

The Forces' favourite paper



Battle of Britain ace and D-Day pilot

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Win!



Sarkar opus final chapter

● See R'n'R page 5

Win!

ROYAL AIR FORCE

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RAF News

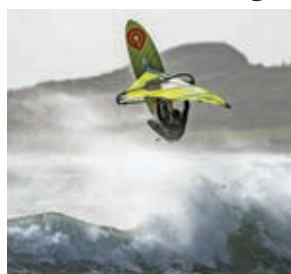


Supervet Colin Bell DFC, 104, on honouring fallen

See pages 14-15



Windsurfing Riding out Storm Amy



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Rugby Ladies' 15 make mark



● See page 25

Awards Sports aces honoured



● See page 27

Poppy power

FRONTLINE FIGHTERS injured in the line of duty joined forces in London as the Royal British Legion launched this year's Poppy Appeal.

Among them was veteran RAF Medic Bronwyn Wilkinson (*far left*) who arrived with her support dog Prince and aviator Cpl Richard Davies (*centre*), who lost his foot during a tour in Akrotiri, Cyprus.

The military charity hopes to smash last year's fundraising total of £51.4 million to support veterans and serving personnel.
PHOTO: MATT ALEXANDER/RBL

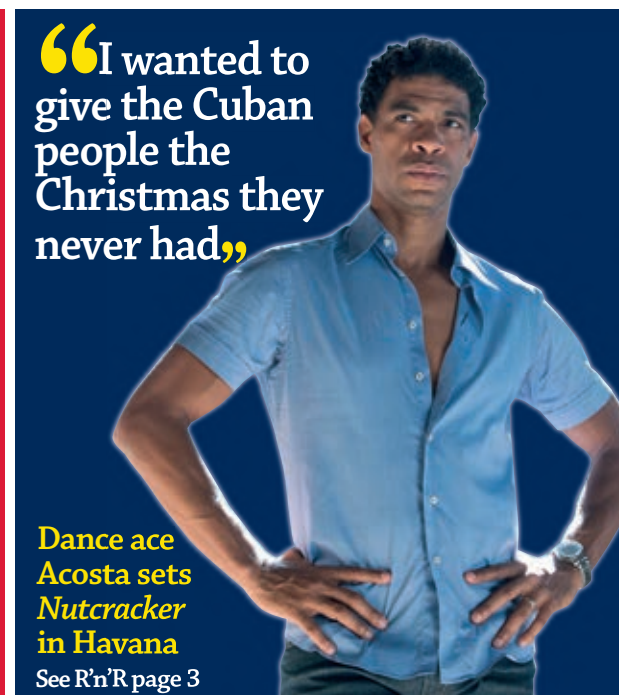


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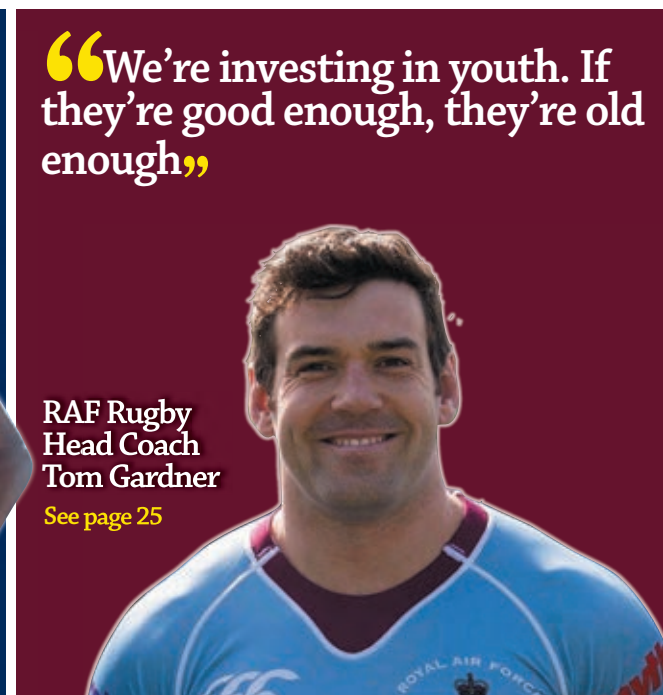
“Remembrance, for the public, depends on how visible our Armed Forces are,”

