

The Forces' favourite paper

VOLUNTEER ACES OF CHURCHILL'S FEW
THE PART-TIME PILOTS AND THEIR AUXILIARY SQUADRONS WHICH HELPED WIN THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN
MARTIN WADE



Part-time aces of Battle of Britain
● See page 19 **Win!**

Banff Film Festival tickets
● See R'n'R page 3 **Win!**



ROYAL AIR FORCE
Friday, Dec 26, 2025
Edition No.1623 **Only 99p**

RAF NEWS

The memorable events & people of the RAF year




SPORTING REVIEW OF THE YEAR

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Boxing Brize Norton Fight Night



● See page 26

Hockey Indoor IS triumphs



● See page 27

Christmas Wokk-ing



Simon Mander
AN AIR Force Chinook flew in to deliver some festive joy to school pupils and youngsters spending Christmas in hospital. The 28 Sqn crew from RAF Benson in Oxfordshire took on this year's seasonal tour of duty, landing at local schools before heading for the children's ward at the John Radcliffe Hospital. The double-rotor frontline helicopter, dubbed the Wokka in the Forces, took on the role following the retirement of the Puma earlier this year. The Yuletide mission is to thank 26 schools and the station community who this year provided 550 gifts for youngsters at the Oxford children's hospital.
● Continued on page 2

BiteSize



“We’re friends on land but we’ll be enemies at sea,”

Rowing ace Wg Cdr Emma Wolstenholme set for epic Atlantic race against three of her RAF Cadet protégés

See page 7



“I felt I had unfinished business with this role,”

Tom Hiddleston is back for the second series of popular BBC thriller *The Night Manager*

See R’n’R pages 4-5

“My family now have more of an idea how hard this sport is,”



RAF bobsleigh ace Cpl Alex Cartagena as he is joined by his mum and sister on the ice in Austria

See page 26



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RAF News

RAF News

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Brize on point

Simon Mander

AIR DROPPING food aid to starving Gazans has won Brize Norton a top humanitarian award.

The station received the Firmin Sword of Peace for its role in preventing famine, awarded by CAS ACM Harv Smyth.

Codenamed Operation Underhill, the global effort was the first time the RAF used the Atlas A400M for humanitarian air drops and involved 83 EAG, 206 Sqn, Joint Air Delivery Transport Evaluation Unit and 47 Air Despatch Sqn.

Detachment Commander Sqn Ldr Lucy Playle said: “Everyone wanted to deliver the aid as quickly as possible and it’s warming to see all those enablers come together to be recognised as a team and Whole Force.”

ACM Smyth said: “Together, they delivered hope where it was needed most, setting a benchmark for operational excellence and teamwork.”



TEAM EFFORT: CAS presents the Sword of Peace to Sqn Ldr Chris Bowen, on behalf of all who played a role in Operation Underhill



CHRISTMAS MISSION: Meeting families and patients at the John Radcliffe Children's Hospital in Oxford

Flying Santa

● *Continued from p1*

“Without the Puma it has been a little more challenging to navigate,” said station spokeswoman Emma Macreadie.

“The joy this brings the children has the parents in tears, they are so grateful as they can’t go to visit Santa in grottoes.”

“The bedside visits are to the Critical Care ward and those in isolation for infection control, where the crew waved through the window. It was very emotional.”

This Week In History



1941

Lancaster arrives

THE FOUR-ENGINE Avro Lancaster bomber enters service with 44 Sqn at RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire.



1929

Trenchard leaves

SIR HUGH Trenchard stands down 17 years after the creation of the Royal Flying Corps and 11 years after the formation of the RAF in 1918.



1965

Whirlwind rig rescue

A 202 Sqn Whirlwind Search and Rescue helicopter is scrambled after the UK’s first offshore drilling platform, Sea Gem, capsizes.

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



Celebrities wish you a Merry Christmas



'ALLO 'ALLO to all you wonderful people serving in the RAF. Christmas is the perfect time to say a huge thank you for all your amazing work and the sacrifices you make to keep us and our country safe. We owe you a great debt of gratitude. Your continued selfless commitment is a huge source of reassurance to us all and it's a privilege to wish you, your families and other members of the Armed Forces, a very Happy Christmas and safe New Year. You are all fabulous.

Lots of Love

Vicki Michelle MBE, actress (left)

● See pages 4-5 for more festive greetings to the RAF Family from the stars

Chiefs eye Leeming for NATO war drills

Lynn Dunne

LEEMING IS set to host more international training exercises after proving its value to Nato chiefs testing multi-domain war fighting skills.

The departure of Swiss F-18s from Leeming marking the end of Exercise Yorknite has helped establish the North Yorkshire station's reputation as a key location for deployed international exercises.

Its proximity to the North Sea Danger Area complex and ranges such as Otterburn and Spadeadam are clear advantages, but trialling new concepts in warfare is where the station comes into its own.

Personnel accustomed to running Hawk and Tutor aircraft now carry out 'hot pit' refuelling of US F-35s and French Rafales.

On Exercise Excalibur Run they dispersed F-18 jets on a base 'under threat', turning around a squadron of aircraft spread across the airfield, at night, in less than 90 minutes.

Leeming also feeds thousands through the existing messes, with support from 3 Mobile Catering Sqn.

And Air Traffic Control handled almost 23,000 air movements this year by 40 aircraft types.

As the RAF's Operational Training Centre, it has direct links to Nato – where validation standards are set.

Planning for exercises usually starts six months in advance, while ensuring that the airfield requirements for the future pilots of resident 11 Sqn QEAF and two University Air Squadrons are met.

Finishing its seventh year at the base, Ex Yorknite enables



TRAINING PLACES: Swiss F-18 prepares for a training mission at Leeming; inset right, Apache helicopter and USAF Osprey take part in combat drills at the North Yorks station

Swiss F-18 pilots to achieve up to half of their night-flying currency for the year.

Detachment Commander Lt Col Reto 'Woody' Wüthrich said: "At Leeming we are close to various ranges, and to the North Sea. That means that more of our time in the air is spent training – not flying to the training areas.

"The support is great. We are always able to find solutions that fit us and everyone else on base. It's comfortable for us to sit in a nest that's already prepared for us."

At the end of January, Leeming hosts Joint Aviation Command helicopters and almost 200 people, supported by 3 Mobile Catering Sqn and Tactical Support Wing,

on Exercise Hyperion Storm.

Operations Wing chief, Wg Cdr Ted Edwards, said: "Leeming's ability to offer a wide range of training opportunities means this year we have supported more exercises and training than ever before.

"Hosting and organising are something at which we are good. In

the summer, we facilitated two major air exercises in parallel, concurrently operating multiple aircraft types, and providing life support to 1,000 additional personnel.

"Alongside the Swiss Air Force, the station exercised its ability to support 24-hour operations whilst also defending the base from intruders and drones."

Celebrities wish the RAF

WISHING ALL RAF personnel on duty or at home – and especially your loved ones – the very happiest Christmas. Military service takes its toll on family life, so I send my thanks for your service and everything you do to keep our country safe. Enjoy the celebrations if and where you can, and good luck for 2026! Thank you all.

John Nichol, author



THE FIGHTER jets from Leuchars and Lossiemouth used to zoom down our Scottish hillsides, contour-flying with thrilling precision, appearing with a roar and vanishing so fast we could hardly glimpse them; we would shout out to each other in excitement but the sheep grazing these remote hills never turned their heads as the great metal thunderbolts swished past their peaceful pastures. This Christmas may my most admiring thoughts and affectionate wishes come whizzing out of the sky, contour-flying goodwill and love to every single one of you in the RAF, with a great song of happiness and gratitude, and trailed by a dazzle of stars. Merry Christmas, you most excellent people, fliers, ground staff, personnel, families, young and old, serving or retired, and a wonderful and brave New Year.

Dame Joanna Lumley, actor



(Photo: Gemma Levine/Getty Images)



AS ALWAYS, I appreciate being given the opportunity at this time of year to wish all the staff of the RAF a very Merry Christmas. I know each and every person, either in the air or on the ground, will have given their utmost during the year to help keep their skills to the highest standard. I hope that you get time to relax and enjoy time with your families and friends knowing that a great deal of you will still be 'on call'. Thank you for your dedication.

Sir David Jason, actor



MY TIME as a broadcaster highlighted the bravery and dedication of our Armed Forces, while my links with the Battle of Britain Memorial Trust inspired me to research the life of French pilot, Sqn Ldr (Commandant) René Mouchotte. That project led to the French Air Force donating to the RAF Club 12 squadron badges of the French who served here during WWII, together with a portrait of René. I wish all those serving in the RAF today, and those who served in the past, a very happy, enjoyable and peaceful Christmas.

Jan Leeming, TV personality



TO EVERYONE in the RAF and the whole RAF family, a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. If you're away on duty or at home with your loved ones, I hope you get to enjoy a real festive feast. Thank you for all you do to help keep us safe.

Matt Tebbutt, chef and TV presenter



DEAREST RAF friends, it's always so special to be connected with you in a small way, and perform for and with you. A huge thanks to you all as always and I wish you all love and a very merry Christmas. Lots of love Kerry x

Kerry Ellis, actor and singer



Family Merry Christmas

WHEN I was writing my message to you, I thought about your motto, 'per ardua ad astra.' In these sometimes troubled days, a sentiment that says 'through struggles to the stars' is a perfect thing to think about at Christmas. So, to all the personnel of the RAF, I want to send all my good wishes and thanks for everything that you all do to overcome those struggles on our behalf. Happy Christmas to you and to all your loved ones and a peaceful New Year. Love, Carly.

Carly Paoli, classical singer



WISHING THE entire Royal Air Force family a safe, peaceful, and very merry Christmas. To everyone on duty over the holidays – especially those serving far from your families – you have my absolute respect. The commitment, courage and discipline you show every single day is the reason our nation feels safe. Your sacrifice doesn't go unnoticed. And from a man who's spent a fair bit of time swinging axes and charging into battle on screen, I can say this honestly: the real warriors are the ones wearing RAF blue. Thank you for your service, your strength, and your resolve. Have a brilliant Christmas stay safe, stay strong, and get home to your loved ones soon. Skal!

Clive Standen, actor



I'VE SAID it before and I'm delighted to say it again: huge thanks to the soaring RAF for everything they have done and continue indefatigably to do. A very Merry Christmas to all its wonderful members. Yours in love and gratitude.

Sue Holderness, actress



WE HAD the best evening at the RAF Club in October and would really just like to say that reading the wonderful wartime letters there between Celia Johnson and Peter Fleming was a high point in our year and we are so pleased that it raised so much money for the Battle of Britain Memorial Trust, a cause so close to everyone's heart. It was a great honour to be there. Happy Christmases all round. With every good wish.

Simon Williams and Lucy Fleming, actors



CHRISTMAS IS a time for family and friends to come together – but this is sadly not always possible for those serving in the Armed Forces and, indeed, our emergency and other essential services. Our thoughts are with all, especially during these uncertain and troubled times. Christmas is also a time to reflect upon the passing year – and to look to the future with hope and optimism. From all of us at the Battle of Britain Memorial Trust CIO, we wish a happy and peaceful Christmas and New Year to all past and present members of the Royal Air Force.


**Dilip Sarkar MBE FRHistS FRAeS
Author and Honorary Vice-President,
Battle of Britain Memorial Trust**



WISHING EVERYONE in the RAF family a very happy Christmas, and best wishes for the New Year, from all at PSB HQ. It was a real honour to be invited to the Royal Aeronautical Society awards ceremony this year.

Public Service Broadcasting, rock band





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Row champ Emma's high seas showdown

Cadets challenge veteran record

holder in 3,000-mile Atlantic dash



OARSOME: Wg Cdr Wolstenholme (centre) with Call to Earth team members Stacey Rivers and John Hammond PHOTO: PENNY BIRD

Staff Reporter

WORLD RECORD breaking ocean rower Wg Cdr Emma Wolstenholme is set for a high-seas showdown – with a trio of teenage RAF cadets she helped inspire in a 3,000-mile race across the Atlantic.

The 43-year-old Air Force veteran and Cadets Ambassador cast off as part of a three-strong crew, Call to Earth, in the World's Toughest Row event, with the Three Flying Fish team of Cadets in her wake.

