

The Forces' favourite paper

Going wild with SERE

See p17



Children just can't bear Corrie Claire

See R'nR page 5



ROYAL AIR FORCE

Friday, April 3, 2026
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RAF News



Targeting UAV terror



See pages 14-15

Netball Drama at the Inters



See page 23

Football Super SIX for women



See page 25

Alpine 20 in a row for skeleton



See page 27

Gunners' drone strike



RAF REGIMENT anti-drone specialists faced down a kamikaze attack on Allied personnel in the Gulf using the latest anti-UAV system Orcus. Gunners destroyed 14 lethal drones launched at a base in the Middle East in one night in the latest test for the UK's state-of-the-art radar and missile launcher, Rapid Sentry. Regt chief Gp Capt Samuel Wiseman said: "Our counter-drone teams continue to deliver assured, professional protection for UK and coalition personnel."

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BiteSize

“Polly brings deep experience of Service life and exceptional leadership,”

Defence Secretary John Healey as former RAF Air Cdre Polly Perkins named first-ever Armed Forces Commissioner

See page 9



“To be trusted with a leadership role in such an experienced squad means a great deal to me,”

New Red Roses vice-captain for the Six Nations Flt Lt Amy Cokayne

See page 24



“It’s the kind of thing you learn at 24, not 44,”

Barnum star Lee Mead on having to master the tightrope in middle age

See R’n’R pp4-5



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

Cranwell conference first

Tracey Allen

MORE THAN 130 RAF personnel attended the first Women in the Air Conference at Cranwell.

The two-day event brought together three pioneering female fighters – Helen Seymour, the RAF’s first woman Typhoon pilot; veteran fast jet pilot Mandy Hickson; and the Service’s longest-serving Chinook crew member, Liz McConaghy.

“Their experiences and messages resonated with the audience, inspiring and motivating everyone,” said organiser Flt Lt Jessie Reid.

She added: “Hearing about all the work being done to combat issues with suitable female equipment and clothing, and consequently overall operational effectiveness, resonated with the entire room and generated conversation that will continue beyond the conference.”

Gp Capt Emma Keith and Wg Cdr Daniela Nowalski gave a



PIONEER: Fast jet pilot Mandy Hickson chats to delegates at Cranwell conference. PHOTO: Gordy Elias

presentation on the opportunities offered by the Tedder Academy, including Alta – a mentoring platform for women in the

aviation and aerospace industry. Flt Lt Reid added: “The conference’s main aim was unquestionably achieved – to

allow an informal space for networking and, building relationships with other women in the same or different professions.”

This Week In History



1937 Jet age is born

ENGINEERING PIONEER Flt Lt Frank Whittle ground tests his first gas turbine engine at Cambridge University, where he is studying as a post-graduate.



1956 Iraq departure

VENOMS OPERATED by 6 Sqn leave RAF Habbaniya marking the end of the Service’s operational deployment in Iraq.



1991 Dakota bows out

THE LAST Dakota retires from the RAF after 27 years’ service. The aircraft rejoins the Service in 1993 with the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight.

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



34 SQN RAF REGT: Gunner sets up ORCUS Counter-Uncrewed Aerial Systems radar mast

Drone-busters

Gunners take out Middle East kamikaze UAVs

Simon Mander

RAF REGIMENT anti-drone specialists deployed to the Middle East faced down kamikaze drone attacks on an allied base, defence chiefs have revealed.

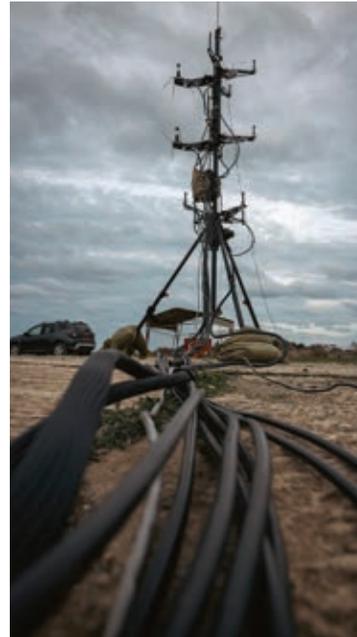
Gunners equipped with the Orcus defence system destroyed 14 one-way drones in one night after detecting and tracking targets closing in on US and UK military assets in the region.

The RAF's Uncrewed Aerial Systems Wing has destroyed more than 70 since the start of the conflict, the MOD said.

As Gunners continue to combat the lethal drone threat in the Middle East, Air Chiefs are stepping up anti-UAV training in the UK.

Recent trials have seen Lightweight Multi-role Missiles used against Banshee drones at Air Defence Range Manorbier in Pembrokeshire using the UK's latest anti-drone kit.

The radar unit works in tandem with a launcher that fires the same weapon Wildcats are armed with in Cyprus, although in naval use



they are called the Martlet.

RAF Regt Commandant General Air Cdre Paul Hamilton said: "Our layered system means we always have options: detect, disrupt, or defeat. Rapid Sentry gives us a credible kinetic safeguard when a drone cannot

be defeated electronically."

Specialist teams from the Counter-Uncrewed Aerial Systems Wing use electronic and kinetic systems to detect, track, identify and defeat hostile drones before they can endanger aircraft, infrastructure or personnel.

Operating from established UK positions, they work as part of a coalition effort alongside the US, British Army and wider RAF.

In recent weeks, Regt operators have engaged multiple drones directed towards coalition forces.

Gp Capt Samuel Wiseman said: "Our counter-drone teams continue to deliver assured, professional protection for UK and coalition personnel. Their consistent performance in demanding conditions reinforces our defensive posture and contributes directly to the wider coalition effort."

The RAF Regiment has maintained a long-term defensive presence in the Middle East, supporting UK and coalition air operations. Its ops will continue as required.

● Defeating the drones: see pages 14-15

£5.4bn Turk Typhoon deal for pilot training and spares

BRITAIN IS to service Turkish Typhoons under a £5.4 billion deal.

Under the contract, BAE Systems will deliver spares and support equipment, engineer and pilot training, electronic warfare capabilities, and technical support services for three years from entry into service of the aircraft.

BAE Systems Group Managing

Director Simon Barnes said: "We are proud to be delivering a trusted defence capability that deepens collaboration and reinforces shared security commitments."

"Türkiye's acquisition of Typhoon strengthens this partnership and enhances the country's advanced combat air capabilities."

This follows the agreement

in October between the UK and Turkish governments for the purchase of 20 Typhoons.

Manufacturing is already underway with the first aircraft scheduled to be delivered in 2030.

Under separate agreements the RAF will train 10 Turkish instructor pilots and 100 maintenance trainers, ensuring the Turkish Air Force can independently deliver training and support to future pilots and ground crew.

More than a third of every Typhoon aircraft is built in the UK and final assembly of Turkish jets will take place at Warton in Lancashire.

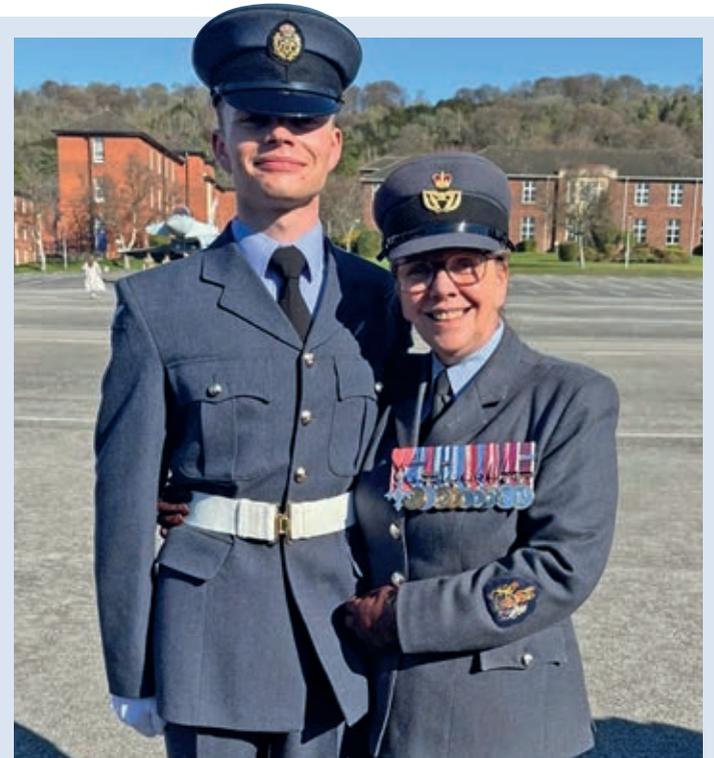
The £5.4bn deal covers airframe components, final assembly and weapons

integration for 20 Turkish Typhoons and an arms package provided by MBDA.

Typhoon is regarded as one of the UK's most successful defence export programmes, contributing £1.4bn in exports annually.



TYPHOON: Export high-flyer for Britain



ONE IN, ONE OUT: Corbyn begins his RAF career as mum Michelle ends hers

WO keeps it in the family

WARRANT OFFICER Michelle Rees-Martin took a bow after 35 years service with the RAF – as her son Corbyn hit the Halton parade ground after completing his initial training.

Michelle got the VIP treatment at the Bucks station as Corbyn marked the start of his Air Force career.

She said: "It was a distinct honour to accompany the inspecting officer and witness my son's successful completion of recruit training, commencing his RAF career as I conclude mine."

"I am immensely proud of his professionalism and dedication, and of keeping the RAF in the family."



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**RAF veteran
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BBMF landmark deal

Simon Mander

ICONIC WARTIME fighters from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight will be kept flying until 2035 under a new £32 million deal.

Spitfire and Hurricane aircraft will be maintained by Peterborough-based Musketeer Solutions under an agreement with Defence Equipment and Support.

The contract covers

maintenance, repair and overhaul, spares availability, and design and production services for five Spitfires and two Hurricanes.

Based at RAF Coningsby, the BBMF maintains a fleet of WWII aircraft which headline at airshows and commemorative events across the UK each year.

BBMF Chief Engineer Gp Capt Andy March said: "By consolidating what was a complex web of legacy contracts into a

single, integrated arrangement, we are giving the BBMF the stable and sustainable foundation it needs to continue honouring those who served and to inspire the next generation of aviators.

"This is a strong investment in UK aerospace capability, bringing together some of the best specialist engineering expertise in the country."

The deal is the largest single contract ever placed by the BBMF Project Team.



Bulletin



Jaime's the wheel deal

Staff Reporter

WADDINGTON SPACE ace Sgt Jaime Green is hoping to clean up for charity when he takes part in the City of Lincoln 10k fun run – with a wheelie bin strapped to his back.

The 38-year-old, who joined up when he was just 16, will be raising funds for the RAF Benevolent Fund, which he says has supported him and his family during his 22 years of service.

He said: "I'm in my final year of serving and know how much support the RAF Benevolent Fund provides, not only to those serving but also veterans, which means a lot to me and is something I think everyone needs."

He added: "My children were helped by the Fund with activities in the community when we lived at Scampton."

"They funded a play park, and I've also seen friends supported through really tough times. I'm proud of what the Fund has done to support our community."

Fundraising regular Jaime has so far netted more than £11,000 for good causes.

● Go to: [justgiving.com/page/ive-bin-running](https://www.justgiving.com/page/ive-bin-running)



Iceland mission tests P-8 crews

Simon Mander
Keflavik Air Base

UK POSEIDON subhunters returned to Iceland for flying training.

Operating from Keflavik Air Base, crews from 42 (Torpedo Bomber) Sqn and two P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft will conduct training sorties that place student crews and instructors in an unfamiliar operational environment.

The North Atlantic remains one of the most strategically

significant maritime regions in the world.

Continually busy with military, commercial and trans-Atlantic traffic, it is a vital artery for UK and Nato security, air chiefs said.

As the gateway to the High North, Iceland is a central location for monitoring undersea activity and maintaining awareness of potential threats.

RAF Air and Space Commander AM Allan Marshall said: "Our return to Iceland provides an excellent training

opportunity and demonstrates the UK's commitment to safeguarding the North Atlantic.

"Operating from Keflavik gives our Poseidon crews the realism and challenge needed to maintain the highest levels of readiness."

"This training strengthens our ability to defend the UK's maritime approaches and reinforces the partnership we share with Iceland and our Nato allies."