Former RAF Navigator and Iraq PoW John Nichol
See page 19



“I wanted to give the Cuban people the Christmas they never had,”

Dance ace Acosta sets Nutcracker in Havana
See R'n'R page 3



“We’re investing in youth. If they’re good enough, they’re old enough,”

RAF Rugby Head Coach Tom Gardner
See page 25

NATO sub hunt pact

Simon Mander

THE UK and Germany are to jointly hunt Russian submarines from RAF Lossiemouth one year after a landmark defence agreement.

Both countries are ramping up cyber and military cooperation to strengthen Nato following the signing of the Trinity House deal.

The project will allow cyber specialists from the two nations to work more closely than ever developing a secure cloud network to share information in real time while defending against cyber attacks.

A Deutsche Marine P-8A will visit the Moray base for the first time ahead of future joint activity with the RAF in the North Atlantic to defend against Russian aggression.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: “This partnership is a cornerstone of European security, keeping us secure at home and strong abroad.”

MARITIME SURVEILLANCE:
Defence Secretary John Healey joins German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius in the P-8 Poseidon hangar at RAF Lossiemouth
PHOTO: AS1 NIRAN LEWIS



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RAF News

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This Week In History



1935 Hurricane debut

THE FIRST flight of the prototype Hawker Hurricane K5083 takes place. More than 14,000 of the fighters were built.

1944 Tirpitz Blitz

A STRIKE force of 30 Lancasters from 9 and 617 Sqns operating from Northern Scotland sink the German battleship Tirpitz in Tromsø Fjord using 12,000lb Tallboy bombs.



1975 Harrier in Belize

1 SQN Harriers deploy to Belize to strengthen the British Garrison and deter possible Guatemalan military aggression.

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

Viking raider Rollo rolls in to Brize

After plundering and pillaging in hit show, actor Clive Standen takes on military duties with the RAF



Tracey Allen

HOLLYWOOD STAR Clive Standen said he accepted an invitation to join the RAF for a week because he wanted to experience the “nitty gritty” of what the Air Force does.

The actor, who plays Viking raider Rollo in hit TV series *Vikings* and appeared in the *Taken* TV spin-off, joined 1 Air Mobility Wing at Brize Norton to experience life on an operational station.

“I didn’t want to be treated with kid gloves. They said ‘don’t worry about that’... It was tough”

He said: “The Air Force approached me and asked if I’d like to experience some of the work the RAF does that’s not just flying.

“I wanted to get into the ‘nitty gritty’ of what the Royal Air Force is about. There are areas in the military that do so much work behind the scenes and they don’t really get the credit for it.

“They set up the infrastructure ready for when the troops come in and really make it look like a base. It’s a whole career that people don’t really realise is there.”

During his time at Brize Clive took part in some gruelling physical training and, although very fit, still found it challenging,



MOVING ON UP: Clive with 1 Air Mobility Wing personnel at Brize Norton
PHOTOS: SGT CATHY SHARPLES

especially the Hyrox fitness competition.

“I didn’t want to be treated with kid gloves and they said ‘don’t worry about that.’ It was tough and these guys, after doing

their workout in the morning, have a quick shower then they’re straight off to load cargo on the back of a C-17, or do even more drills and training,” he said.

“After the PT you’ve got 10



CRUNCH TIME: Actor Clive feels the strain during physical training

hours of hard graft to do – that was the bit that caught me by surprise.

“When we did the Hyrox I chose the Wg Cdr as my partner because he was going to push me to the limit, and that was good. I was treated as one of the team.”

Clive also got the chance to fly on a Voyager to Detroit to pick up troops, take them back to Scotland, collect equipment on the runway and load it onto the aircraft – all in less than 48 hours.

He said: “I got to talk to some 1AMW personnel on the way and I realised some of these guys are so young and they’ve already flown to so many different destinations.