Emma has joined forces with 63-year-old former RAF Jaguar pilot John Hammond and 50-year-old marine technologist Stacey Rivers for the event, competing against more than 50 other teams from across the world.

Starting from San Sebastian on the West Africa coast, rowers will be chasing the current world record time of 29 days to cover the 3,000-mile course to the finish line at Nelson's Dockyard in Antigua.

While the Call to Earth team have a combined age of more than 150, her Flying Fish Cadet rowing protégés, Anna Dunk, Rowan Dally and Harry Allen have youth on their side, clocking up just 59 between them.

The start of the race was delayed by days after a storm front moved in with 40 knot winds whipping up five-metre waves, battering boats moored off the Canary Islands' coast.

As organisers gave the event the green light the Call to Earth team was the 21st vessel to leave – with the Three Flying Fish hitting the water behind them.

Former RAF navigator and trainer Emma will be drawing on years of experience on some of the world's toughest seas to give the seniors the edge.

She led the all-women Team Ithaca to victory completing the 2,000-mile voyage around the British coast and setting a new world record in 2023.

Her previous attempt to row solo across the Atlantic in 2022 ended



ATLANTIC YOUNG GUNS: Cadets Anna Dunk, Rowan Dally and Harry Allen join Emma and her crew ahead of the start of the World's Toughest Row event

with a dramatic nighttime rescue by a giant transporter ship 500 miles off the African coast when an electrical

fault left her without navigation and drinking water.

Emma said: "When I was

advising the Cadets as an Ambassador I never thought that we would end up being rivals, with them out on the ocean.

"It's been great hanging out with them every evening ahead of the start. I know they're going to do well. We really are the best of friends on land – but we will be enemies at sea."

Also flying the flag for the RAF on the high seas are a four-strong team of RAF Regiment rowers – Per Adua 21's Gp Capt Andy Calame, Air Cdre Matt Sowers, Wg Cdr Mike Dewar and Sqn Ldr Mark Jacklin – taking on the crossing to support the Royal British Legion, Macmillan Cancer Support and the Regt's Centurion Fund.

It's a return to the Atlantic for the veteran RAF oarsmen whose last effort was hit by extreme weather and kit failure.

Competitors burn up more than 5,000 calories a day, working in two-hour shifts with two hours rest, around the clock.

Emma will be packing navigation systems and the Starlink satellite internet connection to stay in touch with family and supporters. Call to Earth will also be raising funds for ocean eco projects.

Advertorial.



FROM SOLDIER TO CIVILIAN: THE UNSEEN TOLL OF MEDICAL DISCHARGE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

**HELP for
HEROES**

Anglo-French pact builds Euro-security

Staff Reporter

Lyon, France

CHIEF OF the Air Staff ACM Harv Smyth joined his counterpart Général d'armée aérienne Jérôme Bellanger in Lyon to boost Anglo-French combat power.

They discussed future opportunities and shared challenges, building on the Lancaster House declaration on defence and security cooperation, signed earlier this year, which pledges

collaboration on joint operations, exercises, and capability programmes.

ACM Smyth said: "By working together, we continue to enhance our operational capabilities, promote Anglo-French relations and uphold our shared commitment to global security."

The two men discussed the Multi-National Force Ukraine, otherwise known as the 'Coalition of the Willing' and the success of recent joint operations and exercises.



FRENCH CONNECTION: ACM Harv Smyth with FAF chief Gen Jérôme Bellanger

Vets hearing loss alert

Simon Mander

VETERANS ARE more than twice as likely to get hearing loss than civilians, according to new research.

The findings, published by the Royal British Legion, follow research by the University of Chester.

It found ex-Service personnel are 2.33 times more likely to experience deafness than non-veterans, and 1.6 times more likely to have tinnitus.



A total of 658 veterans were surveyed about the level of noise they experienced and their use of hearing protection.

The results of the survey showed that the most common reason for not wearing hearing protection was that it was not compatible with operational effectiveness and it found an association between deafness and anxiety and/or depression.

The RBL recommends making compensation and hearing aids

more accessible.

Professor Basma Ellahi said: "These survey findings should inform future directions for practice and policy to better support veterans and their support networks."

British Legion campaigns director Angela Kitching said: "The Royal British Legion has long recognised the challenges that Service-related hearing impairment presents for veterans and their families."

"We welcome this research, which fills an important evidence gap on hearing loss and tinnitus in working-age veterans."



The eat is on

Kerry Janes

AIR FORCE chefs celebrated back-to-back wins at Exercise Joint Caterer 25, scooping 60 awards and the Tri-Service Trophy.

The Armed Forces' flagship culinary competition brought together top RAF, Royal Navy and Army cooks.

The Tri-Service Trophy is awarded to the Service with the most Best-in-Class points, which the RAF also won in 2023.

This year the RAF had 18 winners, the Royal Navy eight and the Army four.

In addition, Air Force chefs secured three gold medals, 23 silver, nine bronze, three merit and 18 best in class awards.

Catering Warrant Officer Simon Jacobs said: "These events showcase the skills needed on operations and put chefs under real pressure – just like in the field."

"The camaraderie and applause you hear here reflect the sense of honour in representing

your Service."

Marham WO Derren Parker said: "The best chefs go on to represent the UK internationally and eventually become mentors and judges."

"The Parade de Chef challenge really tested teamwork – producing 22 plates from field kitchens under time pressure."

After 20 years as a civilian chef, Cpl Matthew Strickland competed in his first Ex Joint Caterer, and his sugar craft centrepiece was awarded Gold, Best in Class and the inaugural John Retallick Award – named after a judge who passed away in 2023.

Cpl Strickland said: "This is an event exemplary of the ethos of the catering trade, with the highlight of an RAF win!"

Odiham's AS1 Rhys Yates had just 70 minutes to cook two main dishes and two desserts, in a tiny theatre kitchen in front of a live audience, and was awarded Silver and Best in Class.



MARHAM PERSONNEL went cold turkey as volunteers turned out for a brisk fancy dress Yuletide trek. More than 120 took part in the annual Christmas Turkey Trot organised by Physical Education staff at the Norfolk station.

News

Lossie trip marks Norwegian pact

Simon Mander

PRIME MINISTER Sir Keir Starmer and Norwegian Premier Jonas Gahr got a bird's eye view of Britain's fast jet frontline as they marked a major arms deal at Lossiemouth.

The agreement is aimed at countering the threat to critical undersea cables and comes after defence chiefs accused the crew of the Russian spy ship Yantar of targeting a Lossiemouth P-8 Poseidon crew with high powered lasers off the Scottish coast.

The UK and Norway have agreed closer defence cooperation, with Norwegian personnel to be trained and to operate on RAF Poseidons.

The two leaders also watched a Quick Reaction



MARITIME SECURITY: PM Starmer and Norwegian Premier Gahr chat to crews at Lossiemouth. PHOTOS: SIMON DAWSON

Alert demonstration of crews preparing an emergency launch of a Typhoon.

The Lunna House agreement signed earlier this month is underpinned by a £10bn UK-Norway warship deal and

establishes a combined naval fleet to track Russian submarines across the North Atlantic.

Sir Keir also delivered a Christmas message to RAF personnel serving over the festive period in the UK and abroad.



Staff Reporter

CADETS GOT a taste of life behind the lens at one of Leeming's busiest exercises of the year.

Rookie photographers from 242 Cramlington Sqn were offered time in the studio and on the airfield with Service professionals.

Cadets Emily Hornsby, Joe Martin and Beatrice

Allen were welcomed by ASIs Jess Eglon and Rich Dilworth during Exercise Yorksnite – a four-week detachment to North Yorkshire by Swiss F-18 jets.

After a quick tour of SLR camera lens options they were shown how to capture, upload and edit imagery, and took in spectacular take-off views of the F-18s from Air Traffic Control.

‘A terrific storyteller’
BOOKLIST

‘A pulse-pounding adventure’
PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

PRaise for the Apollo Murders Series
‘NAIL-BITING’ James Cameron
‘EXCITING’ Andy Weir
‘EXPLOSIVE’ Gregg Hurwitz

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**Royal Air Force
Benevolent Fund**

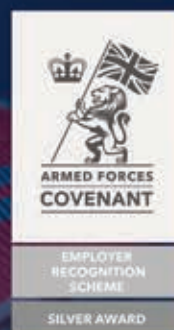


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RAF News

Review of the Year 2025



RAF News Review of the year 2025



January	February	March	April	May	June
01	02	03	04	05	06

1 Sqn Ldr 'Dusko' Frost, who flew into an inferno as wildfires ripped across Cyprus during a 48°C heatwave, heads the New Year Honours after being awarded the MBE for his role supporting local emergency services.

2 Future Top Guns fly for the first time using augmented reality technology which allows them to engage with 'enemy' fighters projected onto their visors.

3 St Mawgan becomes one of Cornwall's largest animal sanctuaries as more than 100 rescued hedgehogs are released at the site's newly rewilded area.

4 WWII hero and champion fundraiser Colin 'Dinger' Bell becomes the oldest recipient in the New Year Honours, receiving the BME at 103.

1 UK combat jets join the world's biggest air combat drill as Exercise Red Flag marks its 50th anniversary. Britain, Australia, and Canada launch training sorties from Nellis Air Base.

2 RAF amateur archeologists unearth a 2,000-year-old Iron Age haul of chariot parts from beneath the Valley airfield. The find is declared a national treasure and donated to Museum Wales.

3 WWII pilot and founder of the world's largest humanitarian airline Jack Hemmings dies, age 103. He served in India flying Lockheed Hudsons to protect the Bay of Bengal from the Japanese and received the AFC.

4 Tornado parts are recycled as new components for the futuristic Tempest fighter. Bits from the veteran jet are ground down and 3D printed into parts for the UK's next generation military aircraft.

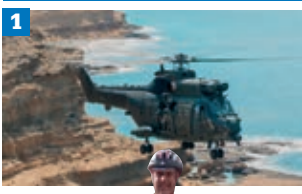


1 Puma helicopters launch a farewell tour of the UK as the veteran aircraft retires from service after more than 50 years on frontline combat, security and humanitarian missions.

2 Channel 4 series *Top Guns* returns giving viewers unprecedented access to RAF fighter jets, drones and Service personnel as the cameras head right back onto the frontline.

3 Veteran Douglas Gowans is dubbed Chop Gun after saddling up for a ride from Derbyshire to Germany in memory of the Dambusters on his vintage Raleigh Chopper to raise money for The Royal British Legion.

4 Rookie race ace and F1 hopeful Aidan Young lands a sponsorship deal with his local RAF station as he prepares to hit the track for the national karting championships sporting the Air Force badge on his helmet.

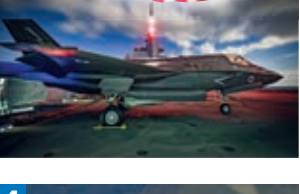


1 Churchill's Few pass into history with the death of the last Battle of Britain pilot, John 'Paddy' Hemingway, at the age of 105. At 21, he was one of some 3,000 pilots and crew who drove back the Luftwaffe in 1940.

2 A 60-year-old ban on Tunnocks Tea Cakes is lifted after the product aces pressure tests at the Aerospace Medicine facility. The embargo was introduced during the Cold War following claims the snacks explode under rapid changes of altitude.

3 F-35 Lightnings hit the deck of HMS Prince of Wales as the Carrier Strike Group launches Operation Highmast – an eight-month deployment taking in Europe, the Gulf and Indo Pacific.

4 Mountain Rescue veteran David 'Heavy' Whalley, who served for almost 40 years and was one of the first on the scene of the Lockerbie disaster, dies at the age of 72.



1 Rookie Benn Morris becomes the fourth generation of his family to serve with the RAF and part of a Service dynasty stretching back 87 years to his great-grandfather, who signed up in 1927 as one of the famous Trenchard Brats.

2 F-35, Typhoons and combat helicopters join veteran aircraft of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight and the Red Arrows as the RAF marks VE Day 80 with a display of 23 aircraft.

3 Typhoons scramble from Poland three times in three days to intercept Russian aircraft close to Nato airspace. RAF jets launch twice in one day to track Ilyushin Il-20M and two SU-30 flankers.

4 Air chiefs unveil the StormShroud drone designed to fly alongside Typhoon and F-35 and disrupt enemy radar, reducing the risk of ground to air missiles.



