate gamble, he seeks to convince the world that the battle for France is neither over, nor lost. Reality, however, is unyielding and seems determined to prove him wrong. Yet, little by little, resistance fighters,

IRON MAN: Uncompromising De Gaulle (right) played by Simon Abkarian © 2026 Pathé Films

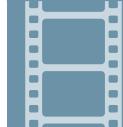
rebellious students and determined soldiers rise up in England, France and Africa to join the cause. Their faith, audacity and thirst for freedom defy what history seemed to have written in advance.

The diptych is helmed by filmmaker Antonin Baudry – director of breakout submarine thriller *The Wolf's Call* – drawing on his own career within the French diplomatic corps.

He said: "I often wondered what kind of person it took to refuse to surrender in 1940 – to disobey their own government while devoting their life to France. Few people can do that. I became fascinated by them, so much so that I wanted to make not one film, but two."

Filmed in France, Morocco and the UK, film one of *De Gaulle* will be in cinemas on June 10 and film two on July 3.

Ardavan Safaee, chairman of Pathé Films, said: "We are immensely proud to bring this ambitious project to life. The two films intertwine the momentum of a gripping geopolitical thriller with the emotional depth of a shared human journey."



Film Review

Wake Up Dead Man (12A)

In cinemas now and on Netflix

Knives Out's back

BENOIT BLANC (Daniel Craig) returns to untangle another *Knives Out* mystery, this time in the quiet, forgotten town of Chimney Rock, where the local pastor has been killed and the dwindling congregation are all suspects.

Josh O'Connor plays Father Jud, a troubled young priest and former boxer, tattooed and with a tendency to blaspheme. "Young, dumb and full of Christ," he is quietly relocated after punching the deacon of his original parish. Landing in a secluded church, Jud falls under the supervision of Monsignor Wicks (Josh Brolin) who appears to have a rather aggressive approach to spiritualism.

As is now tradition for the *Knives Out* series, the film takes its time before revealing the central murder or even unveiling Blanc himself. Instead we are introduced to the congregation, including: a washed-up sci-fi author (Andrew Scott), disgraced politician (Daryl McCormack), a drunk doctor (Jeremy Renner) and a formidable church lady (Glenn Close), to name a few. A buried history will emerge – of hidden wealth, institutional rot, and the suspicious death of the previous priest.

As the third entry in the series, the formula is familiar by now. The challenge is no longer surprise, but how to outdo what came before without losing the sharp elegance that made the original film feel so fresh, or getting too muddled.



STARS: O'Connor (Fr Jud) and Craig (Benoit Blanc)

Writer-director Rian Johnson delivers in terms of style and atmosphere, and O'Connor is an inspired choice as the film's emotional anchor. However, for the most part, the supporting ensemble feels thinner and less sharply defined than in previous instalments. The result is a film stacked with an incredible cast of characters, who aren't terribly interesting in the time they are allotted, but are very much integral to the twisty whodunit caper.

Not the best of the unofficial trilogy, there is still so much wit and creativity in *Wake Up Dead Man*, that you're left hoping the franchise will continue.

Three roundels out of five

Review by Sam Cooney