“The level of maturity in people their age is inspiring, they have to hit the ground running. I was really impressed with their efficiency, coming up with solutions to problems and just

getting on with it”

Born on an Army base in Northern Ireland – his father was in the Royal Army Veterinary Corps – Clive is now based in Texas and is currently in Abu Dhabi shooting a war film with a horror twist, he said.

He added: “I’m not allowed to mention who’s also in it, but it reminds me of George Clooney’s *Three Kings* film. I’ve been here for a few weeks and will be here for another month.

“I’ve spent a lot of time in the Middle East lately. I’ve filmed a travel show, *Arabia’s Best Kept Secrets*, that’s on the Discovery Channel in November.”

He’s now hoping to experience another aspect of life in the Air Force. He said: “I would love to try lots of different factions, if I can help in any way to show there are so many opportunities in the RAF and it’s not just boots on the ground, I’m happy to be there.”



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ISTAR Russian border mission



Simon Mander

BRITISH SURVEILLANCE aircraft have patrolled the border with Russia in a joint mission with US and Nato forces.

An RC-135 Rivet Joint and P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft flew a 12-hour mission 10,000 miles along the Alliance's eastern flank, down past Belarus and Ukraine.

The mission was supported by a United States Air Force KC-135 Stratotanker from the 100th Air Refuelling Wing at RAF Mildenhall.

The operation follows repeated incursions by Russian drones and aircraft in the last month, including incidents in Poland, Romania and Estonia.

"Not only does this provide valuable intelligence to boost the operational awareness of our Armed Forces but sends a powerful message of unity to Putin and our adversaries," said Defence Secretary John Healey.



UK crews' 12hr sortie to secure NATO borders

NATO ROLE: Rivet Joint and Poseidon P-8 aircraft carried out a 12-hour mission following Russian drone incursions. Top left, refuelling from a USAF Stratotanker

The RC-135 Rivet Joint is designed to monitor a vast range of different signals from across the electromagnetic spectrum, allowing it to eavesdrop on military communications.

The P-8A Poseidon, which specialises in anti-submarine warfare, flew around the Baltic Sea. "Missions like this demonstrate Nato's unity and readiness to defend its members

against any aggression. Our ability to operate seamlessly with USAF assets underscores the strength of the Nato," said ISTAR Commander Gp Capt Matthew D'Aubyn.



Reserves mark date

THE FIRST RAF squadron to shoot down an enemy aircraft in WWII celebrated its centenary and remembered its war dead in a series of ceremonies.

One of the top four flying units during the conflict, 603 (City of Edinburgh) Sqn, Royal Auxiliary Air Force also flew the oldest aircraft in the RAF during the Battle of Britain – The Spitfire Mk IIa (P7350) currently flown by the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight.

Personnel laid wreaths at the graves of the 11 war dead in Scotland and others were laid in the Netherlands and at Malta Memorial to remember those killed in the air battle for the island.

The only RAuxAF Sqn still operating from its original location as envisaged by Lord Trenchard, the unit exercised its right to parade down the Royal Mile with drums beating, bayonets fixed and flags flying accompanied by the RAF Central Scotland Pipes and Drums.



VETERAN AIRCRAFT tech Steve Green is volunteering for duty with the RAFBF – after the charity helped him rebuild his life following a horrific motorcycle crash.

After serving for 10 years, including tours in the Falklands and Afghanistan, Steve was preparing for life in Civvy Street when he was involved in an accident which left him fighting for his life.

The dad-of-two spent a month in intensive care in Bristol, followed by months of specialist

treatment at spinal unit and rehabilitation centre, Headley Court.

Unable to work and facing escalating housing costs, the Fund stepped in and purchased a home through its Housing Trust, then adapted it to meet Steve's needs.

Now working as a Civil Servant for the MOD designing aircraft engineering courses for the Army, Steve is keen to pay back to the Fund. He said: "I am a volunteer for the Fund. It's important for us all to give back."

SAR stars honoured

SEARCH AND Rescue personnel who saved 14 fishermen in the South Atlantic and a veteran of more than 32 years RAF service were honoured during a Royal visit to Brize Norton.

Flt Lt Mike Howell received a King's Commendation for Bravery in the Air for his part in the Falklands search and rescue mission, while MAcr David Russell was awarded a Meritorious Service Medal for his long career.