1 Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer says Britain must be 'battle-ready' to counter the growing threat from Russia, ahead of the Strategic Defence Review.

2 The Typhoon force nets £204 million for the world-beating ECRS Mk2 radar allowing pilots to detect, identify, and track multiple targets in the air and on the ground.

3 Protector enters RAF service as the first Remotely Piloted Air System authorised to fly in UK airspace, making its debut with a short sortie from its Waddington base to Marham.

4 Brize personnel volunteer for duty as zoo keepers for the day at the Cotswold Wildlife Park, getting up close and personal with the venue's resident lemurs, penguins, giraffes and rhinos.





July
07

- 1 Harrier veteran ACM Harv Smyth DFC is named as the new Chief of the Air Staff. The ex-jump jet pilot and weapons instructor has served in Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia, Iraq and Afghanistan.
- 2 The RAF prepares to go nuclear for the first time since the retirement of the V-Force as the UK pledges to buy 12 F-35A fighters capable of carrying nuclear missiles.
- 3 The first RAF Atlas A400M carrying British citizens fleeing Israel following Iranian rocket attacks takes off from Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport en route for Akrotiri in Cyprus.
- 4 ACM Sir Richard Knighton is named as the New Chief of the Defence Staff after three years leading the RAF. He is the first Air Force non-pilot to hold the UK military's most senior post.



August
08

- 1 Chinooks tackle Cyprus' biggest wildfire in 50 years, which devastates miles of parched woodland. UK crews dump 450 tonnes of water on to the blaze as temperatures soar to 45°C.
- 2 The Central Band of the Royal Air Force takes to the stage at Buckingham Palace to provide the musical accompaniment after the Lionesses' Euro 2025 winners parade through the capital.
- 3 Veterans and the Royal Family lead the nation in a two-minute silence marking VJ Day and the 80th anniversary of the end of WWII.
- 4 Defence chiefs confirm gay and lesbian military personnel who were dismissed or prosecuted under the UK Forces' ban on homosexuality, axed in 2000, are to receive compensation payments of up to £70,000 each.



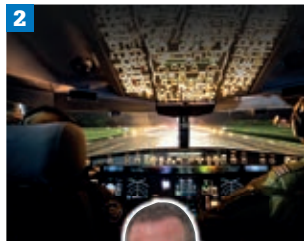
September
09

- 1 The Chief of the Air Staff, ACM Harv Smyth leads tributes to The Few as the nation marks the 85th anniversary of the fight to halt the Nazi invasion in the skies over the English Channel.
- 2 Harrier veteran Gp Capt Jim Calvert, who completed tours in Afghanistan and detachments on HMS Illustrious and Ark Royal, is appointed Commander Lightning.
- 3 WWII Catalina pilot Flt Lt John Cruikshank, the last airman to be awarded the Victoria Cross for a daring attack on a Nazi U-boat in the North Atlantic in 1944, dies at the age of 105.
- 4 Crews line the flightdeck of HMS Prince of Wales as the Carrier Strike Group is given an official welcome as it arrives in Japan, marking the halfway point in Operation Highmast.



October
10

- 1 The Reaper MQ-9 retires from service at Waddington after 18 years of targeting terror on the frontline as The Duke of Edinburgh arrives at the station where crews operated the aircraft on Ops across the Middle East.
- 2 Typhoons launch their first Nato air defence sortie over Poland following Russian drone attacks. Two jets blast off from Coningsby supported by a 10 Sqn Voyager tanker to counter the threat.
- 3 HRH The Princess of Wales is on a roll during a visit to Coningsby – as she performed the aerobatic loop manoeuvre in the Typhoon simulator before meeting crews and families at the station.
- 4 Typhoon pilot Sqn Ldr Ben Polwin is crowned UK air race king after storming to victory in one of the sport's most prestigious event in a light aircraft he built in his garage.



November
11

- 1 Vikings star Clive Standen takes on military duties at Brize Norton's 1 Air Mobility Wing to experience life in the Armed Forces, loading up an Atlas and joining a Voyager troop flight to the USA.
- 2 Defence chiefs warn President Putin that UK Forces are ready to act after the Russian vessel Yantar targets an RAF Poseidon crew with high-powered lasers off the Scottish coast.
- 3 Military chiefs vow a policy of zero tolerance after a shock report claims that nearly 70 per cent of women serving in the Armed Forces have suffered sexual harassment in the last year.
- 4 Specialists from the RAF Regt's Counter Uncrewed Air Systems Wing are deployed to Belgium to support the nation's military and combat drone activity disrupting airports and military bases.



December
12

- 1 THE Carrier Strike Group makes an emotional return to the UK following a milestone eight-month mission spanning Europe, The Middle East and the Indo-Pacific.
- 2 Air Force snapper Cpl Tom Barnard's shot of an Atlas flying through the famous Mach Loop in Wales tops the public poll with more than 1,200 votes to take the coveted People's Choice photo competition crown.
- 3 Benson's 28 Sqn take to the skies in a Chinook to bring some festive joy to school pupils and young hospital patients in Oxfordshire as they take part in the station's annual Santa Drop.
- 4 British undersea infrastructure is to be protected from Russian subs through a defence pact that will see UK and Norwegian navies operating side by side in the North Atlantic.





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CAMARADERIE: There was a slap-up Christmas lunch and a chat for veterans at RAF Cranwell



EAT AND GREET: RAF Brize Norton event

True spirit of Christmas at RAF stations



BRIZE: Party was a cracker

Tracey Allen

CHOIRS, VETERANS' lunches and even a penguin have all featured in RAF stations' seasonal celebrations, helping to forge community spirit, bring Christmas cheer, and raise funds for charities.

RAF Brize Norton hosted its annual veterans Christmas lunch in the Officers' Mess. The day is organised by the team from People & Families Support at Brize and included a tour of the Oxfordshire station, where visitors had the opportunity to learn more about the modern-day role of the RAF, meet those currently serving, and enjoy a Christmas lunch with personnel, including the Station Commander, Gp Capt Louise Henton and Commander Air Wing, Gp Capt Andy McIntyre.

Kate Coats from People & Families Support said: "We have a great team who've pulled together to lay tables and polish glasses to get ready to welcome the veterans to Brize this year. Alongside our People & Families team we've had volunteers from across the station helping too, which has been great. It's fantastic to see the smiles on everyone's faces."

Gp Capt Henton said: "It's a really good opportunity to bridge generational gaps by inviting veterans to speak with



HITTING THE RIGHT NOTE: Singers at RAF Shawbury carol concert, attended by over 850 people

our current Service personnel as they tell stories about what life in the RAF today is like.

"It's also important for our people to hear about what life was like for our veterans, so it's a real two-way street that everyone benefits from. People & Families Support have done a fantastic job, and I'd like to thank the RAF Benevolent Fund and the Oxfordshire Lieutenancy for their support in making the event possible."

RAF Cranwell hosted a veterans' Christmas lunch with entertainment

from vocalist Miss Sarah-Jane singing 1940s classics, and Cranwell Primary School Choir.

And RAF Shawbury singers were in fine voice for one of the biggest carol concerts. More than 850 people were at St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury for the event, heralded by the entry of the Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire and the station commander, Wg Cdr Paddy Durnin, to a fanfare played by the Band of the RAF College.

The RAF College Band, the Spitfires Choir and Shawbury's own soloist, Sqn

Ldr Andy Smailes, all took part, along with St Mary's Primary School Choir.

More than £2,600 was raised for charity and Cosford's Pipe Major David McRobb brought the concert to a stunning conclusion.

Spare a thought over the holiday period for members of 78 Sqn hard at work at NATS Swanwick, where they provide air traffic services for all military aircraft within UK airspace. Personnel from Area Radar, Distress & Diversion, and the Military Airspace Management Cell will be continuing to ensure the safety of UK airspace during the festive season.

The squadron organised a Christmas card drive to send cards to local hospitals and care homes, helping to engage with vulnerable members of the community. Personnel also ran a fundraising stall within NATS to raise money for both the RAFBF and Sophie's Legacy, a local charity supporting families dealing with cancer and providing vital childhood cancer research. The fundraisers were delighted to be joined by Promise the Penguin, the charity's mascot (pictured right).



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ARCHIE MCKELLAR: 602 & 605 Sqns. Became an ace in a day

JOHN DUNDAS: 609 Sqn. Journo had 10 victories to his name

Part-time aces of Battle of Britain

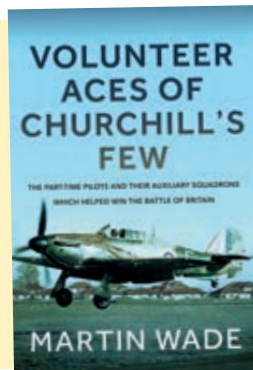
THE STORY of the Battle of Britain, fought just over 85 years ago, is well known. A new book sheds light on the less well known, but pivotal, role played in securing that victory by part-time pilots who served in the squadrons of the Auxiliary Air Force (AAF).

Volunteer Aces of Churchill's Few, by Martin Wade (pen-and-sword.co.uk), tells how the AAF provided 14 of the 60 RAF fighter squadrons involved in the Battle. Their pilots, who also came from the RAF Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR), trained in their spare time before the war and provided some of the highest-scoring RAF aces in the Battle, helping these Auxiliary squadrons achieve 30 per cent of the enemy 'kills'.

One of those squadrons was No. 609 (West Riding) Sqn. Like all AAF units, it was founded as an almost entirely part-time unit. One of their pilots was David Crook, who joined the squadron in August 1938, learning to fly with them in his spare time while working in the family sporting equipment business. By the end of the Battle of Britain he was credited with shooting down five enemy aircraft – making him an ace.

During those desperate months in the summer and autumn of 1940, Crook and thousands of other former part-timers would show great skill and killer instinct and had become highly capable pilots.

Crook saw that the pre-war part-timers had shown real commitment in giving up their spare time to prepare to defend



Copies up for grabs

WE HAVE copies of the book to win – for your chance to own one, tell us:

In which year was the RAFVR formed?

Email your answer, marked Volunteer Aces 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 January 16, 2026.

Win!



RAYMOND DAVIS: 601 Sqn pilot shot down nine aircraft during the Battle

their country. "As we did our peace-time training at weekends and in the evenings, this meant that we had to give up almost all our normal pursuits and spare time pleasures...and concentrate instead on loops and rolls, formation flying and fighter tactics, armament and engines," he said. Alongside Crook in 609 was John Dundas, a journalist when he joined the squadron, who destroyed 10 enemy aircraft during the Battle.

Among the other aces featured in the book is Archie McKellar. He worked for the family building firm and honed his flying skills at weekends with No. 602 (City of Glasgow) Sqn. Nicknamed 'Shrimp' because of his short stature, his record towers over many others in the Battle, with 17 victories. While flying with No. 605 (County of Warwick) Sqn, he became an 'Ace in a Day' after shooting down five Me 109s in 24 hours.

Drawing on primary sources – squadron diaries, combat reports, memoirs, logbooks, letters and interviews, the book covers

the formation of the AAF and RAFVR and the build-up to war and tells the story of these part-time aces from their perspective.

It shines a light on the distinctive ethos and spirit of the Auxiliary squadrons, forged as part-timers before the war and bolstered by their regional identities.

Millionaires' Squadron

The book also highlights the differences between the two main routes for part-timers to serve in the RAF – the Auxiliary Air Force and the RAFVR. Formed in 1924, the AAF was seen by many as a bastion of elites and filled with former pupils of public schools and Oxbridge graduates. This was typified by No. 601 (County of London) Sqn – the so-called 'Millionaire's Squadron' which boasted members of the nobility in its ranks and provided many aces, like Raymond Davis who shot down nine enemy aircraft during the Battle.

The RAFVR meanwhile, was formed in 1936 to attract

more recruits from middle-class backgrounds, like James 'Ginger' Lacey, a trainee pharmacist from Yorkshire who joined the RAFVR in 1937. With No. 501 (County of Gloucester) Sqn he became one of the highest scoring former part-timers in the Battle, credited with 18 victories.

Regardless of origin, such were the endeavours of these pilots in the Battle of Britain that AVM Keith Park, then AOC 11 Group, summed up their vital contribution, stating: "Without the Auxiliaries we would not have defeated the Luftwaffe in 1940". Likewise, Commander-in-Chief, Fighter Command, ACM Sir Hugh Dowding was to say at the height of the battle, "Thank God for the RAFVR!"