"Together, we ensure that this strategically vital region remains

secure, stable and well-defended."

This deployment continues decades of close cooperation between the RAF and the Icelandic Coast Guard.

Operating abroad forms a key part of the Service's Agile Combat Employment approach to disperse, deploy and operate effectively from across Europe.

By completing their training in Iceland, Lossiemouth-based Poseidon crews ensure the UK can continue to employ maritime patrol aircraft from the base whenever required.

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Epsom Playhouse

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Terry O'Toole Theatre, Lincoln

2026

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Clean sweep for iconic warbirds

Simon Mander

DUSTBUSTERS WITH a head for heights are carrying out the annual suspended aircraft spring clean at the RAF Museum Midlands.

Hanging up to 100ft in the air, eight aircraft are given a light dusting as part of the annual inspection.

Other aircraft being spruced up include a Canberra, Meteor, Sabre, Hunter, Lightning, Dakota, and Javelin within the Museum's National Cold War Exhibition.

RAF Museum Midlands Curator Tom Hopkins said: "Each aircraft in our collection has its own story and maintaining them properly is essential to ensuring those can continue to be shared with future generations.

"The suspended displays are some of the most striking in the Museum, but they also require a very specialised approach to care.

"It's fantastic to collaborate with a team that can safely access these aircraft and conduct such work with precision, helping us keep them in excellent condition for everyone who visits."

Strapped into harnesses the cleaners climb the rafters of the building and abseil down to access the aircraft.

No cleaning solutions are used on the aircraft, and large soft fibre mops are deployed to preserve



the paintwork and decals on the museum's iconic collection of warbirds.

The team are also conducting safety inspections of the suspension cables supporting the aircraft in their flying display positions.

As part of this year's spring clean, some of the Museum's older aircraft in other display hangars have also been spruced up including a WWII Wellington bomber.

Additionally, other harder to reach aircraft including the

Lincoln, TSR2, JU88, Bristol M.1c, and Hart, have all been dusted down to keep them looking their best.

During the clean the Museum will remain open to visitors who can see the high-flying team in action.



CYPRUS RULING: Sir Keir Starmer

PM rules out Cyprus strikes

PRIME MINISTER Sir Keir Starmer says American aircraft will not be able to use Cyprus' airbase to conduct strikes on Iran.

The assurance came during a telephone conversation with the island's President Nikos Christodoulides.

Sir Keir reiterated that Akrotiri would not be involved in the UK's continuation of its agreement with the US to use UK bases in collective self-defence of the region, including for the degrading of Iranian missile capabilities.

Discussing the economic impact of the ongoing conflict, the leaders agreed that deescalation in the region was the priority.

C-17 lifts island defences



A STORMER air defence battery from Royal Artillery is unloaded from a C-17, by RAF movers at a British base in Cyprus.

Armed with the Starstreak High Velocity Missile it can counter threats from very high performance, low-flying aircraft and fast 'pop up' helicopter attacks.

The rocket, which travels at more than three times the speed of sound, uses a system of three

dart-like projectiles, allowing multiple hits on the target.

It can be fired from the shoulder, from a lightweight multiple launcher or from the Stormer armoured vehicle.

Its rapid response capability make it a crucial component in defending against modern drone warfare and other airborne threats.



Badge of honour

18 SQN crews took to the skies alongside a French Air Force's 3/67 Parisis Sqn ES355 Fennec as part of the Anglo-French Pegasus Exchange training drill.

The FAF unit operates across the world supporting Special Forces and counter terrorism operations, and shares the Chinook Sqn's Pegasus emblem.



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Dunc's Brize surprise



Simon Mander

HERCULES VETERAN Flt Lt Dunc Wright made his final RAF flight in an A400M after a 36-year career.

As he landed at Brize Norton for the last time, station fire crews marked his retirement in traditional style with a blast from the water canon.

Dunc qualified on 15 aircraft

types, including the legendary C-130J which went out of service in 2023.

He completed three tours and taught on the King Air and Dominie at Cranwell.

As the Central Flying School Examiner, he was responsible for instructional standards of multi-engine Qualified Flying Instructors across all three Services.

Since 2014, Flt Lt Wright has

been the multi-engine standards evaluation pilot for the Air and Space Warfare Centre, where he standardised the flying on both the Empire Test Pilots' School and 206 Test and Evaluation Squadron. In 2019, he became an Air Mobility evaluator pilot and QFI for 206 Sqn, on C-130J and A400M.

His career was marked by a touchdown at Brize.

RETIREMENT: Flt Lt Wright is greeted by Brize pals after making his final flight on board an Atlas A400M



Cold play



NORTHERN FLIGHTS: Atlas A400M prepares for a sortie in the Arctic circle. Inset above, cargo drop drill

Simon Mander

PILOTS ARE conducting low-level tactical flying training in the High North ahead of Exercise Cold Response.

Training in temperatures as low as -21°C, RAF personnel hone their situational awareness, critical thinking and problem-solving and maintain their operational readiness.

A400M exchange pilot US

Marine Corps Captain Jordan Schultz said: "Flying at a low level gives you the tactical advantage. It's a little more difficult than just flying straight and level at that altitude.

"All your reflexes and reaction times need to operate quicker, you need more planning and a lot more safety measures need to be in place."

The exercise also gave aircrew a chance to practise their low-

level drop procedures, delivering equipment without landing.

Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte recently visited Norway, where he met Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre before travelling north to Bardufoss Air Base and the Setermoen training area, to observe the exercise.

Speaking in Setermoen, Mr Rutte described Norway as "a key player" for the security of the alliance's northern flank.

Forces watchdog chief appointed

Simon Mander

A FORMER RAF officer has been chosen as the first-ever Armed Forces Commissioner.

Defence Secretary John Healey picked ex-Air Cdre Polly Perkins as the new independent champion and direct point of contact for personnel and their families.

She will have powers to investigate welfare issues and raise concerns that impact Service life, including equipment, housing and unacceptable behaviours.

Mr Healey said: "With demands on defence rising, from the conflict in the Middle East to growing Russian aggression, we are asking more of our military, and it is right that we continue to support them and their families.

"This new Commissioner role has powers to challenge Ministers and military leaders and to report directly to Parliament.

"Polly brings deep experience of Service life and exceptional leadership as this country's first-ever Armed Forces Commissioner."

Air Cdre Perkins served for

over 30 years, specialising in logistics and holding senior leadership roles including Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff, British Forces Cyprus.

She deployed on operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan and was awarded a CBE for her service.

The move to appoint a commissioner has been inspired and modelled on the Commissioner for the Armed Forces in Germany.

The Interim Commissioner will conduct all the job's functions until a permanent appointment is made in the coming months through open competition.

The role will take responsibility for the existing Service Complaints Ombudsman and will ensure there is no break in that service, the MOD said.

NEW POST: Commissioner Air Cdre Polly Perkins



News



EASTERN PROMISE: 3 Sqn Typhoons supporting Nato Black Sea air policing mission from Borcea Air Base in Romania

UK joins Romania beat

TYPHOONS ARE to deploy to Romania on their latest Nato air policing mission.

Jets from 3 (Fighter) Sqn will operate for four months from Borcea Air Base, carrying out Quick Reaction Alert to defend the alliance's eastern flank.

Personnel from 121 Expeditionary Air Wing take over from the outgoing German Eurofighter contingent.

3(F) Sqn's Wg Cdr Sonny

Roe said: "Working alongside our Romanian partners, this mission shows the RAF's ability to rapidly project credible air power in support of collective defence whenever and wherever required."

For more than 60 years, Nato Air Policing has protected allied airspace 24/7.

121 EAW's mission also supports Nato's Agile Combat Employment principles, proving

the RAF's ability to disperse, adapt and operate from varied locations at short notice.

RAF personnel will work with Romanian and deployed multinational personnel through the Combined Air Operations Centre Torrejon in Madrid.

Nato Air Policing remains a visible symbol of allied solidarity, ensuring the ongoing safety and security of the Euro-Atlantic and Black Sea regions.

CAS eyes India pact

Simon Mander

BRITAIN'S AIR chief is in India to boost military ties between the two countries.

Chief of the Air Staff ACM Sir Harv Smyth paid homage to the fallen soldiers at the National War Memorial and reviewed the Guard of Honour by the Indian Air Force at the start of his three-day visit.

He met India's ACM Amar Preet Singh to discuss evolving security threats and ways to further strengthen the partnership between the two air forces.

The two air chiefs will travel to Air Force Station Gwalior to understand IAF's operational procedures and best practices in countering new-age aerial threats.

ACM Smyth said: "The planned arrival this September of Indian Air Force Qualified Flying Instructors at Valley - joining the IAF instructor already contributing at Cranwell - illustrates the depth of trust, shared professionalism and mutual commitment that underpin our relationship."

"I look forward to building on this momentum and continuing to deepen the cooperation between our air forces in the years ahead."

As the fourth and most senior flag-rank visitor from the UK to India in 2026, CAS's visit signals the strategic importance both nations place on developing a strong defence partnership.

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



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Box clever for Easter

FAMILIES CAN enjoy an egg-citing Easter break at the RAF Museum Midlands with a Great Egg Hunt, interactive animal encounters and a creative bird box workshop.

Nature lovers will discover the role animals have played in the RAF and get up close to owls, snakes, lizards and a curious kinkajou and build their own colourful bird boxes to support local wildlife.

Museum spokesman Mike Groves said: "Easter is such a special time for families to come together, and we're thrilled to offer activities that are fun, interactive and educational."

● Visitors should pre-book at rafmuseum.org/midlands.

It's in the can for Mawgan team



Staff Reporter

THE EAT was on for St Mawgan fundraisers as they hit the road for a supermarket sweep to support local food banks.

The team donned fancy dress as they clocked up more than 70 miles from Truro on the Cornish coast to St Mawgan during their three-day charity stunt.

The event raised more than £3,000 to add to 700kg of groceries donated to Newquay Foodbank.

Station Commander, Wg Cdr Helen Simpson said: "The team's spirit and resilience have been remarkable."

"Walking 70 miles is no small task, but doing it to support those facing hardship shows the strength of character of the whole force we're privileged to have here at St Mawgan."



Cobra allies strike



COMBAT TRAINING: Polish F-16 joins German Eurofighters at RAF Waddington for Exercise Cobra Warrior
PHOTO: AS1 WILLIAM MOULTON

Simon Mander

POLISH F-16 Fighting Falcons and German Eurofighters have landed at a Lincolnshire station for Britain's toughest air training.

Allied crews are conducting combat drills together as part of Exercise Cobra Warrior, which brings together Nato air and ground units in one of Europe's most advanced and demanding

warfighting environments.

Luftwaffe Detachment Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Marcus said: "The past days have been characterised by intensive preparations and coordination with our international partners. Our shared Nato mindset unites us and strengthens the alliance."

Hosted at RAF Waddington, Cobra Warrior challenges participating forces to refine

joint mission planning, tactical integration, and decision-making within Composite Air Operations.

Senior officer in charge of exercise planning, Gp Capt Ray Morley, said: "Cobra Warrior is a year-round effort that brings together expertise from across the RAF and Nato."

"Designing a scenario of this scale requires close coordination and an extraordinary team effort.

"Seeing our allies arrive in the UK is a powerful reminder of why this exercise matters. It strengthens our readiness, deepens our partnerships, and ensures we remain prepared to meet the challenges of tomorrow."

The exercise includes integrated air-land training with the RAF Regiment honing close air support procedures, ground threat replication and combined planning.

Bulletin



Move on up

RELOCATING RAF families will be helped to move by a new £32,000 fund.

The RAF Association has teamed up with universities in Exeter and Nottingham to run the Serve Connect Programme so Service families can maintain supportive relationships.

Lecturer in Social & Organisational Psychology Dr Stefan Schilling said: "Relocation is one of the most disruptive experiences serving families face, and such transitions have frequently been found to worsen mental health."

"Unfortunately, until now there has been no targeted, evidence-based support to help them rebuild the social connections and sense of identity that frequent moves erode."

"This grant allows us to address that gap directly, and so we are delighted to be working with the RAF Association to support demanding transitions."

Defeating the drones

Drone Warfare is the modern Blitzkrieg, fortunately new RAF Regiment Commandant General, Air Cdre Paul Hamilton, knows how to beat them



VIGILANT: Gunners monitoring ORCUS and radar systems

A CROSS THE world from Ukraine to the Middle East drone attacks are changing the face of modern warfare.