The Princess Royal was visiting XXIV Sqn to celebrate its 110th anniversary, making it the fourth most senior Squadron in the RAF. Founded in September 1915, it flew combat missions over the Western Front during World War I and now specialises in communications and training.

The squadron is the Operational Conversion Unit for the Boeing C-17 Globemaster III and Airbus A400M Atlas.

It teaches new pilots and



loadmasters while producing engineers for the A400M.

Princess Anne met squadron personnel during her two-hour visit, toured the A400M Cargo Hold Trainer Equipment and the A400M Simulator.

Officer Commanding XXIV Sqn, Wg Cdr Allister Dow, said: "I feel immense pride leading a squadron with such a rich heritage and witnessing our personnel deliver world-class Air Mobility training and operational support."



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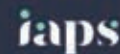
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Tribute to WO Paddy

TRIBUTES HAVE been paid to aerospace systems manager Warrant Officer Alastair 'Paddy' McNickle who has died of cancer aged 56.

Paddy joined the RAF in April 1989, served across the UK and deployed to the Falkland Islands, Iraq, the former Yugoslavia and wider Middle East.

However, much of his later career was spent at Boulmer when he chose to settle with his family in Alnwick.

"Never without a smile, Paddy lit up a room with his honesty, quick wit and sharp operational focus. A true gentleman, he was always happy to pass on his knowledge to those with less experience and was a delight to work alongside," said station commander Wg Cdr Joe Redhead.

Gp Capt Lisa Foy added: "Paddy made a profound impact on everyone around him. The many heartfelt tributes from colleagues far and wide speak volumes about the high esteem in which he was held."



HOT SHOT: World and European Pigeon Shooting Champion Mark Winner and the unique Krieghoff shotgun which took more than 1,000 hours to engrave with tribute to The Few

Tracey Allen

A FORMER cadet who dreamt of joining the Air Force before becoming the World Clay Pigeon champion is gunning for glory – with a bespoke shotgun engraved with a tribute to the heroes of the Battle of Britain.

Mark Winner had his sponsor, exclusive German gun manufacturer Krieghoff, include the designs featuring Spitfires, Lancasters and wartime leader

Sir Winston Churchill on the stock and barrel.

When he takes aim at his next tournament rivals will be staring down the barrel of his RAF-inspired weapon.

He said: "The leadership of Churchill and the bravery of The Few helped shape our nation's enduring



spirit – to stand firm against evil, to lead by good example, and to always fight the good fight.

"For me the gun is a lasting reminder of the importance of the brave airmen – from Great Britain and from many nations around the world – who fought for the

freedom we know today.

"Without their courage and sacrifice, the world might be a very different place."

The unique shotgun designs took Krieghoff master engravers more than 1,000 hours to create and Mark has christened the gun 'The Few'.

Despite his demanding international schedule the tournament Top Gun still finds time to coach the RAF shooting team.



X marks the awards spot

Staff Reporter

THE LEEMING-BASED RAFX team has won two prestigious Sanctuary Awards.

They scooped the Innovation and Sustainable Delivery Awards for monitoring emissions and promoting green technology.

As part of the project a real-world Living Lab was set up at the North Yorkshire airbase carrying out the world's first investigation on the impact of basalt rocks on carbon capture.

Sqn Ldr Mike Tunstall said: "Project ViTAL put RAFX on the world stage."

JEF teams take command

Simon Mander

CONTROLLERS FROM the RAF teamed up with allies to demonstrate how to coordinate air operations in austere and contested environments.

Personnel joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and British Army troops on the Joint Expeditionary Forces military training event, called Tarassis, in Latvia to manage airspace for fixed-wing and rotary aircraft.

Equipped with communications, meteorological and surveying equipment they showed how to enable air operations where conventional air traffic control facilities are absent.

Working with 20 Works Group Royal Engineers, they supported Royal Canadian Air Force C-130 Hercules missions from



temporary landing zones.

During the exercise, RAF tactical air traffic controllers also liaised with pilots, ground crews,

and the Army's 8 and 11 Brigade to coordinate troop transport, resupply missions and close air support.