The huge contribution of those part-timers to the eventual victory was echoed many years later by the then AVM 'Sandy' Johnstone, who was CO of No 602 (City of Glasgow) Sqn during the Battle.

He said: "[The Battle] established once and for all

that members of the Auxiliary and Reserve forces were more than able to play their full part alongside the Regular squadrons. After all, more than a third of all aircrew taking part in the Battle had been 'part-time aviators' before the outbreak of the war."

Martin Wade added: 'It's great to be able to publish this account of the part-time aces of the Auxiliary Air Force squadrons in the Battle of Britain. As someone who is proud to serve in today's RAuxAF, I believe that through the many achievements of the former part-timers – those in the Battle of Britain stand out because of their importance in saving Britain in its moment of utmost peril – making this perhaps their 'Finest Hour'.

"However, in giving up their spare time to serve their country and the RAF today, members of the RAuxAF remain, in another of Churchill's enduring phrases 'twice the citizen'".

● The book is available via bit.ly/VolunteerAces.



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Lanc Pathfinder bomb aimer who survived 28 missions dies aged 102

FLT LT JACK DARK, who has died aged 102, flew as a navigator/bomb aimer in a Lancaster of Bomber Command's Pathfinder Force when he completed 28 operations over occupied Europe.

He joined the RAFVR in March 1942 and trained as a navigator in South Africa. On return to the UK, he trained to be a bomb aimer on heavy bombers and, after converting to the Lancaster, joined 106 Squadron at Methwingham, near Lincoln, in October 1944.

With his Australian pilot, he flew his first operation on October 28 when he dropped mines in the Drammen Fjord, Oslo. After attacking Heilbronn on December 4, his Lancaster was attacked by a Junkers 88 night fighter. After taking evasive action, the two air gunners managed to shoot down the enemy aircraft.

83 Sqn

Dark later attacked the Urft Dam and on December 18 shipping in the distant port of Gdynia on the Baltic coast was the target on a round trip lasting 10 hours.

In January 1945, Dark and his crew transferred to 83 Sqn.

Following a detailed study into the effectiveness and accuracy of the

bombing by Bomber Command aircraft, several key measures were introduced to improve accuracy. One was the creation of a Pathfinder Force under the command of Air Vice-Marshal Don Bennet, a highly experienced pilot and long-distance navigator.

Squadrons, manned by experienced bomber crews, had the task of identifying and accurately marking aiming points for the following main bomber force to bomb. A second development was to introduce more accurate navigation and bomb aiming aids and these included the ground-mapping H2S radar carried by some of the heavy bombers.

H2S radar

Dark and his crew had already completed several missions when they were transferred to 83 Sqn of the Pathfinder Force. It was Dark's responsibility to identify the bomb release point using his H2S radar and drop flares or markers to assist the aiming of the main bomber force.

When he and his crew joined the squadron, the Combined Chiefs of Staff had ordered an all-out attack on oil and transportation targets. Over the next three months, they attacked 14 targets, eight were against synthetic oil plants and

three were against the Mittelland and the Dortmund-Ems canals.

On February 13, he marked an aiming point for the attack on Dresden and on March 22, the oil refinery at Hamburg was his target.

On April 25, Bomber Command made its final attack of the war with its heavy bomber force. The target was the oil refinery at Tonsberg near Oslo, and this proved to be Dark's 28th and final operation of the war.

During the time Dark was serving on his two squadrons, over 100 Lancasters and their crews, each with seven young men, were lost on operations. He commented: "It was a constant reminder

of how vulnerable we were."

Dark rarely spoke of his wartime experience but he did so in recent years, featuring in Sky TV's film *Lancaster* and in Guy Martin's *Lost World War Two Bomber*.

During the making of a documentary film, *A Memory Owed*, which featured the actor James Bolam, Dark made the comment: "It was out of this world really, seeing all the anti-aircraft fire coming up and the flares and fires on the ground. I don't think I used to think much of what was happening down there."

WAAF

He returned to Horsham in Sussex where he spent the rest of his life.

He married his wife Pat, a former WAAF, who served on a gun emplacement in Antwerp in the latter part of WWII, on September 29, 1951 and she died in September 2021.



BOMBER CREW: Jack Dark in his RAF days, right, and, seated left, in later life at the Lincoln Bomber Memorial with fellow veterans and serving personnel





2025 IS 'a red-letter day in the history of science', to quote a Doc Brown-ism. It's also a landmark date in the history of film, because this year marks the 40th anniversary of *Back to the Future*. We couldn't let that slip-by unnoticed.

To celebrate this magnificent milestone, I made my way out to Hollywood, where I was invited to a sold-out party.

Titled as the 'Enchantment Under The Sea' dance, the event took place at one of the original filming locations, Hollywood United Methodist Church, 6817 Franklin. oIn 1985, Marty McFly (Michael J Fox) took to the stage in this magnificent 1920's church to let rip with his version of *Johnny B Goode*. Forty years on, several generations, who have grown up watching the classic trilogy, gathered to celebrate the spirit of Marty McFly and his eccentric bestie, Doc Emmett Brown (Christopher Lloyd).

Mr Fox and Mr Lloyd may not have been present themselves, but there were plenty of character actors around to ensure that the film was duly recreated. I also had the honour of meeting Claudia Wells, who played Jennifer Parker, Marty McFly's girlfriend in the original film, and Darlene Vogel, Griff's bad-girl gang member from *Back to the Future Part II*.



with a thin steering wheel and no electric aids in sight. Standard physical buttons operate everything and its simplicity is a thing of beauty.

It's a classic, two-seat, sports car set-up, with plenty of leg room. You sit low behind the wheel and it has an air of Lotus engineering that makes it feel like a fast machine, even before you start moving. That's hardly surprising because the bulk of engineering design was completed by Lotus. It's a mid-engine car, so the 2.8 litre V6 sits behind you – another element that makes it feel very much like sitting in the Esprit.

The big difference here is the gull-wing doors, that open the cabin up beautifully when you get out.

On The Road

The DMC-12 comes with a 2.8 litre, normally-aspirated V6. That will give you 130hp, 0-60mph in 9.6 seconds and a top end of 130mph. It's not fast, by modern standards, and, come to think of it, didn't set the world on fire back in '82. What it does have is an engaging drive, in a way that no modern car can match. There's feedback through the steering wheel and it's just great fun to hurl around.

I didn't get to drive the car in Hollywood and on the two previous occasions that I have, they have both been manual versions, so I can't comment on the auto, but the five speed manual is an 80s classic that I loved. It's relatively flat through the bends and goes willingly where you point the nose. No power steering makes



TRAILBLAZING:
Car's gull-wing doors

tight manoeuvres a challenge when parking but, as soon as there's slow-speed movement, the problem is solved. Beyond that, it's a well balanced fibreglass chassis that allows the linear steering to flow. There are no airbags, or ABS either and no catalytic converter to reduce power. Just a good old-fashioned EFI (Electronic Fuel Injection) system, bolted to a mid-engine V6.

Owning

Owners I have spoken to say they have no regrets and have overcome a range of challenges to achieve their dreams. Edwin Bineda, who owns this particular time machine, explained that he was initially scammed out of \$30,000 trying to buy a car before he found this one. Nevertheless, he didn't give up and bought the car pictured in Georgia, in 2018. It took him a year to make it reliable and a further year to complete the time machine conversion. It's cost him, roughly, the

The real star

There are a few films where a car has been as much of a star as the lead actor and *Back to the Future* is a good example. The DeLorean DMC-12 is one of the most famous cars in the world, thanks to its role as Doc Brown's time machine. Now one enterprising company has made it possible for you to experience that automotive movie magic yourself.

DeLorean Rental, the brainchild of Jason Alspaugh, started in the US and experienced rapid success, quickly expanding to offer time machines in locations around the world. In the UK, you can now book a time machine, or an unmodified car, to appear at your wedding, party, film shoot, or corporate event.

As every car is a bespoke collector's item, they're not available for self-drive hire, but you may be able to get behind the wheel, subject to arrangement with the individual owner. DeLorean Rental can also assist if you're intent on buying one!

DeLorean DMC-12

The DeLorean Motor Company was founded in 1975 by motor industry executive John DeLorean and started producing its first model in Belfast, early in 1981. The DMC-12 was, in fact, to become the only model produced by the ill-fated manufacturer, with the last car rolling off the production line towards the end of 1982. Just 9,000 DMC-12s had been made.

Outside

The DMC-12 is a thing of beauty. Designed by Giorgetto Giugiaro, the legend who created the Lotus Esprit, the Maserati Ghibli, the Ferrari 250GT and the Volkswagen Scirocco, its sporty lines have stood the test of time. Even by modern standards, it looks like a true sports car, especially with its time machine clobber attached.

The gull-wing doors are a signature piece, with paint-free stainless steel bodywork helping it to stand out. Film fans marvel at the attention to detail, with the rear vents dominating the back end and the Mr Fusion reactor (that transforms ordinary rubbish into enough electricity to power the 1.21GW needed for time travel) sitting proudly in the rear panel. The iconic 15 inch alloy wheels, with their Cooper Cobra G/T tyres, enhance the image further.

Finally, the neon trim and time machine cabling that adorns the sides/front bumper grabs the eye instantly. You could spend £200k on a supercar and still not own a machine that attracts this much attention. You have to be a bit eccentric to drive one, but what a car!

Inside

The DMC-12 comes with a choice of leather upholstery. You can, either, have black, or grey. The car in the film sports the grey. The dashboard is quintessentially 80s,

DeLorean DMC-12

Pros

- A classic that will only appreciate
- Stunning retro looks
- Great to be seen in
- A fun drive

Cons

- Difficult to find a good example
- Restoration/build costs unpredictable
- All classics require regular maintenance
- Parts are not cheap

Verdict

Everyone should have a DeLorean in their life, at some point. For most, having a time machine arrive from 1985, for that special family event will be enough to scratch the itch, but for the collectors among you, the engineers who love a challenge, buying one should absolutely be on your list. DeLorean Rental can help with both (DeLoreanRental.com). There's also a DeLorean revival on the horizon, with a Texas relaunch of the brand. A 2020s model, intriguingly labelled 'Alpha' is a modern sports car, with gull-wing doors. No launch date yet, but we'll keep you posted.

equivalent of £94,000, but he was recently offered \$250,000 for the car – not that it's for sale.

RAF Sport Review of the year 2025

Also
pages
24-25



2

January

01

1 HAVING CALLED for Service heads of departments to ‘Do more for sport’ in his annual ‘State of the Nation’ interview with *RAF News*, Director of RAF Sport Air Cdre Rich Fogden’s words were put into action in the opening month of the year and beyond.

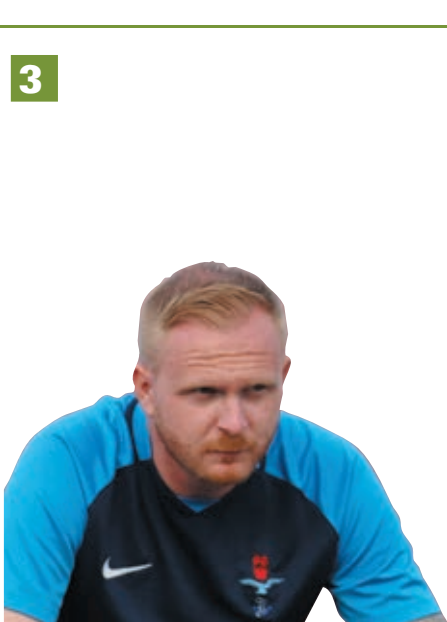
2 THERE WAS huge RAF rugby league news as women’s team captain AS1(T) Grace Burnett signed for RFL Women’s Super League side Huddersfield Giants. The signing meant Burnett traded one WSL side for another as she moved from Warrington Wolves, who she played for 13 times, scoring once in the 2024 season.

3 THERE WAS Stateside success for service BMX star Cpl Chris Taylor, who snatched third place on his USA race debut at the Grand National Finals in Tulsa. Competing in the ‘Biggest BMX race on Earth’, at the SageNet Expo Centre, he blasted his way to the podium after a nerves-of-steel break on the final corner of the race.