Once considered niche tools used primarily for reconnaissance, uncrewed aerial systems are now relatively cheap, widely available and increasingly capable, posing a growing threat to military installations, aircraft and personnel.

And although an F-35 hit the headlines globally when it conducted the aircraft's first UK combat shoot down of two drones over Jordan, such action is very much a last resort.

Supported by Typhoons, the 617 Dambusters Sqn jet fired two Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missiles (ASRAAM) within 20 minutes to take out the one-way 'Kamikaze' or 'Shahed-style' intruders as they flew low over the desert. And while

Typhoons and Lightnings patrol Qatar, Cyprus, UAE, Jordan and Bahrain, the main defence against UAVs is far less glamorous.

The RAF Regiment is drawing on a combination of advanced sensors, electronic warfare and precision Air Defence systems to defeat them.

"Drone activity is now a routine feature of the operating environment. Our Force Protection approach has had to evolve rapidly, and the RAF Regiment is leading that adaptation with modern, scalable counter-UAS capability," said Air Cdre Paul Hamilton.

Akrotiri

"At the centre of this capability is a suite of technologies designed to detect, disrupt and, if necessary, defeat hostile uncrewed aircraft before they can threaten critical infrastructure."

And as the recent attack by a drone on Akrotiri in Cyprus and subsequent evacuation of the base showed, being forewarned of a strike is to be forearmed.

Air Cdre Hamilton said: "Early detection is



LAST RESORT: When other measures aren't practical, F-35 can shoot down drones, as one did over Jordan (strike inset above)



AIR DEFENCE: RAF Regiment anti-UAS equipment



DRONE-BUSTERS: Members of 34 Squadron RAF Regiment set up Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems

PHOTO: CPL ADAM FLETCHER (RAF)

critical in countering drone activity. Systems such as ORCUS, the RAF's integrated counter-uncrewed aerial system, enable operators to detect, track, identify and defeat UAS operating near protected locations."

Using radars and radio frequency detection sensors, the system can detect and identify the specific signals emitted by UAS and their controllers.

Further identification and tracking are conducted using ORCUS' ultra long-range thermal imaging camera, further adding to an overall picture of activity within the airspace surrounding an air base.

By identifying potential threats early, RAF Regiment teams can decide on the most appropriate response before a drone reaches sensitive areas.

Air Cdre Hamilton said: "Early detection of hostile UAS is vital; we have witnessed the destruction they have caused in Ukraine. Systems like ORCUS give our operators the ability to see, understand and mitigate the threat much earlier, enabling timely and proportionate decisions."

Electronic warfare plays a vital role in modern counter-drone defence. Technologies such as NINJA allow operators to interfere with or take over control of the communications links that control many types of UAS.

By disrupting or overriding these signals, operators can prevent UAS from completing their mission. In some cases, they may even be able to redirect a drone or force it to land safely, allowing it to be recovered and analysed.

Intelligence

This approach provides an effective way of neutralising drone threats without the need to physically and expensively destroy them, while also offering opportunities to gather intelligence about how the drone was operated and where it may have originated.

Air defence systems provide a final layer of protection. Together, these



TYPHOON: Patrols Middle East and Cyprus

capabilities form a layered defence that enables RAF Regiment units to protect air operations against a wide range of threats.

Air Cdre Hamilton said: "Our layered system means we always have options: detect, disrupt or defeat. Rapid Sentry gives us a credible kinetic safeguard when a drone cannot be defeated electronically."

Countering drone threats is not a challenge faced by the RAF alone. Across NATO and partner nations, Air Forces and ground units are developing similar capabilities to protect airbases and deployed operations.

The RAF Regiment regularly operates alongside allied forces, integrating its counter-drone systems with those of partner nations during exercises and operations. This interoperability is essential to ensuring coalition forces can share information, coordinate responses and maintain a common picture of the airspace around key installations.

By combining capabilities across nations, allied forces can build a more resilient defence against drone threats, ensuring that air operations can continue safely, even in contested environments.

"Modern air defence is a team effort. The RAF Regiment, and RAF specialists, trains, and fights alongside our Joint Partners and allies every day, ensuring that whatever the threat, we have a shared understanding and a unified response," said Air Cdre Hamilton.

At a recent Royal United Services Institute speech, the Chief of the Air Staff ACM Harv Smyth brought the point home when he said the Akrotiri attack marked a new era of RAF bases coming under attack.

Air power

The drone hit a hangar and there were no casualties, but the event showed how easy it was to lose control of the air.

Airbases remain critical hubs for air operations, enabling aircraft to deploy rapidly in support of national and allied objectives. Protecting these locations is therefore essential to maintaining the RAF's ability to project air power.

Specialist teams from the Regiment's No.2 Counter Uncrewed Aerial Systems Wing are currently working alongside the US, Army and wider RAF across the Middle East to engage multiple drones directed against coalition forces.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She was airlifted to a UK mental health facility.

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

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

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

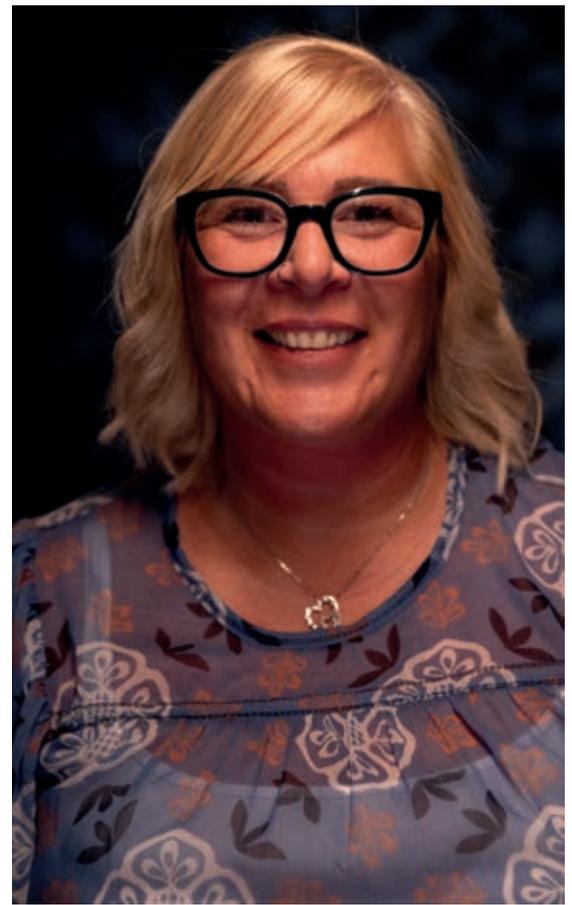
For years, Caroline struggled, but then she found hope in an unexpected way: an invitation to a Help for Heroes Christmas party.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Her message to other veterans still fighting for peace?

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

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

THE WILD BUNCH

Cranwell specialists teaching aircrew how to survive being downed in hostile territory



ON THE RUN: Trainee learns how to evade capture



IN AT THE DEEP END: BBMF personnel are taught maritime survival in the Cranwell pool (also below)
PHOTOS: GORDON ELIAS



JON BLOWER
Lancaster engineer/technician

“Thankfully, I have not been in a situation where I needed maritime survival training but we know that in real life it can happen. The training has been great – I’m just glad it’s in the pool here at Cranwell and not in the actual sea.”



CONNOR MASON
Dakota engineer/technician

“Like most people, I think it will never happen to me. We obviously do airshow displays over the sea every year, so having this training makes sense.”



CHF TECH SHELLEY MORRIS

“Survival training is always something that you want to have stored away at the back of your head. It was tough but I really enjoyed it. It’s great to put yourself in that situation to see if you can cope with it and pull through.”

“THE MOST important thing is acceptance. You need to accept what has happened and move on.”

Forces survival expert and Army veteran Dave Budgen doesn’t pull his punches. His opening shot might sound like the well-meaning advice of a lifestyle coach but he’s deadly serious.

He’s part of the Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Extraction team at RAF Cranwell’s Robson Academy which delivers a literal crash course to all aircrew graduates.

“In the military we all know that things don’t always go according to plan. When you think you’re screwed you need real experiences to fall back on. Accept what has happened to you and start to work the problem,” Dave said.

“We are here to instil a

culture in our graduates. There is always a way. No matter how bad things may seem somewhere out there, there is an answer.”

Mandated for all RAF, Navy and Army aircrew, the SERE survival course throws Forces rookies into the nightmare scenario of being downed in hostile territory.

It is a five-day test of skill, determination, initiative and courage that is designed to galvanise the young military mindset and give graduates the skills they need to battle the elements, avoid the enemy and find their way home.

North Yorkshire

Thrown into the wilds of a North Yorkshire training range with a minimum of kit, they learn how to administer basic first aid, build a shelter, scavenge for food that is decidedly off-menu, purify and store water, navigate without maps or compass, and keep themselves alive until help arrives.

It’s a military rite of passage that will stay with them for the rest of their career.

SERE training



chief Mark Fairhead added: “What we teach are the practical principles and psychology of survival.”

“Success is about doing the basic stuff well. And doing it well when you are injured, tired, cold, wet and hungry. And when no one is watching.”

RAF News joined the SERE

team at their Cranwell base as they gave the engineering team from Coningsby’s Battle of Britain Memorial Flight an introduction to maritime survival.

Following a briefing on how to improve the chances of surviving in the sea after ditching, they hit the pool for a life raft drill.

Former Army Infantry and Afghanistan veteran Dave added: “Survival is a state of mind – but it’s a state you have to put yourself in.”

“You need to realise that things are bad and that you need to make them better. That applies to surviving in the sea just as it does on land.

“You have to ask yourself what you can do to improve your chances. The more skills you have the better the chances that you will make it through.”

To hammer home the importance of the skills aircrew learn in the wild, the Cranwell team instigated the Wall of Gallantry – a canvas for some of the Armed Forces’ living legends to sign before speaking to the class about how they faced down adversity.

To qualify, guests have to reflect the SERE ‘Unconquered Spirit’ motto; have crashed, ejected, been held captive, returned to flight after injury, or succeeded in the Invictus Games.



DAVE BUDGEN

MARK FAIRHEAD



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RAF News
The official voice of the Royal Air Force

by Tracey Allen

History off the Hanger **Feature**

The Corporal and his young German bride

WHEN YOUNG RAF Corporal Dennis Allen was sent to Germany as part of the Allied Occupation following World War II he had no idea it would change his life.

Based at Hohenlimburg near Hagen, in North Rhine-Westphalia, Dennis met a pretty receptionist at a hotel there that British Servicemen often visited for a post-work drink.

Her name was Lieselotte Lalla – Lotte for short – and they fell in love. It was 1947 and the thought of a member of the British Armed Forces marrying a German girl was considered out of the question by many.

But Den, as he was known, and Lotte, firmly believed in their love for each other and, after successfully negotiating the bureaucratic hurdles they had to overcome for Den to wed an ‘enemy alien’ as she was classed then, the couple were married in Hohenlimburg, Lotte’s home town, on November 8, 1947. Den was 26 and Lotte was 20. They moved to England and settled in Den’s home town, St Albans.

New Jersey

The couple were happily married for more than 50 years and now Lotte’s beautiful beaded wedding dress has gone on show at a major exhibition at a National Trust property in Devon.

Clothes and fabric were in short supply in Europe after the war so Erna, Lotte’s eldest sister, who emigrated to the USA before WWII, settling in New Jersey, bought the stylish gown for her sibling and sent it to Germany. Sadly, Erna couldn’t make it to the wedding and the sisters later lost touch.

The bridal gown is on display as part of the *History off the Hanger* exhibition at Killerton House, near Exeter, until November 1.

Den and Lotte’s daughter, Mrs Paula Tippett, donated the treasured dress to the Killerton costume collection, after finding out about the collection when she watched the BBC TV series *Secrets of the National Trust*. It is the largest cared for by the Trust, with more than 22,000 items.

Paula explained: “Erna also

80-year-old wedding dress reveals inspiring story of love between ‘enemies’ Den & Lotte



DIFFERENT LIVES: Young Lotte went on to marry airman Den and live in St Albans

had the headdress, veil and undergarments made and shipped to Germany. The veil no longer exists and only the petticoat remains from the undergarments.

