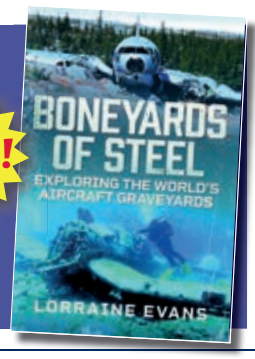
The Forces' favourite paper

The final resting places of aircraft

Win!



● See page 17

Ex-pilot's lightbulb moment on energy

Win!



● See R'n'R page 5

ROYAL AIR FORCE

Fri, Nov 27, 2026
Edition No.1645

Only 99p

RAF News



Pubs that helped fuel the Battle of Britain pilots

See pages 14-15



Rugby

McNally's on board



● See page 23

Esports

RAF triple title victory



See p26

Powerlifting

Show of strength



● See page 27

All Guns blazing

RAF stars' TV return



THE RAF is set to return to TV as Channel 4 launches the highly-anticipated third series of *Top Guns: Inside the RAF*.

Filmed over 12 months with unprecedented access, cameras follow UK crews spearheading operations and combat training across the globe, responding to rising tensions in the Middle East and protecting British lives from drone attacks.

Hard-hitting footage shows how Typhoons scramble to intercept Russian military aircraft approaching Nato airspace, while cutting-edge surveillance platforms track maritime and military activity.

Away from operations, the series provides a unique insight into the people behind the uniform. Cameras follow trainee fighter pilots, RAF Regiment Gunners in the Arctic Circle, and Typhoon pilots taking part in the world's largest aerial warfare exercise in Nevada.

Combining frontline action with powerful personal stories, *Top Guns: Inside the RAF* offers a compelling look at the commitment, professionalism and expertise of RAF personnel.

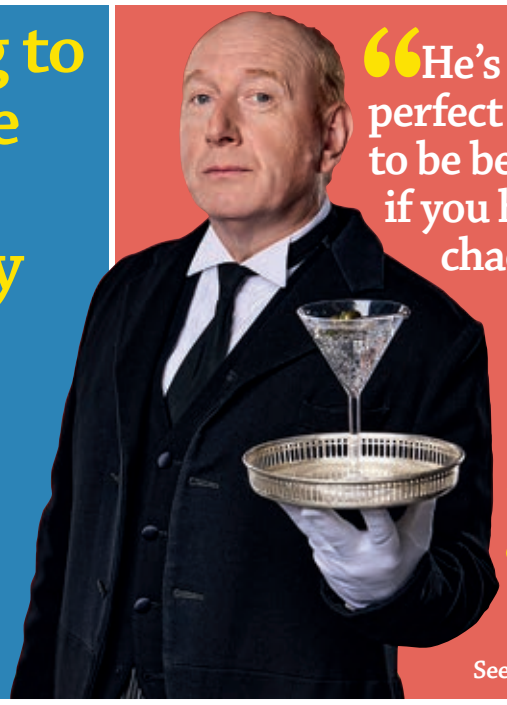
● *Top Guns: Inside the RAF* starts on Channel 4 on November 30.

BiteSize



There's something to celebrate at RAF Valley

See page 7



"He's the perfect person to be beside you if you have a chaotic life"

Actor Adrian Scarborough on playing butler Jeeves

See R'n'R pages 4-5

"There are so many outstanding players in the women's game"



Flt Lt Amy Cokayne named in World Rugby's dream team

See page 23



CH-47 back in black

Simon Mander

THE FIRST of the UK's 14 extended range Chinook CH-47 helicopters took to the skies in Pennsylvania ahead of delivery to the RAF next year.

Sporting a distinctive matt black paintwork, the aircraft boasts a suite of upgrades to deliver unrivalled frontline rotary combat capability.

The latest variant of the 40-year-old Chinook features Boeing's new Active Parallel Actuator System 'fat tank' for extended range, terrain following radar, a digital automatic flight control system to allow pilots to hover in areas of limited visibility and an in-flight fuel probe for air-to-air refuelling.

The upgrades are part of a £1.4 billion 10-year package to keep the famous double rotor aircraft at the forefront of combat and humanitarian missions worldwide.

● *See page 7 for full story*



UPGRADE: The UK's new long-range Chinook boasts black paintwork and a suite of digital flying aids PHOTO: BOEING

ROYAL AIR FORCE

RAF News

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

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

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

News Editor: Simon Mander
Email: Simon.Mander116@mod.gov.uk

Sport: sports@rafnews.co.uk

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

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

This Week In History



1973

Lanc joins BBMF

THE BATTLE of Britain Flight is renamed the BBMF as Lancaster B1PA474 flies into RAF Coltishall to join the fleet of vintage aircraft. The unit relocates to Coningsby in 1976.

1980

Chinook lands

THE FIRST of the initial batch of 33 Boeing-built Chinook heavy-lift helicopters enter service at RAF Odiham.





1991

Women join jet set

THE RAF lifts its restrictions on the employment of female fast jet pilots. Flt Lt Jo Salter receives her wings in April 1992.

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

Brize fleet returns after £180m revamp



TOUCHDOWN: Vespia Voyager christens the new runway at Brize. *Inset left*, Gp Capt Macartney, Wg Cdr Graham Prager and Gp Capt Stu Patton

Staff Reporter
Brize Norton

THE UK'S flagship Vespina Voyager touched down at Brize Norton to mark the return of the RAF transport fleet following a £180 million runway upgrade.

Atlas, Voyager and C-17 crews relocated to Boscombe Down and civilian airports across Britain as construction began four months ago.

Station chiefs gathered to welcome the first crew to land on the new 3km runway as Defence Infrastructure Organisation contractors handed the site back to the RAF.

Station Commander Gp Capt Kate Macartney said: "The reopening of the runway and the return of the first aircraft represent a landmark moment for RAF Brize Norton.

"This project has required exceptional collaboration between military personnel, industry partners and our wider Station community.

"The investment made in our infrastructure ensures RAF Brize Norton remains ready to deliver Air Mobility operations whenever and wherever they are required, while securing the station's future capability for generations to come."

Operating from Boscombe Down, Prestwick, Stansted, East Midlands and Bournemouth airports, Brize crews have continued to support Quick Reaction Alert missions to protect UK skies, support operations in the Gulf and Nato exercises across Europe and fly the flag for Britain flying Royals and the nation's political leaders worldwide.

Brize Norton Commander Air Wing, Gp Capt Stu Patton, added: "I am immensely proud to say that we have not missed a beat on operations around the world. We have proved our ability to operate to a high level from unfamiliar environments.

"Operationally, our work has continued at pace: whether providing emergent operational support to Saudi Arabia, delivering operational sustainment across the Middle East and beyond, or delivering new joint capabilities, we have continued to find new and innovative ways to continue to deliver from unfamiliar locations and support environments.

"This has ably demonstrated our assured ability to overcome obstacles to deliver dispersed operations under pressure and at scale. I well recognise that this has asked a great deal from families, crews, engineers, support teams and beyond."

The new runway has been constructed using pavement quality concrete and asphalt to improve its resilience to higher temperatures and the effects of climate change, which is expected to more than double its service life.

DIO Chief Executive Mike Green said: "Delivering at pace while maintaining our focus on the RAF's operational needs is no small achievement.

"The collaboration between DIO, the RAF and our contractors has been outstanding, and the result speaks for itself."

The runway replacement includes the refurbishment of taxiways, upgrades to airfield lighting systems and improvements to drainage to strengthen the airfield's long-term operational capability.

UK signs Norway Poseidon P-8 service deal

Simon Mander

POSEIDON PERSONNEL from the RAF and Norway will be able to service each other's aircraft under a new deal.

The agreement, developed over the last 18 months, was finalised in Greenwood, Canada.

Both countries operate the same P-8A variant and are committed to maintaining freedom of manoeuvre and security across the North Atlantic and High North.

By recognising the training and competence of each nation's technicians, the agreement reduces support burdens during deployed operations, increases aircraft availability, and provides commanders with greater operational agility.

1 Group Chief Air Engineer Gp Capt Alex Hunter said: "This is another tangible step towards the more integrated and agile force that modern warfighting demands.

"Cross-servicing is about much more than engineering cooperation: it gives commanders greater freedom of action by allowing Allied forces to operate, recover and regenerate aircraft from a wider range of locations with a smaller support footprint."



Poppy pledge

VETERANS FACING problems on the job market are to get extra help following a £132,000 boost.

The Poppy Factory landed the funds from the Veterans Foundation to expand its Navigator service, which this year supported 167 ex-military with 39 progressing into employment support and 13 moving into jobs.

The grant covers the cost of two new full-time posts to provide up to six months of tailored, one-to-one support.

Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund



"Our break gave us the chance to spend quality time together as a family"

RAF veteran Bill

Need a break?

Apply for a relaxing stay in Yorkshire

Our accessible four-bedroom bungalow in the seaside town of Bridlington is the perfect place to unwind when life feels challenging.

Serving and former RAF personnel are welcome to apply for a stay.

Apply to stay:
rafbf.org/folly-visit

Call our helpline:
0300 102 1919

Scan me with your camera

The RAF Benevolent Fund is a registered charity in England and Wales (1081009) and Scotland (SC038109). Eligibility criteria apply, visit our website for more details on the application process and pricing.

UK's dog soldiers have their day



Tracey Allen

UK FORCES' frontline canines have been recognised for their bravery with the launch of a Remembrance-style silhouette based on an RAF police dog.

The silhouette, at the National Military Working Dogs Memorial (UK), in North Wales, is based on Lucky, an RAF Police search dog who served during the Malaya Campaign from 1949-52.



DICKIN MEDAL: Kuno

Memorial Trustee Sophie Spindler said: "The unveiling is an exciting milestone for our charity and an important step in recognising the service, loyalty and sacrifice of military working dogs who have served with our Armed Forces."

Lucky was one of four German Shepherds selected by the RAF Police Dog Unit for specialist tracking duties in Malaya, alongside Jasper, Bobbie and Lassie.

"Dogs underwent rigorous training to locate insurgents hiding in the dense jungle, where conditions made tracking difficult and dangerous.

"Tragically, the other three dogs lost their lives, leaving Lucky as the only survivor following three years of service in Malaya," Sophie added.

Lucky's handler, RAF Police Cpl Bevel Austin Stapleton, credited his dog with saving his life on numerous occasions and the Alsatian was posthumously awarded the PDSA Dickin Medal in 2007.

In recent years the medal, known as the animal kingdom's Victoria Cross, has been awarded to a number of military working dogs operating in the combat zone.

Belgian Malinois Kuno received the award in 2020 after charging through a hail of machine gun fire as Special Forces stormed a heavily-defended Al-Qaeda compound in Afghanistan.

The dog suffered serious injuries when he launched the lone-wolf attack allowing SBS and Afghan Special Forces pinned down by machine gun fire to take the position during the daring UK-led operation in 2019.

Bullets shattered one of his hind legs and ripped through the other but the Forces dog fought on, dragging the terrorist to the ground and allowing Coalition troops to move forward and complete their mission.

Shorthaired pointer Hertz was the first UK military working dog trained to sniff out electronic communications kit used to trigger IEDs, the biggest killer of frontline troops during the 14-year campaign.

Working with specialist RAF Police handlers, the courageous canine patrolled the areas around Camp Bastion and supported security patrols in Kabul.

On his first day on duty in Helmand with Air Force Police handler Sgt Jonathan Tanner he sniffed out a haul of drugs and personal electronic devices.

During his 13-month tour he went on to track down more than 100 items of contraband and became a highly valued figure on the ISAF base.

The silhouette based on Lucky was created in the workshop at The Pet Cemetery in Brynford, Holywell, where the memorial was built following a successful fundraising campaign started in 2018 that raised £200,000.

The structure features a bronze statue of Dickin Medal recipient airdog Buster, who completed five tours of duty of Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Sophie added: "The idea for the silhouette came from our Chairman of Trustees, John Ward, who was inspired by the soldier silhouettes displayed across the country, particularly around Remembrance Day.

"Having also seen the introduction of a silhouette recognising the contribution of nurses, he felt it was only right that military working dogs should receive similar recognition for their service and sacrifice."



KU DARES WINS: Military working dog Kuno was seriously injured in a Special Forces raid in Afghanistan and airlifted back to the UK for treatment. *Inset right*, RAF Police dog Hertz sniffed out deadly IEDs and electronic devices in Helmand

Buzz on

Staff Reporter
Leeming

HORNETS BROUGHT a buzz back to North Yorkshire as they carried out their annual nighttime and low-level training.

Swiss Air Force F/A 18s are in action again at Leeming for their Yorknite exercise, which runs until next month.

The jets take advantage of the base's mile-long runway to practise manoeuvres not possible in their homeland. Switzerland regularly trains alongside Nato forces and maintains aircraft and personnel at a state of readiness.



SWISS ROLE: Hornet takes to the skies above Leeming during latest Nato-backed training

Forces welfare check

FORCES WELFARE chiefs have launched a 24hr support service aimed at serving and veteran personnel struggling to cope with the pressures of Forces life or adapting to Civvie Street.

SSAFA's Individual Assistance Programme offers volunteers access to specialist therapists and counsellors with online and face to face sessions to help with a range of personal health, finance and legal issues.

The service is delivered by independent welfare group Health Assured to help the Forces community cope with a range of issues including bereavement, family concerns, caring responsibilities, relationships and financial problems.

Amy Bartlett, SSAFA's Head of Volunteering, said: "Each day, SSAFA volunteers give their time, skills and compassion to support members of the Armed Forces community.

"Their contribution is remarkable, and it's vital that they know support is there for them too.

"Volunteering can be hugely rewarding, but life can also bring difficult moments. Our new IAP offers a confidential, independent place to turn whether someone's facing a significant challenge, needs practical guidance or simply wants to talk."



Become a member of the Royal British Legion today

Whether you have served or are serving, are part of the Armed Forces community, or just want to stand with our service personnel, there's a place for you at the Royal British Legion.

Together, our members form an international community that champions our cause, strengthens camaraderie, and helps the Armed Forces community access support for life.

Search **Join RBL**

rbl.org.uk

Registered charity number in England and Wales 219279 and Scotland SC054446

ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

UK Chinook H-47 lifts off



UPGRADE: New Chinook H-47 features extended range and air-to-air refuelling

Simon Mander

BRITAIN'S NEW Chinook has made its first flight in America.

The aircraft, the first of 14 due to arrive in the UK next year, took off from its Boeing production facility in Pennsylvania.

Equipped with an Active Parallel Actuator System, like lane assist for cars, it also flew with so-called ER, or extended range, fuel tanks.

These Chinooks will also come with an in-flight refuelling probe, which will be a new capability for the British helicopter fleet.

Defence Minister Luke Pollard said: "The Chinook H-47 is being procured with full air-to-air refuelling receiver capability. On current plans, refuelling support will be provided by the U.S. KC-130."

The new aircraft will be based at Odiham where deliveries are expected to run until 2032.

Currently, the RAF has a fleet of 50 Chinooks of all types and that number is expected to fall to around 36 helicopters.

New H-47 helicopters will replace the older high-hour airframes, providing greater range and aerial refuelling.

The RAF's Voyager tankers cannot perform the role for helicopters and so slower turboprop aircraft, such as KC-130Js, will be used.

Chinooks have been in service for more than 40 years and have consistently provided heavy-lift capabilities for combat and humanitarian operations around the world, as well as emergency response support in the UK.

In Brief



Engineered for success

ENGINEERS WHO keep RAF jets airborne are to get more support from a new headquarters.

The centre will bring together expertise, resources and priorities across air bases to ensure it can best support operational delivery.

Ground Engineering Services' Wg Cdr James Sheldon said: "This is a real opportunity to build a framework that is genuinely invested in Ground Engineering and its people.

"By connecting our workforce, expertise and resources as one enterprise, we can make Ground Engineering more productive, better represent our people and improve the availability of the Airfield Support Equipment that enables air base operations."

Developed in conjunction with Station Commanders and Principal Engineers, it balances enterprise coordination and local command.

While local stations retain responsibility for delivering missions, Ground Engineering Services HQ will ensure it is working towards shared priorities.