4 INTER-SERVICE preparations began on the Austrian slopes for Exercise Alpine Challenge 25, which would see ski, snowboard and telemark stars get a chance to fight for Inter-Service places, while novice personnel got a taster of the competition for the first time.



3



3

February

02

1 THERE WAS late Challenge Cup woe as the senior men’s rugby league stars fell to the Army 22-16. The 2024 IS champions led for 70 minutes of the rescheduled clash at Aldershot Garrison Stadium.

2 THE SEVENTH Invictus tournament and the first-ever winter/summer games in the event’s history saw three RAF personnel lead the GB team in Vancouver. Team captain Cpl Stephen Hooper (Ret’d) and vice-captains Flt Lt Gemma Barnes (Ret’d) and Sqn Ldr Neil Thomas were at the helm.

3 AFTER A decade of UKAFFC dominance, the team’s head coach Cpl Daryl White resigns from the post following another successful Kentish Cup campaign. White guided the team to a fifth Kentish Cup win in six tournaments in Stroo, Holland, beating France 1-0 and Holland 2-1.

4 THE SERVICE’S equestrians produced a fabulous second place at the London International Horse Show, Olympia. The dynamic duo of Flt Lt Michelle Randall and WO Keeley Martin jumped superbly, with Randall coming second. Chair of RAF showjumping Wg Cdr Haley Norris said: “Having two RAF riders in the final was an incredibly proud moment.”



2



4

March

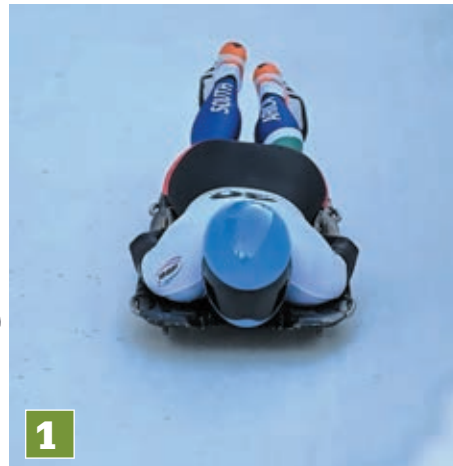
03

1 FLT LT Nicole Burger secured qualification for the IBSF skeleton World Cup in 2026, before heading off for IS duty in Lillehammer as women’s captain. The RAF and South African ice sports star competed in Winterberg, St. Moritz and Lillehammer.

2 THE RAF-led Invictus GB team produced an incredible second place with a medal haul of 38 in the Vancouver Whistler hosted games. Rowing and swimming successes saw Team UK produce the most podium finishes.

3 IT WAS the end of an era for RAF Under-23s football as Sgt Danny Bartley oversaw his last game with a 3-1 defeat to the Inter-Services winning Army. He said: “It’s been an absolute pleasure managing the team for the past four seasons.”

4 THERE WAS an alpine gold rush at the Inter-Services in Meribel with 19 RAF individual wins and team victories in men’s ski and women’s snowboarding. Fg Off Ollie Weeks took the men’s individual title and AS1 Georgina Davis the women’s ski title, while women’s snowboard captain Cpl Natalie Fields also took top spot.



1



5

April

04

1 THERE WAS double Six Nations try glory for RAF rugby stars Flt Lt Amy Cokayne and Flt Lt Sarah Bonar, as England and Scotland won their opening clashes. Hooker Cokayne got England’s Women’s Six Nations defence off to a great start with a poacher’s try in a 38-5 bonus point victory over Italy in York, while Bonar’s Scotland overcame Wales 24-21 in Edinburgh, with the aviator touching down.

2 AS1 GEORGIA CALLAWAY stormed to first place in the Ladies Lift-Off powerlifting event at RAF Cosford.

3 IT WAS a match to remember as the RAF Mustangs stormed to a 64-6 win over the Royal Navy to kick off the 2025 Inter-Services championship in style. The Mustangs would go on to beat the Army Jackals 20-14 to take the championship title for the second time, in November.

4 A 3-0 AWAY defeat at the hands of the Royal Navy spelled the end of the road for the Service senior men’s footballers’ Inter-Service championship hopes.

5 BACK-TO-BACK wins saw the SRT(W) women’s footballers make it five IS championship title wins in a row. Stand-in manager FS Michelle Perkins saw her charges secure a 1-0 win in Portsmouth, to kickstart their title charge, then finish things with a 4-3 win over the Army.



2

RAF Sport Review of the year 2025

2



May

05

1 RAF DINGHY Racing celebrated its first-ever Inter-Service win in the Team Racing Championships at Bowmoor Sailing Club, Gloucester, beating the Army 2-1 in their three-race final clash.

2 A PERFECT 10 catches saw Cpl Loz Howard take a first victory at the RAF Carp Angling Association's development event at Norton Disney.

3 THE SERVICE'S karting association had a new star in its midst as Flt Lt James Ling picked up the first Premier win of the season in Llandow, Wales.

4 BACK-TO-BACK Inter-Services wins was the reward for the RAF's duathlon men's team at Thruxton Race Circuit, Andover on a bumper day for the association.
The men's team took all three podium spots, with first-placed Cpl Adam Baker reclaiming the Open Senior Male title he last won in 2023. The RAF Women's team took a brilliant second place.

5 A DOMINANT 45-13 victory saw RAF Marham's joint Service rugby union team Marham Bulls/Lightning Force win the Navy Cup.
The resounding win over HMS Queen Elizabeth (QNLZ) at Burnaby Road, Portsmouth was the culmination of several years of near misses for the team, made up of RAF/RN/Army and US Marines personnel.



4



June

06

1 TWO TITANS of Service rugby union bid adieu.
The Service's most capped player Flt Lt Dave Manning hung up his boots after the IS championship and women's team coach WO John Wilding left the RAF.

2 THE RAF finally scratched their seven-year IST20 itch, winning the title for the first time since 2018 at Lord's with a crushing defeat of the Royal Navy.

3 A FOUR-GOAL thriller and a penalty shoot-out saw UKAF's women footballers secure back-to-back President's Cup wins in Amsterdam over the Dutch Air Force.
There was redemption for opening goal scorer AS1 Shaunna Jenkins, who, having missed the final spot kick to lose to the Dutch three years ago in Havant, stepped up to net the winning penalty.

4 NEWS OF the first ever biennial Tri-Nation's rugby league tournament between RAF and its Australian and New Zealand counterparts was announced.

5 THERE WAS double joy and a tournament for the ages as RAF ice hockey celebrated back-to-back Inter-Service men's and women's titles in the championship's 20th year.



5



July

07

1 A STORMING 3-1 win saw the Service's polo stars start their season with an opening IS victory over the Royal Navy to take the Duke of York's Cup.
The closely-fought match at Tedworth Park saw the RAF jump to a two-goal lead over the first couple of chukkas in their bid for the trophy, which has been fought for since 1928.

2 A KNOCKOUT piece of Service boxing history was made at RAF Akrotiri as the station's Officers' Mess held its first outdoor event under the lights.
The eight-bout fight card featured RAF Select and Army Select boxers.

3 IT REALLY was third time lucky for WO Alex Lilley, after he was presented with The King's Medal for shooting by the Monarch at Windsor Castle in July.
The RAF hotshot had already won the prestigious gong in 2016 and 2018, but didn't get a visit to a royal palace on either occasion.

4 THERE WAS a hat-trick of RAF waterskiing championship wins for Flt Lt Jack Jardine at Queensford Lakes in Oxford.

5 IT WAS the return fight of his dreams after injury as the Service's only professional boxer, Cpl Brad Axe, landed a unanimous defeat of Sam Kirk at London's York Hall.



1



August

08

1 ARCHER SGT Ellie Spinks was on target for her first-ever National Tour stage win after a nail-biting finale in Barnsley.
She emerged victorious in Stage 5 of the six-stage national event, beating Anastasia Wilson, the reigning queen of UK barebow archery.

2 AN NHC A Class 342 sailing first was the RAF's reward from this year's Inter-Service's Offshore Regatta on the Solent.

3 MEDALS GALORE was the return for RAF martial artists at the recent Inter-Service championships at HMS Nelson and HMS Temeraire, Portsmouth.
There was a first place in karate, with five golds and two silvers, and a third in Brazilian jui jitsu – despite winning eight golds, 14 silvers and nine bronze medals.

4 THE RAF'S men's road cycling team became history makers taking their first Open title at the Inter-Service Road Race Championships in Yorkshire.
Second and third place finishes for Sgt Rich Summerbell (Brize) and AS1 James Bunting (Fylingdales) were enough to seal the race.

5 AN 11-MINUTE time gap secured a stunning victory for AS1 Thomas Stegeman at the 2025 cross-country Inter-Service cycling course in Wales.



Also see p23

4



September

09

1 THE SECOND leg of the Loriners Inter-Services competition saw the RAF take first place to be sitting pretty for the remaining championship rounds.

In an incredibly close finish at the Royal Navy Equitation Championships, the RAF team took the win by just one second over the Army.

2 SNETTERTON WAS the venue as the RAF sidecar duo of Cpl Rob Atkinson and Sgt Mark Middleton recorded their first class victory as the SSD entered its penultimate round.

3 SERVICE SEA-FISHING ruled the IS waves, making it 18 years in a row, after a close-fought win at Holyhead, North Wales.

Pushing the RAF all the way, the Royal Navy finished just a few fish shy.

4 IN RUGBY union there was Defence Rugby Cup semi-final heartache as UKAF's women bowed out of the tournament proper losing 31-7 to France.

5 SERVICE WOMEN'S rugby union made history as Flt Lts Amy Cokayne and Sarah Bonar faced off in the World Cup quarter-finals in Bristol.

The clash saw Cokayne and Bonar take to the field for England and Scotland respectively, with England winning 40-8. It was the first time RAF personnel had met at this level.



1

1



October

10

1 ANGLING ACE Sgt Steve Reid landed the biggest prize of his career as he was named the RAF's Sportsman of the Year 2025.

He was joined on the podium by cycling supremo Cpl Sarah Toms, who took the women's title after an outstanding year representing the RAF and UK Armed Forces with stunning success on road, track and time trial events.

2 ASI CAMERON TINDLE got Royal approval at this year's Braemar Games as the RAF's relay runners won gold at the annual Scottish tournament.

HM The King presented the team captain with a trophy to cap off the weekend, which saw the Service represented in various sports.

3 SERVICE CYCLISTS made podium history in Portsmouth as they took all three top spots at the IS Criterium Open Championships for the first time.

Cpl Euan Campbell won, with Cpl Danny Hedley second and Sgt Craig Robinson third.

4 RAF SHOOTERS ended their clay pigeon season with a bang, beating the all-powerful Army team by eight points to take the final Armed and Emergency Services event.

The aviators hosted the competition at their Home For Sport, Nottingham & District Gun Club.



2

3



November

11

1 THE RAF Waterski & Wakeboard team made a splash at the Inter-Services Championships at Liquid Leisure in Windsor, winning both the Waterski and Boat Wakeboard team events.

The RAF also topped the podium individually, with Flt Lt Lucy Carter in the Women's Waterski Slalom, Sqn Ldr David Jenkins in the Men's Waterski Slalom, Sqn Ldr Emma Phillips in the Women's Boat Wakeboard, and Sgt Rich Philips in the Men's Boat Wakeboard.

2 CPL JENNIFER Sabine pulled no punches as she was named the RAF Boxer of the Year at the association's AGM at RAF Northolt, closing out a successful year for the sport. Also recognised for their contributions were bright new hope ASI Kieran Brimicombe and sport stalwart Sgt George Westfel.

3 HIGH ROLLERS from RAF Esports win the sixth Call of Duty Endowment Bowl (CODE Bowl VI) tournament in Las Vegas.

The RAF are the first Service to take home the prestigious trophy twice, after also triumphing in the international competition in 2022.

4 FLT LT MICHAEL KALLENBERG battled November winds and rain to end 10 years of chasing the pain to claim the top spot at the Snowdon Marathon, crossing the finish line in 2:33:54.



4

1



December

12

1 THERE WAS a pre-Christmas cracker for Sgt Dan McNamara and his Wolverhampton Women's team as they won their TNT Friday Night Football TV debut bow 2-0.

2 THE DECEMBER chill was thawed out with some white-hot sports action in a super sixth-placed debut World Cup finish for Service GB bobsleigh star Cpl Alex Cartagena in Cortina Milano.