“My mother was a very organised and tidy person and took great care of the dress. She put it in a big cardboard box and kept it in the loft. It was only when she wanted the loft cleared that I found the wedding dress. Mum unwrapped it and put it on a hanger, and I said ‘this is fabulous.’

“She asked me to keep it at my house, where we had room, take it out of the box once a year and hang it up, to help preserve it.”

Killerton House

Paula added that before Lotte died in 2017, aged 94 – Den passed away in 1999, aged 78 – she told her daughter that she wanted the dress to be conserved in some way.

Shelley Tobin, Killerton’s costume curator, explained: “This dress is so special because it preserves the memories of not only the person who originally wore it for her wedding day, but the other stories around it, given the situation in Germany and the UK at the time of the marriage.

Bravery

“It speaks of Lotte’s bravery too, coming to live in England at a sensitive time only a few years after WWII ended, and of the situation in America, where it was most likely made in New Jersey by one of the newly set up bridal companies.

“The dress is in excellent condition, made of sparkling white rayon satin with hand beading over the bust and yoke, fastened with many tiny covered buttons, a fashion at the time. Fashion goes in cycles, and this gown is a good example of that as it features elements of ‘Victorian’



LOVE ACROSS DIVIDE: Cpl Dennis Allen and Lotte Lalla on their wedding day in 1947 in Hohenlimburg, and Lotte’s dress on display now at Killerton House, near Exeter (below)
PHOTO: Steve Hayward

dress, inspired by the bustle gowns of the 1870s and 1880s.

“The extremely long train is very glamorous and would have been quite a talking point, given that materials and new clothes were hard to come by in Europe and rationing was still in force.”

Opportunities

Paula acknowledged that things couldn’t have been easy for her mother when she started her new life in England.

She said: “Lotte’s mother-in-law was very kind to her but it’s only now I’m older that I’ve come to appreciate just how difficult it must have been for Mum in the early years because she didn’t speak English. She learnt it very quickly, she was an intelligent lady, but was like many women of her generation who weren’t given the opportunities to develop their talents.”

Paula explained that Den, always known as ‘Johnny’ – his middle name was Jack – to the German side of the family, got on very well with the Lalla clan.

She said: “My uncle Fritz, who served in the Marines during the war, and my father, a former Gunner, were very close and all Lotte’s siblings welcomed Dad. He was the ‘enemy’ really but they all loved him, he was such a lovely chap with a good sense of humour and a warm personality.”



Paula, who lives in Lincolnshire, hasn’t seen the dress in its display case yet but is planning to visit Killerton in the summer.

She said: “I’m really looking forward to seeing it, I’m very excited, the family is thrilled to bits. Mum would be thrilled to know it was on display, she was so proud of it. Dad would have been delighted too – he thought the world of her.”

● **Go to:** nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/devon/killerton for more details.

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The top RAF doctor who fought hospital closures

Queen's Honorary Physician also lectured at Institute of Aviation Medicine at RAF Farnborough and did much to improve conditions and health for personnel

AIR VICE-MARSHAL Manus Moran, who has died aged 98, became a senior officer in the RAF Medical Branch and a consultant in otorhinolaryngology (ORL), which focuses on diagnosing and treating ear, nose, and throat disorders. He rose to become the Dean of Air Force Medicine and Senior Consultant of the RAF Medical Service.

He was born in Dublin and studied medicine at University College, Dublin, where he was awarded the Medical Society Gold Medal. On graduation in 1952, he served a year at St Vincent's Hospital in his home city and a second year in general practice in Lutterworth, Leicestershire.

Cyprus

Having worked in England for more than a year, he was required to complete National Service. After completing his service in the RAF, he elected to remain and was granted a permanent commission. Over the next few years, he served at numerous RAF hospitals in the UK and abroad, specialising in ORL. During an appointment in Cyprus in the early 1960s, he had the additional responsibility as the Officer in Charge of Aeromedical Evacuation.

In 1965 he was appointed as the consultant in ORL by the Armed Forces Consultant Appointment Board of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. In October he left for the large RAF hospital at Changi in Singapore, where he also became the visiting Consultant Surgeon to the Johore Government, an experience he described as "unique".

Over the following years, he fulfilled increasingly senior

consultant appointments at RAF hospitals in the UK and Germany before spending five years as a lecturer at the Institute of Aviation Medicine, RAF Farnborough.

In 1980 he received the Lady Cade Medal, awarded annually to, "The medical officer of the Royal Air Force Medical Services who has brought about an advance in medical science... and who has contributed to an improvement affecting the health of living conditions for Air Force personnel."

In 1988, Moran was appointed to be a Queen's Honorary Physician and Dean of RAF Medicine at the Central Medical Establishment in London, in the rank of Air Vice-Marshal.

During this period, he led a campaign to persuade the government to maintain two RAF hospitals when all six, two of which were abroad, were under threat of closure. Despite the efforts of the RAF's senior medical officers, all were closed. Initially, a Tri-Service hospital was identified, but the idea did not survive. In July 1990, he was appointed the Senior Consultant, Royal Air Force and retired in 1991.

He was immediately appointed a civilian consultant at the Princess Alexandra Hospital Wroughton, Swindon until it closed in 1995. He was then appointed to be a consultant to the Metropolitan Police in London, a post he held for eight years.

Scientific Exhibition

Throughout his career, he conducted many studies and areas of research relating to ear, nose and throat issues. In 1976, and over the following three years, he was the project officer and



RAF MEDICAL
BRANCH: AVM
Manus Moran

main contributor who designed and presented the programme for the Royal Air Force Scientific Exhibition held in Birmingham in 1979. He chose the theme "Man and Balance". A year later, he presented his paper at the 5th British Academic Conference in ORL and produced a book for the occasion covering all aspects of "Man and Balance," including disease processes, aviation aspects, orthopaedic conditions, odontogenic abnormalities and medical and neurological

considerations. The world-renowned Professor Sir Donald Harrison commented, "It was the highlight of the exhibition," and this was reinforced by the eminent Professor Harold Schuknecht of Harvard Medical School.

Irish College of Surgeons

In 1991, Moran was invited to be chairman of the general committee for the Eighth British Academic Conference

held in Dublin, a success which resulted in him being awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the Irish College of Surgeons.

He had been elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons and in 1989 he was appointed Commander of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem. He remained closely involved in aviation medicine and in 1996 was elected a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society.



EVERY SO often we see a motor manufacturer attempting to do something different and Genesis is one of the brave few. Hyundai's posh brand (think Lexus to Toyota, or Range Rover to Land Rover) has decided that the future lies in side-stepping the conventional retail model, with a more personal approach.

There are no Genesis showrooms in the UK. Instead, you'll find 'retail studios' within selected partner organisations and, as soon as you enquire, Genesis will allocate you a personal assistant, to guide you through the available options. Many of these assistants have been recruited from other areas of retail, so there's no commission-driven hard-sell involved, just a comfortable buying experience.

This is not a new concept, by any means. Daewoo did something similar back in the 1990s, where the company employed only customer advisors, rather than sales staff. It was refreshing then and it's been rebooted now for a new generation of buyers.

Then we come to the premium quality vehicles on offer, all of which come with a (Hyundai-level) five-year warranty, five years of servicing and five years roadside assistance.

Exterior

The G80 is the company's flagship model, a Bentley-esque executive saloon with charisma to rival those prestige German brands.

It's been designed to look sporting, with parabolic lines and a gaping signature front grille. Sleek headlamps and tail lights help to emphasise the image.

The massive alloy wheels, the flowing bonnet, the Bentley-style badge, the side vents behind the front wheel arches and the neat flick at the end of the boot lid all build up a picture of expansive luxury.

Interior

The G80's cabin is beautifully put together and well appointed, with a range of high-quality, tactile materials. The front seats are finished in refined quilted leather and provide support to rival any orthopaedic options on the market.



Genesis: the posh Hyundai marque

The Korean Bentley

The driving position is spot on for a big, luxury model, with plenty of electric adjustment on the seats and a steering wheel that lines up perfectly with the pedals. Stare down the vast bonnet as you pilot the G80 down the motorway and you get the impression that this is an expensive luxury machine.

This is surprisingly intuitive, operating with satisfying haptics. The on-screen graphics are spot on and the menus operate quickly. Just below the main 14.5 inch screen, another, smaller screen gives you the data for the climate control. It's operated by physical switchgear too, so it's easy to use on the move.

In the back, there's limo-class amounts of room, with adjustable seats, TV screens and high-tech controls in the centre armrest. It is a luxury affair and no doubt.

The doors shut with a premium, nicely damped thud and everything feels solidly built.

There are a few details that let the premium image slide slightly, if you go looking for them. The steering wheel is more Daewoo than Mercedes and there are still a few too many scratchy plastics on display.

The only other, slight, drawback is the boot. This is smaller than most of its rivals, thanks to the batteries eating into the space. It's a slightly odd shape too.

On The Road

The G80 Electrified is now solely available with 354bhp dual motors mated to a 94.5kWh

battery. Petrol and diesel variants have been quietly erased, leaving the EV as the last standing big beast of the range.

It's rapid enough, generating 516 lb ft of torque, a 0-62mph time of 5.1 seconds and a top-end of 139mph. Official figures state that you'll get up to 354 miles of range on a single charge.

Refinement is the word of the day here and the G80 feels well suited to electric power. It's a genteel cruiser, that glides serenely along the motorway and whistles quietly around town.

Despite the soft ride, body control is well preserved, allowing you to get a wiggle on when you need to. At a spirited pace, it changes direction with enthusiasm, thanks to a range of clever electronics and plenty of grip. You might even have termed it a 'fun' drive, had there been a bit more feedback through the steering wheel.

There's a bit more tyre noise than you'd find in the class leaders, but overall decorum is incredibly high. This is Business Class, all day long.

Recharging is rapid too, going from 10-80 per cent in just 25 minutes, on the right charger.



Genesis G80

Pros

- Limo-luxury interior
- Good value for the class
- Looks big and expensive

Cons

- Some materials let it down
- Could be viewed as a cheap copy of other premium brands

Verdict

The Genesis G80 is an expensive-looking machine that provides a refreshing alternative to big-hitting European luxury brands. It's well made, relaxing to drive and reassuringly comfortable, offering a world-class ride for rear-seat passengers. It's also immensely well-equipped and more subtle in design than most rivals. The mission of cars in this class is to provide stress-free travel. The G80 is a master at its game.

Sport

NETBALL

Netballers cock-a-hoop after battling displays



ON THE BALL: Sgt Kayleigh Briercliffe
PHOTOS: RAF COSFORD



CPL LIBBY WEDDLE: Development Player of the Tournament shows some air power

But Masters lose out after appeal

Daniel Abrahams

DESPITE NOT winning any matches at the recent IS netball championship, the RAF women's netballers have won a legion of new fans after their amazing battling displays.

The aviators hosted the three days of action at Cosford and produced back-to-back thrill rides, despite losing to the Royal Navy 42-41 and the Army 35-43, but the drama didn't end there, as the Masters' win was wiped out after an appeal from the Army.

The hosts' performances and matches were seemingly backed by a superb Masters tournament 'win', but having already been presented with the trophy, the veterans lost out after an appeal by the Army.

Under a new rule change, the RAF Masters lost out by 0.07 of a goal, on goal average, and the

Army won the silverware, despite the RAF Masters beating the Navy 44-34 and the Army 48-40.

A spokesperson for the event said: "The appeal outcome was announced after the event and under the ruling, which was originally given on goal difference, not goal average, which is the new ruling, the RAF Masters went from first to second."

The women's open team played two thrilling clashes, with captain Sgt Emily Fitzpatrick saying: "Both games, against the Army and especially the Navy, were extremely tight and could easily have gone either way."

"The team showed great commitment, work rate and togetherness from start to finish, and everyone gave absolutely everything for the team. When the margins are that small it often comes down to a few moments,

but I'm so proud of how we stuck together, competed right until the end in both games and showed the standard we're capable of playing at."

"There are a lot of positives to take from these two performances, and it gives us some strong foundations to build on as we move forward into next season."

There were further plaudits for the aviators with three Player of the Tournament awards: AS1 Adi Makutu won Open PoT, while Development Player of the Tournament went to Cpl Libby Weddle and Masters Player of the Tournament to Sgt Jess Parrott.

The men's showcase clash saw the RAF go down 25-40 to the Army.