The changes also focus on professionalisation, workforce development, standardisation, and the sharing of expertise.

By connecting engineering activity across air bases, the RAF can make better use of specialist knowledge and improve the visibility of competing demands.

National treasures

Iron Age haul nets Valley team top award



JACKPOT: The team of amateur archaeologists celebrate at Valley after discovering Iron Age artefacts. *Inset left*, parts of the 2,000-year-old chariot bridle found in 2024

Simon Mander

AMATEUR FORCES archaeologists who discovered parts of a Celtic chariot thought to be around 2,000 years old during an excavation at Valley have netted a top conservation award.

The team of volunteers were presented with the Silver Otter Trophy *(above right)* at the recent Sanctuary Awards following the find during runway improvements at the fast jet training station.

The project, dubbed Operation Nightingale, unearthed artefacts linked to the Llyn Cerrig Bach Celtic hoard, which was first discovered on the site in the 1940s.

The scheme was set up to support serving military personnel and veterans suffering from PTSD and mental health problems.

The original Llyn Cerrig Bach hoard was discovered in the 1940s during work to extend the airfield for American bombers during the Allied war effort. It is regarded as one of the most important collections of Iron Age artefacts in the UK, comprising more than 150 objects dating from between 300BC and 100AD.

Speaking at the time of the most recent discovery in 2024, volunteer archaeologist FS Graham Moore said: "It wasn't until the final day with just 10 minutes to go that I discovered the horse bridle-bit. At first the team thought I was joking, but quickly realised I'd found something special."

An awards spokesman said: "The team's efforts have greatly increased the known size of the Llyn Cerrig Bach hoard. The standard of this year's Sanctuary Awards winners shows that Defence has both the ambition and talent needed to drive fundamental change as we adapt and prepare against current and future threats."

The finds have been gifted by the MOD to the National Museum in Cardiff ahead of their permanent display in the Oriel Môn museum on Anglesey.



Beyond the base.
Sustaining jobs across the UK.

Specialist defence work that builds jobs, skills and growth.

Beyond the base, Serco supports local jobs, invests in SMEs and helps grow rural and coastal economies. For every five direct Serco roles, three more are supported through our supply chain, creating lasting benefits for the communities that stand alongside our Armed Forces.

Explore PROTECT, the framework behind our mission-critical operations: www.serco.com/defence/PROTECT

Mountain rescue

Highlands test combat medics





LIFE-SAVERS: Air Force and Army medics hone their battlefield skills on board a Chinook before transferring casualties to A400M

Staff Reporter

AIR FORCE and Army medics joined forces to test their medical evacuation skills in the Highlands.

Brize-based Tactical Medical Wing personnel and 16 Medical Regiment soldiers were put through their paces on Exercise Venture Spirit.

Medical teams and casualties were airlifted by 18 Sqn Chinooks to Honington and transferred to an A400M to simulate their move to a hospital.

The exercise is designed to rehearse the movement of casualties from a battlefield to UK hospitals for treatment.

Hosted by Flying Station Aldergrove, the drill included low-level formation flying sorties in Scotland with A400Ms working with 16 Air Assault Brigade conducting live drops from the aircraft ramp.

Bulletin



Vets net funding

HOMELESS VETERANS in the South West and Wales will get 90 more bedspaces after a £1.2 million cash boost.

The money from the Office for Veterans' Affairs, which is being delivered through the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, will support Alabare's Homes for Veterans.

It's part of £8.7 million allocated to eight organisations across the UK.

The charity offers temporary supported living accommodation and specialist care, from a team of colleagues.

Alabare Chief Executive Andrew Lord said: "We are really pleased to have been awarded funding from the Government to continue our vital work supporting former military personnel who find themselves homeless, often rough sleeping."

Trauma medic's combat lessons

Simon Mander

SURVIVAL TRAINING chiefs brought in a combat-hardened veteran medic who worked alongside Special Forces at the height of the conflict in Afghanistan to brief the next generation of UK aircrew on the brutal reality of war.

Lt Col Simon Davies revealed the harrowing details of his life as a trauma specialist during his four tours with UK troops during the ISAF campaign, as he spoke to graduates at the Aircrew SERE Training centre at Cranwell.

Centre Commanding Officer Mark Fairhead said: "Simon delivered the most impactful, most shocking presentation that we have seen at SERE. It could have come with a health warning.

"He provided a shocking visual insight into trauma on operations on the frontline and the ethical challenges of making tough decisions when prioritising casualties, particularly young children, during what often appeared as senseless acts of violence and cruelty."

As part of the SERE course trainee Air Crew learn survival and navigation techniques and life-saving battlefield first aid.

Guests invited to speak during graduation and sign the centre's Wall of Honour, have all survived against the odds, exemplifying the SERE motto 'Animus Invictus' – 'Unbroken Spirit'.

Lt Col Davies taught trauma courses to the Special Air Service before deploying on Operation Herrick and was appointed a member of the Royal Red Cross – an award once received by Florence Nightingale – by Prince Charles at Buckingham Palace.

Mr Fairhead added: "We could only marvel at the sacrifice of men, women and children in combat and the huge selfless, personal dedication of the medics in patching them up and saving lives.

"But I worry about the continuity of experience and how deeply disturbing a battlefield would be without that dedication and commitment."



SURVIVOR: Trauma medic Lt Col Davies signs on to the SERE Wall of Honour after speaking to Air Crew graduates about the reality of war. *Inset left*, medical evacuation teams treating an injured soldier on board a Chinook during the conflict in Afghanistan

News

CENTRAL FUND

FORMER SERVING?

DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN STILL PLAY THE SPORTS LOTTERY?

Only open to serving and former serving, the exclusive nature of our RAF charity lottery gives players a great chance of winning a cash prize. So why not show your support for as little as £1 a week and you could be a £10,000 jackpot winner!

Join today or increase your tickets at:

www.rafcf.org.uk

SCAN ME



HOW MUCH IS IT? £1 PER TICKET HOLD BETWEEN 1-6

LEAVING THE RAF? UPDATE CIVI DETAILS 0370 050 5893

WIN BIG CASH PRIZES! £10,000 TOP PRIZE 20 WINNERS EVERY WEEK!

RAFCentralFund BeGambleAware.org

The RAF Sports Lottery operates as a society lottery within the Royal Air Force Central Fund and is licensed and regulated by the Gambling Commission (www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk). The Royal Air Force Central Fund is a company registered in England and Wales 8555984, Charity registered in England and Wales 1152560, Charity registered in Scotland SC044299.

Registered office: Hurricane Building | HQ Air Command | RAF High Wycombe | Bucks | HP14 4UE
Principal office: RAF Central Fund Danesfield | New Lock Lane | Henley Road | Medmenham | SL7 2EY



'Ugly' medal haul set for £50,000



RESCUE MISSION: WO Geordie Armitage flies into the Lion's Den in Helmand with troops clinging to Apache 'Ugly 50' to rescue critically-injured comrade in 2007

Simon Mander

MEDALS AWARDED to a helicopter pilot who staged a daring attempt to rescue a wounded Marine from the Taliban are expected to fetch £50,000 when they go under the hammer.

With four volunteers clinging on to the side of their aircraft, two Apache helicopters descended into the so-called 'Lion's Den' of Jugroom Fort amidst a deluge of RPG fire and attempted the unprecedented feat.

Pilot WO Keith John 'Geordie' Armatage of 656 Sqn was honoured for his part in the operation in Garmsir, Southern Helmand, in January 2007.

Flying 'Ugly 50' alongside 'Ugly 51,' the effort to 'never leave a man behind' was chronicled by one of them – Ed Macy – in his best-selling book, *Apache*.

Video footage captured by the helicopters was released to worldwide media outlets by the MOD.

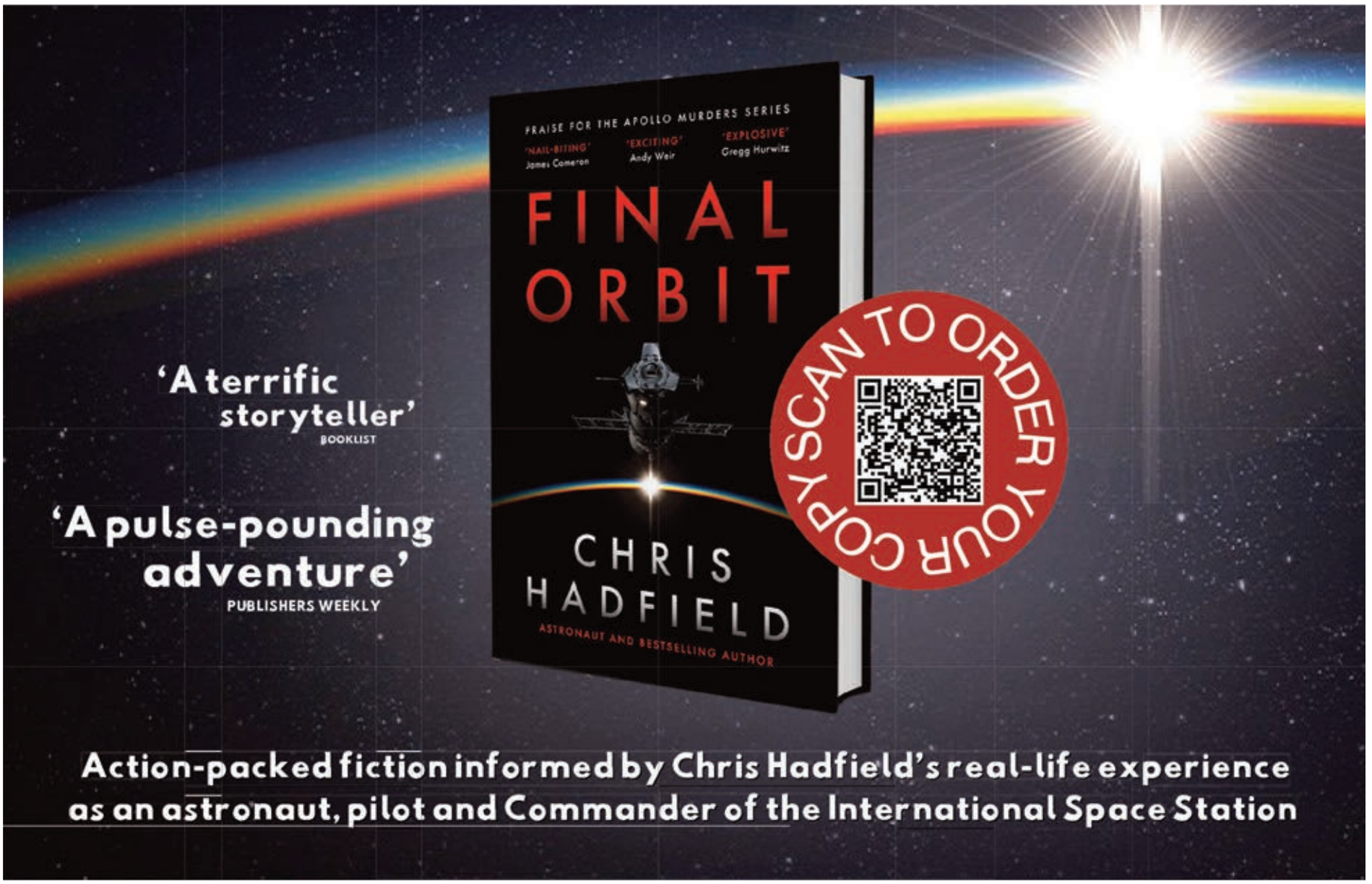
Auctioneers Noonans' medal specialist Mark Quayle said: "Iconic is a word which is bandied around all too frequently these days and often used without reflecting its true meaning – but in the case of the Jugroom Fort Rescue, it is entirely appropriate.

"Not only was this rescue attempt an extraordinary example of heroism, under extreme circumstances, but it was also unprecedented in helicopter aviation.

"Flying blind into the maelstrom of Taliban RPG fire is one thing, but landing in the lion's den and attempting an extraction with a combat helicopter is altogether another level.

"Tragically, their efforts were in vain, as Lance Corporal Matthew Ford had been fatally wounded.

"However, the importance of this operation was highlighted when the MOD gifted 'Ugly 51' to The Army Flying Museum in Hampshire – where it is available to view to the public today."


'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
FINAL ORBIT
CHRIS HADFIELD
ASTRONAUT AND BESTSELLING AUTHOR
SCAN TO ORDER YOUR COPY
Action-packed fiction informed by Chris Hadfield's real-life experience as an astronaut, pilot and Commander of the International Space Station


MORE GAMES FOR 2026
bfbs PRO LEAGUE
Find out more and sign up at bfbsesports.com
ESPORTS FOR THE ARMED FORCES
Images: BFBS/British Esports/Jonas Kontautas

BY APPOINTMENT TO
HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III
MEDALLISTS
WORCESTERSHIRE MEDAL SERVICE LTD
BROMSGROVE

ARMED FORCES COVENANT
EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME
SILVER AWARD

WORCESTERSHIRE MEDAL SERVICE LTD

Specialists in the manufacture and supply of full and miniature size medals, medal mounting and framing.



Visit Our Website:
www.worcmedals.com
+44(0)1527 835375
sales@worcmedals.com

124 High Street, Bromsgrove, B61 8HJ

Brazil honours Battle of Britain and D-Day hero

Simon Mander

A BRAZILIAN-BORN Battle of Britain pilot who flew almost 300 operational sorties has been honoured by his homeland.

Wg Cdr Robin John McNair DFC and Bar has been posthumously awarded the Order of Aeronautical Merit, one grade above a knighthood, by Brazilian Air Force chiefs.

His son Duncan said: "Brazil was his homeland though he flew with the RAF right through the war including Battle of Britain."

Serving first with 3 Sqn then 249 Sqn, he shot down a Heinkel bomber over Liverpool, an exploit that received national press coverage and featured in Douglas Bader's book *Fight for the Sky*.

"Robin was a renowned pilot, leader of the Death and Glory operations in the Normandy campaigns in 1944 and widely believed to have disabled Rommel during these attacks," said Duncan.

Leading 124 Wing of Hawker Typhoon fighter bombers in the Falaise Gap battle, in combat formation he was known to expose his own position to protect his least experienced pilots."

After the D-Day landings he also took part in Operation Crossbow – flying missions against Nazi V-weapon sites.

In 1945 he commanded 74 Sqn, which was one of the first units equipped with the Gloster Meteor jet.

The award ceremony in London took place on Brazilian Air Force Day and the 120th anniversary to the day of the first self-powered flight of an aeroplane in history.

Brazilian Air Attaché in the United Kingdom, Col Leandro Vinicius Coelho, said: "The Ordem do Mérito Aeronáutico is the oldest and most distinguished honour of the Brazilian Air Force, created in 1943 to recognise military personnel who have distinguished themselves in the profession of aviation.

"It is the highest tribute the Brazilian Air Force can bestow, and this posthumous award is our way of formally honouring your father's remarkable legacy as a Brazilian, and of ensuring his memory endures within the history of Brazilian aviation."

Past recipients include General Eisenhower, cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, and the President of Brazil.

McNair was invested with his first DFC by King George VI at Buckingham Palace on December 8, 1942.

During the war McNair joined the Caterpillar Club for twice surviving bailing out of a plane damaged during combat.

After the war Wg Cdr McNair became a director of British Airways. A blue plaque stands on McNair Road in the London borough of Ealing as testimony to his war service, charitable and civic work.

He died on May 18, 1996, three days before his 78th birthday and is buried in West Sussex. "He was a very compassionate, devout, modest man," added Duncan.



NATIONAL HERO: Brazilian-born Wg Cdr McNair with his wife Estelle. *Inset left*, the Order of Aeronautical Merit

Bulletin



COMBAT TESTED: UFORCE's Oleg Rogynskyy with Defence Secretary Wes Streeting on board HMS Prince of Wales

Ukrainian drone deal

UKRAINIAN DRONE pioneers UFORCE are expanding their British operations, bringing battle-tested technology to the frontline.

The Government-backed National Wealth Fund is investing £113 million in the firm to expand its engineering, training and production team and invest in a British supply chain.