The RAF ice sports star, who is homing in on Olympic glory next year, secures the podium finish in the 4-man GB bob team driven by Brad Hall.

3 THERE WAS DOUBLE duathlon joy for WO Matt Allen after securing European and World Championship places for 2026 with solid finishes in the UK to close out the year.

He will now line up for the GB team in his age group at the July 2026 European Championships in Spain and the World Champs 2026 in Abu Dhabi in November.

4 A CRACKING end to the year for Service boxing saw Cpl Brad Axe secure a unanimous points win in his return in Bristol after six months away. The RAF firefighter instructor defeated Steven Davis after four rounds of blistering action, while the 106th Lord Wakefields at RAF Cranwell made history hosting their first ever Class A 80kg Youth Championship bout, with ASI Bradley Higgs of Odiham taking the honours.



2

Sport

BOXING

Army shaken to the Corps



FIGHTING FOR PRIDE: RAF and Army boxers gave their all in the ring at RAF Brize Norton

Daniel Abrahams

THE HIGHLY anticipated RAF vs RLC Fight Night proved a resounding success for the hosts at Brize Norton, winning five out of the evening's eight bouts.

Cpl Ben Gurnell, RAF Boxing coach, said: "We couldn't be prouder of the fighters, the fans and everyone behind the scenes who made this event extraordinary. The energy in the arena was incredible and tonight proved once again why



boxing continues to captivate audiences."

The action-packed evening saw home station fighter AS1

Travas Stock take the first bout, before AS1 Lilly Surridge beat her Ring Amateur Boxing Club opponent to make it two wins out of the two for the hosts.

It took until bout six for the Service to secure another win as AS1 Jerome Smith (RAF Wittering) won his clash with a Royal Logistic Corps opponent. Coningsby fighter AS1(T) Mason Slender won the next before Brize fighter AS1 Charlie Topp closed out the evening with another victory.

BOBSLEIGH



SPRINT START: Cartagena and Hall

Top support for Corporal

IT WAS a family affair for RAF/GB bobsleigh star Cpl Alex Cartagena as he raced as part of the two-man bob team with Brad Hall in Innsbruck, Austria.

The aviator was roared on by mum Gill and sister Sofia for his two runs, which saw the duo finish in 17th place, +1.81 seconds behind the winning German pairing of Johannes Lochner and Georg Fleischhauer on 1 minute 45.08 seconds.

Cartagena said: "It was a complete surprise to have my family there. It was a tough weekend. The track was short, and the times were another step forward for me."

"My family now have a better idea of how difficult this sport is. It's hard for people to understand what is involved. I had a day off before the racing so it was great to be able to spend some time



FLYING THE FLAG: Alex, Gill & Sofia

with my mum and sister.

"I cannot wait for my dad to be able to get out to see me in action, hopefully at the Olympics if I am selected."

● Follow Team GB on Instagram @britishbobsleighandskeleton.

SKELETON



DAREDEVILS: RAF skeleton camp personnel in Sigulda, Latvia

Latvian liaison for RAF sliders

SERVICE ICE sports stars held a first joint training camp in Sigulda, developing and coaching Service and Latvian sliders.

It saw RAF and New Zealand skeleton star and coach Flt Lt Rhys Thornbury train 20 Royal Air Force sliders, eight new and 12 development athletes, alongside six Latvia Air Force personnel.

The event was run in conjunction with the British Embassy in Latvia, through defence attaché Sqn Ldr Steve Priestnall.

Thornbury said: "The

Latvian personnel, who were novices to the sport, slid over a three-day period, and it was a brilliant piece of defence engagement.

"Our personnel performed around 300 runs over the full two-week camp and there were some noticeable achievements."

"The Latvian Air Force engagement was brilliant and something that hasn't been done before. It was great to build relations with another NATO partner using sport as the link."

● Follow RAF Skeleton on Instagram @raf_skelton_team.



SLIDER: Adrenaline rush

5 RAF Sport

pages of



Review of highlights of 2025's RAF Sport

See pages 23, 24 & 25

HOCKEY



NO WAY THROUGH: Sgt Rhian James defends against the Army for the RAF Women's Seniors

TRIPLE TOP

Indoor Inter-Services triumph for RAF

Daniel Abrahams

THERE WAS a dominant close to 2025 as Service hockey stormed to glory at the Army-hosted IS indoor championships in Aldershot.

The association won three of the five trophies available – senior men's, women's and men's masters – on a day of blistering action.

Cpl James Havlin, RAF hockey spokesman, said: "Winning three of the five titles on offer reinforces the RAF's position as the dominant force in Service Hockey. We look forward to carrying this momentum into the 2026 outdoor season."

The senior women kicked off the sweep, flying out of the traps with a 5-2 blitz of the Royal

Navy, with AS1 Alex Naughalty grabbing a brace.

Going one down to the red-hot Naughalty, the Army fought back to level, but the RAF weren't rattled, they struck again through Wg Cdr Jane Lewis to end the third quarter 2-1 up.

What followed was pure chaos. The Army won a penalty flick, but Cpl Kiera Hayman, the hero between the posts, pulled off a massive save. Then came three Army short corners in a row: Hayman saved two, the third fizzed wide.

The RAF were hanging on, but still dangerous on the break, but with 80 seconds left the Army levelled again, with the RAF winning the championship on goal difference.

A total display from the senior men's team crushed the Navy 5-2 before a 4-4 draw with the Army, which left players and crowd breathless.

With the Army having beaten the Navy the clash was a winner takes all and leading 4-3 in the closing stages another last gasp Army goal pegged things back, but it was not enough with the aviators winning on goal difference.

A hat-trick of championship wins was completed when the men's Masters team won 7-0 over the Navy before winning 2-1 against the Army to take the championship for the first time in 13 years.

● Follow RAF Hockey on Instagram @RAFHockey.

ROWING

Oar-some year... and there's more to come



RAF ROWING celebrated one of its most successful years to date with IS wins, along with displays in Europe to help strengthen the future of the association.

The Joint Services Regatta, hosted at Peterborough City Rowing Lake in September, saw the RAFRC secure two of the four Inter-Service titles on offer; taking convincing wins in both the Men's 8+ and the Women's 4+ and was a superb start to the racing season.

RAF Rowing Club Vice-Chair Sqn Ldr Chris Nash said: "The wins in Peterborough set a strong foundation for the months ahead."

The association continued its momentum into October, as personnel travelled to the Netherlands to race at the Army Regatta in Breda.

Shifting its attention to training, the club has begun preparations for one of the landmark events of 2026 – the 100th anniversary of the Head of the River Race, set to be held in London next March.

Nash said: "We aim to field a crew capable of mounting a serious challenge for the Forces



Pennant at this historic edition of the race.

"With rising membership numbers, renewed structure and improving performance across both men's and women's squads, the club enters winter in a promising position."

"We are always looking for personnel interested in rowing or learning about the sport."

● Follow RAF Rowing on Instagram @rafrowing.

TRIATHLON



IRONMAN: Sgt Scott Hill has his sights set on Euro and World glory next year

Sergeant Scott's not over the Hill

"YOU'RE NEVER too old," is the battle cry of Sgt Scott Hill as he sets his sights on a triple crown of triathlon triumphs next year.

Hill, 42, a stalwart of the Service sport, qualified for the European middle distance triathlon championships in Banyoles, Spain in July, Ironman Italy in September and world long distance triathlon championships in Abu Dhabi in November.

He said: "I am open to learning

and adapting and that, I think, is key to longevity. Next year will be no different, I am pushing myself and want to achieve more. I want to qualify for the Ironman world championship Kona Hawaii 2027 – from my finish time in Ironman Italy, so there's a lot to go for."

"I am the first RAF athlete to race the Ironman World Champs twice in its history, and I intend to qualify again. I represent the RAF, Central Fund and Sports Federation

when I run, and I am proud to do so."

The British Triathlon Federation (BTF) high performance coach will also be taking to the airwaves next year when he hosts a triathlon-based podcast for UKRunChat and UKTriChat social media platform.

He said: "The year ahead is exciting and another chance to learn and develop."

● Follow FS Scott Hill on Instagram @ironhill93.

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



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

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



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

**HELP for
HEROES**

R'n'R



Win!

**Win tickets to Banff Mountain
Film Festival ● p3**



**Fab-u-lous!
– Strictly Live
arena tour**

● See
page 4

Panto reviews pages 3 & 8 + Announcements: page 6 + Puzzles: page 8

BREW+
BAKE!



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

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



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

Real thrills at local cinemas

GET SET for thrilling adventure – the Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour is bringing a night of adrenaline-packed films to venues around the UK and Ireland in 2026.

With extreme climbing, kayaking, mountain biking and more, the popular Festival features two new collections of inspirational short films from remote corners of the planet.

“Immerse yourself in a night of gripping adventure – up on the big screen,” said tour director Nell Teasdale.

“The Banff Mountain Film Festival showcases the year’s most inspiring stories of adventure, with cutting-edge expeditions, extraordinary human resilience and the enduring magic of wild places.”

The breathtaking documentaries are introduced by a compère, and each screening will see a free prize giveaway to win outdoorsy goodies from the tour’s partners.

The films are chosen from hundreds of entries into the Banff Mountain Film and Book Festival, which is held every November in the Canadian Rocky Mountains and celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2025. The UK and Ireland tour is back for its 17th year, and will visit more than 50 locations in spring and autumn 2026.

“Whether you’re a seasoned adventurer or simply love great storytelling, this year’s films offer something for everyone,” added Nell.

Film highlights include *Gabon Uncharted* in which four elite white water



MANDALA: Epic mountain bike adventure

kayakers embark on a 12-day descent of the mysterious Ivindo River in Gabon, Central Africa. Battling towering waterfalls and treacherous rapids, this is a story of friendship, teamwork and passion. It’s described as a high-stakes adventure revealing the gritty reality behind the veneer of social media.

The Finisher tells the extraordinary story of British runner Jasmin Paris and her groundbreaking completion of the Barkley Marathons, a race known for its extreme difficulty, cryptic rules and unpredictable conditions.

Only a handful of runners have ever completed the course, and never any women. The film chronicles Jasmin’s three-year journey of preparation, and brutal scenes from the race itself, showing her monumental achievement.



GABON UNCHARTED: Four elite white water kayakers take on Central Africa’s deadly Ivindo River

Mandala is about a spellbinding mountain bike journey through Nepal, from the bustling streets of Kathmandu to the vertiginous mountain paths of the Himalayas.

Starring legendary French mountain biker Kilian Bron, who is passionate about finding the balance between culture and sport, *Mandala* is hailed as a visual and sensory work of art.

Win a pair of tickets

WE HAVE a pair of tickets to the festival, to a venue of your choice. For your chance to win this great prize, answer this question correctly:

Where is the Banff Mountain Film and Book Festival held every November?

Email your answer, marked Banff Mountain Film Festival competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by January 10.

Please ensure that you mark on your entry which venue you prefer to attend – see the website: banff-uk.com for venue details.



THE FINISHER: About extreme runner Jasmin Paris



Panto Review

Dick Whittington

Oxford Playhouse until Jan 4

Updated Dick Whittington is still a Christmas cracker



MESSAGE: Panto celebrates individuality and diversity

PHOTO: CRAIG FULLER

THERE ARE no big celebrity names in the cast of this panto but that doesn’t mean it isn’t a starry show.

It’s a riot from start to finish, with a brilliant live three-piece band and a first class cast who deliver a perfect production full of fun and laughs, slick choreography, impressive acrobatics and banging tunes.

Toby Hulse’s interpretation of the traditional Dick Whittington story sees Dick becoming ‘Oxenford’ market trader Dot (a delightful Daisy Ann Fletcher), the dastardly Rattagher brothers are the splendidly boo-worthy villains and the fabulous dame, Sarah Fitzwarren, (Lucy Frederick) – owner of London Town restaurant Cor Pie Me – on a campaign to be Lord Mayor.

As befits a seasoned stand-up comedian, she’s lightning quick with the ad libs and quips.

The show also features Daniel Forrester as the appealing but naive Damian Allbran, Mayor of London, who is roped in to help Liam Rattagher, with Elliott Wooster as the sparkling Fairy Bowbells (and Dick/Do’s cat Misty).