Looking to use the tournament as a launch pad, RAF Netball Elite Team Manager WO Claire Bullen said: "The Inter-Services is an incredible event and a real highlight of the sporting calendar, showcasing the pride and quality of women's sport across the Armed Forces."



"Congratulations to the Army on a well-deserved win this year. The RAF programme continues to build strength and depth, and if we keep progressing the way we are, I'm confident we'll see one – if not all – of the Inter Service trophies sitting in the RAF cabinet next year."

RAF Netball chair Wg Cdr Suzy Flynn added: "The competition this year across all squads was the closest it has been in a decade. The Open squads played with fire, with their through court speed and

their movement delivered to perfection. Shout-outs to Flt Lt Laura Price, Fg Off Lexie Hart, Fg Off Maisey Osborne and Flt Lt Nat Daly, who were exceptional."

"This year saw the return of Sgt Jess Parrott, who made her debut with the Masters, linking with FS Becky Hill and FS Erica Flewin to create attacking greatness. Such was her impact that she was awarded the player of tournament for the Masters competition."

● Follow RAF Netball on Instagram @rafnetball.

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

A challenge in Wales

SERVICE SENIOR men's rugby stars did the hard yards in Wales last week during a tough training camp at Cardiff Metropolitan University.

The camp, that also saw the team play Merthyr RFC and Welsh Premiership side Cardiff Bucks 2, was hailed "positive and beneficial" by RAFRU head coach WO Tom Gardner.

Speaking to *RAF News Sport*, he said: "The main objective of the week was to expose the group to high-level, competitive environments and strengthen both performance and cohesion. From a coaching and playing perspective, it's actually encouraging to have problems and questions to answer. If every session went perfectly, there'd be no real growth."

On the week's challenging itinerary, Gardner said: "We started on Monday with two solid sessions, but the key work came on Tuesday when we faced Merthyr. They're one of the top semi-professional sides in Wales outside of the URC clubs, so it was a high-quality test made possible through my strong connection with their head coach."

"What made that session particularly valuable was the environment. Unlike professional set-ups, where everything is structured and optimised, Merthyr brought a play that really challenged our players."

"They were able to frustrate



us, and that's exactly what we want. It exposed areas where we needed to think differently and adapt, rather than relying purely on physical or technical ability."

With an IS championship under his belt, Gardner knows the value of tough challenges helping to forge champions. He said: "Some players came away frustrated, but that's a positive. Those are the moments where learning happens. Over the past two years, we've deliberately increased the level of challenge through tougher fixtures and competitive training, and this was another step in that progression."

The squad then followed a rest day with analysis of the Merthyr clash, before facing Cardiff, a side Gardner described as "young and streetwise."

He added: "We're in a good place as a group, and now the focus shifts to our final preparations before heading into the Inter-Services."

● Follow RAF rugby on Instagram @RAFRugby.

RUGBY UNION

RAF AND England Rugby Union star Flt Lt Amy Cokayne will be her country's vice-captain for the Women's Six Nations, which kicks off this month. Meg Jones has been named captain.

The Red Roses have won the tournament for the past seven years in a row and are red hot favourites to make it eight. They are also the World Cup holders, after triumphing on home soil last year, with hooker Cokayne playing a lead role.

The aviator (*inset*) told



Lead role for Cokayne

RAF News: "It's a huge honour to be named vice-captain for the Red Roses. Representing my country is always special, and to be trusted with a leadership role in such an experienced group means a great deal to me."

"I'm incredibly proud to represent the RAF while playing for England and I've received so many kind messages

from RAF colleagues since the announcement, including a very special one from the Chief of the Air Staff.

"Integrating new players into the squad will be a focus for me as we begin a new World Cup cycle. It's something close to me personally, as I joined the Red Roses shortly after they won the 2014 World Cup, and I remember how important it was to feel welcomed and supported."

MOTORSPORT

HAIRY MOMENT: Bike flips over during training round at Brands Hatch track, injuring 'passenger' Sgt Mark Middleton



Unlucky break for sidecar duo

THE SERVICE'S sidecar duo had a testing start to the season after a spill wrote off their only F1 bike at Brands Hatch.

The duo of Cpl Rob Atkinson and Sgt Mark Middleton were completing their first testing sessions of the year at the world-famous Kent racetrack before a crash in the third session saw the bike spin nose over tail, with Sgt Middleton suffering a broken radius in his left wrist and the duo's only F1 ride being wrecked.

The team had secured second place in qualifying and fourth place in race one and two before the disaster in race three.

They must now have all hands on deck to rebuild the bike in time for their next testing sessions, scheduled for Darley Moor in

Middleton injures wrist as F1 bike flips at Brands

Derbyshire on April 17-19, before the BSC racing starts for real with round one at Donington Park on May 15-17.

Middleton said: "We do not have another F1 bike, so we are going to look at getting this one repaired/rebuilt for the season."

"We have the smaller F2 bike but weren't planning on using it much. Injury-wise, I have some bumps and bruises but I'll be all right. Rob got away without a scratch."

● Follow the team on Facebook @RAFSidecar.



FRACTURE: Sgt Middleton's wrist

WINTER SPORTS



SEVENTH HEAVEN: RAF luge team won for the 7th time consecutively

Winter wonders

● Continued from p27 into second, while the women came third after a sled crash during the second run. The win came with a bit of Olympic firepower from GB star Cpl Alex Cartagena, third in the individual event alongside AS1(T) Ethan Green. Fg Off Ashya Colvin (Pilot) and AS1(T) Lucy Robinson secured second in the individual women's.

FS Ross Brown, RAF coach and team manager, said: "This year's event pushed everyone

to their limit. Facing off against teams stacked with international talent, fresh from the Olympics, made for an incredibly high-calibre field. However, through sheer teamwork and dedication, our group rose to the occasion."

Event OIC Sqn Ldr Stephen Preston added: "Overall we had some excellent results from the champs. There are very few sports out there that pit Novices against Olympians in the same race and how all our athletes handled that pressure has been incredible."

FOOTBALL

It's super **SIX** for the women



SIX OF THE BEST: RAF women celebrate with the trophy after securing their sixth consecutive Inter-Services title
Photos: Graeme Main, Soldier Magazine

Daniel Abrahams

THE RAF women's football team celebrated a super six of IS championship wins with a 3-0 demolition of the Army at Bracknell Town's SB Stadium.

Speaking to *RAF News Sport* after his debut bow as Inter-Services head coach, FS Karl Craven said: "The result was fantastic and really summed up the work we've put in all week. Our preparation was excellent. We spent time analysing the opening game, looking at what we did well, where we fell short, and they took that hard work from the training pitch straight into the game, and I think the three goals reflected that."

"The first came from our high press, something we'd specifically worked on. The second showed the improvement in our finishing, and the third was a great team goal."

Equalling the record of consecutive championship wins, the RAF followed up their dominant 2-1 win over the Royal Navy with a professional display, which saw them seemingly frustrated for the opening 30

Army	0
RAF	3



GOAL-SCORER: AS1 Abi Hayes

minutes as the young Army team held the score to 0-0 with a mixture of gritty defending and luck as chance after chance seemed to escape the RAF.

Having worn down their opponents, the RAF pounced on a mistake to open their account.

A poor back-pass from the Army was leapt upon by AS1 Lucy Farrow, and she rounded the goalkeeper to make it 1-0.

From there, the RAF took

control as Fg Off Jeorgia Carr hit the crossbar and was then denied by a good save, before finding the net with a stunning effort.

Having controlled the ball superbly just inside the Army area surrounded by defenders, quick feet saw her make some space, enough to fire home a stunning left foot effort into the bottom corner of the host's goal.

A 52nd-minute third from full back AS1 Abigail Hayes, who having started the move in her half continued her run in the inside left channel.

The aviators worked the ball well and Carr found the marauding Hayes inside the Army penalty area, before she curled a sublime effort over the stranded Army keeper for her second in two games and the win.

Craven added: "I'm incredibly proud and it's my first IS win with the ladies, which is special. But more importantly, I'm proud of the team."

"To come away with the IS title and make it six consecutive IS titles is a fantastic achievement. Now, I'll take a few weeks downtime before the focus shifts to preparation for next season."



CAMPBELL: RAF captain kept Army keeper Luke Cairney busy all game

Agony for men

Daniel Abrahams

"SUCH IS football, you must take your chances," said SRT team captain FS Mike Campbell after his side agonisingly lost a match they had dominated 2-1 to the Army.

His team had out-played the hosts but were left to rue countless missed chances when Bryant Poilus netted a 96th-minute curling effort to secure the win for the men in red.

Speaking to *RAF News* following the defeat at Aldershot Town's EBB Stadium, Campbell said: "We are obviously upset about the result. I felt we dominated the ball in the first half and were unlucky not to be a few goals ahead at the break."

"The second half was more fiercely contested and resolute defending by the Army kept them in the game. They knew a draw would be enough to give them a final against the Navy and we had to push forward."

"Unfortunately, we just couldn't find the breakthrough and by pushing forward left ourselves open in the dying minutes of the game."

The aviators brushed off their 3-1 opening clash defeat to the Royal Navy, storming into the hosts with pace and power, finding immediate joy out wide through the excellent Cpl Joe Spalding.

Campbell forced a great save from Army keeper Luke Cairney who turned the goal bound effort round, missing out again minutes later.

Sgt Michael Goddard then went close on 13 minutes, then after 19 minutes Spalding cut inside on the left and produced a pinpoint effort that beat Cairney at his far post.

Campbell saw another headed chance miss after 24 minutes, before he flicked another Spalding effort just wide two minutes later.

Having wreaked havoc down the left, Cpl Henry Jordan then

Army	2
RAF	1



GODDARD: Went close on 13 minutes
Photos: Graeme Main, Soldier Magazine

limped off after 28 minutes, and two minutes later RANK Danny Dixon was unlucky to concede a soft free kick on the edge of the RAF penalty area. The hosts slammed in the goal through Sean Woolley, but the RAF continued to dominate until the half-time whistle.

A golden opportunity after the break saw Goddard somehow miss a header at the far post of the Army goal, as the hosts began to put in some heavy challenges to break the aviators' rhythm and spirit.

It took until the hour mark for the hosts to register their second effort on goal as the RAF created further chances.

Then as the game seemed set for a draw, the aviators failed to clear the ball properly and Polius, having come off the bench, sealed the deal and broke RAF hearts.

Campbell added: "In both games, I felt that our game plan worked, but we just didn't have enough to get the results over the line. With so many debutants this season and last-minute real-world issues creating availability issues, we did ourselves proud, but ultimately fell short."

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

BOXING

Is there a surprise on cards?

Fighters hoping to hit back at Army in Inters

Daniel Abrahams

RAF BOXING is looking to make another huge stride with this year's Inter-Service championship after coming tantalisingly close to the title last time out.

The Royal Navy-hosted event at HMS Nelson in Portsmouth will see the Air Force put forward a hugely impressive card of fighters in both the men's and women's disciplines - with National Amateur Championship places on offer as well as the chance of Service glory.

Spokesman Sqn Ldr Joel Sweeney said: "We ran the Army close last year and we have been doing so for the last few years. The fact that we have such an exciting selection of boxers on the card at this year's Inters is a win, regardless of the outcome our future is very bright."

The association will be fielding five male and four female boxers.

Sweeney added: "The amazing work our director boxing WO John Kearns has done has allowed us to create depth within our elite cadre, which is really good to see.

"Our team captain Cpl Arran Devine, with Boxing Scotland, has us hopeful he will continue to shine. Boxing Scotland have allowed him to box in the English Champs, and we are hopeful he will go the length of the comp.

"AS1(T) Jayden Johnson's debut IS last year went on to the semis, he has gone up to 60kg, so it will be good to see how he deals with the challenges that brings.

"AS1 Kymani Coleman has been a great addition after joining



AS1(T) JAYDEN JOHNSON: Aviator (left) is moving up in weight after IS debut last year

18 months ago and fights from Waddington. He has been fast tracked through development to elite and that jump has been well within his wheelhouse. He is a terrific boxer to watch, along with AS1(T) Blaine Lambert and Sgt Cam Lewis - we are hoping for big things from these two, who are both Combined Services champions.

"On the women's side of things, it is growing at a rapid rate. They have a fabulous new Deputy Chair in Gp Capt Sarah Moorhead and we will be fielding some raw and some seasoned fighters, which is great.