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."

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

Club class chefs serve up a winner

Simon Mander

RAF CLUB superchefs have been recognised for their culinary talent after netting Craft Guild graduate awards.

Matthew Crane and Kai-le Tran both clinched the accolade after a series of challenges including preparing classic French cuisine and creating a dish using a mystery basket of ingredients.

The results were revealed at Fortnum

& Mason, where industry leaders gathered to honour them.

Founder and organiser Steve Munkley said: "What stood out this year was the sheer determination and professionalism shown by every finalist. These ambitious chefs are the future of our industry, and it's a privilege to support their journey."



The graduates will be invited to compete in the semi-finals of the Young National Chef of the Year in 2026 and enjoy a tour of Fortnum & Mason's London store and embark on a three-day culinary trip to France.

HIGH FRYERS: RAF Club chefs Kai-le Tran (left) and Matthew Crane



In Brief



NATO CALL: RAF Regt joined alliance teams in Denmark following air traffic disruption

Regt Danish drone alert

Staff Reporter

COUNTER DRONE specialists from the RAF were deployed to Denmark after disruption to military and civilian air traffic near airports.

It came as the Scandinavian country hosted two major European summits in Copenhagen.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "No one should be in any doubt that we are facing a level of grey zone activity and aggression that is testing us and our allies."

Nine international partners including the UK and Ukraine contributed specialist units now operating on Danish soil.

Chief of Danish Defence, General Michael Wiggers Hyldgaard, said: "The assistance from our close allies enabled us to adapt quickly to the situation and demonstrate that, when it matters, we stand together."

Following recent airspace violations by drones and jets, Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte said: "Make no mistake – this defensive Alliance is ready and willing to do what it takes to keep our one billion people safe and our territory secure."

The Alliance is testing integrated counter-drone systems under Eastern Sentry, as well as fostering cooperation with the EU and private sector for rapid innovation.

Peace at last for Lanc crew



Simon Mander

BURIALS HAVE taken place of three bomber crew members shot down during a raid over Germany.

Families gathered in The Netherlands to witness their burial, with full military honours, 82 years after they were killed in action during World War II.

Their remains were recovered from the wreckage of Lancaster ED603, which crashed into Lake IJsselmeer near the village of Markum in June 1943. All seven crew died.

The service was conducted by The Reverend Dr Philip Wilson. The RAF King's Colour Squadron provided the bearer party.

Padre Wilson said: "All of the three airmen had over 40 sorties in Bomber Command and we have laid to rest young aviators of valour whose sacrifice won our freedom. It was an emotional farewell."

The Joint Casualty Commission Centre



worked with many Dutch organisations who support the national recovery of aircraft wreckages with missing crew from WWII.

Of the seven-man crew aboard, four were recovered and buried shortly after the crash.

The remaining three were listed as missing and commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial.

They were 23-year-old Pilot Officer Charles Frederick John Sprack, Pilot Officer Arthur Bertram Smart and Pilot Officer Raymond Edward Moore, who enlisted in 1938 when only 16 years old and was 21 when he was killed.

Gail McCord, niece of Pilot Officer Smart, said: "Today was closure for the families, it is nice all three crew have been laid to rest together – they flew, served and died together."

Commonwealth War Graves Commission head of commemorations Dr James Wallis added: "War dead should, where possible and practical, be buried with their comrades."

"We are grateful for the support from municipal authorities in making this happen. We will now care for these graves in perpetuity."

News

Nuke kids on the Cold War block

BUDDING YOUNG artists are set to storm a Cold War bunker and exhibit their work to mark Remembrance Day.

Local schools will be showcasing their talent at RAF Neatishead in Norfolk – the secret nerve centre of Britain’s air defences at the height of the Soviet nuclear threat.

The site was bought by robotics pioneer William Sachita in 2022 and he will be opening the six acre bunker complex for three days as the nation marks Remembrance.

Norfolk schoolchildren and military veterans are being invited to create artwork for a permanent display inside.

Project curator Anya Vero said: “Imagine telling your loved ones that your artwork is permanently displayed in a nuclear bunker.