Not forgetting Fintan Hayeck as the athletic Albert Square, hopelessly in love with Sarah’s daughter Alice (Sophia Lewis), who has a crush on boyband member ‘Barry Garlow’.

Set in the Britpop-tastic 1990s, it’s all gloriously silly and very enjoyable while delivering the direct message that diversity is to be celebrated and you should be proud of your individuality.

This is in the face of the

Rattagher brothers’ devilish plan to turn the world into a beige, dull place where everyone is the same. And our heroic goodies get together to thwart Liam’s aim of forming an *X-Factor* style boy band – Boybland – of mind-numbing boringness.

Robin Hemmings steals the show as Liam with his great performance as the swaggering, scheming baddie who, underneath it all, just wants to be loved by his big brother Noel.

I was charmed by the performances of the panto’s Young Company, surely nurturing stars of the future, particularly Yuen of ‘Team Pie,’ with his lovely voice and strong stage presence.

It’s a real Christmas treat.

5 roundels out of 5

Review by Tracey Allen



Dance
Strictly Live
UK arena tour



PECS APPEAL: Harry Aikines-Aryeetey with dance partner Karen Hauer

Gladiator Harry in return to the arena

GLADIATOR AND Olympian Harry Aikines-Aryeetey and his dance partner Karen Hauer will don their dancing shoes in January and take to the road to dazzle arena audiences up and down the country in the Strictly Come Dancing Live UK Arena Tour for 2026.

Running from January 23 to February 15, other couples announced for the 30-date tour include performer La Voix and Aljaž Škorjanec, trailblazing model, actor and influencer Ellie Goldstein and her dance partner Vito Coppola, and TV star and broadcaster Vicky Pattison and Kai Widdrington

They will be joined by the Strictly judges Shirley Ballas, Anton Du Beke and Craig Revel Horwood, with *It Takes Two*'s Janette Manrara returning to host the tour.

Harry said: "I'm switching the *Gladiators* arena for the Strictly Live Tour arenas and can't wait to get back on the dance floor! It's amazing to be reunited with Karen again. Expect more fun, more

laughs, and even more energy."

La Voix, who had to withdraw from the latest *Strictly* series due to injury, said: "I loved being part of the show and was devastated when my time on it was cut short. But now I'm absolutely thrilled to have the chance to get back on an even bigger dancefloor with the sparkling 2026 Strictly Live Tour sashaying my way around the country with my wonderful partner, Aljaž, by my side."

Ellie said: "It was a dream come true to be part of this year's *Strictly Come Dancing*. And now, I'm over the moon to continue my dancing journey on the arena tour with my 'Cheeky Team' partner, Vito."

Vicky added: "I had an incredible couple of months on *Strictly*. Now I'm buzzing like an old fridge that I get to continue this amazing experience and put my dancing shoes back on for the tour at arenas all over the country – including my hometown of Newcastle."

● **Go to: strictlycomedancinglive.com for more details.**



TV
The Night Manager 2
BBC platforms and Prime Video

Night Manager

THE NIGHT MANAGER is back – the thrilling BBC series, based on the novel by John le Carré, was a huge hit when it ran back in 2016. Now, almost a decade on, Tom Hiddleston is returning in the title role for the much anticipated second series that starts on New Year's Day.

Hiddleston reprises his role as Jonathan Pine, the former soldier turned hotelier who became a reluctant spy in pursuit of arms dealer Richard Roper (Hugh Laurie).

Pine (below) is now living as Alex Goodwin, working as a low-level MI6 officer running a quiet surveillance unit in London. But one night a chance sighting of an old Roper mercenary prompts a call to action and leads Pine to a violent encounter with a new player: Colombian businessman Teddy Dos Santos.

On this perilous new journey, Pine meets Roxana Bolaños, a businesswoman who reluctantly helps him infiltrate Teddy's Colombian arms operation. Once in Colombia, Pine is plunged deep into a deadly plot involving arms and training of a guerrilla army.

To stop it, he must don a new identity as a reckless Hong Kong playboy bold enough to win the trust of Dos

Hiddleston's back as former soldier with taste for espionage

Santos and his team. But as Pine gets closer to Teddy, he uncovers another figure pulling the strings, Gilberto Hanson, a terrifying local arms dealer whose reach extends to the heart of London's intelligence community.

Pine's infiltration becomes a dangerous game of deception, seduction, and survival. Roxana may be Pine's only ally – or his greatest risk. Teddy's loyalties to both Pine and Hanson waver between devotion and suspicion.



As allegiances splinter, and the scale of MI6 corruption comes to light, Pine races to expose a conspiracy designed to destabilise a nation. With betrayal at every turn, he must decide whose trust he needs to earn and how far he's willing to go before it's too late.

Along with Laurie, Hiddleston is an executive producer of *The Night Manager 2*.



GLAMOUR: Roxana (Camila Morrone)

Hiddleston said: "I think I felt I had unfinished business with this role. I found making the first series incredibly fulfilling, I found it really stimulating. It was about the world as we find it, but it was also about fascinating, mysterious characters with very deep, complex inner lives."

When the new series begins, it's eight years later – Roper is dead and Pine has been living under another name.

"In that half-waking sleep of Alex Goodwin, a scent of familiar dragon smoke glides into Pine's sphere and the old dragon-slayer in Pine is reactivated. There is a strain of something he recognises, and that impels him to Colombia, into another



TV
ITV & ITVX
Festive offerings

Return of Red Eye

ITV AND ITVX has a host of compelling dramas in its line-up for 2026. They include series 2 of the thriller *Red Eye*, starting in January, with Jing Lusi reprising her role as British cop DS Hana Li for a new investigation alongside guest star Martin Compston.

Inside the US Embassy the celebrations for a newly-appointed US Ambassador to London are shattered when a call threatening to blow a British plane out of the sky if anyone leaves triggers an immediate embassy lockdown and traps guests and staff inside.

Compelled to join forces with the Head of Embassy Security, Clay Brody (Compston), a former colleague who once screwed her over, Hana has to see her way past her distrust of him and focus on the investigation... the plane that will be blown up is a government jet and Director General Madeline Delaney is onboard.



UNEASY ALLIANCE: Cop Hana and security boss Clay in *Red Eye*
PHOTO: © ITV

With a killer wreaking havoc inside the Embassy and evading them at every turn, Hana and Brody must

Edited by Tracey Allen



Theatre

Nigel Havers Talking B*ll*cks
UK tour

r turns playboy



REUNITED: Pine (Tom Hiddleston) and Burr (Olivia Colman) PHOTOS: BBC/Ink Factory/Des Willie

dance with danger," Hiddleston added.

The actor praised the show's writer David Farr, also an executive producer, saying he had "achieved the impossible."

Hiddleston explained: "*The Night Manager* was based on a novel by John le Carré, there was no second novel, no sequel. David has written it with all the sophistication and complexity that le Carré would approve of and admire."

Olivia Colman also returns to the cast, as Angela Burr. Talking about the relationship between her character and Hiddleston's, she said: "There's such a great deal of

respect between the two, and it's a tender relationship in many ways. They look after each other. They're friends who have each other's backs. Angela is protective of him as she's the one who got him into this, so to her, she feels responsible for the situation. Overall, their relationship is lovely."

Diego Calva, who plays new character Teddy Dos Santos, said: "I feel lucky and proud to have worked with the cast. They have become like family. Tom is one of the most disciplined, energetic, and charismatic actors I have ever worked with. Being surrounded by people who put 100 per cent into the



'BUSINESSMAN': Dos Santos (Calva)

job makes you want to be at their level."

And Camila Morrone is the glamorous Roxana Bolaños.

"Tom is one of the most invested actors I've ever worked with" she said. "He's always happy to be there, and he's in more scenes than anybody. His energy is relentless, and he's both so focused and prepared. It's something you can't fake. Tom is also very genuine and as a scene partner, that's a beautiful quality to have. He wants to bring something special to the audience."

She added: "If you like shows about danger, espionage, sex, betrayal, love, heartbreak, drama and suspense, *The Night Manager* is for you."

● **The first series is now on BBC iPlayer and you can watch series 2 from January 1 on BBC iPlayer and BBC One in the UK and on Prime Video from January 11 where available.**

ve and Betrayal of The Lady

discover who is behind the treacherous plot before time runs out for the hostages within the Embassy and the passengers on board Delaney's plane.

● **SHAUN EVANS** (*Until I Kill You*, *Endeavour*) stars as John Hughes in *Betrayal*, described as a gripping thriller about trust, truth and the personal cost of secrecy in the modern intelligence world.

Hughes is a mid-career MI5 officer navigating a rapidly evolving intelligence landscape while struggling to keep his personal life intact. Acting on a hunch, he meets a British-Iranian man with links to the Stockport gangland who claims to have intelligence about an imminent plot on UK soil.

When the encounter takes an unexpected turn, John finds himself facing scrutiny from his superiors while his partner Claire (Romola Garai)

grapples with the secrecy that defines his world.

● **ANOTHER NEW** series is psychological thriller *Gone*, a chilling mystery focusing on local headmaster Michael Polly, played by David Morrissey (*The Long Shadow*, *Sherwood*, *Britannia*), who becomes the prime suspect in his wife Sarah's disappearance.

● **THERE'S ALSO** *The Lady*, that charts the rise and fall of Jane Andrews from Buckingham Palace to convicted murderer.

Based on true events surrounding Andrews' story, the partly fictionalised drama stars Mia McKenna-Bruce as Andrews, who became the then Duchess of York's dresser at the Palace. The Duchess is played by Natalie Dormer (*Game of Thrones*).



NIGEL: Will be showcasing an offstage skill
PHOTO: Matt Crockett

Charmer Havers set to reveal secret talent

CURRENTLY TREADING the boards for his usual panto gig at the London Palladium – this festive season it's *Sleeping Beauty* with Catherine Tate and Julian Clary – Nigel Havers has announced he will be setting out on his second UK tour next year.

*Nigel Havers Talking B*ll*cks* tours the country in spring and autumn 2026, kicking off at the Festival Theatre, Chichester on January 16 and culminating at G Live Guildford on October 26.

The popular actor – his roles include Ralph Ernest Gorse in *The Charmer* and Lord Hepworth in *Downton Abbey* – who presents *The Bidding Room* on BBC One, has also starred in hit films including *Chariots of Fire* and *A Passage to India*.

Havers said: "Well, I loved my first tour – and I think the audiences did too – so here we go again! Join me, a stage, and a lifetime of gloriously ridiculous stories to share with you. You'll

get the full Havers experience: charm, wit, and absolutely no running in slow motion. I'll be taking you on a thoroughly entertaining trot through five decades in showbiz.

"From my early days as a fresh-faced drama school hopeful, to the highs and lows of a career that's seen me in everything from *Chariots of Fire* to *Empire of the Sun* to *Don't Wait Up* and some rather marvellous West End plays – and more than my fair share of Palladium pantos.

"Of course, there'll be behind-the-scenes gossip, tales of triumph (and disaster), moments of sheer madness, and a fair bit of talking b*ll*cks. And just when you think you've got me figured out, I might surprise you. Let's just say there's a taste of my very first acting role and a little showcase of one of my off-stage talents – I'll leave you guessing."

● **Go to:** nigelhavers.live for full tour details.



Your Announcements

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

Death

ABBOT James (Jim), passed away on December 1, aged 74. He served from 1968-1991 with postings at Cranwell, Gan, Buchan, Neatishead, Luqa, West Raynham, St Helens, Boulmer, Ayos Nikalios and Honington. The funeral took place on December 17 at Preston Crematorium.



James Abbot

Associations

RAF Bawdsey Reunion Association. Have you ever served at RAF Bawdsey? If so, why not join our Association and come along to our next Annual Reunion to be held at Bawdsey Manor on Saturday, June 6, 2026. For full details please contact Doreen Calver on: doreen.bawdseyreunion@btinternet.com or telephone her on: 0751 3301 723.

591 SU Association. In its 72nd year of existence, 591 Signal Unit has established an Association (better late than never!). Ex-members and currently serving ex members of 591 SU are invited to visit the Association's website at: 591suassociation.co.uk for membership details and news of the next annual reunion along with other upcoming events for 2025.