"Cpl Jen Sabine - the 2024 Development champion - is making a move from three two-

minute rounds to three three-minute rounds, so that's exciting."

Sweeney added that newcomer AR Amelia Kennedy is a great example of the Whole Force of sport in action, as she is a reservist from 4624 Sqn at Brize Norton with 34 bouts under her belt, showing the sport is open to all.

"We are set up to push this side of things, so it's great to see this in effect," added Sweeney.

The evening will see Cpl Frankie Lyall (IS champion 2022) make a return to the ring, along with Wales champion Cpl Carys Mainwaring, who Sweeney feels "Could go all the way."

● Follow RAF boxing on Instagram @raf_boxing.



ELITE DISPLAY: There was an impressive victory from the association's Sgt Lewis

Knockout night for Sumpter

A COMBINED elite and development team provided fireworks at RAF High Wycombe as the boxing association homes in on this year's Inter-Service championships (see below).

The Officers' Mess at RAF HQ hosted the night of action as the Service faced off against a selection of Southern Counties' most accomplished civilian and Army opponents in what proved to be an exciting display of skill, strength and sportsmanship over nine bouts.

The Mess was transformed into a vibrant setting with the crowd creating a lively atmosphere between fights as the aviators took their opportunity to shine.

Among the evening's most memorable moments was a standout performance by Cpl Jos Sumpter, whose speed and skill culminated in the only knockout of the night.

The evening concluded with a thrilling final bout featuring the Elite Squad's Sgt Cam Lewis, whose hard-fought victory was a fitting finale to an action-



UP FOR THE FIGHT: AS1 Surridge, Cpl Mainwaring and Cpl Sabine

packed event.

An association spokesperson said: "The team's dedication to training and their commitment to the sport was evident in each round, as they demonstrated technical skills against tough components.

"This event highlighted the rising talent within the RAFBA and underscored the commitment of the association to developing future champions.

"It served as a celebration of the sport's ability to unite individuals from diverse backgrounds, pushing them to their limits and inspiring others.

"It was a powerful reminder of the mental and physical strength that defines this sport."

Win tickets to see pro Axe

RAF NEWS Sport has teamed up with Cpl Brad Axe to offer readers a knockout prize ticket giveaway to the professional boxer's next bout at York Hall, London.

The pair of tickets, valued at £120, are for Brad's ring return against Kevin Reavell at the spiritual home of British boxing in London's East End on May 3.

The DAZN Top Tier clash forms part of a high-quality night of ring action and left The Axe Man purring: "This is another incredible opportunity for me to box on sports streaming giant DAZN, in what will be my biggest fight yet.



"This bout is a 50/50 clash on a huge card where I will be the co-main event.

"It will be an honour to have as many RAF personnel there

as possible, so please enter the competition to get a chance to come along."

For your chance to win a pair of standard tickets for the night, priced £60 each, simply answer the following question:

Who is Cpl Axe fighting at York Hall on May 3?

Email your answer and full contact details, including phone number, to: sports@rafnews.co.uk by April 20.

Please mark entries: Axe Man ticket giveaway.

Tickets for the evening are priced £60 standard and £100 VIP, contact Axe @brad.axe.7 on Facebook for details.

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

5 RAF Sport

pages of



See p26

WIN

fight night tickets

ALPINE

20

in row for skeleton

Men do it again...and women are No.1 too



HISTORY-MAKER: Men's skeleton team's Fg Off Jed McNab (also inset right)



Daniel Abrahams

THE RAF'S ice sports stars were celebrating a dominant display at this year's Inter-Services in Norway as they won four out of the five team events on offer.



OLYMPIAN: Flt Lt Nicole Burger led women to victory

The landslide of victories at the famous Lillehammer track saw the skeleton stars win both men's and women's team disciplines, with the men marking their 20th year in a row of wins, while luge took the team event for the seventh year in a row and bobsleigh took the men's team event, with the women coming third.

Skeleton OIC and team captain Flt Lt Rhys Thornbury, who won the men's individual title by a margin of 3.34 seconds over Army slider Arran Holmes, said: "This was a great result for us, the 20th year for the men's team to consecutively win. That's something special and well worth shouting about.

"The women's team smashed it, producing the biggest victory in their history, Nicole [Burger] and the rest of the team produced a massive effort to win it."

Thornbury's teammates came fourth through Cpl Sam Jones, fifth AS1(T) Sion Mansell, sixth Cpl Adam Carballo and seventh Fg Off Jed McNab, to ensure the title.

The women, led by Winter Olympian Flt Lt Nicole Burger, who took the female individual title by more than five seconds from Royal Navy slider Rachel

White, saw Sgt Shawnie Etchells come third, AS1(T) Mia Terry fourth and Wg Cdr Lisa Mitchell fifth to take the team title.

The Luge team of Fg Off Luke Farrar, Flt Lt Danny Burke, Cpl Henry Parkin and Cpl Ailsa Dermidy took first place over the Army, with Farrar completing a first and third in the men's discipline, with Flt Lt Danny Burke. Cpl Elisabeth Coates was second for the women, with Cpl Ailsa Dermidy third.

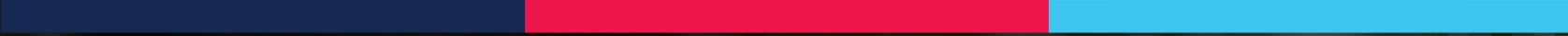
Farrar would go on to win the RAF Championship men's event with Dermidy the women's - held concurrently with the IS.

Farrar, luge OIC, coach and competitor, said: "Another fantastic year for us. Alongside our team win, we saw impressive debuts, especially from Cpl Elisabeth Coates. The team are building year on year, we have a fantastic group who exceed standards and expectations at every opportunity.

"It was my first year back sliding after four years off the sled as coach. So, it was fantastic to lift the trophy for first place."

The bobsleigh team saw the men beat the Army

● Continued on p24



TO **EVERY WOMAN** WHO WORE THE UNIFORM

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R'n'R



**Join the circus –
Lee Mead stars
in Barnum**

● See
pages
4-5

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

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



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
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Exhibitions

In Bloom

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, until August 16

Blooming marvels



Everhard Kik (1636–after 1701) and Daniel Frankcom (active around 1710), *Sunflower* (*Helianthus annuus*), 1703

The Duke and Duchess of Beaufort, on loan from the Badminton Estate, Gloucestershire

HOW MUCH do we really know about the plants and flowers in our gardens and vases? Beyond their beauty, many have surprising stories of exploration, exchange and discovery.

In Bloom, a major new exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, takes visitors across the world and back, tracing the journeys that some of Britain's most familiar plants travelled to get here.

The exhibition, which runs until August 16, features more than 100 artworks, including botanical paintings and drawings, historical curiosities and new work by contemporary artists.

A Museum spokesperson said: "It follows the passion and ingenuity of early plant explorers and the networks that influenced science, global trade and consumption. Visitors will learn how plants changed our world and left a legacy that still shapes our environments and back gardens today."

Dr Francesca Leoni and Dr Shailendra Bhandare, co-curators of the exhibition, said: "It offers the rare chance to understand, appreciate and contemplate the histories of some of our best loved blooms.

"Unravelling stories of great scientific achievements, daredevil explorations and

networks of exceptional individuals, it presents a vivid curatorial account of how our world was changed by our interactions with plants, through outstanding objects, with a conscious attempt at delivering an environmentally responsible exhibition."

The spokesperson added: "*In Bloom* also explores the visual traditions that shaped how plants were recorded and understood. Paintings, drawings and prints by some of the greatest botanical artists of all time – Rachel Ruysch, Maria Sibylla Merian, Georg Dionysius Ehret and Ferdinand Bauer – show how artists and illustrators became essential to identifying species, comparing varieties and sharing information across borders.

"This was also the period in which Carl Linnaeus (1707–78) set out the system of naming and classifying plants that is still used today. This legacy remains visible in the work of modern botanical artists including Rory McEwen, Pandora Sellars and Fiona Strickland – whose works are also on view."

The exhibition closes with new contemporary works by Anahita Norouzi, Kate Friend, Işık Güner Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg and Justine Smith.

● **Go to:** ashmolean.org for further information.



Işık Güner (b. 1983), *Fritillaria imperialis*, 2024
© Işık Güner Collection



Music

Nerina Pallot

Royal Albert Hall

Pallot's appy to mark 25th

THE BRIT and Ivor Novello nominee Nerina Pallot plays her biggest ever headline show at London's Royal Albert Hall on May 31.

The one-off event celebrates the 25th anniversary of her career.

Nerina said: "The Royal Albert Hall is one of the most beautiful venues in the world. To be playing there, 25 years after I released my first record, is something I never imagined. I want this night to be a thank you to everyone who's been on the journey with me – and a celebration of the songs that brought us here."

Artist, producer and songwriter Pallot will also release her first Best Of album in May to coincide with the event.

She debuted in 2001 with *Dear Frustrated Superstar*, before breaking through with her second album, 2005's *Fires*. Certified Gold in recognition of 100,000+ sales, the album featured two chart hits – *Everybody's Gone To War* and *Sophia*.

She has also written for artists including Kylie Minogue and Diana Vickers, and continues to tour across the UK and Europe.

Part of Nerina's new-found reconnection with fans has come from the launch of her



PALLOT: 25 years in the business

new app at CHMBR, a platform that is free to use for fans.

She added: "Like so many creatives, I have become really fed up with social media. What started as a genuinely fun and wholesome way to connect with people has turned into being a dancing monkey for the algorithm and being exposed to AI slop, or worse, increasingly distressing images or online vitriol.

"As a musician, it's become almost impossible without spending vast amounts of money on ads just to reach the people who actually follow me on a platform and, as a fan, I'm sick of missing out on announcements by my favourite artists because the algorithm decided to show me something else.

"I decided to do something about it and created CHMBR. It's a private app that allows everyone who follows you on it to see everything you post when you post it, without adverts or an unpredictable algorithm. For fans, it means never missing out on things from your favourite creators."

● **Go to:** nerinapallot.com for more.



Film Review

Two Prosecutors (12A)

In cinemas now

Soviet prisons and the letter written in blood

A YOUNG, idealistic prosecutor in Stalin's USSR investigates a letter from a Soviet prison, written in blood and detailing corruption, in Kafkaesque nightmare *Two Prosecutors*. There's a calm, unnerving absurdity to it all, with scenes unfolding so slowly that the tension might almost pass for humour – if it weren't so steeped in paranoia.

Kornev (Alexander Kuznetsov), just three months into the job, is the film's fragile anchor. Investigating the letter's claims of brutal interrogations, he steps into a world run as much by fear as by rules, rules it seems very few are willing to question. Before he can do anything, he has to wait, endlessly, drifting between offices that feel no different from prison cells.

Saturated but digitally crisp, the film is stark but carefully composed. You're given plenty of time to take it in, largely because you're forced to wait nervously alongside Kornev for some authority figure to appear. Prisoners, NKVD officers, and bureaucrats blur together in a maze of corridors, tucked away behind doors and down labyrinthine passageways. Every conversation feels loaded: it's impossible to tell whether someone is confused, complicit, or quietly setting a trap.



NAIVE NEWBIE: Kornev (Aleksandr Kuznetsov)

Around Kornev is a world of quiet horror: prisoners beaten down, letters describing abuse burned en masse, survival depending purely on endurance. One inmate insists he's still alive only because he refuses to confess to their lies, and that a confession is as good as a death sentence.

A chamber piece about the futility of pushing back against a machine built to protect itself, *Two Prosecutors* is bleak, often absurd, and suffocating. The humour, when it bubbles up, offers little relief from the hopelessness.