“The walls that once protected this nation will now carry messages of hope from our community’s children.”

ART ATTACK: Curator Anya Vero. Inset above, Neatishead radar tower



Vulcan SOS

Simon Mander

A CRITICAL fundraising appeal has been launched to preserve the legendary Vulcan XH558, currently based in Doncaster.

Since being asked to vacate their current site, the Vulcan to the Sky Trust has faced uncertainty around Doncaster Sheffield Airport’s future and the Cold War bomber’s popular engine ground runs.

A drop in public events, shop sales and public tours have also hit the group, still reeling from the financial crisis caused by the pandemic.

Chief executive Marc Walters said: “The reality is that Vulcan XH558 needs urgent support.

“We face an immediate need for funding which, if we can secure it, will present us with an opportunity to enter a new and exciting chapter.”

The recent decision by South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority to grant Doncaster funding of up to £160m will enable the council to press ahead with its work to fully reopen the Airport and FlyDoncaster Ltd has identified



FUNDING CRISIS: Vulcan XH558

a potential plot of land for The Vulcan Experience.

“Most importantly, it will allow us to expand our education programme and inspire the next generation of engineers and aviators,” added Mr Walters.

“But before we even get close to building The Vulcan Experience, we need to ensure that the charity has the funds to continue our work maintaining and looking after Vulcan XH558.”

Trust chairman Air Cdre Edward Jarron added: “Every donation, no matter the size, brings us closer to securing the future of Vulcan XH558.”

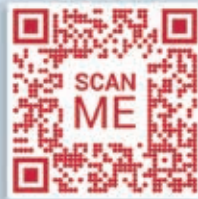
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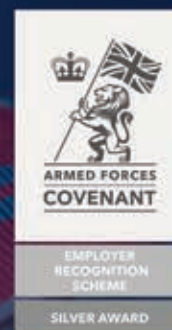
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Royal double act lands at Benson

Simon Mander

PILOT PRINCES from Britain and the Middle East paid a flying visit to Benson.

Veteran Search and Rescue flier HRH the Prince of Wales and fellow helicopter pilot Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II of Jordan toured squadrons and hangars, meeting trainees and technical staff, observing aircraft and discussing mission roles.

Prince William trained at Shawbury and went on to fly with 22 Sqn at Valley.



His connection deepened in recent years when the unit reformed at Benson in 2020.

Crown Prince Al Hussein completed helicopter pilot training in 2019 with the Royal Jordanian Air Force and holds the rank of Major.

Kensington Palace said the event signals "robust relationship and mutual respect for the Armed Forces."

The two heirs have remained close friends with overlapping passions in aviation, leadership and fostering defence partnerships.



REGAL EAGLES: HRH The Prince of Wales chats to 22 Sqn personnel at Benson. Inset left, Crown Prince Al Hussein Bin Abdullah II of Jordan

SAS combat Doc's lessons from Gaza

Simon Mander

A FORMER SAS battlefield doctor who volunteered for duty in Gaza has been honoured by UK Forces survival training chiefs.

Orthopaedic surgeon and author Dr Richard Villar has just returned from Gaza working for the UK-based Medical Aid for Palestinians.

He was invited to add his name to Cranwell's Wall of Gallantry which celebrates the achievements of the UK Forces' frontline fighters.

Speaking to the latest class of aircrew to graduate from the SERE training course, he warned students that what you see in the media is not what you get.

Aircrew SERE training officer Mark Fairhead said: "Richard outlined difficulties operating as a politically neutral live-saver, focusing on the patient before him not the politics of the moment, revealing the catastrophic impact on the civilian population in increasingly urbanised conflict."

"He included some graphic images and statistics, including the fact that 25 per cent of all deaths in war were avoidable with adequate medical provision."

"This offers hope that with people like him lives can still be saved in the direst of circumstance."

Dr Villar joined 22 Sqn SAS as a Medical Officer after completing his training at St Thomas' Hospital in London.



In 1981 he left full-time service to embark on a career as an orthopaedic surgeon.

Mr Fairhead said: "Richard stressed the importance of early intervention with bleeding and the

role of a doctor and humanitarian in war and natural disasters.