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

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: tibbett@ntlworld.com

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

All are welcome to attend the Trade Group 11 Association reunion to be held on Friday, March 20 to Sunday, March 22, 2026. The venue will be The Marriott Delta Hotels, Mellors Way, off Woodhouse Way, Nottingham Belfry, Nottingham NG8 6PY.

Further details if required can be found on the TG11 Association website at tg11association.com. If you are not a member of the Association, details can be found on how to join.

RAFA Standard is blessed

MEMBERS OF the RAFA Caduceus (Medical Services) Branch attended St Clement Danes, the RAF church on The Strand in central London, last month for the blessing of the branch's new Standard.

The service was led by Wg Cdr Ashley Mitchell, and the blessing carried out by Chaplain-in-Chief of the RAF The Venerable Dr (AVM Giles) LeGood, who is also the current Royal British Legion National Chaplain.

Paul Newton, chair of the RAFA Caduceus Branch, said: "The Standard, which we won in a competition held by Newton and Newton Flags Ltd, was paraded by our Standard Bearer, Kelvin Kettley, and escorted by Sqn Ldr Amir Khan, Cpl James McNulty-Ackroyd, FS Emma Wilkins, and Air Recruit Amy Williams, with Sqn Ldr Emma Kerslake acting as the Parade Marshal.

"Readings were given by AM Claire Walton and AVM Dave McLoughlin and prayers read by Air Cdre Darren Ellison, Prof Andrew Hartle, Robbie



SERVICE: AM Claire Walton, Director General Defence Medical Services (above, left) gave a reading at the event. PHOTO: VIVIENNE NEWTON

Cormie and myself. The RAF Association was represented by both Air Cdre (Ret'd) Alan Opie, the South East and East Area President, and Jenna Walters, the Branch Membership and Wellbeing Officer."

Mr Newton added: "The

Branch is incredibly grateful to all who gave up their time to attend this event and make it an exceptional day for everyone. We were lucky to have Service personnel from the 1960s to today represented and a broad spectrum of trades and professions present."

In the pink on the Island

THE MILITARY detachment on Ascension Island came together in a vibrant show of support for Pink at Work Day, proudly wearing pink T-shirts to raise awareness and funds – more than £375 – for the St Helena Cancer Support and Awareness Charity.

Cpl Matthew Glover, from Air Movements, said: "A key contributor to the fundraising was the Air Movements Flight, who wore their pink shirts during both the northbound and southbound legs of the South Atlantic Schedule. They collected donations from passengers on these flights, which were included in the overall total."



VIBRANT: Ascension Island community members take part in Pink at Work Day

He added: "This initiative highlights the strong community spirit and compassion of the deployed personnel at Ascension Island Base. Their

efforts serve as a reminder that meaningful engagement and support for important causes can continue, regardless of location or operational commitments."

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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Festive feast at Marham

CHRISTMAS jumpers were donned for a festive lunch at RAF Marham, funded by the RAF Benevolent Fund.

It was attended by more than 70 vets from the local area.

The veterans (pictured right) were treated to a seasonal three-course meal served by personnel from the Norfolk station.

The RAF Honington Voluntary Band entertained the guests.





IN GEAR: A seasonally-decorated car at the British Motor Museum

Twixmas at the Museum

IF YOU'RE looking for something to keep the kids entertained between Christmas and the New Year, the British Motor Museum at Gaydon, Warwickshire is running Twixmas Crafts from December 28-30 with a range of LEGO® activities.

Whether youngsters are dreaming up a fun festive mosaic or building something completely unique, the Museum has mountains of LEGO® bricks ready for their imagination to run wild, said a spokesperson.

And *The 12 Cars of Christmas*

sees six mischievous elves hiding in historic motors and six festively decorated cars. Children can help find the elf-culprits responsible for decorating them and set off on the trail to match each elf to their motoring masterpiece.

Emma Rawlinson, the Museum's lifelong learning officer, said: "The holiday activities are included in the admission price, creating a great value day out filled with Christmas memories."

● Go to: britishmotormuseum.co.uk for more details.

A new life for Mandy

THE WIFE of an RAF veteran says she has regained her independence and rebuilt her confidence after the RAF Benevolent Fund supported her following a life-changing illness.

Mandy Cole, whose husband Martin served from 1984-1996 as an airframe technician, now uses an electric wheelchair after previously having led a very active life.

Everything changed for Mandy after a hysterectomy caused complications that led to muscle damage and the need for a stoma. A few years later, she collapsed while out shopping and woke up in intensive care.

She said: "A virus had attacked my muscles and my nerve endings. The doctors said I probably wouldn't walk again, but with intensive help from the physiotherapists, I did. I couldn't leave the house because all I had was a manual wheelchair. My legs were like jelly, and I was basically housebound."

She later suffered sepsis and



INDEPENDENT: Mandy in her electric wheelchair

spent another three months in hospital, with her condition worsening further. Then a care manager told her about the RAFBF.

Mandy added: "The new electric wheelchair has totally transformed my life. I can go out on my own now and I'm not relying on Martin to push

me everywhere. Before, people would speak to him and look right over me in my manual wheelchair. Now they speak to both of us. It has made a huge difference to my dignity.

"The Fund has given me my independence back. It's totally changed my life for the better."

● Go to: rafbf.org



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Prize Crossword
No. 400

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

- Across
- 6. Pilot rolls a 6 on reaching a hill (7)
 - 7. Welshman outside Londonderry on a regular basis (5)
 - 9. Bee's aircraft of choice? (5)
 - 10. Wire car upsetting RAF personnel (3,4)
 - 12. Pilots cheer activating these aircraft (11)
 - 14. Inquisitive felines from 120 Sqn (7,4)
 - 18. We hear brasher rock (7)
 - 19. Nut has a foot problem (5)
 - 21. Derrick's bird (5)
 - 22. Family death at ex-RAF base (7)

- Down
- 1. Obvious six balls to begin (5)
 - 2. Mother joins Royal Navy that is in Hitchcock movie (6)
 - 3. Work for patient biblical character (3)
 - 4. Am back from north of the border with lucky charm (6)
 - 5. Does Lea brag about school subject (7)
 - 8. End of the Union? (7)
 - 11. Military Intelligence tunes up for periods of time (7)
 - 13. Gossip about Fleetwood Mac (7)
 - 15. At first Isobel seen laughing at neighbour's Danish kitchen unit (6)
 - 16. Challenge fishing gear (6)
 - 17. Smooth newspapers (5)
 - 20. Concealed in rubbish I downloaded (3)

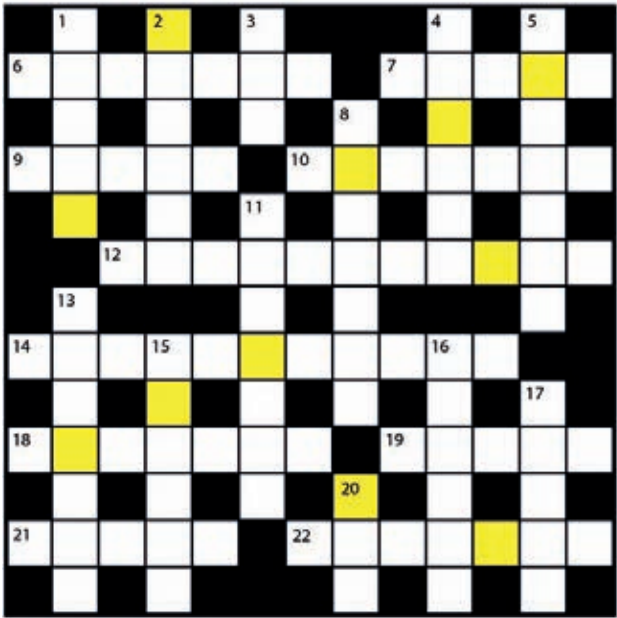
Name:

Address:

.....

RAF station:Crossword No. 400

The winners of our Prize Crossword and Prize Su Doku puzzles will receive a recent top aviation title – please send your entries to the address printed in the adjacent Su Doku panel, to arrive by January 16, 2026.



Due to early Christmas deadlines the winners' names for Prize Crossword No. 399 and Prize Su Doku No. 408 will be published in our next edition (cover date January 23, 2026).

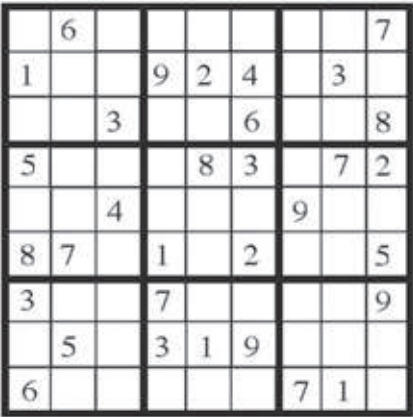
Solution to Crossword No. 399
Across – 7. Lounge 8. Victor 10. Pimento 11. Salvo 12. Stew 13. Scoop 17. Rogue 18. Halo 22. Axing 23. Success 24. Boeing 25. Gunner
Down – 1. Flypast 2. Mummies 3. Agent 4. Mission 5. Stalk 6. Crook 9. Tom Cruise 14. Top Guns 15. Cayenne 16. Consort 19. Rambo 20. Cider 21. Scout
RAF station – Coningsby



Prize Su Doku
No. 410

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

Solutions should be sent in a sealed envelope marked 'Su Doku' with the number in the top left-hand corner to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP14 4UE, to arrive by January 16, 2025.



Solution to Su Doku No. 409

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



Panto Reviews

Jack and the Beanstalk

Waterside Theatre, Aylesbury, until Jan 4



Jack and the Beanstalk

Swan Theatre, High Wycombe, until Jan 4

Pantos Jack up the festive fun

THE STARS are out at two top Buckinghamshire theatres – both staging Jack and the Beanstalk.

At Aylesbury's Waterside Theatre, Nigel Harman (*EastEnders*, *Casualty*) leads the cast as baddie Fleshcreep, a role he obviously enjoys and executes superbly.

And at the Wycombe Swan, Radio 2's Scott Mills and *Strictly*'s La Voix are the big names, as Mayor Mills and Dame Trott respectively.

It's a simple story – in a nutshell, the Trotts are poor, as Silly Simon (local legend Andy Collins) quips in the Waterside's show "too poor to pay attention", due to horrid henchman Fleshcreep enforcing taxes as his boss, the scary giant, decrees.

Simon's brother Jack (Joe Sleight, *Blood Brothers*), trades beloved cow Daisy for a bag of magic beans that grow into a huge beanstalk, leading to the hungry giant's lair.

The Trotts acquire a chicken that lays a golden egg, so the family become rich. Jack chops down the beanstalk and the threat from the giant is over.

There's plenty of the required corny jokes for the kids and innuendo for the grown-ups – many delivered with perfect comic timing by seasoned panto dame Leon Craig as Dot Trott. His costumes



PHOTO: Barry Rivett

WATERSIDE: (l-r) Andy Collins, Leon Craig and Joe Sleight

are fantastic – crazily colourful, with outrageous wigs and, in the glittery green and gold finale, spectacularly glam.

In part two there are clever new 3D special effects (don't forget to collect your 3D glasses) although perhaps a bit scary for some little ones.

Then Silly Simon and Jack equip themselves with



PHOTO: Matt Martin

STAR NAMES: (l-r) Scott Mills, La Voix and Matt Edwards at the Wycombe Swan

giant water pistols for the venue's traditional water fight with the audience.

Along with the familiar *12 Days of Christmas* routine, some corpsing from Harman the audience loved, and his groovy dancing in 'the fungeon', this is a funny, sparkling show.

Over at Wycombe on the Wold, where Mayor Mills is also the local radio station's DJ, Poison Ivy (TikTok star Jo Osmond) makes a first-rate villain and Dame Trott copes admirably with having one foot in a medical boot (La Voix had to leave *Strictly* due to injury).

However, it's *Britain's Got Talent* finalist Matt Edwards who

steals the show with his exuberant performance as Jack's brother Larry. The audience loved his comic antics and he brought a fizzing energy to the production.

The youthful Mark Read (from boyband A1) is splendid as Jack, La Voix is her usual quick-witted and glamorous self and Vanessa Dumatey as Fairy Flora showcases her lovely voice in the cast's uplifting rendition of 'Ain't No Beanstalk High Enough'.

Both pantos provide great seasonal entertainment for the whole family.

Four roundels out of five for both 
Reviews by Tracey Allen