Defence Secretary Wes Streeting said: "Bringing battle-tested expertise to the UK will create high-skilled jobs, spur innovation and strengthen our warfighting readiness, enhancing our ability to deter our adversaries."

UFORCE is a Ukrainian-founded, British-headquartered company developing combat-proven autonomous and uncrewed systems.

The technology was tested aboard HMS Prince of Wales in Norway, where Mr Streeting piloted a UFORCE MV7 uncrewed vessel which was located over 1,500 miles away in the Atlantic Ocean near Portugal.

UFORCE chief Oleg Rogynskyy said: "The UK was an early supporter of Ukraine's defence technology ecosystem, listening to our challenges and helping us tackle them.

"We're pleased that UFORCE can now play a role in helping the UK develop its ecosystem in return."

Bowled over

Staff Reporter
Leeming

A CINEBOWL and new accommodation block have been opened at Leeming as Air Command and Control Force teams relocate to the North Yorks station from Scampton.

The unit is responsible for round-the-clock air surveillance of the UK, assigned Nato airspace, and other overseas locations.

Construction began in September 2025 on the £15m project to deliver new offices and a 32-bed Single Living Accommodation block.

The new facilities are heated with air source heat pumps, powered in part by solar panels, and use harvested rainwater, creating sustainable facilities that are cost-effective to operate and maintain, DIO project chiefs said.

DIO project manager Nicola Bond said: "Air C2 Force can now complete their move to Leeming.

"It is wonderful to be able to bring this journey to a successful conclusion."



OPEN FOR BUSINESS: Leeming chiefs cut the ribbon on the new accommodation block and Cinebowl complex

Feature Beer fuelled aerial fight

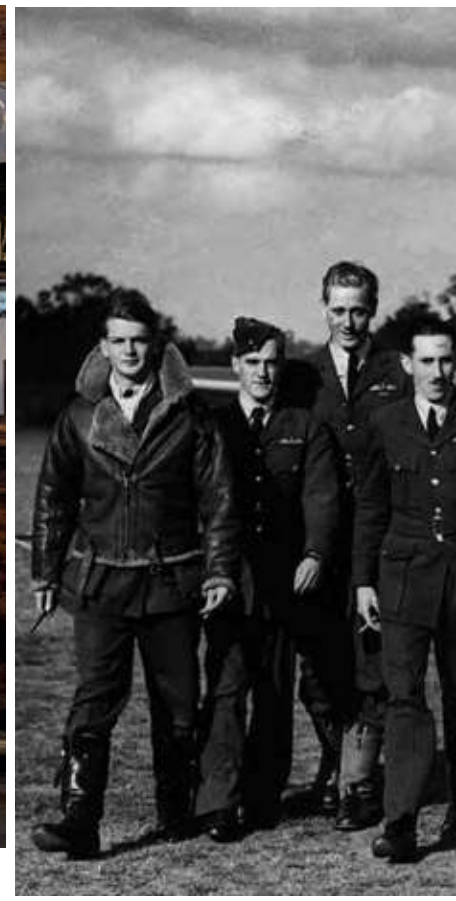
The pubs that kep Britain pilots ale a

Sinking a few was just the tonic for The Few





TIME WARP: The bar of the Chesterfield Arms in Mayfair (formerly Shepherd's) is much the same today as it was in 1940, when 92 Sqn pilots used to hold court there



IN THE summer of 1940 Fighter Command fought by day and recovered by night, in pubs that kept its pilots flying. In his autobiography *The 92 Sqn Ace*, Brian Kingcome described the end of the day at Biggin Hill, during the autumn of 1940.

"When we were stood down half an hour after dusk there was the choice of either scooting up to London, where 10 shillings would cover an evening at Shepherds and the Bag of Nails, or the White Hart at Brasted, where five shillings kept us in beer until the local bobby moved us on at closing time."

The local pub was where pilots decompressed, grieved their losses, and reinforced themselves for the next morning. Wg Cdr Edward Donaldson remembered pilots drinking up to eight pints a night, their 'quota', since there seemed 'no point in staying sober'. In their own way they helped keep Fighter Command in the air.

RAF News went on a pub crawl taking in five famous wartime boozers where the redoubtable Few gathered during the Battle of Britain.

RAF BIGGIN HILL – The White Hart, Brasted

MOST EVENINGS, Kingcome's 92 Sqn could be found at the White Hart, seven miles from Biggin Hill in the village of Brasted. "We did regard the pub as our personal territory," Kingcome wrote, "and grew pretty stuffy if lesser squadrons (to us) tried to gatecrash."

But the White Hart did not belong only to 92 Sqn. The station commander, Dickie Grice, had made it official before that squadron arrived, driving his pilots down to Brasted himself, a Tannoy speaker mounted on the station runabout to warn the landlady, Kath Preston, that they were on their way.

"Calling the White Hart," he would belt out as the vehicle bounced down the lane. "Set up 25 beers and 26 eggs and bacon." Then, for himself, "This is the CO, and I want three scotches and two pints of bitter."

Pilots signed a plywood blackout board during an impromptu farewell party for Grice in the autumn of 1940. Following that party some of the RAF's most famous pilots added their names in chalk while flying from 'the Bump'. In 1946, the ace Sailor Malan unveiled it, now framed and under glass. "It would be a strange man," he said, "who didn't have sadder thoughts when he reads some of these names and remembers."

The White Hart still trades on Brasted High Street, its oak beams intact. The blackout board is on display at Shoreham Aircraft Museum.

RAF TANGMERE – The Unicorn, Chichester

ON THE southern coast, Tangmere's fighter pilots spent their evenings three miles west in Chichester, at the Unicorn on Eastgate Square. WAAF Janet Pieters remembered them congregating in the upstairs Heroes Bar, a crowded space with framed photos of station pilots and barely a surface left unsigned.

The landlord, Arthur King, was devoted to his fighter boys. He would provide drinks to pilots short on funds, mediate domestic trouble with local women, and use his extensive black market connections to keep them well fed. That devotion outlasted the Battle.

A week after D-Day, he arranged for three Spitfire Mk IXs to carry 270 gallons of Henty and Constable bitter from Tangmere to the Normandy airstrip at Bény-sur-Mer in specially coated drop tanks, the first British beer to land in the invasion zone.

The pub closed in the 1960s. The building still stands, but is now a Giggling Squid Thai restaurant. Have a pint instead in the Nag's Head around the corner, another wartime haunt still trading.

RAF NORTH WEALD – The King's Head, North Weald Bassett

NORTH OF London, the King's Head, a timber-framed 15th-century hall house, stands on the High Road half a mile from the gates of RAF North Weald.

During the Battle of Britain, when the exasperated station medical officer lectured the pilots on the dangers of flying all day and carousing all night, Flying Officer Barry Sutton suggested they all adjourn to the King's Head for a pint of 'deathly brew'.

The doctor was led off and plied with so much ale that the pilots had to undress him and 'put his inert body to bed'.



SIGNED BY HEROES: The framed blackboard at The White Hart in Brasted

On August 24 the Luftwaffe dropped more than 200 bombs on North Weald. The Woolpack pub across the road took a direct hit, and nine soldiers of the Essex Regiment were killed in a shelter nearby. The King's Head was still standing when the smoke cleared. It is standing still, Grade II listed, trading as a Vintage Inn.

RAF HAWKINGE – The Cat & Custard Pot, Paddlesworth

RAF HAWKINGE, above Folkestone, was so close to Pas-de-Calais that during the Battle, squadrons flew in at dawn, refuelled, flew their sorties and withdrew at dusk. Pilots rarely stayed the night.

Only the ground crews stayed, and their off-duty local was the Cat & Custard Pot, a short walk away in the hamlet of Paddlesworth, whose village sign humorously announces, 'Highest Church, Lowest Steeple, Poorest Parish, Fewest People.'

A diminutive brick building beside the tiny Norman church of St Oswald, it stands about 650 feet up, the highest pub in Kent. Inside is a traditional rural inn with immense character and walls hung with Battle of Britain memorabilia.

The pub still has two front doors, from the days when a wall divided public bar from saloon. When pilots did call in, the doors kept officers and other ranks apart.

The Cat & Custard Pot still trades, its interior largely as the ground crews knew it, and is well worth a stop for anyone visiting the Kent Battle of Britain Museum at Hawkinge.

LONDON – Shepherd's, Mayfair

THE LONDON half of Kingcome's choice led to Shepherd Market. Bob Stanford Tuck would arrive

by Justin Omps

ot Battle of nd hearty



249 SQN: Members of The Few



EARNED A PINT: Three Spitfire pilots with 19 Sqn based at Fowlmere, Cambridgeshire, gather to confer after a mission in September 1940. *Left to right*, Flt Lt WJ ' Farmer' Lawson, Sqn Ldr BJE 'Sandy' Lane (Officer Commanding) and Flt Sgt GC 'Grumpy' Unwin
PHOTO: AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH (RAF)

exhausted through the blacked-out streets, and the moment he pushed through the blackout curtains at Shepherd's a voice would roar across the bar.

"Hiya Tommy, over here you blighter, and buy us all a drink."

Fighter Command had made Shepherd's its unofficial London headquarters, mainly due to the publican, Oscar, a dapper Swiss whose bearing, as Geoffrey Page recalled, "smacked more of the Harley Street surgeon than the Shepherd Market publican." Oscar tracked postings, casualties, and marriages better than RAF Intelligence. Because of him Shepherd's was the first stop for many pilots on a 48-hour pass eager to learn the latest 'gen'.

On a good night there were "so many slant-striped DFC ribbons that the room seemed tilted to one side."

Tuck recalls one evening finding Johnnie Kent, Max Aitken, Peter Townsend and Cocky Dundas there, "all broad grins and friendly eyes and clinking pint pots."

Shepherd's stands 350 metres from the RAF Club on Piccadilly and trades today under its pre-war name, the Chesterfield Arms.

LAST ORDERS

BETWEEN LAST orders and the morning scramble, these pubs put exhausted young men back together, and the next day they flew again. All five buildings still stand, and four of them are still pubs.

● ***Pubs, Pilots and the Battle of Britain*** **by Justin Omps is published by Pen & Sword in early 2027 and is available to pre-order now. An interactive map of every pub in the book is at pubsandpilots.com.**



THE KING'S HEAD: North Weald



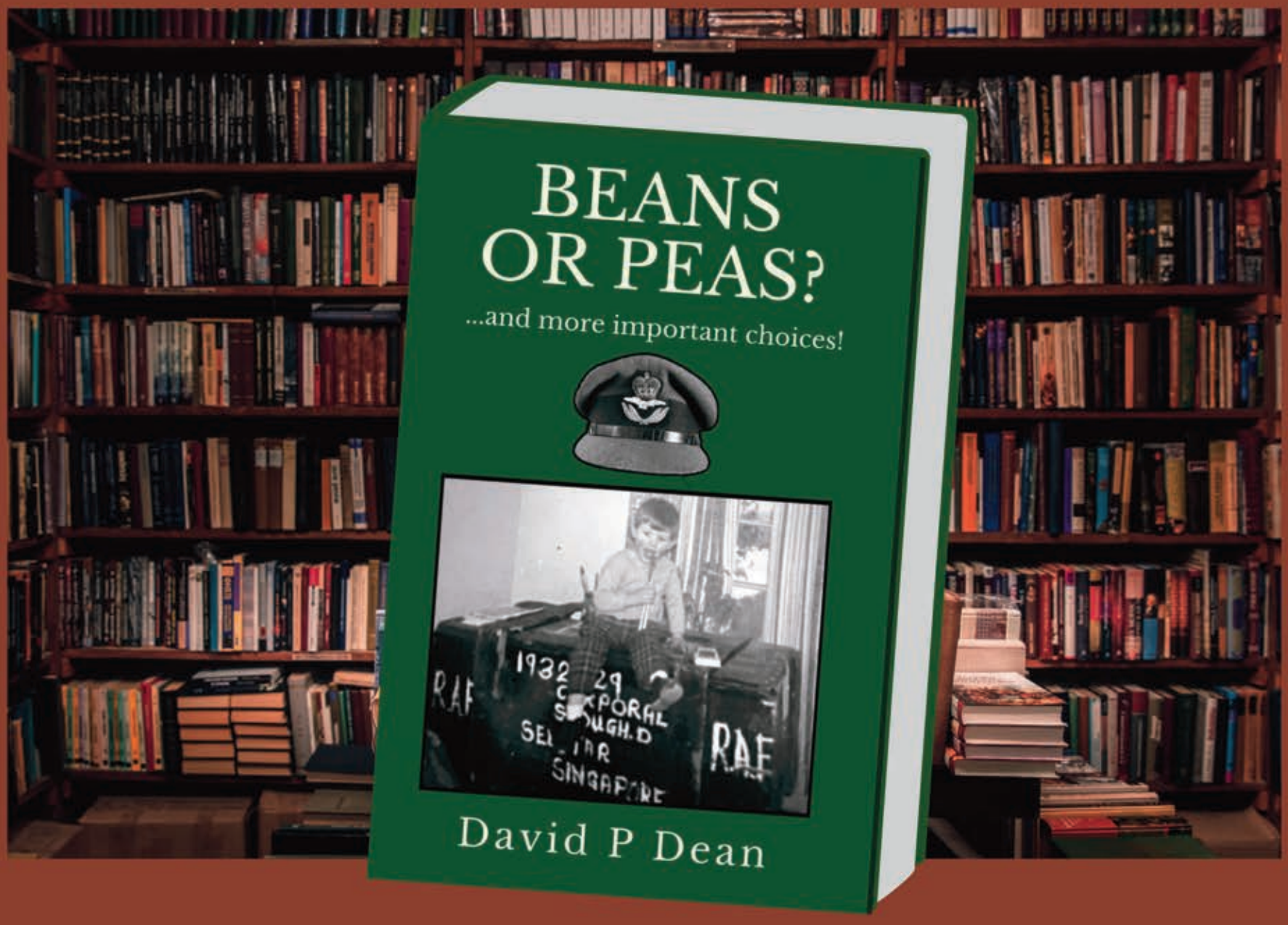
FORMER UNICORN PUB: Chichester



THE WHITE HART: Brasted



THE CAT AND CUSTARD POT: Paddlesworth



This non-fiction memoir tells the story of a disillusioned young man who, unable to fulfill his potential as a dancer, decides to join the RAF Boy Entrant Scheme in the mid '50s as a trainee cook.

It's the tale of an ordinary, often rebellious, but caring young man who blunders from disaster to disaster in the days of National Service as a cook on an RAF station in Middle England, told in the first person; a rollicking irreverent depiction of life from seventy years ago.

There is plenty of bawdy humour, with sexual encounters never far away, and authority, of course, is snubbed at every possible opportunity. An interesting insight into life on an RAF station in the '50s that goes beyond station life and ventures into the private turmoil encountered by those who stepped up to support their country.

Join Dixie as he ventures from continent to continent, country to country and ultimately from fecklessness to faithfulness.

A testimonial to enduring love

A whopping 600 pages!

Out on Amazon

Feature

GROUNDED

The final resting places of aircraft



WATERY GRAVE: Blenheim Bomber on the seabed



TAILFIN HEADSTONES: Soviet pilots' cemetery in Estonia

USING HER background in archaeology and death history, Lorraine Evans has written *Boneyards of Steel* (pen-and-sword.co.uk), an interesting study on the 'afterlife' of aircraft following the end of their service.

From the collections lying in large fields behind perimeter fences, to those buried underground, turned into memorials or acting as headstones, Evans provides a detailed account of the different roads for decommissioned aircraft using carefully selected case studies to highlight certain examples and demonstrate how the approach of mortuary/deposition study can be applied to aviation.

Starting with the one of the images readers will most often think of when asked what happens to decommissioned aircraft, the author explores what she describes as 'graveyards' or 'boneyards' – the vast expanses of space where hundreds of aircraft sit waiting to be scrapped or salvaged for parts and the multimillion business that supports these efforts.

She also describes how the recent trend for urban exploration has illuminated previously unknown sites such as in Russia at an old, abandoned satellite communications facility and how Google Maps has also meant people can do their own research from the comfort of their own home.