"There is a need to understand the culture of the people you work with and treat."

Author of *Knife Edge*, *Winged*

Scalpel and *Gaza Medic*, Dr Villar spoke about the impact of post-traumatic stress on casualties, witnesses and those left at home wondering what had become of their loved ones.

Bulletin



Bearing up

CHARITY MASCOT Edward the Bear made an appearance at Lossiemouth to spearhead SSAFA's latest campaign.

Station photographers snapped the furry fundraiser alongside the Moray station's famous vintage Jaguar, dubbed 'Spotty', and the MacRoberts Reply Typhoon on display in the 6 Sqn Hangar.



Space race

AEROSPACE FANS are ready for take off at the RAF Museum Midlands as the venue launches jet and space week.

Among the space age attractions on offer are a tour of the solar system in the Planetarium Dome, plant trail hunt and Lego rocket building sessions.

Go to rafmuseum.org/midlands.

Feature WWII Survivor



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GREEN PARK: Colin Bell at the Bomber Command Memorial in London in 2023
PHOTO: OLIVER DIXON



LOOKING SKYWARD: Mr Bell at the RAF Benevolent Fund's garden at the 2022 Chelsea Flower Show
PHOTO: OLIVER DIXON



EARLY DAYS: Colin in the US in 1942

by Tracey Allen

The RAF Supervet, 4, and Pouring se who like the imate crifice wars

AT THE age of 104 supervet Colin Bell has written his first book. Published in March 2026 *Bloody Dangerous* (hachette.co.uk), by the former Flt Lt, a DFC winner who carried out 50 missions over Germany in World War II, is described as the last first-hand account of that war.

The ex-Mosquito pilot – who abseiled down a 17-storey building aged 102 in aid of charity – appeared at Cheltenham Literature Festival earlier this month with Dr Tessa Dunlop to discuss the historian and broadcaster's latest book, *Lest We Forget, War and Peace in 100 British Monuments* (harpercollins.co.uk).

Born in 1921, Colin grew up between World Wars I and II. He remembered: "It was a particularly difficult time for a teenager. My parents and all those I knew around them were absolutely horrified at the prospect of another world war. They would have done anything to avoid the awful slaughter that had occurred in WWI, which I suppose is understandable, but we now know that appeasement never pays.

Despots

"It is always the despots that make wars," he added. "Whenever the Treasury want to save money they cut back on defence and that is the very thing that encourages despots. There's no question in my mind that defence ought to be the first priority [for government]."

Dr Dunlop explained that, up until the Napoleonic Wars "commemoration was all about hero men – Wellington, Nelson, the building of Great Britain." She said: "There was a sea change from the Crimean War onwards when we also remember the fallen."

The first memorial that named individual rank and file was the Crimean War Memorial at Bath Abbey Cemetery, erected in 1856. This was because journalists were camped in with the soldiers on the battlefield, she explained.

"The Boer War was seen as a pyrrhic victory," she added. "But it was seen as important to lionise the fallen because if you don't you're not going to be able to recruit for the next generation."

Colin recalled attending numerous Armistice Day ceremonies between the wars. He said: "I always remember how carefully the two-minute silence was observed. Traffic used to come to a standstill in cities all over the country. I think it was revered more when I was a young man than it is now."

He added: "After WWII, in my experience, nobody wanted to remember it, it was almost as if everyone wanted to forget it. It was not until the Iraq war and when bodies started coming back into RAF Brize Norton that people seemed to wake up to the fact that wars resolve in people getting killed and there was a change of attitude then."

Dr Dunlop noted: "Following WWII, veterans said 'we want no more monuments to war, they didn't stop a second world war.'"

Colin joined the RAF towards the end of 1940 and did his flying training in America. He returned to England in 1943, converted to the Mosquito and joined 608 Sqn (Pathfinder Group) based at Downham Market.

Of the 50 bombing raids he completed over Germany, 13 were over Berlin. More than 55,500

airmen from Bomber Command died in WWII.