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



Theatre

Barnum – The Circus Musical
UK tour

Mead throws his hat into the ring

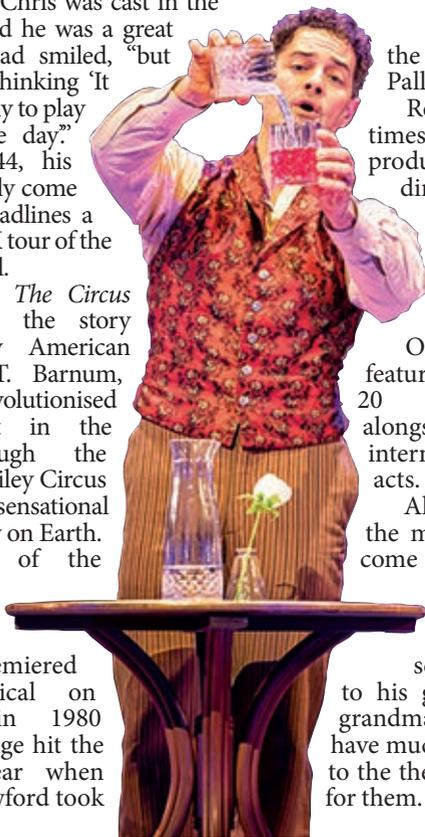
WHEN LEE MEAD was around 13 or 14 he appeared in a school production of *Barnum* in his home town of Southend-on-Sea as the show-hosting Ringmaster. He recalled: “I had such a brilliant time and I thought the story and the characters were wonderful. And it had all these fantastic songs, like *Come Follow the Band*, *The Colours of My Life* and *There is a Sucker Born Ev’ry Minute*.”

His friend Chris was cast in the lead role. “And he was a great Barnum,” Mead smiled, “but I remember thinking ‘It would be lovely to play that part one day.’” Now, aged 44, his wish has finally come true as he headlines a lavish new UK tour of the classic musical.

Barnum – The Circus Musical tells the story of legendary American showman P.T. Barnum, who revolutionised entertainment in the 1800s through the Barnum & Bailey Circus and his sensational Greatest Show on Earth.

The life of the marketing genius and master of spectacle premiered as a musical on Broadway in 1980 and was a huge hit the following year when Michael Crawford took

Lead role as greatest showman is dream come true after 30 years for actor Lee



the lead at the London Palladium.

Revived numerous times since, the latest production of *Barnum* is directed by Jonathan O’Boyle (*The Last Five Years*), choreographed by *Strictly Come Dancing*’s Oti Mabuse and features more than 20 actor-musicians alongside acrobats and international circus acts.

Although starring in the musical is a dream come true for the *Any Dream Will Do* BBC talent show winner, Lee also sees it as a homage to his grandad Bert and grandma Lil. They didn’t have much money, so a trip to the theatre was very rare for them. “But they saved up

for a year and a half to see *Barnum* at the London Palladium and they loved it. It stayed with them their whole lives. They would have been so proud to see me in it. Every performance is going to be for them,” said Lee.

Since finding fame in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* in 2007 after he won the public vote on *Any Dream Will Do*, Mead has starred in shows including *Wicked*, *Legally Blonde*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, and *Chicago*. “But *Barnum* is definitely my most challenging role,” he admitted. “It’s an enormous part, with huge monologues and so many songs, and I don’t think I leave the stage for two hours, apart from the interval of course.”

Then there’s the tightrope walking, which Lee has trained intensely for over several months. “It’s the kind of thing you learn at 24, not 44,” he laughed, “so I’ve had to get myself fit and put in the work. The rope is about 7ft off the ground and, although I



MASTER OF SPECTACLE:
Lee Mead as P.T. Barnum (also inset far left)
PHOTOS:
PAMELA RAITH

trained with a harness on, there’s no harness during the show itself. You have to use your whole body, your whole core and every ounce of your focus and energy to get across that wire, but I like a challenge.”

Hugh Jackman played Barnum in the big screen blockbuster *The Greatest Showman* and, as in the film, the musical looks at the real man behind the on-stage persona. He had a wife named Charity but became infatuated with Swedish

singer Jenny Lind. “So he’s a flawed character, as most human beings are,” Mead mused. “As an actor it’s interesting to explore that side of him alongside all the spectacle. It makes for great drama.”

Lee’s career highlights so far include performing at the Palladium on his 40th birthday with a full orchestra, singing in front of The Queen and the Royal Family at the Royal British Legion’s Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall in 2019,



Exhibitions

Seeking the Sublime
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

The sublime work of RAF vet B



RAF VETERAN Frank Bowling, now 91, is considered one of the most important British artists working today. Born in British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1934, he came to London and began National Service in the Air Force in 1953.

He went on to graduate from the Royal College of Art and while studying there, between 1959 and 1962, formed a lasting friendship with fellow student David Hockney.

Aged 30, in receipt of a Guggenheim Fellowship, Bowling moved to New York, returning to

London in the mid 70s to take up teaching roles at art colleges, while continuing to sustain a transatlantic practice for decades, working between studios in London and New York.

In 2005 he became the first black artist elected to the Royal Academy of Arts. He received a knighthood in 2020.

Seeking the Sublime is a free display, just opened, at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, that charts the evolution of Bowling’s remarkable career, from figurative works of the early 1960s and poured

abstractions of the 1970s, to major new paintings shown publicly for the first time.

A spokesperson for the Museum said: “*Seeking the Sublime* includes key examples of Bowling’s early work alongside evidence of his close study of historic artists such as Goya and Rembrandt.

“In the 1960s and early 1970s Bowling began incorporating ‘found’ imagery into his work, including the structure of his mother’s shop in Guyana – Bowling’s Variety Store, in the painting *Beggar No.5*.

“By the early 1970s, he moved towards what he described as ‘pure abstraction’, exemplified by works such as *Sentinel* (1976).

The spokesperson added: “From the 1980s onwards, everyday materials – including household objects and flora – entered his work, as seen in *Tracey’s Bouquet*, which incorporated a gift from the artist Tracey Emin directly onto canvas.”

Now 91, Bowling continues to work in his studio daily. The new exhibition features previously unseen work produced by the artist in the past five years, including

Edited by Executive Features Editor Tracey Allen

Annie
role for
soap's
Cassie



Theatre

Annie
UK & Ireland tour

From Coronation Street to Easy Street for Claire

Coronation Street's Claire Sweeney is to star as Miss Hannigan in the UK and Ireland tour of the musical Annie.

Sweeney (inset) can currently be seen as Corrie regular Cassie Plummer and takes to the stage in *Annie* from July 7 at the Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff before playing a host of dates up to March 2027.

She takes over the role from *Strictly Come Dancing's* La Voix, who stars as Miss Hannigan from May 23 to July 4 in Wimbledon, Birmingham, Manchester, Plymouth and Canterbury.

In 1930s New York during The Great Depression, brave young Annie is forced to live a life of misery and torment at Miss Hannigan's orphanage. Her luck soon changes when she's chosen to spend a fairytale Christmas with famous billionaire Oliver Warbucks.

Meanwhile, spiteful Miss Hannigan has other ideas and hatches a plan to spoil Annie's search for her true family...

The musical's Tony award-winning score includes the unforgettable songs *It's the Hard*



CAST: Alex Bourne (left) and La Voix

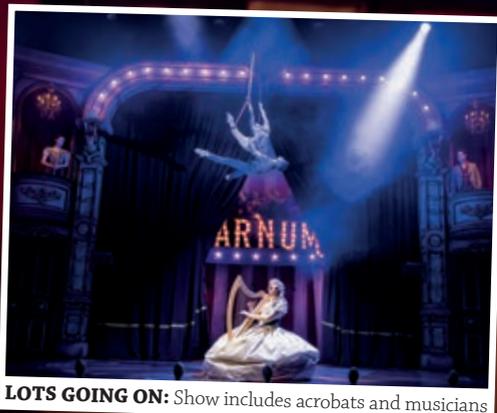
Knock Life, Easy Street, I Don't Need Anything But You and Tomorrow.

Sweeney is also known for playing Lindsay Corkhill in *Brookside*. Her other credits include roles in *Clocking Off, Holby City, Merseybeat, Candy Cabs, Scarborough, The Good Ship Murder* and *Benidorm*.

And her many West End credits include playing Roxie Hart in *Chicago* at the Adelphi Theatre, and Miss Adelaide in *Guys and Dolls*, playing opposite Patrick Swayze, at The Piccadilly Theatre.

Alex Bourne returns to *Annie* as Oliver Warbucks, having played the role in the West End, in Toronto and on a UK tour.

● **Go to: anniethemusicaltour.uk for full tour details.**



LOTS GOING ON: Show includes acrobats and musicians

and playing Caracticus Potts in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.

His TV work includes stints as Nurse Lofty Chiltern on *Casualty* and *Holby City*, but it's his appearance as himself on *Motherland* that gets the most response from the public. He laughed. "I played Lofty for five years but I've had more people stop me and ask about *Motherland*, even though I was only in one episode. That's the one thing in my career that I haven't done yet that I would love to do – to have a recurring role in a sitcom."

For now, he's busy with *Barnum* and looking forward to taking it around the country. As father to Betsy, 14, and soon-to-be stepfather to his fiancée Issy's son Alfie, 12, he admitted: "Being away from home can be hard, but Issy and the kids will be coming along to the show a few times. Plus, I get to be in one of the greatest, most iconic musicals ever."

● **Go to: kenwright.com/productions/barnum-2026-uk-tour for more information.**



Films

Ghosts: The Possession of Button House

In cinemas from October 23

TV fave Ghosts on the Button



HAUNTED HOUSE: The cast of *Ghosts* find a new place to hang out this autumn

HALLOWEEN HALF-TERM could be especially haunting this year as the award-winning BBC comedy *Ghosts* is brought to the big screen.

Ghosts: The Possession of Button House will be released in cinemas nationwide across the UK and Ireland on Friday October 23, 2026.

The plot is under wraps as filming continues at West Horsley Place in Surrey and other locations across the South East of England.

Marie-Claire Benson, EVP, Head of the Motion Picture Group at Lionsgate UK who

are releasing the film in the UK and Ireland, said: "We're excited to give families something they can enjoy together this Halloween – and what better way to celebrate than seeing everyone's favourite ghosts on the big screen, to capture the spirit of the season."

Alison Owen and Debra Hayward, Producers for Monumental Television, who produced five series of *Ghosts* on BBC One, said: "After its

enormous success as a television series, we are thrilled that audiences will get to experience *Ghosts* on the big screen. It will be an unmissable event."

Written by Mathew Baynton, Simon Farnaby, Martha Howe-Douglas, Jim Howick, Laurence Rickard and Ben Willbond, the film stars Baynton, Farnaby, Howe-Douglas, Howick, Rickard, Willbond, Lolly Adefope, Charlotte Ritchie and Kiell Smith-Bynoe.

Bowling

Swan Upping (2020) and *Yellow Map* (2025) – pictured left.

He said: "It is a great pleasure to have my work shown at the Fitzwilliam Museum. Cambridge has long been a place of inquiry and reflection, and I am delighted to be part of that tradition."

Frank Bowling: Seeking the Sublime runs until January 17, 2027.

● **Go to: fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk for more.**



FRANK BOWLING: Pictured by Ben Bowling



Your Announcements

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

Associations

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

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

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

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

THE RAF Air Loadmaster Association (ALMA) will be marking its 25th anniversary in May with a weekend of special events. The Association will be holding a Gala Dinner at the RAF Club on Saturday, May 9 followed by a service of commemoration at the RAF church, St Clement Danes in The Strand, central London, on Sunday, May 10, followed by lunch.

Both events will be attended by the ALMA's patron, former Chief of the Air Staff ACM Sir Andy Pulford. During the service, a commemorative Association crest floor tile will be unveiled. There will also be a visit to the Houses of Parliament on the afternoon of Friday, May 8, followed by dinner at the Archduke in Waterloo, then a visit to the Tower of London on the afternoon of May 9. The Association is looking to recruit new members. If you are interested in joining, or would like more information about the anniversary events, please contact Les Weston via email: lesalma9001@gmail.com or you can call on the following number: 0753 1523456.

THE 23 Squadron Association is pleased to announce its intention to hold its Association Dinner on Saturday, October 10. The event will provide a valuable opportunity for former members of 23 Squadron to reconnect, share memories, and celebrate the proud history of the Red Eagles. The Squadron Committee cordially invites all previous personnel who have served with 23 Squadron – across all eras and roles – to register their interest and request further details, including venue details, timings, menu and booking instructions via the email address: red eagles23sqn@outlook.com

Reunions

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

ALL ex Clk Secs who were trained on the Apprentice Wing at RAF Credenhill in the 1960s and 1970s are cordially invited

to contact the undersigned with a view to arranging a reunion this year. Please email: David.tibbett@ntlworld.com

Fundraising concert

THE ROYAL Air Force Music Charitable Trust's 2026 fundraising concert tour starts on April 18 with a special big band concert held in the Lecture Theatre of Newark Academy featuring Royal Air Force Swing Wing with guest jazz trumpet soloist Nathan Bray – well known for playing with Ronnie Scott's Big Band. On May 16 the charity presents a concert in Lincoln Cathedral performed by the Band of the Royal Air Force College with compère Melvyn Prior, featuring music from renowned composer John Williams. Concerts will follow with the Central Band of the RAF and the Band of the RAF College in Weston-super-Mare, Epsom, Newark and Doncaster. The 2026 tour will end with another RAF Swing Wing big band concert at the Terry O'Toole Theatre in Lincoln on October 16. Go to: rafconcerts.uk for further information.