However, the book does not just focus on those aircraft whose life ended at the end of their Service career but includes those lost in accidents or as the result of acts of war and terror. Given the topic, it is unsurprising that a large part of the book is focused on crash sites and accidents, bringing into focus the complexities around aviation archaeology.

Evans delicately explores topics pointing out the problems in the past but also highlighting how the field has changed in recent times. This section does not shy away from the legal aspects and indeed gives a fairly comprehensive coverage of the laws in the UK and, more specifically, the Protection of Military Remains Act (POMRA), providing readers with a framework to understand the legislation but also the difficulties the MOD faces at home and internationally in protecting sites.

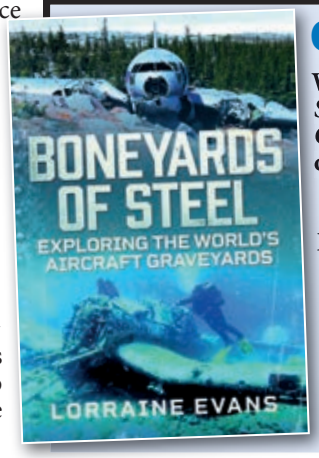
Underwater crash sites are also included, with their own chapter describing the complicated nature that the location presents to researchers and archaeologists alike. The remembrance of crash sites and the use of aircrafts parts in memorials also has its own chapter and gives a poignant reminder to the reader of the human tragedy behind the mechanical loss.

The book makes use of a case study-based approach in most of its chapters that perfectly highlights the theoretical concepts put forward by Evans such as 'graveyards' and contextualises the topics for readers. Whilst understandably much of this focus is directed towards the UK and America, the book is not limited to these areas and does give examples globally. The controversial Spitfires of Burma are discussed as is the conversion of an Airbus A320 into a restaurant in India as well as the marking of a crash site in West Africa, to give but three examples.

Evans also doesn't limit the conversation to just military aviation and broadens the discussion with civilian aircraft, allowing her to explore some of the most famous aviation tragedies such as 9/11 and Lockerbie, which she does with care and sensitivity.

Evans' book is written in an engaging informal style, one that feels like a conversation with the reader and this makes it a welcoming study to those who are unfamiliar with the field and language of death history. It starts the discussion of what fates remain to aircraft and what we can learn about society from them and leaves the door open for further conversation. It does meet the main aim of the author 'to introduce the subject matter of aviation gravesites, aircraft final resting places and the basics of aviation archaeology to the uninitiated' but also provides a thinking point for those who feel they are familiar at least with certain aspects. It is an interesting viewpoint and approach to a topic that is not often explored further beyond wreck sites and the world of aviation archaeology.

Review by Emily Walton



Copies up for grabs

WE HAVE copies of *Boneyards of Steel, Exploring The World's Aircraft Graveyards* to win. For your chance to own one, answer the following question:

What does POMRA stand for?

Email your answer, marked Boneyards of Steel competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: *RAF News*, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air and Space Command, High Wycombe HP14 4UE, to arrive by December 11.

Win!



SECRETS?: US forces use equipment to pull a MiG-25R

Advertorial.

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

Elaine Paxton has always believed in teams.

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

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

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

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

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

The next day came the call she will never forget: Adrian wasn’t expected to survive. Elaine was told to say goodbye. Standing by his bed, she turned – as she always had – to humour. “I told him I’d just bought him a £500 lifetime membership to a distillery, and he’d only had it 17 days,” she says. “That wasn’t acceptable.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

HELP for HEROES

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**.

Pilot at his peak

Long-range deployment recordholder and 208 Sqn aerobatic team member

FLT LT Peter Mcleland, who has died aged 93, was a Cold War fighter pilot who flew a single-engine jet with his squadron from Germany to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1953 on a historic long-range deployment by the RAF, the longest at that time.

During his time as a cadet in the Air Training Corps, he was able to fly on several re-supply flights during the Berlin Airlift, where his fascination with aviation was born.

He joined the RAF in 1951 to train as a pilot. During his advanced training at RAF Chivenor, in Devon, the engine of his Vampire jet trainer failed at 13,000 feet. Despite his limited experience, he evaded large cloud banks and made an emergency landing at base. He was awarded an endorsement for his "Exceptional Flying Skill". On a graduation ceremony at the Albert Hall, he received his wings from Gp Capt Len Trent VC.

Rhodesia

On completion of his training in October 1952, Mcleland was posted to 266 (Rhodesia) Sqn at RAF Wunstorf in West Germany, where he flew the Venom fighter bomber. Coinciding with the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953, there was a celebration in Salisbury (now Harare) to mark the centenary of Cecil Rhodes. No 266 Sqn was invited to represent the RAF.

After weeks of meticulous planning, the 12 Venom FB 1 aircraft took off on May 31, 1953, and headed for Malta on Operation Long Trek. The aircraft did not carry overload fuel tanks, so range was limited to about 650 miles. Each leg had to be planned so that there was a diversion airfield in range should weather or an aircraft emergency force a landing at an unscheduled and remote airfield.

Over the next 10 days, the aircraft headed for Rhodesia via Libya, Egypt and on to Khartoum in Sudan. From there, airfields able to handle jet fighters were few and far between. After landing at Juba, Entebbe and Lusaka, where the jets flew an air demonstration to the public, the 12 Venoms headed for Salisbury arriving on June 8. They arrived as a complete formation on schedule, a testimony to the skill of the 12 pilots and the ground crew pre-positioned at the transit airfields, some with very limited facilities for servicing and refuelling jet aircraft.

Over the next few days, the aircraft carried out demonstration flights and on June 13 and 14 they flew formation and aerobatic displays during the Rhodes Centenary Air Rally. After further displays at Bulawayo, the formation began the long journey back to Germany on June 17, where all 12 arrived together.

Mcleland spent four years in Germany when the squadron provided air defence for NATO, including elements on 15-minute quick reaction alert, in addition to its ground attack role. At the end of his tour in November 1956, he was assessed as an above average fighter pilot and awarded a Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air. He then became an instructor at the RAF's fighter training school.

He returned to a squadron in January 1959, when he joined 142 Sqn at Nairobi. Three months later, the squadron was renumbered 208 Sqn.

Mcleland was selected for the squadron's four-aircraft RAF aerobatic team, which became the official regional RAF team providing displays at many locations in Central Africa and the Middle East including a return to Salisbury. Displays were also given at the 80th birthday of the Sultan of Zanzibar before leaving for Aden and bases in the Persian Gulf.

In March 1960, the pilots returned to England to convert to the Hunter fighter before flying 12 aircraft to their base in Nairobi, completing the 6,000-mile journey in three days.

The four-aircraft aerobatic team reformed with Mcleland as a member and tours and displays throughout the Middle East continued. When he left the squadron in August 1961, he was assessed as an exceptional fighter pilot.

After 18 months as a simulator instructor on the new Lightning fighter, he decided to leave the RAF, and he joined British European Airways.

He started flying the Vanguard airliner before transferring to the BAC 111 and then the Trident III. He remained with the airline, now British Airways, flying on the European routes for 20 years and retired in December 1985 having accumulated 11,100 flying hours.

Offshore sailing was a great passion, and he made many trans-Atlantic voyages. With his wife, Nicci, they sailed several sections of the RAF Yacht Club's Tradewinds Round the World Rally, including through the Panama Canal to the Galapagos Islands and thence across the Pacific.



AFRICAN ADVENTURE: Mcleland brings up the rear with 208 Sqn aerobatic team colleagues as they pass over Tanzania's Mt Kilimanjaro

MCLELAND: Exceptional pilot

ROYAL AIR FORCE



RAF News

The Forces Favourite Read

Hit your target market with **RAF News** - the official newspaper of the Royal Air Force since 1961.

Reaching an audience of more than 50,000 readers every fortnight, **RAF News** is the Forces' favourite newspaper delivering exclusive news, features and sports action from across UK Defence.

To discuss your advertising in **RAF News** please call or email:
T: +44 (0)7482 571535
E: edwin.rodrigues@rafnews.co.uk

RAF News
The official voice of the Royal Air Force



Tim Morris

Much to be said for a spell in LA

FOR MANY first-time visitors, Hollywood is synonymous with glittering film premieres and larger-than-life ambition, but beyond the famous Walk of Fame, beyond the flashing cameras, lies a neighbourhood that rewards curious exploration. It's a place where old-school film magic sits in perfect harmony with the buzz of live music venues, rooftop bars and world-famous cultural institutions. Having clocked up hundreds of miles already on our Mustang road-trip (see our motoring section p22), we were back in the hills and it felt like we'd come home.

Location

Every time I touch-down in the States I feel welcome, but my daughter and I have spent some time in Hollywood over the years. That, combined with the fact that the area was featured in almost every one of my favourite childhood films, makes it all feel very familiar.

This particular district of Los Angeles is very exciting, with neon signs competing for your attention, tour buses cruising the boulevards and aspiring actors mingling with visitors from around the world. Look a little deeper, though, and the district reveals its hidden layers.

Historic theatres, hidden cocktail lounges and hillside viewpoints remind you that Hollywood is more than a tourist attraction. It remains one of the world's most influential centres of entertainment and creativity. The film and music industries are still thriving in this part of the US and working studios continue to employ thousands of people. That means vibrant communities still living the Hollywood dream, and everything is catered for here, from quiet diners to A-List clubs.

Relax

Rising above the city, on the slopes of Mount Hollywood, Griffith Observatory offers one of Los Angeles' most iconic perspectives. The observatory combines science, architecture and extraordinary scenery, in a setting that has appeared in countless films. Stand on the balcony that runs around the outside and the famous Hollywood sign appears, framed by the surrounding hills.

During the day, visitors can explore interactive exhibits and peer through telescopes, while learning about astronomy and space exploration. As evening approaches, the real magic begins. The sun sinks behind the iconic city skyline and the lights of Los Angeles begin to sparkle below. The panoramic view is unforgettable, providing a valuable reminder of the scale and diversity of the city beyond Hollywood's famous streets.

Enjoy an immersive show in the main Planetarium. These are voiced, live, by professional actors and actresses (we are in Hollywood). Then, head back to the roof. Look through the giant telescope and you can see other planets with the naked eye. It's breathtaking.

My tip would be to reserve parking outside the Observatory and save yourself a very long uphill walk.

Adventure

Just south of the main tourist thoroughfares lies Hollywood's emerging Vinyl District, a haven for music lovers and collectors. This creative part of town celebrates Los Angeles' enduring relationship with recorded music. Independent record shops line the streets, offering everything from rare jazz pressings to contemporary indie releases.

Next, it's time to get behind the scenes and join the 'Warner Bros. Studio Tour Hollywood'. This remains one of the city's standout experiences and is a must. Unlike many attractions that simply celebrate movie history, this tour provides a genuine look at how film and television productions are still made today. Universal may give you a theme park style series of rides, but this is the real deal, as they say.

Visitors can explore backlots, sound stages and famous sets that have been used in productions ranging from classic Hollywood films to modern television hits.

For film enthusiasts, it's an incredible experience that gets you on the lot, right next to where real shows are currently being shot. This is the working machinery of Hollywood in action, with a few fascinating immersive experiences along the way. Have a picture taken on the '*Friends*' sofa or turn up at the Harry Potter exhibit and let the sorting hat sort you. Which house you'll end up in is anyone's guess.

Eat

Hollywood's dining scene is remarkably varied. Trendy rooftop lounges sit alongside historic diners and family-run taquerias. My tip for lunch in the Vinyl District would be to stop at Caffe Hub, a friendly little diner on Selma Avenue. Besides great food, they know how to make a good cup of tea, which is not always an easy find in LA.

Sunset Boulevard remains one of the best places to start an evening, offering everything from casual street food to upscale dining experiences, with sweeping city views. Musso & Frank Grill is my tip for an outstanding dinner experience. It's been going since 1919 and has provided the backdrop for more films than I can count.

Music venues, comedy clubs and intimate cocktail bars ensure that entertainment continues long after sunset in this part of town. Unlike some of Los Angeles' more residential neighbourhoods, Hollywood thrives after dark, making it one of the city's most energetic areas for nightlife.

Stay

Situated just off Hollywood Boulevard, DREAM Hollywood is a modern, stylish hotel that offers visitors a cosmopolitan experience in the heart of the action. Its greatest strength is its location, right in the heart of the Vinyl District.

Rooms are modern and well-designed, featuring floor-to-ceiling windows, comfortable furnishings and a sleek aesthetic that reflects Los Angeles' fashionable side. The rooftop pool and bar are standout features, attracting both guests and locals with impressive views across the Hollywood Hills. Service is polished and professional, with an added twist. You can ask for room service by robot! That is soooo LA.

The main drawback is that the vibrant location can bring noise, particularly at weekends. Guests seeking a quiet retreat may prefer other neighbourhoods, but travellers looking to immerse themselves in Hollywood's social scene will find the setting hard to beat.

Verdict

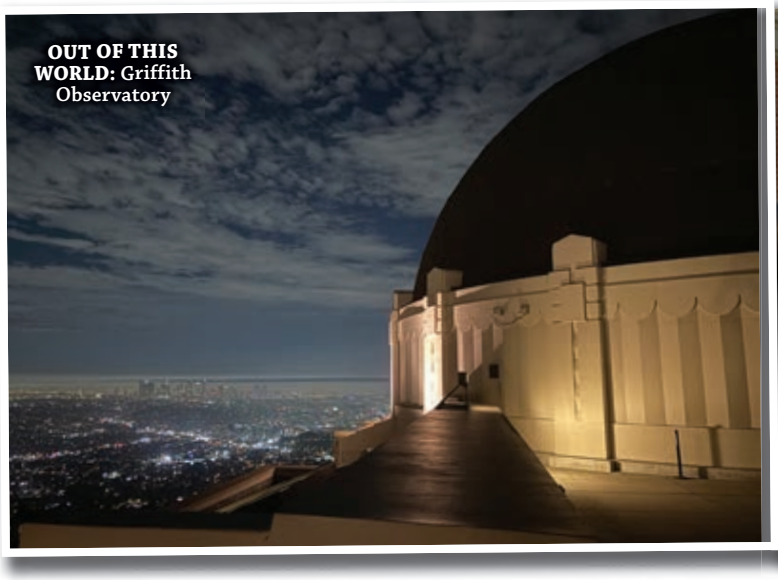
Hollywood continues to reinvent itself, while preserving the movie magic that made it famous. For travellers willing to look beyond the obvious, Hollywood remains one of Los Angeles' most fascinating areas, where imagination, entertainment and history converge under endless Californian sunshine.

VISIT

- **discoverlosangeles.com**
- **wbstudiotour.com**
- **griffithobservatory.lacity.gov**
- **hyatt.com/dream-hotels/en-US/laxdz-dream-hollywood**
- **caffehubhollywood.com**



HARRY SPOTTER: Enjoying the young wizard's exhibit on Warner Bros. Studio tour



OUT OF THIS WORLD: Griffith Observatory



GET SET: Take a tour of the huge WB movie complex

Motoring Polestar 3 (from £76,540 otr)

Tim Morris









SCANDI STYLE: The Polestar 3 looks good for such a large SUV

In Pole position

THE POLESTAR 3 is a very smart bit of kit. It's a premium Swedish sports utility vehicle (SUV) that combines minimalist design with impressive electric vehicle (EV) responsiveness. The range-topping 'performance' model produces a stonking 680hp and reaches 60mph in 3.8 seconds. Alternatively, plump for the 'dual motor' variant and you'll get up to 402 miles of official WLTP range. For a hefty EV SUV, that's impressive.