RAFA V50 challenge

THE RAFA V50 challenge has netted a staggering £142,000 for the charity to date. The 'V' stands for virtual – wherever you are in the world, you can take part. How you complete your 50 miles is up to you – walk, run, cycle, hike or even roller skate. You can mix and match activities to fit around your lifestyle. This year's challenge runs from April 27 to May 3. You can go solo or team up with friends, family or colleagues – however you choose to take part, the Association will support you with fundraising tips, advice and a RAFA V50 T-shirt. Go to: rafa.org.uk to find out more or search RAFA V50.

Boost for vets' care



SUPPORT: Delighted Benson House care home staff with their VFF certificate

AN OXFORDSHIRE care home has been recognised for the exceptional service it provides for veterans and their partners.

Benson House in Wallingford has now gained Veteran Friendly status. The Veteran Friendly Framework (VFF) helps providers offer appropriate support for vets living in care homes across England.

Benson House is part of the Caring Homes group, which is committed to achieving VFF status across its 18 eligible homes in England, said a spokesperson.

More than 2,250 veterans and partners are already being supported by the VFF across England, they added.

Benson House customer relationship manager George King said: "This is fabulous news for the home. Our team has learned a huge amount about the Armed Forces, in particular that there are more veterans out there than we had imagined.

"All the Benson House veterans now have a poppy image on their doors and members from our local Royal British Legion regularly visit for a chat with them."

He added: "We have contacted veterans' charities, including SSAFA and the RAF Benevolent Fund. In April we're hosting our own veterans' coffee morning where groups from the local community are invited to join us for an informal get-together – the first of what we intend will be regular veterans' gatherings at Benson House."

The home will also host regular commemorations around dates including Armed Forces Day, Battle of Britain Day, D-Day, VE and VJ Days and Remembrance.

The VFF is a collaboration between Royal Star & Garter and the Royal British Legion, who are joint funders, and the NHS Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance. Last year an independent evaluation praised the impact of the VFF on the lives of veterans living in care homes, finding they gained from improved social connections and felt less isolated.

Grab a bargain at sale

THE NEXT Newark Air Museum Outdoor aeroboot/ aerojumble sale at the museum's site in eastern Nottinghamshire (*below, right*) takes place on Saturday, April 18.

The funds the museum raises from organising the event will be used to support the development of facilities at its Gateway Aviation Site, said a NAM spokesman.

"Buyers and visitors who attend this fundraising event will have the opportunity to search through a varied selection of aviation and avionic items: including books, paintings, prints,

DVDs, plastic kits, die-cast models, clothing, radio equipment and a wide range of aircraft parts," he added.

The museum is open from 9am to 5pm with the sale taking place between 9am and 2pm – organisers say arrive early to get the best bargains.

● See the Events Page of the museum's website: newarkairmuseum.org for further details or call: 01636 707170.



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Cranwell hosts flying scholarship selections



REACH FOR THE SKY:
The scholarship candidates and supporting staff

RAF CRANWELL hosted the final selection process for Flying Scholarship for Disabled People (FSDP) recently.

"The scholarships were created in 1983 in memory of Gp Capt Sir Douglas Bader and give a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for disabled people to help realise their

abilities through learning to fly. Since then, over 430 people have been awarded scholarships," said a spokesperson for the Lincolnshire station.

Eighteen candidates and more than 50 supporting staff and trustees took part in the three-day selection process, including 20 volunteers, with help from

2160 (Sleaford) Sqn ATC.

The spokesperson added: "The scholarship provides 16-20 hours flying tuition depending on aircraft type and all associated theory training and examination.

"The cost of each scholarship is £12,000 – all raised by sponsorship and fundraising. Current

sponsors include the Red Arrows, the RAF Typhoon Display Team, Boeing and Lockheed Martin.

"For the past two years, the charity has also awarded two Scholars Scholarships to enable successful candidates to complete further flying training to gain their Private Pilot Licence."



BIG BUNNY HUNT: Kids are invited to find rabbits hiding among cars

Easter fun at museum

THE BRITISH Motor Museum in Gaydon, Warwickshire, is offering a basket full of cracking activities this Easter until April 12.

The Great Big Bunny Hunt takes place daily – children will need to find the six Easter bunnies hiding around the cars and note down the name of each rabbit they find.

And every day during Easter they can try their hand at Hatch your own

Car, hatching a car from a paper egg base and decorating it with craft materials.

The Egg-straordinary Family Tour runs from April 7-12, when families can join costumed explainers for a family-friendly tour exploring some of the eggs-traordinary vehicles in the museum's collection.

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



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R'n'R



Prize Crossword

No. 406

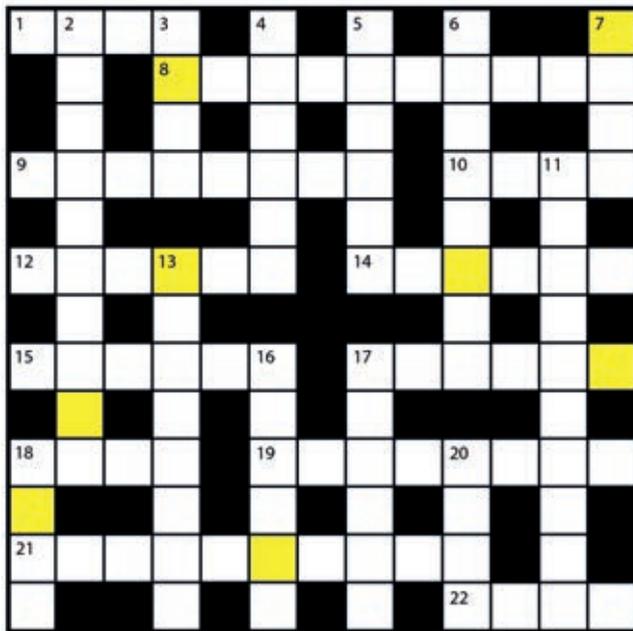
Solve the crossword, then rearrange the eight letters in yellow squares to find an RAF station

Across

- 1. Levy I place on car (4)
- 8. Elated prey disturbed time and again (10)
- 9. RAF aircraft considered a pest? (8)
- 10. Hexahedron Simba takes east (4)
- 12. Boulder set about by RAF youngsters (6)
- 14. Informative bank employee? (6)
- 15. Very small period of time (6)
- 17. Money from Ernie Wise: what a nut! (6)
- 18. In charge, we hear, that's clear (1,3)
- 19. Estimate Ma is missing fellow worker (4-4)
- 21. RAF personnel who find a way (10)
- 22. Neck some skis should have (4)

Down

- 2. Serbia coat ruined by RAF skills (10)
- 3. Country involving ravines and quicksand, originally (4)
- 4. A Doctor of Philosophy is involved with bugs (6)
- 5. Lion consumes five or Bob (6)
- 6. RAF plane that was up to any task (8)
- 7. Instrument played by fraud, by the sound of it (4)
- 11. Carnivorous guards? (10)
- 13. Life-enhancing spirit (3-2-3)
- 16. Catch mother or father upset (6)
- 17. Outright Carry-On involving chalk (6)
- 18. Pubs' popular points (4)
- 20. Mother's 1,000 dollar disguise (4)



Across - 7. Legion 8. Tucano 10. Dilemma 11. Inter 12. Note 13. Sheep 17. Ebony 18. Lama 22. Milan 23. Scatter 24. Linton- 25. On-Ouse
 Down - 1. Gliding 2. Agility 3. Dogma 4. Jupiter 5. Waste 6. Board 9. Sasha Nash 14. Abandon 15. Cast Out 16. Harrier 19. Smile 20. Plank 21. Maine
RAF plane - Buccaneer

Prize Crossword No. 405 winner is: E James, Oxon.

Name:

Address:

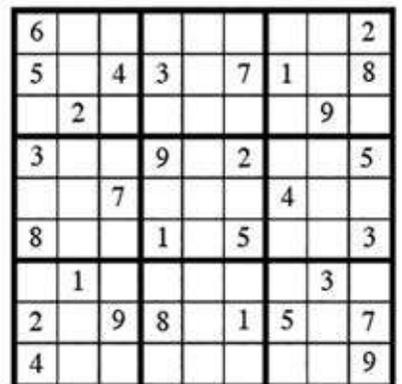
RAF word: Crossword No. 406



Prize Su Doku

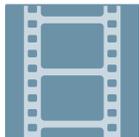
No. 416

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 April 17, 2026. The winner of Su Doku No: 414 is: CJ Hunter, Surrey.

Solution to Su Doku No. 415



Film Review

The Last Supper (12A)
 In cinemas now and for Easter

Uninspiring Last Supper

THE FINAL meal that Jesus shared with his apostles becomes the central pillar of this religious film, which also deals with the influential forces leading to his betrayal and crucifixion.



JESUS: Jamie Ward

It's not a particularly showy depiction. Despite a handful of familiar faces in the cast, the film is pretty modest in scope – telling its story largely through the perspective of Peter (James Oliver Wheatley). His early charity and kindness shared with the other apostles is cut short when their supplies run dry while feeding the starving masses.

Enter Jesus, played by Jamie Ward, who performs the miracle of feeding the multitude, calling upon God to multiply the dwindling loaves and fishes, which are then shared among the huge crowd. It is an act that strengthens the faith of his flock and convinces some of the doubters. This opening scene feels deliberate, linking devotion and prayer with the literal breaking of bread, an idea that will resurface later.

Ward has a softness that communicates Jesus's message of love but lacks authority at times, such as when he banishes the traders from his Father's house. For large parts of the film, he even seems overshadowed by his wig.

More compelling are the performances that have a dash of villainy. Judas (Robert Knepper), who spends much of his time scurrying about looking suspicious, is tormented by greed for riches as well as power, cajoled by Satan, who appears to him as a serpent. His arm is further twisted by the quietly intense Caiaphas (James Faulkner), the

high priest, who is determined to bring Jesus to trial.

The titular Last Supper sees playful conversation give way to prophecies of betrayal and denial, in the case of Peter. But the meal itself becomes a richly spiritual and symbolic practice, drawing on the religious rite of Passover.

Though these details add some texture, *The Last Supper* remains a straightforward, workmanlike retelling that never quite matches the scale of its subject, ultimately feeling more stale than inspired.

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

More names Chalke-d up

NATIONAL TREASURES Mary Berry and Alan Titchmarsh have joined the list of VIP speakers appearing at the Chalke History Festival in June.

Berry, the much-loved food writer, chef and former presenter of *The Great British Bake Off*, will join the popular gardener, best-selling author and broadcaster Alan Titchmarsh (*inset below*) to talk about gardens for the National Garden Scheme.

Award-winning actress, and star of iconic TV series such as *Downton Abbey*, *Wolf Hall: The Mirror and the Light* and *Killing Eve*, Harriet Walter will be making her debut at Chalke when she talks about visibility and representation of older women in the arts.

And bestselling author and co-host of *The Rest is History* podcast Tom Holland will be sharing his passion for cricket when he is joined by former England spin bowler Vic Marks and commentator Simon Hughes as they debate the best England team captains from 1979 to 2025.

History fans with a particular fascination with World War II, and the lead up to it, are in for a treat. Bestselling author



SAS AUTHORITY: Damien Lewis

and an expert on the world's most infamous special forces unit Damien Lewis will be sharing tales of high-stakes operations and undercover rescues undertaken by the SAS; co-hosts of the hugely popular podcast *We Have Ways of Making You Talk* Al Murray and James Holland will be discussing the sinking of the Bismarck in May 1941 and the ever-popular WWII veteran Colin Bell returns, aged 105, to recollect the time when he flew 50 missions over Germany as a Mosquito pilot.



Go to: chalkefestival.com to find out more.