Exterior

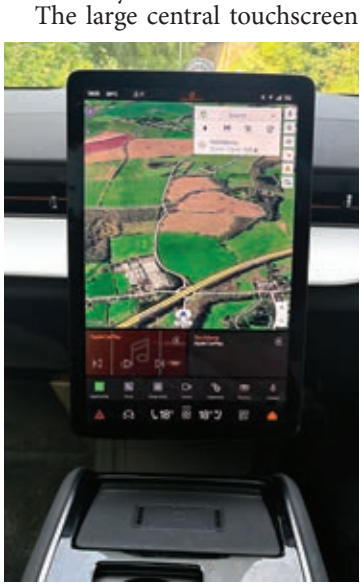
The Polestar 3 stands out in a market crowded with bulky electric SUVs. Its sleek roofline, angular lines, futuristic lights and distinctive aerodynamics give it a properly sporting appearance. Look down the bonnet and you'll see muscly air vents, providing downforce to the nose. There are also vents in the arches and on the rear corners.

20in alloy wheels and 'Swedish Gold' (yellow) callipers help contribute to the performance appeal. Putting this car to the test on a 400-mile round-trip to foggy Cornwall proved a few points, but one thing really stood out. In a crowded segment, it's one of the few large EVs that genuinely turns heads.

Interior

The Polestar 3's cabin oozes minimalist Scandinavian style. The materials used are high quality and the cabin has a calm, luxurious feel. It's just 'zen' in here… in a very solidly-built kind of way.

The large central touchscreen



dominates the dashboard and runs Google's Android software. It's rapid enough, with sharp graphics, but the system has the common modern-day fault that too many functions are buried deep within complicated menus.

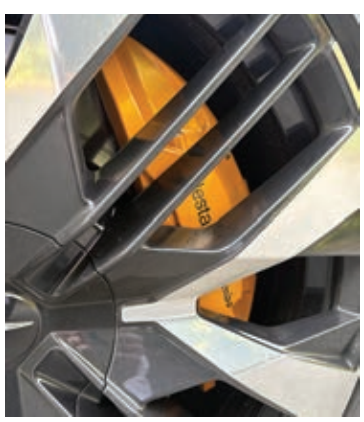
You may be able to set simple settings on the move, you may end up in a hedge, it's 50/50. That type of complicated.

Passenger space is generous, for both front and rear seat passengers, with comfortable sports seats in the front. The driving position is well thought out and it's a very refined place to be on a long run.

On the Road

This is where the Polestar 3 really surprises. Weighing well over two tonnes, you'd expect it to be a bit of a bus through the bends, but it manages to deliver surprisingly engaging handling. The steering is accurate, body control is strong and the car feels more driver-focused than most competitors in this class.

Performance varies slightly



depending on which version you go for, but all are impressive. The standard Rear Motor produces 333hp and reaches 60mph in 6.3 seconds, while the Dual Motor increases output to 544hp and cuts the sprint to 4.5 seconds. The Performance model develops 680hp and covers the same dash in just 3.8 seconds. Top end is either 130 or 140mph.

This is another model to have come on in leaps and bounds, in terms of charging technology. The latest model dramatically cuts the time you'll need to spend at the charger. Official figures give a 10 – 80 per cent charge time of 22 minutes on a 350kW DC charger but, realistically, you won't need a full zap to reach your destination. By the time you've popped to the bathroom and grabbed a take-out drink from the counter, the car's good to go. It's a million miles away from the old days of charging delays.

You'll never achieve the 402 miles WLTP, in the real world, especially navigating thick fog to Cornwall, but the range is impressive. It's sharp to drive, comfortable on a run, rapid off the mark and it looks good. It's a bit on the bulky side in tight coastal streets and around town, but has more sensors than a SpaceX rocket to keep you safe.

As you may expect, for all that, it's not cheap. Prices currently start from £76,540 for the Rear Motor model, rising to £92,040 for the flagship Performance version. It sounds hefty, but that's where the posh end of this segment sits.

Polestar 3

Pros
- Smart Scandinavian styling
- Impressive performance
- Plenty of EV range
- Fast-charging capability

Cons
- Expensive
- Fiddly touchscreen controls
- Boot space trails some rivals

Verdict
THE POLESTAR 3 is a cracking blend of style, quality and EV driver appeal. There are rivals that are more practical, but it offers impressive range, rapid acceleration and a cabin that feels special. It's one of the strongest alternatives to the German class leaders out there.

RUGBY

World Rugby's dream team accolade for hooker Amy

Another honour after her RAF awards Special Recognition boost



DIFFICULT YEAR: Cokayne is smiling again after injury slowed her march to a possible 100 international caps for England

Daniel Abrahams

"IT'S A huge honour," is how Service rugby union ace Flt Lt Amy Cokayne described being named in World Rugby's women's team of the year.

It's the second awards accolade for the hooker, after she received the RAF Sports Special Recognition Award last month.

World Cup winner Cokayne took on the new vice-captaincy role for England earlier in the year, scoring in every game as the Red Roses won their eighth consecutive Six Nations trophy and their fifth Grand Slam in a row.

The end of the year saw her WXV Global Series campaign kiboshed through injury and she had to watch from the sidelines as England's near four-year winning streak was ended by a draw with Canada and then a subsequent defeat by the same opposition.



RED ROSE STALWART: Cokayne in action for England against France in Bristol last year

Cokayne – selected alongside five of her Red Roses teammates in the dream team along with stars from New Zealand, Canada and France – said: "There are so many outstanding players in the women's game, so to be recognised alongside them is something of which I'm incredibly proud.

"It's been a special year, but not without its challenges, particularly with injury, so to get back playing and finishing the year on 97 caps makes it even more meaningful.

"The RAF has been a massive support throughout my career and has enabled me to pursue rugby at the highest level. I'm incredibly proud to be an RAF provost officer as well as an England rugby player.

"Ninety-seven caps is something I'm very proud of, and of course 100 is now not too far away. If I was fortunate enough to reach that milestone during next year's Six Nations it would be incredibly special, but you can never take selection for granted. For now, it's about staying fit, performing well for my club [Sale Sharks] in the PWR [Premiership Women's Rugby] and hopefully earning the opportunity to get there."

Welsh boardroom role for Cardiff star and aviator McNally

SGT JOSH McNally's rugby union career has taken on an official turn after he was appointed Chairman of the Welsh Rugby Players Association.

RAF and Cardiff star McNally, 36, succeeds Scarlets back-rower Josh Macleod in the position.

He told *RAF News*: "It's a real privilege to take on the role, particularly at such an important time for professional rugby in Wales.

"Having balanced my career in the RAF alongside professional rugby, I've experienced first-hand the importance of strong leadership, teamwork and looking after the people around you."



McNally (*pictured left*) joined the RAF in 2009, becoming a stalwart of the men's rugby union team winning the Inter-Services championship in 2015 and 2018. He joined the RAF Rugby Union Centre of Excellence Scheme in 2012.

"The RAF has played a huge part in shaping me as both a player and a leader, and I hope to bring those experiences into this role," he said.

"My priority is to ensure players have a strong, collective voice in shaping the future of the game, while making sure they are supported both during their playing careers and beyond."

Through the Excellence scheme, McNally joined Henley Hawks in 2012 before a move to the Premiership with London Welsh, London Irish and five seasons at Bath, making 82 appearances and regularly captaining the side before his move to Cardiff.

The 6ft 7in lock, who has known his fair share of hardships during his career, added: "I believe the players' voice has never been more important. Players must have a meaningful role in shaping the future of the professional game, with their views heard and valued.

"Having experienced different environments throughout my career, I've seen first-hand the importance of clarity and having the right support around you. The WRPA plays a vital role in ensuring players are represented, supported and given opportunities to develop both on and off the field.

"I'm looking forward to working closely with CEO Gareth Lewis, the Executive Committee and our members to build on the excellent work already being done, strengthening our collective voice and ensuring players remain at the heart of the decisions that shape their future."

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

Sport



TULSA 2024: Cpl Chris Taylor in action in one of his motos (*front centre*) in the United States



BIG ACHIEVEMENT: Cpl Chris Taylor in Tulsa last time out with his trophy (*centre*), with Sgt Matt Haywood (*left*) and Cpl Callum Haywood

Riders hope for spell of Potter magic in Tulsa

Sports Reporter

LOOKING TO improve on a third place for Cpl Chris Taylor in 2024, the Service's BMX team head Stateside for the USABMX Race of Champions.

The aviators attend the Race of Champions and Grand National Finals, held annually at the SageNet Expo Centre in Tulsa Oklahoma, every two years, with Taylor's third in the 51-55 Intermediate Men's 20" category last time out giving the team motivation to fight for further success.

Team member Sgt Matt Haywood said: "With the USA being the birthplace of BMX, it's a great opportunity to race in one of the most competitive series out there and to experience the atmosphere of this indoor event."

"It is where champions are crowned, so to have sealed a podium two years ago was a great achievement and we will be looking for further glory later this month.

The team also use the event as an opportunity to engage with race fans and other teams to highlight the work of RAF cycling and BMX.

This year Haywood and his fellow aviators will be meeting team sponsor Doug Potter, CEO of Potter Racing Products.

Haywood said: "The team are really looking forward to catching up with Doug. Potter Racing Products has been supporting us since 2013, when they began designing and supplying custom race plates for us. This evolved into including the team's custom race jerseys and then the full race strip.

"Their work means we always stand out on the track and gives instant brand recognition at all races the team attend.

"They have been with us from the very beginning, giving time and products freely in support of what we do. Having come from a military family and with one of his own having also served, we are extremely proud and honoured to have Doug's support both past, present and in the years to come."

● **Follow RAF BMX on Facebook @RoyalAirForceBMXRacing.**



HONING SKILLS: RAF BJJ players Chf Tech Jackson (*top*) and Cpl Davies

MARTIAL ARTS

Getting to grips with BJJ at Germany training camp

A PACKED five-day itinerary saw Service personnel spread the martial arts gospel with a training camp in Hammelburg, Germany.

The nine-member RAF Martial Art Association Brazilian Jui Jitsu team of Cpls Walvin, Lennox, Davies, Henderson and Howe, Chf Tech Jackson and Barton, Flt Lt Herbert and AS1 Sackey joined forces with Sgts Schwarb and Peters of the Luftwaffe for training sessions. The event also featured a further five members of the Bundeswehr Nahkampf training team.

RAF spokesperson Cpl Eleanor Walvin said: "The aim of the camp was to develop fitness and BJJ levels of all those attending, and to significantly contribute to both organisations' understanding of respective cultures.

"Personnel also looked to improve the Bundeswehr's Nahkampf training syllabus, enhance mutual understanding and interoperability between two NATO partners and also spread interest for RAF BJJ."

The week kicked off with European Champion and BJJ brown belt Schwab holding two technical training sessions. BJJ black belt instructor Burak Basak, who has competition wins at the NAGA Germany Grappling Championships and has podiumed at IBJJF level, also shared his expertise.

Personnel were thanked for helping to train the host instructors with a dinner.

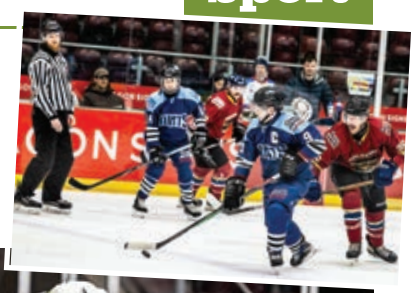
A closing side control yoga cooldown session was taken by brown belt Chf Tech Andrew Jackson, before the team presented a BJJ gi jacket to the Nahkampf team.

● **Follow RAFMAA on Instagram @raf.martial.arts.**

ICE HOCKEY

LOVE ME TENDER

It's a first as trophy shared after goalie injured in collision





HONOURS EVEN: RAF Stars attack before the game is halted. *Inset top*, action from the Masters v Selects clash

Daniel Abrahams

HISTORY WAS made at the Vindico Arena in Cardiff as the Service ice hockey championship was shared for the first time.

With RAF Stars leading Bluewings 5-4, an injury to the Stars goaltender meant he could not continue and both captains agreed to end the final and share the trophy.

Event OIC Cpl Lewis McCracken said: "In what can only be seen as a remarkable demonstration of leadership, sportsmanship and respect for the competition, both team captains – Cpl Jake Brough (Bluewings) and Fg Off Max Marshall (Stars) – agreed to bring the championship final to an end as a draw.

"This marked the first time in the history of the RAF Ice Hockey Championships that the final concluded without a winner. It made for an unusual but memorable end to an outstanding contest."

McCracken added: "The championships once again demonstrated the strength, camaraderie and competitive spirit within RAF Ice Hockey, with contributions from players, officials and supporters helping to make the event a success."

The event kicked off with six RAF regional teams – Bluewings, Stars, Blackhawks, Lossiemouth Jets, Vulcans and Dragons – preparing for battle.

Following a closely contested round-robin group stage, four times champions Bluewings topped the standings, edging ahead of Stars on goal difference, with both teams level on points.

The Bluewings would edge out Lossiemouth 5-2, while Stars beat Blackhawks 8-1 in the semi-finals.

The final would provide plenty of action with Bluewings taking the lead three times, only for Stars to haul them back.

Towards the end of the second period, Stars made it 4-3, before Bluewings levelled early in the third period, with the Stars once again finding a way through, to take a 5-4 advantage.

Then history was made following a collision between the Stars goaltender and a Bluewings player and the captains called things to a close.

The final was followed by the RAF Selects versus Masters clash, which went the way of the Select team, 5-3.

After the action on the ice, the association's Sportspersons' Dinner saw awards presented to Cpl Jake Brough (Best Defender), Tournament MVP, AS1 Kenzie Jordan, Cpl Sam Lawrence (Best Goaltender) and Aaran Hazeldine (Best Forward).

BOXING

Seconds out, round won: top year for boxers

RAF BOXING is looking to land further knockout blows next year after a bumper 2026 ended with them winning Team of the Year at the RAF Sports Awards.

Association spokesperson Cpl Benjamin Bailey said: "Following our success at the 2026 UKAF Champs and winning the team award, our focus is already firmly set on retaining the title in 2027 and making more history.

"We are building a programme that will push the team to the next level and ensure we are ready to defend our title."

The association took the Service's top team prize at the annual event at the RAF Club in London after a year that saw them win their first IS title in 54 years, with personnel competing in 70 per cent more contests than previously.

With aviators taking part in bouts across the UK and internationally in Germany, Bahrain and Sweden, the Service became a staple at the Four Nation Championships, England Boxing National Amateur Championships, Golden Girl Box Cup, Women's Winter Box Cup, Ed Bilbey Box Cup and Haringey Box Cup.





CLUB CLASS: Being presented with Team of Year award at the RAF Club, and Cpl Arran Devine with IS trophy, *above right*

The team will be ringing the bell from the start of next year, kicking off with their Elite Squad training camps, before competing at the Golden Girls Box Cup in Sweden in February, followed by the defence of their UKAF Championship title in March at Aldershot.

Bailey added: "We are aiming to retain the UKAF Elite title and the work for this starts in January, where we will establish a training camp at RAF Brize Norton, then international competition in Sweden and high-level sparring opportunities with GB, England and leading England Boxing clubs. This really is the start of another explosive year inspired by all we achieved in 2026."

● **Follow RAF Boxing on Instagram @raf_boxing.**

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

Sport

RUGBY UNION

U23s aiming to climb to new heights

Young guns out to retain IS title

Daniel Abrahams

"OUR HOPES for this year? Two wins," said RAF U23s rugby union coach FS Matthew Clarke after his side played their final Inter-Services warm-up clash.

Closing out the four-match IS preparation, Clarke's charges succumbed to a last-gasp two-point loss at Cambridge University, but are aiming to retain the prestigious armed forces crown for the first time in 21 years.

Clarke (*inset, right*) said: "To retain the title would be an incredible achievement for the players and support group. But more than that, producing players that can go on to represent the RAF at As and Senior level is the next key thing."



The U23s endured four tough warm-up clashes which also saw one win, 38-12 over Bath University, a 22-47 defeat to a Coventry side made up of Premiership Academy and Championship players and a bruising 59-0 defeat to Level 5 side Stourbridge.

The RAF face the Royal Navy in their opening game at Havant RFC before closing out the championship against the Army on December 2 at Cardiff Arms Park.

Clarke added: "The link between us and WO Tom Gardner and his senior team is very tight, highlighted in the fact that 11 current U23s were selected in the Seniors squad for the French Air Force Defence Engagement fixture.

"That experience was invaluable for the players, to see how the Seniors operate and gain that confidence in their own ability. Bringing that kind of knowledge back to the U23s squad improved standards and you could see the growth of each player.

"Hopefully, a successful year with the U23s will allow a few more of my players to bolster the seniors squad."

● **Follow the U23s on Facebook @RAF Rugby Union.**



RISING STARS: Many of the U23 players are hoping to make it to the senior side

ESPORTS

International triple crown for Service esports stars

THERE WAS triple joy for the Service's esports and drone stars at the inaugural International Defence Esports Games (IDEG) at the British Arena in Sunderland.

The four-day event saw 10 nations – Canada, France, Japan, Netherlands, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, the United States and UK – do battle in Rocket League, Counter-Strike 2, iRacing and VelociDrone events.

The RAF recorded wins in Rocket League, iRacing and VelociDrone.

Team GB's Rocket League team, coached by RAF Esports game lead AS1 Stelios Elia and featuring AS1(T) Edward Nussey-Waite, kicked off the event with a dominant set of performances.

GB beat the Netherlands 3-0 in the first semi-final, before thrashing Team USA 4-0 in the grand final.



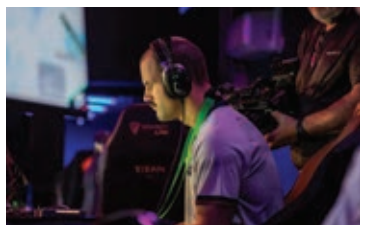
TEAM GB: Rocket League winners including coach AS1 Elia (*left*) and AS1(T) Nussey-Waite (*right*) with Army colleagues

RAF Esports chairman Sqn Ldr Stephen Rennie said: "Winning the International Defence Esports Games is a brilliant result for UK Defence and a testament to the teamwork, discipline and communication our players showed under pressure against some of the best military teams in the world. I'm hugely proud of everyone involved, and this success shows what our people can achieve when they come together as one team."

A double RAF effort sealed the VelociDrone final as RAF Regiment II Sqn's AS1 Kieran Oldham secured the win after teaming up with actual drone racer Chf Tech Simon Fassler.

Oldham said: "It's been amazing. This venue is absolutely like no other. I've never seen anything like it. Learning skills from RAF Astra and combining all our skills together creates an immense race."

The third top spot went the way of RAF logistics' AS1 Will Foulkes, *pictured right*, who stormed to glory in the iRacing



VELOCIDRONE: AS1 Kieran Oldham

In a show of sportsmanship, he helped coach Japanese racer Taku Yokohama ahead of the final, using Google Translate to overcome the language barrier.

The aviator said: "What a weekend. It's been great working with the different countries in iRacing.

"It was brilliant working with Taku too and all the racers. Taku has only been on iRacing for a couple of months and had a lot of questions."

● **Find out more about RAF esports at discord.gg/GCmCFv7x8.**

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

5 pages of RAF Sport



See p23

World Rugby dream team slot for Amy

POWERLIFTING

AIRPOWER

Service lifters in show of strength at RAF Cosford



POWERHOUSES: MOD Stafford's Cpl Fiona MacGregor (*above*) and RAF Marham's Cpl Cameron Beckingham (*below*)



Daniel Abrahams

IT WAS three in a row for the service's powerlifting men and a runners-up spot for the women at the IS championships at RAF Cosford.

Spokesman Cpl Christopher Nance said: "Strength, teamwork and Service pride were on full display throughout the championships as the RAF once again proved itself a force to be reckoned with on the Inter-Services powerlifting platform."

Showcasing the best talent from across the Armed Forces, the championships saw the male aviators produce consistency and depth throughout, accumulating enough points to claim the men's title, with the Army securing second and Royal Navy third.

The women's team were equally competitive, with the Army taking the overall title after a strong collective performance. The RAF women delivered an impressive campaign to finish runners-up, while the Royal Navy placed third.

Individual performances produced some remarkable results from athletes across all three Services, with the RAF securing second and third in the men's full power – Cpls Alex Ayres and Kev Briggs behind the Army's L/Cpl Godfrey Amoo, with a one-two in the women's event for Cpl Fiona MacGregor and AS1 Jade Harper.

All top three spots went to the RAF in the men's squat, courtesy of Flt Lt Sam Burgess, AS1 Jack Hardy and AS1 Oliver Croft – first to third respectively. While Cpl Rachel Larson was runner-up and AS1 Jenna Allen third in the women's event.

Cpl Cameron Beckingham came second in the men's bench, with Flt Lt Rachael Davies joint third with Becky Caxman (Navy) in the women's category.



The men's deadlift saw L/Cpl Tom Beall (Army) win, with AS1(T) Duncan Colf taking second and a third-place spots for Cpl Will Strickland-Miller. Flt Lt Hannah Taylor was third in the women's event.

Nance added: "The team produced an exceptional display of strength, determination and teamwork at the championships. The event continues to highlight the benefits of Service sport, providing personnel with opportunities to develop resilience, discipline and camaraderie while competing at the highest level.

"The standard of lifting on display reflected the dedication and commitment shown by athletes throughout months of training and preparation.

"The team will look to build on this momentum and continue challenging for honours across all categories going forward."

Men's Team
Flt Lt Sam Burgess
Fg Off Luke Cook
FS Bill Dunn
Cpl Chris Nance
Cpl Kev Briggs
Cpl Alex Ayres
Cpl Cam Beckingham
Cpl William Strickland-Miller
AS1 Oliver Croft
AS1(T) Andrew Johnson
AS1 Duncan Colf
AS1 Jack Hardy

Women's Team
Flt Lt Rachael Davies
Flt Lt Hannah Taylor
Flt Lt Fei Du
Sgt Rachel Larson
Cpl Fiona MacGregor
AS1 Emily Cantley
AS1 Lauren Clark
AS1 Cathy Hanna
AS1 Jenna Allen
AS1 Georgia Callaway
AS1 Jade Harper
AS1 Lisa Shaw

LIVING WITH PAIN AFTER SERVICE?



If you served and are now living with pain, Help for Heroes can help.

We know pain can impact every part of daily life, disrupt your sleep and take a toll on your mental health.

Our clinical team, including nurses, occupational therapists and medical advisers, can work with you to understand your needs and explore practical support.

Get in touch with Help for Heroes today to find out more about how we can support you.

helpforheroes.org.uk/painawarenessmonth
0300 303 9888

ISSN 0035-8614 44
9 770035 861068

HELP for HEROES

R'n'R



Just Jeeves – and Wooster!

● See pages 4-5

Film reviews: page 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.

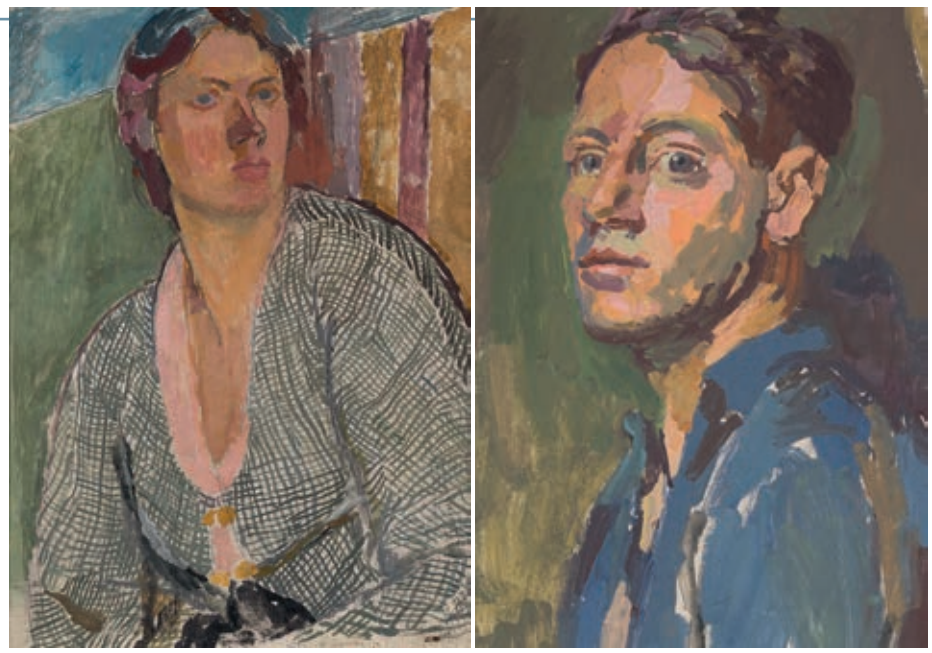
COMBAT STRESS
FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

Combat Stress, Company Registered in England & Wales No 00256353.
Charity Registration No 206002 (SC038828 in Scotland).

Galleries

Vanessa Bell & Duncan Grant: Inside Bloomsbury
Tate Britain, until April 11, 2027

The avant-garde Bloomsbury duo



SELF-PORTRAITS: Vanessa Bell c.1915 ©2026 Estate of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant c.1920
© 2026 Estate of Duncan Grant

THE EXTRAORDINARY five-decade creative partnership between Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, two of the most influential British artists of the 20th century, is celebrated in a new exhibition at Tate Britain.

Featuring more than 300 works, *Vanessa Bell & Duncan Grant: Inside Bloomsbury* is the first major exhibition to chart the duo's relationship and artistic trajectory – from early post-impressionist and abstract paintings to late naturalistic self-portraits, landscapes and still lifes.

A Tate Britain spokesperson said: "Associated with the trailblazing Bloomsbury Group, Bell and Grant's radical experimentation and unconventional approach to life reshaped art, literature and societal thought in Britain.

"Demonstrating how they broke down the boundaries between art and everyday life, the show brings together furniture, ceramics and textiles adorned with their modernist designs, as well as a once-in-a-lifetime restaging of the artists' studio, relocated to Tate Britain from their East Sussex home, Charleston."

The spokesperson explained that although first introduced in 1906, it was a letter from Bell to Grant in 1909, inviting him to tea and proposing they address one another by their first names, that marked the beginning of an enduring, artistically fulfilling partnership. Portraits and self-portraits spanning Bell and Grant's careers chart both the course of their relationship and the evolution of their approach to artmaking.

As core members of the Bloomsbury Group – a collective of artists, writers and intellectuals who discussed progressive ideas at 46 Gordon Square, London, the home of Bell and her siblings – both artists were at the forefront of avant-garde art in Britain.

"Viewing their works side-by-side, visitors encounter their experiments with bold colour, simplified shapes and rhythmic lines, influenced by Roger Fry's seminal exhibition 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists' in London in 1910. Their experimental works are exemplified by Bell's *Studland Beach* c.1912 and Grant's *Group at Asheham* 1913, which depict their circle of friends," the spokesperson added.

"Though their partnership was predominantly creative, Bell and Grant shared a home for over 50 years and a daughter, Angelica. Favouring experimental ways of living, Bell had an open marriage with art critic and fellow Bloomsbury Group member Clive Bell, while Grant predominantly had relationships with men.

"After World War I, Bell and Grant returned to more naturalistic subjects, inspired in part by their travels across Europe. With a newfound sense of colour and form, they painted scenes along the Seine in Paris, and landscapes across the South of France, Italy and Spain. By the 1920s, they had settled into a stable, non-traditional family unit at Charleston.

"The exhibition presents paintings conveying the serene life they experienced, marked by family, friends and art making, such as Bell's *Interior with the Artist's Daughter* c.1935-36."

● **The exhibition runs until April 11, 2027. Go to: tate.org.uk for more information.**

Film Review

The Match (12A)
Out now

Football and the Falklands



RIVALRY: Argentina's Diego Maradona and England's Peter Shilton shake hands before the infamous game

THE INFAMOUS '86 FIFA World Cup quarter-final between England and Argentina gets a forensic breakdown in this documentary.

The Match opens with a fleeting mention of Lord Byron's flag-planting mission to the Falklands, tracing the events that will lead from here to Maradona's Hand of God in Azteca Stadium, Mexico.

The history is brief but injected with gravitas. Archive video, newspaper headlines and a good deal of Margaret Thatcher run alongside match footage. We also watch some of those involved react to the playback, shot in black and white, their faces lit up by the projection.

Gary Lineker, John Barnes and Peter Shilton are among the England squad watching back the games and offering their points of view. But we also get the Argentine side: Ricardo Giusti, Julio Olarticoechea and Jorge Burruchaga. To the documentary's credit, it is very even-handed between the two sides, even when covering the history.

The relationship between the two countries is examined in relation to the war over the Falkland Islands. Although a concerted effort is made to focus on football over politics, this context is vital to understanding the longstanding rivalry. You can see this in match-ups from decades previous, though avoided in the World Cup of '82, which took place just months after the war had broken out.

The documentary looks at the details of the game that would lead to its iconic highlights, including the introduction of yellow and red cards and how they would play a part in this story (though a whole lot of drama would have been prevented with video replay!)

Of course, Diego Maradona's hand-goal is the moment. But the film expands its legacy, looking not just at his extraordinary goal a few minutes later, but also near misses – the so-called Nape of God – the pitch, and the importance of the kit, which provides a lovely final flourish to the story of England midfielder Steve Hodge.

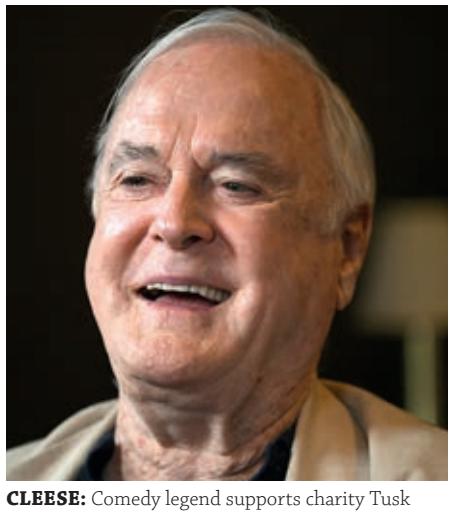
A playful and exciting re-examination of an infamous match, soaked in nostalgia for the game.

Four out of five roundels
Review by Sam Cooney

Theatre

The Holy Grail and John Cleese
Gillian Lynne Theatre, December 14

Cleese on *The Holy Grail*



CLEESE: Comedy legend supports charity Tusk

FOLLOWING A sold-out UK tour, comedian John Cleese hosts a screening and Q&A about the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* at London's Gillian Lynne Theatre on December 14 in aid of African conservation charity Tusk.

The night will begin with an introduction from Cleese – who, among other parts, played the famous limbless Black Night in the film. Audiences will then enjoy a screening of the iconic 90-minute movie, which is in the top 15 of the BBC's funniest films of all time.

Afterwards, there will be a 45-minute Q&A interview with Cleese conducted by Charlie Mayhew, the President and CEO of Tusk, and the audience will have the chance to ask their own questions.

During the discussion, Cleese will reflect on the making of the film, the legacy of Monty Python… and a few other choice memories.

Cleese is a patron of Tusk and his wife Jen an ambassador.

They said: "We are delighted to be helping a charity close to both of our hearts and which does such valuable conservation work in Africa, as well as celebrating more than 50 years of *Monty Python and The Holy Grail*."

John added: "I didn't expect the Holy Grail legacy to continue for quite so long, nor for me to either, but I am very glad that we have."

A spokesperson said: "As a patron and ambassador of Tusk, John Cleese is generously donating the proceeds from this show to support Tusk's extensive conservation work across Africa; protecting endangered species and wild landscapes, mitigating human-wildlife conflict, and promoting community development and education. Since Tusk was established in 1990, the charity has invested over £150m into effective conservation programmes to benefit both wildlife and people alike."

● **Go to: LWTheatres.co.uk for ticket details. All proceeds from the night will be donated to Tusk.**

Exhibitions

Agatha Christie: A World of Mystery
The British Library, London, until June 20, 2027



TRAVELLER: Agatha Christie under a tree on Honolulu beach after surfing, 1922
© The Christie Archive Trust

The making of the world's best-selling author

MARKING 50 years since her death, *Agatha Christie: A World of Mystery* at the British Library is a fascinating, immersive exhibition about the best-selling novelist of all time.

Staged in five themed sections, starting with The Country House, Childhood and Imagination and finishing with The Theatre, Audience and Evolution, covering the 1890s to the 1950s and up to the present day, the detailed show features more than 100 exhibits, including many personal objects belonging to Christie never displayed before.

And it contains plenty of interesting nuggets of information about her life and work, ranging from the charming story that family friends nicknamed the young Agatha 'the Pinkling' because of her love of pink evening dresses, to the revelation that she loved driving and said the only thing as exciting as getting her car – a Morris Cowley she bought with a £500 pay check from writing the novel *The Man in the Brown Suit* – was meeting the Queen.

Plus the fact that she made her detective Hercule Poirot a Belgian refugee because she was inspired by those she met in Torquay during World War I.

The exhibition, which runs until June 20, 2027, is a delight for Christie fans and includes items such as her 1937 Remington typewriter, the cover of the typescript of *House of Beauty*, her first short story written when she was a teenager, and the costume worn by Joan Hickson as sharp-eyed sleuth Miss Marple in the much-loved BBC series *Agatha Christie's Miss Marple*.

Also on display is Christie's handmade silk coat, made for her in the late 1920s, which she would have worn for glamorous events and travel.

A spokesperson said: "The exhibition examines not only the origins of iconic fictional creations like Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple but also goes behind the characters and stories to explore Christie's world and legacy.

"It takes visitors on a journey through Christie's upbringing, her interests and travels and how she adapted her novels for the stage, through five immersive sections filled with items from her personal life, including professional and personal correspondence with other writers, family photographs and notebooks and typescripts for novels.

"There are also clues and 'Easter eggs' dotted throughout the exhibition for Christie fans to sleuth out. Christie's impact on the wider crime fiction genre is explored through interviews within the exhibition with leading writers, broadcasters and notable fans."

● **Go to: events.bl.uk/exhibitions/agathachristie for more information.**

Theatre

Perfect Nonsense
UK tour

BORN TO SE

Scarborough's a natural as the unflap

HE'S A well-known face in film and on TV – from his starring role in *The Chelsea Detective* to playing long-suffering husband Pete Sutcliffe in *Gavin & Stacey*. Now Adrian Scarborough is back in the theatre – and going on tour for the first time in 30 years – with the riotous comedy *Perfect Nonsense*, based on the ever-popular Jeeves and Wooster stories by PG Wodehouse.

Scarborough will portray the superbly unflappable valet Jeeves with Tom Rosenthal – best known as Jonny Goodman in the hit Channel 4 sitcom *Friday Night Dinner* – as the gloriously hapless Bertie Wooster, for the tour which starts on January 29 at Aylesbury's Waterside Theatre.

But, Adrian revealed, he won't be playing just Jeeves – he'll also be taking on the roles of stern Sir Watkin Bassett and Sir Watkin's sentimental daughter Madeline.

The actor said: "I'm a Wodehouse fan, I'm very fond of his writing, it's still the one place I go to if I need cheering up, you can always guarantee you'll have a good laugh out loud.

"I thought this would be a fun way to go out on the road, I fell in love with the script and thought the play would be the most wonderful thing to do."

He added: "Tom plays only Bertie but I get to play other roles, so I get the best of every world, including playing Sir Watkin, Madeline and several others. Sometimes I have to play two different roles in one scene, which is very funny and silly. I love the characters, they are all so eccentric, they're just divine."

Written by Robert Goodale and David Goodale, *Perfect Nonsense* is adapted mainly from Wodehouse's classic 1938 novel *The Code of the Woosters*, in which Bertie's Aunt Dahlia blackmails him into stealing a valuable antique silver cow-creamer from the pompous Sir Watkin. Mayhem inevitably follows with the menacing Roderick Spode coveting the same cow-creamer while also pursuing the fanciful Madeline.

Scarborough described Jeeves as 'the perfect manservant.'

He explained: "He provides everything from vital bits of information to the perfect pot of tea. Jeeves has very particular opinions about things which are all correct and right and proper. He always knows a way out of things and he is completely unrufflable. He's the perfect person to have alongside you if you live a chaotic and mad existence, which Bertie does. Jeeves gets Bertie out of every conceivable scrape so brilliantly."

Adrian and Tom have worked together previously, on the ITV2 comedy series *Plebs*.

Adrian revealed: "We've never worked on stage together before and not been in each other's company for very long because *Plebs* was shot on a shoestring and we had to work incredibly quickly. I'm a big fan of *Friday Night Dinner*, Tom is completely wonderful in it."

Scarborough's upcoming role is the latest in a highly successful career that's included appearing in *Killing Eve, A Very English Scandal, Doctor Who, Miranda* and *Sanditon* on TV. His film credits include *1917, The King's Speech, Les Misérables, Gosford Park, Vera Drake, Notes on a Scandal* and *On Chesil Beach* and he's won two Olivier Awards for stage work.

Jeeves isn't the first time he's played a manservant. He said: "I was the butler in a remake of *Upstairs, Downstairs* for the BBC and a valet in *Gosford Park*. I was also in a wacky show for America called *Blunt Talk* with the late Sir Patrick Stewart, as



LOYAL JEEVES: Scarborough

Compiled by Executive Features Editor Tracey Allen

ERVE

ppable Jeeves



ADRIAN: Has had many TV and film roles

Patrick's character's trusty second in command.

"My character was absolutely wonderful to play, he was a complete alcoholic, quite mad and got up to lots of silly things. There was a whiff of Jeeves about him certainly because the writer Jonathan Ames was a huge Wodehouse fan.

"Patrick was a dream. He was very unassuming and an incredibly generous, easy going and fun person to have on set. I shall miss him terribly. I also did a radio play with him which was one of the happiest jobs I've ever done. That was also sort of how my part in *Blunt Talk* came about in a way because he put in a good word for me which was terribly generous and sweet of him, so I ended up going off on this mad adventure to Hollywood. It was great."

Over the years Jeeves and Wooster have been played by many actors – perhaps most notably Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie in the early 1990s ITV series.

Who is Adrian's favourite? He said: "I've always been very fond of the radio versions Richard Briers did, I was terribly fond of him and got to work with him on more than one occasion. He was very good on radio, a sort of lexicon of sound effects, he just expressed himself so brilliantly aurally."

He added: "I think the Fry and Laurie series really stands up, they are still very watchable – those two were born to play those roles.

"The Jeeves and Wooster stories are so harmless, they don't hurt anybody – they are quite wonderful."

Tracey Allen

● **The tour runs until May 8. Go to: perfectnonsenseplay.com for more details.**

Theatre

Scrooge! Cirque Extravaganza

UK show this December

What the Dickens? Circus Scrooge mix

FORGET THE traditional *A Christmas Carol*, *Scrooge! Cirque Extravaganza* takes Charles Dickens' much-loved festive classic and gives it a spectacular new twist, combining musical theatre, comedy and storytelling with the jaw-dropping skills of contemporary circus.

The show will be staged in four different venues around the country in December. Rather than simply adding a few circus acts to a traditional production, the cirque becomes an integral part of the storytelling, creating a fantastical world in which Scrooge's journey unfolds.

Fezziwig becomes a flamboyant circus owner, the supernatural world of the three Christmas ghosts is brought to life through amazing cirque artistry, and Scrooge's journey is punctuated by aerialists, acrobats, fire performers, juggling and other breathtaking acts.

The production features a 24-strong cast, led by experienced West End theatre performers including Richard Gauntlett as Ebenezer Scrooge, Jordan Conway as Charles Dickens and Nathan Paul as Mr Fezziwig, alongside 16 circus performers.

The international cirque ensemble includes aerialists, acrobats, fire performers, break-dancers and other specialist artists from countries including China, Morocco, Canada, Hungary and Belgium.

Jordan also takes on the role of Circus Director, bringing together the theatrical and circus elements of the production, with the dazzling cirque staging led by Harvey Donnelly. With more than 17 years in the industry, Harvey has performed in seven productions with Cirque du Soleil and worked internationally with Disney, alongside an extensive career spanning live entertainment, theatre and large-scale productions.

Playing Dickens, Conway acts as narrator and guide through this reimagining of the classic tale. His credits span theatre, film, television, comedy and animation, including the BAFTA-winning BBC series *So Awkward*.

At each performance, every ticket holder is automatically entered into a free £1,000 Lucky Seat prize draw, with one audience member selected during the show to take home the cash.

Scrooge! Cirque Extravaganza is at the Blackpool Opera House from December 10-13 and tours until December 28.

● **Go to: scroogecirque.com for a full list of tour dates.**

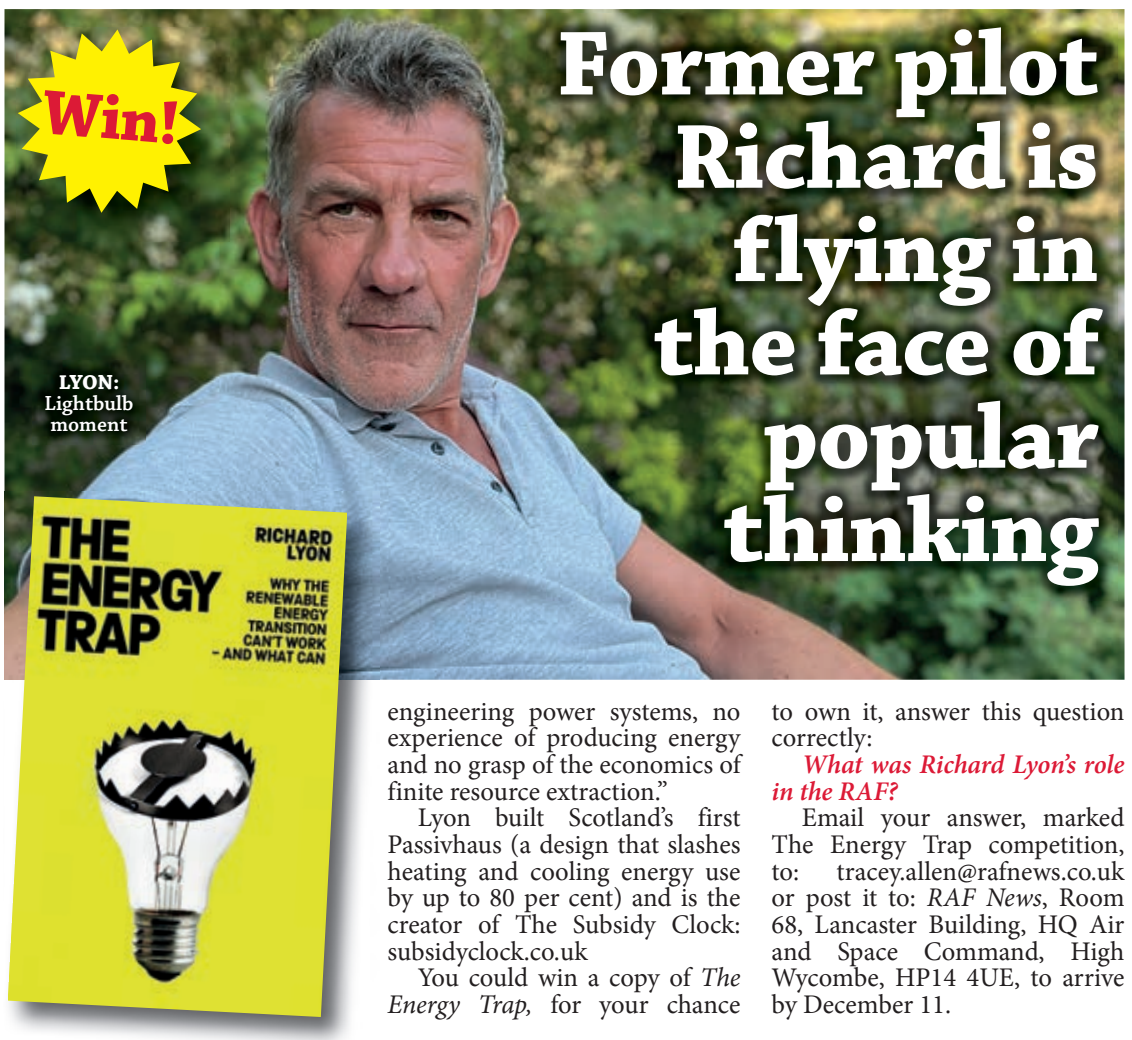


NEW TWIST: Scrooge with flying ghosts and, *inset*, a circus firebreather performer

Books

The Energy Trap

Forum/Swift Press



Former pilot Richard is flying in the face of popular thinking

FORMER RAF pilot Richard Lyon, now an electrical engineer, petroleum engineer and energy economist, is the author of *The Energy Trap* (Forum/Swift Press) that's been described as the best book on energy you will ever read.

In it, Lyon strips the energy debate back to physics and claims that fossil fuels are running out, the proposed replacements (wind, solar, renewables) can't do the job and the people in charge don't understand the science well enough to realise. He proposes that we stop wasting what remains on systems that can't work and start building the one that can.

He said: "The energy system that feeds, heats, and transports eight billion people is being dismantled – with confidence, with public money, and with almost no scrutiny – before anything remotely adequate exists to replace it. Many are being written by people with no training in physics, chemistry, engineering power systems, no experience of producing energy and no grasp of the economics of finite resource extraction."

Lyon built Scotland's first Passivhaus (a design that slashes heating and cooling energy use by up to 80 per cent) and is the creator of The Subsidy Clock: subsidyclock.co.uk

You could win a copy of *The Energy Trap,* for your chance to own it, answer this question correctly:

What was Richard Lyon's role in the RAF?

Email your answer, marked The Energy Trap competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: *RAF News*, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air and Space Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by December 11.

R'n'R

Your Announcements

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

Seeking

I would like to catch up with a friend from our posting in North Front Gibraltar 1961-63 – his name is Bill Chapman and we worked together in the Instruments Workshop. We met briefly after re-pat but then lost touch. Bill is the taller chap on the right in the photo, below. Please email Harry Burton: harryhburton00@gmail.com



SEEKING two mates from my days at St Athan in the early 70s, Wiggy McVey and Geordie Hepple, they were painters and finishers based at West Camp, St Athan. Please contact Charles Bell: chabell36@aol.co.uk

SEEKING contact with former aircrew and ground crew of 80 Sqn who served prior to the September 1969 disbandment.
I am looking to collect, document and preserve first-hand accounts, photos and flight logs from this era. Please email: andrew.nash.722@mod.gov.uk

SEEKING Con Roscrow/Roscoe (not 100 per cent sure of his surname). Con was a Col. engine fitter when I was posted to 56 Sqn at RAF Waterbeach in April 1956 as a young airman.
Over the next four years he mentored me until I became Junior Tech (engines) and was posted to Australia. During this time we became good friends and I have looked for him for many years, problem being he would be in his early 90s now as I'm 88. Please contact: peterrandell286@btinternet.com

Reunions

CALLING all former TG11 comms personnel, T/phonists, TPOs, Tels, Wop Specs, TCOs, TRCs, plus all comms trades associated with the 'Sparks' badge.
All are welcome to attend the Trade Group 11 Association reunion to be held April 9-11, 2027. This will be at the Eastwood Hall Hotel, Mansfield Road, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, NG16 3SS.
Please find further details at: tg11association. com where, if not already a member of the association, there is a facility to become one (just click on the register motif at the top of the website page).

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.

Associations

RAF Bawdsey Reunion Association: Have you ever served at RAF Bawdsey? If so, on June 5 2027 our Association will be holding our next Annual Reunion & Lunch at Bawdsey Manor, in this the 90th celebration year of RAF Bawdsey becoming the world's first operational Radar Station. For full details please contact Doreen Calver on: doreen.bawdseyreunion@btinternet.com or telephone her on: 0751 3301 723.

THE RAF Air Loadmaster Association (ALMA) marked its 25th anniversary in May and is looking to recruit new members – serving personnel as well as veterans. If interested in joining, please email Les Weston on: lesalma9001@gmail.com or call: 07531 523456.

DID you know that the Armourers have a virtual Branch that currently stands at 751 members both serving and retired? We are always on the lookout for more to join us. If you are already a RAFA member of your local branch you may add the Armourers as an additional branch at no extra cost. To join, visit the RAFA website and select Armourers as your branch or phone: 0800 018 2361. For more information email: plumbersrest@outlook.com

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

591 SU Association. 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 plus other upcoming events for 2026.

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

For sale

TWO piece (jacket and trousers) RAF Warrant Officer Mess Dress for sale, 40" chest, 36" waist, 29" inside leg. Hardly worn so in excellent condition. Price £50 plus P&P. If interested please contact me by email: johnandlizknight@outlook.com or call: 01278 671231.

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.**

Important Notice

The publishers of *RAF News* cannot accept responsibility for the quality, safe delivery or operation of any products advertised or mentioned in this publication.
Reasonable precautions are taken before advertisements are accepted but such acceptance does not imply any form of approval or recommendation. Advertisements (or other inserted material) are accepted subject to the approval of the publishers and their current terms and conditions. The publishers will accept an advertisement or other inserted material only on the condition that the advertiser warrants that such advertisement does not in any way contravene the provisions of the Trade Descriptions Act.
All copy is subject to the approval of the publishers, who reserve the right to refuse, amend, withdraw or otherwise deal with advertisements submitted to them at their absolute discretion and without explanation.
All advertisements must comply with the British Code of Advertising Practice. Mail order advertisers are required to state in advertisements their true surname or full company name, together with an address from which the business is managed.

Veterans charity receives National Lottery grant



SUPPORT: Vets today who are helped by the charity

THE STOLL Foundation, which provides supported housing to vulnerable veterans, has been awarded a substantial grant of more than £170,000 by the National Lottery Heritage Fund to run *Veterans' Voices: 100 Years of Housing Heroes*, a multi-year project exploring the charity's rich heritage, famous founder and heroic residents.

Running from 2026 – 2028, the project will uncover the charity's forgotten history by enabling The Stoll Foundation's residents and members of the local community to explore archives, learn heritage skills and take part in creative workshops.



Veterans' Voices will culminate in an exhibition in 2028 featuring never-seen-before archival material, a spokesperson said.

The Stoll Foundation (originally The War Seal Foundation) was founded in 1916 to provide accessible housing, support and medical treatment to soldiers returning from the frontline of World War One with traumatic and debilitating injuries.

The spokesperson said: "Today, the charity supports more than 300 residents across properties in West London and Aldershot, providing safe housing and well-being support."

It was founded by theatre impresario Sir Oswald Stoll *(inset, below)*, who founded the Royal Variety Performance and established some of the country's most famous theatres, including the London Coliseum.

"The project will shed light on the life and work of the entertainment legend, as well as the contribution of other original board members including the founders of Selfridges and Boots," the spokesperson added.

"The impetus for the *Veterans' Voices* project was the sale of our original building [Stoll Mansions] to our neighbours, Chelsea FC, which has enabled us to purchase modern, higher-quality accommodation for our veterans.

"We'll be exploring stories across the 110 years of our history, from our first residents – soldiers who suffered life-changing injuries in the First World War – to our current residents, who have served in a range of recent conflicts," said Heritage Project Officer Dr Olivia Baskerville.



ROYAL VISIT: Queen Mary of Teck and Princess Mary at Stoll Mansions, around 1919

Dambusters honoured with bomb donation

A LATE historian's family and the water company Severn Trent have honoured the RAF Dambusters by transporting a replica 'bouncing bomb' from Derwent Dam to 617 Sqn's official base at RAF Marham.

Members of the famous squadron recently took delivery at a special handover ceremony at the Norfolk station.

The life-sized replica had been part of a former Dambuster museum housed in the dam tower, but will go on display again at 617 Sqn's official HQ, said a Severn Trent spokesperson.

The museum was founded by the late local historian Vic Hallam in the 1980s but has been closed for around 10 years.

The original 'bouncing bomb' was invented by Sir Barnes Wallis, and codenamed 'UPKEEP' before the top secret raids on dams in Germany in May 1943.

The squadron's Flt Lt Ady Hargreaves took delivery of the replica and said: "On behalf of 617 Sqn, I'm delighted to accept the handover of the replica UPKEEP mine.



"Its presence will be a constant reminder to all who work or visit the squadron of the significant history of the Dams raids – of the men who conducted the raid in 1943 and the innovation that the raid signified."

The Dambusters were led by Wg Cdr Guy Gibson and practised low-flying raids in Lancaster bombers across the waters of Derwent in early 1943, ahead of the successful mission targeting dams in Germany.

Eight aircraft were damaged or shot down during Operation Chastise on May 16 and 17, with the loss of 53 lives, but the mission was a success with two dams breached. Wg Cdr Gibson was awarded the Victoria Cross for his leadership of the legendary Dambusters and for his personal bravery.

The replica bomb (*pictured left*) will go on permanent display at Marham.

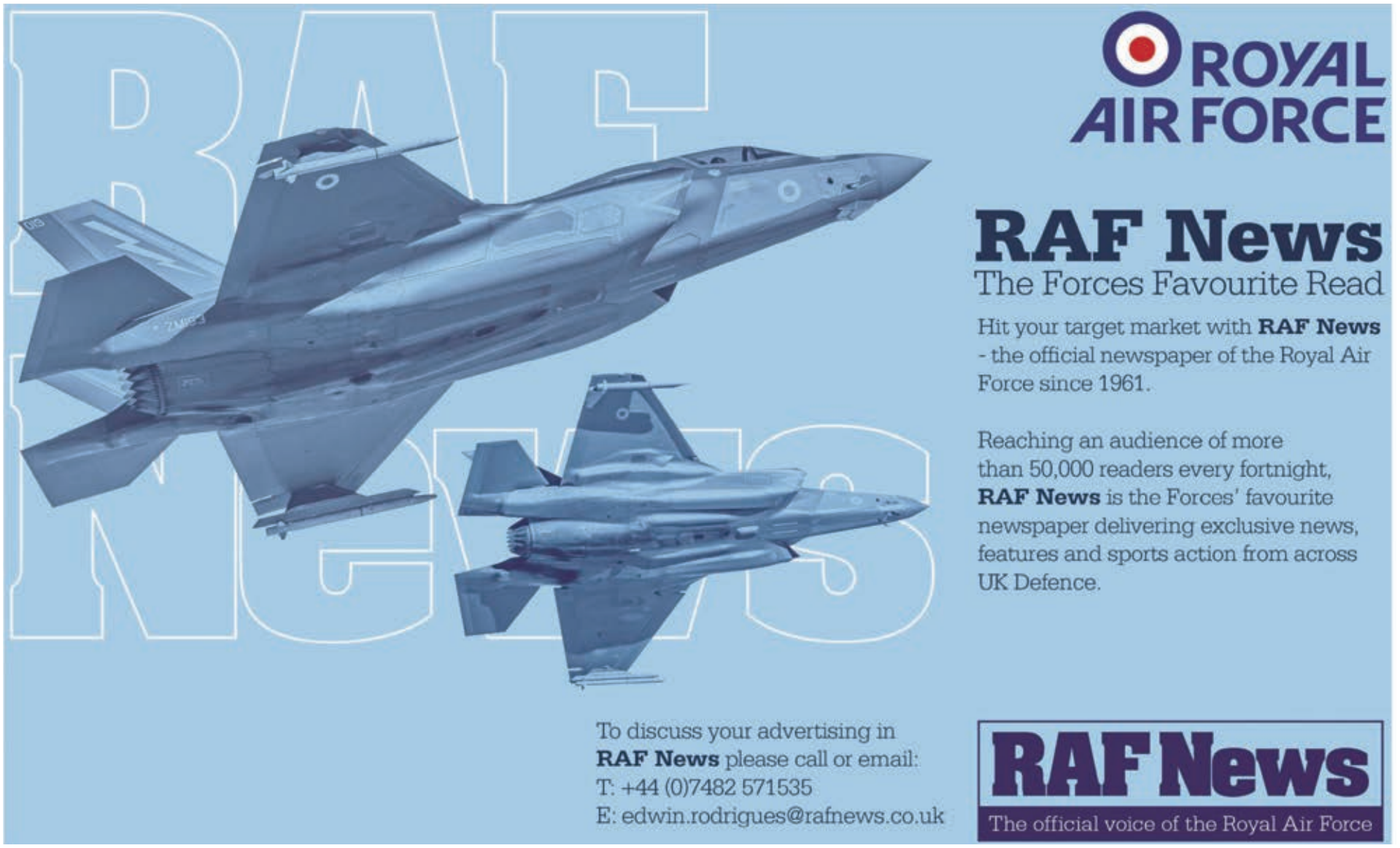
The spokesperson explained: "Derwent Dam Museum was opened to the public every Sunday and on Bank Holidays, but it was closed for security reasons in around 2016, soon after much-loved Vic had sadly passed away.

"His family has worked closely with Severn Trent and the RAF to generously support the donation and delivery of the replica from Derbyshire to Norfolk."

Severn Trent's George Cook, a former Bombardier in the 1st Royal Horse Artillery, said: "We are hugely proud of our links with the Dambusters at Severn Trent and this donation to RAF Marham is a wonderful way to honour that legacy."



LEGACY: The replica bomb is moved from Derwent Dam



R'n'R

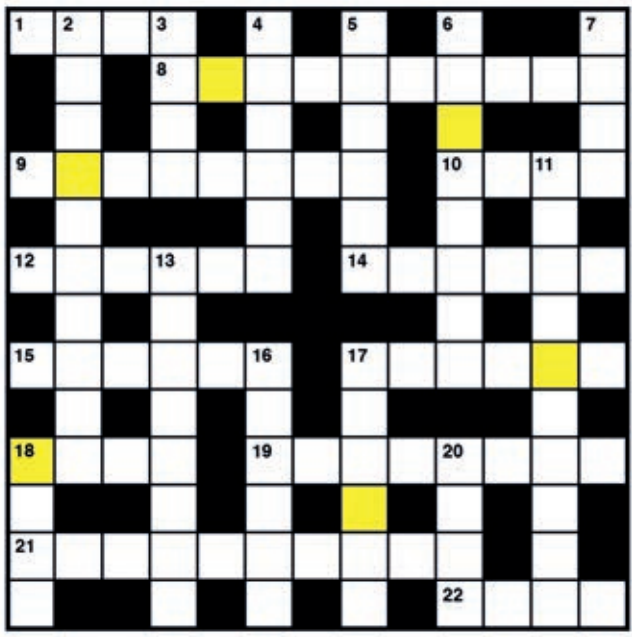
Prize Crossword
No. 422

Solve the crossword, then rearrange the 6 letters in yellow squares to find an RAF term.

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 December 11, 2026.

Across
1. Race around area of land **(4)**
8. Reconsider the endless fluid making a profit **(5,5)**
9. Want mags from RAF station **(2,6)**
10. Large spruce **(4)**
12. See 19 Across
14. Before our stomach has unwelcome growth **(6)**
15. Bowler in waves, French waves **(6)**
17. What celebration has left to some degree **(6)**
18. Iron gratitude for cheese **(4)**
19. And 12 Across. Scandalous flat involving RAF plane **(8,6)**
21. Wanting odd combination in RAF station **(10)**
22. Frank to duck swan **(4)**

Down
2. Maybe cannot ever offend against prohibition **(10)**
3. First eruption terrifies nation: active volcano **(4)**
4. Weapon used by corsair gunners **(6)**
5. Atmospheric RAF communications system? **(6)**
6. It guarantees boiling perfection **(3,5)**
7. Eastern navy loses a deadly sin **(4)**
11. Jekyll and Hyde bullied foe alarmingly **(6,4)**
13. Soldier to give orders in middle of storm **(8)**
16. Creature went on horseback outside Newport **(6)**
17. Proposes I get involved in assignments **(6)**
18. Curry favour with camel **(4)**
20. Florence's local flower **(4)**



Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

.....

RAF term: .....Crossword No. 422

Prize Crossword No. 421 solution
Across – **7.** Top Gun **8.** Hunter **10.** Tornado **11.** Kenya **12.** Oboe **13.** Smart **17.** Piano **18.** Wear **22.** Usual **23.** Express **24.** Oppose **25.** Lizard
Down - **1.** Station **2.** Sparrow **3.** Pumas **4.** Junkers **5.** Stink **6.** Dream **9.** Commander **14.** Kinloss **15.** Veteran **16.** Preside **19.** Tutor **20.** Puppy **21.** Spain
RAF term – Red Arrows

The winner of Crossword No. 420 is J Evans, High Wycombe.

Prize Su Doku
No. 432

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 December 11, 2026.
The winner of Su Doku No.430 is: A Coxon, Surrey.

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

Solution to Su Doku No. 431

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

Film Review
Fjord (15)
In cinemas now

Cultures clash in Fjord

A ROMANIAN family relocate to a small Norwegian town, where suspicions of abuse lead to their children being taken away and their beliefs put on trial, in Cristian Mungiu's divisive film inspired by a real case.

Mihai (a bald and stern-looking Sebastian Stan) and his Norwegian wife Lisbet (Renate Reinsve) have five children, including a baby, and are devout evangelical Christians. They are instantly plugged into a community where everyone is each other's neighbour – which means a lot of prying eyes for our band of outsiders.

Noticing bruises on one of the older children, and hearing about their routine of Bible study and discipline at home, the teachers act quickly to intervene. Before they have even heard the full extent of the accusations, all five children are taken into protective care and a lengthy investigation begins.

Whether the intervention is justified is another matter. Given what we see of the family, alongside the smug and superior attitudes of the uber-progressive locals and lawyers, there is certainly an element of prejudice at play, whether racial or religious. This is evident in how criticisms levelled at the family shift away from physical abuse towards their more traditional values around music and sexuality.



OUTSIDERS: Mihai, Lisbet and their children

Another aspect that is touched on is the relationship between eldest daughter Elia (Vanessa Ceba) and rebellious neighbour Noora (Henrikke Lund-Olsen), whose carefree attitude infects the film with a sense of violent possibility, before it eventually becomes a courtroom drama.

Through all of this, the film does feel weighted to one side, which makes it a whole lot less interesting than it might have been had it been more neutral. Or perhaps that is the intention, and what it reflects are the opinions and politics of the viewer.

Fjord is a frosty little film with an interesting idea, let down by uneven storytelling.

Three roundels out of five

Review by Sam Cooney

Music
The Wellermen
Homeward Bound

Wellermen original material

THE WELLERMEN'S rise has seen them amass more than 270 million streams and sell out tours in the UK and US and now the Transatlantic folk supergroup have announced the release of their new album, *Homeward Bound*, on March 12, 2027 – their first collection of self-written material.

A spokesperson said: "From *Captain Caroline*, a tale of a pirate ship's cat, to boldly taking a leap of faith to start your own life journey with *Mom I'm Going*, all the way to the album's closing title track, an evergreen capturing of homesickness – these sound like the kind of tunes that have been sung in pubs and bars from Bolton to Boston over centuries.

"That timelessness is infused by a rich tapestry of diverse influences spanning the band's varied backgrounds in the UK and North America, from cowboy ballads, bluegrass, and Appalachian folk songs to the songwriting of Nick Drake and Richard Thompson."

The Wellermen's Jonny Stewart said: "It's an album that is true to us as people and our tastes. We all contain multitudes but if you had to put us in a box, Luke Taylor is the country boy, Sam Pope is the sea shanty-loving pirate, Seb Payne is the mystic, Bobby Waters is the metal bass and I'm the Celt. We can see each other in each of the songs, but we've synthesised it all to be The Wellermen."



TIKTOK CREATIONS: Folk band The Wellermen

The album began after a gig in Ohio n 2025, when The Wellermen made the most of a week off from touring by hiring a cabin in the woods and deciding to write songs together.

The band's roots started in 2021 when the Scottish singer Nathan Evans recorded himself singing the sea shanty *Wellermen*. It became a viral hit on TikTok as people added their own versions, from which The Wellermen emerged.

As the sea shanty craze took off and interest in them intensified, the band recorded their self-titled debut album in their individual home studios without ever meeting in person. Their first performance together was on the back of a cruise ship and the reaction was instant, with a room full of people singing the shanties back to them.

Go to: thewellermen.com for more.