He said: "The real casualties were incurred by those flying the heavy bombers. The aircraft were slower, more vulnerable and the aircrew suffered very heavy casualties. At the start of a tour of operations, if there were four Stirling captains in a room, three months afterwards those captains and crew would all be dead. There was only a 25 per cent chance of survival – those were rather horrific odds. By contrast fully-laden heavy bombers flew at 170 to 180mph – a fully-laden Mosquito flew at 420mph.

He added: "The chances of being shot down by a propeller-driven night fighter if you were flying a Mosquito were relatively small. But we lost 25 per cent of our complement in 1944-45."

Modest Colin explained: "I had seen the Battle of Britain in the air and, like every red-blooded young man, I wanted to join the Air Force and get into Fighter Command. Don't think for one moment I consider myself a hero, I'm not. The real heroes were the boys of the Battle of Britain, ably led by Lord Dowding and Sir Keith Park. If we had not defeated the Luftwaffe in the Battle, Bomber Command would never have come into existence because we would have been subjugated by the Germans. If I had my way Dowding would be on a plinth in Trafalgar Square at least as high as Lord Nelson."

He also praised Bomber Command Commander in Chief Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, a somewhat controversial figure.

"He was the consummate war leader, until he arrived Bomber Command was an ineffectual force," said Colin. "He organised 1,000 bomber raids on Cologne – no one had seen anything like it before. It cemented in people's minds that Harris was a force to be reckoned with."

The National Memorial to the Few, to the aircrew who won the Battle of Britain, was unveiled by The Queen Mother at Capel-le-Ferne, Kent in 1993. There was still no monument for Bomber Command.

Bomber Command

Colin said: "Bomber Command never really became efficient until we got the wonderful organisation of the Pathfinders and the Australian Don Bennett, who led the Group and evolved the system of marking targets with flares. From that point onwards, Bomber Command caused damage to all the manufacturing cities in Germany.

"Bomber Command mounted a raid on Peenemünde where the Germans were developing V1 and V2 weapons. On the very first raid Bomber Command inflicted such damage on Peenemünde that when the Commandant, who was having lunch with Hitler, saw it, he had a seizure and fell down dead – which I found deeply satisfying."

The Bomber Command Memorial, in Green Park, central London, was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth II in 2012. It is the most visited monument in London and is maintained by the RAF Benevolent Fund.

Dr Dunlop said: "The Bomber Command Memorial really works, it lionises the men who gave their lives and reminds us of the cost of war."

AUTHORS: Colin Bell DFC and historian Dr Tessa Dunlop, and their new books, inset above





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VERY FEW men fought in the Battle of Britain and on D-Day. They were a rare breed. In *The Shy Assassin* (Grub Street, £25, grubstreet.co.uk) Air Marshal 'Black' Robertson examines the career of the Battle of Britain ace and D-Day Mosquito pilot Cyril Babbage. His inspiring achievements are impressively chronicled in this well-presented study.

Babbage was in the cockpit of some of the RAF's most iconic machines. He flew Spitfires, Mosquitos and post-war Meteors and Vampires, gaining a reputation as a capable and fearless fighter pilot and an accomplished instructor, embracing the jet age. By the end of his 25-year RAF career he had flown almost 30 different aircraft types.

The author has consulted everything available pertaining to Babbage. With limited source material, he explores Babbage's links to events and individuals and tells these stories too. Throughout the struggles, Babbage was always identifiable by his 'polka-dot cravat cum scarf', a good luck present from his aunt, Gertrude Wells.

The real action starts at the height of the Battle of Britain. In mid-August 1940, Babbage and his No. 602 Squadron colleagues headed south in their Spitfires from Drem in East Lothian to Westhampnett, a satellite station of Tangmere. They flew into the midst of a battle, with a burning Me 109 nearby and a damaged Hurricane stuck in the middle of the airfield.

Ju 87

On Sunday, August 18, 'the hardest day', Babbage opened his account. He put a Ju 87 into the Channel and damaged a Me 109. A week later, on August 25, he claimed two more – a Me 110, whose cockpit disintegrated under fire before bursting into flames, and a Dornier 17 bomber, which plunged into the sea.

On August 26, Babbage had his first lucky escape, shot down and ending up in the Channel, before being pulled out by local fishermen, a photographer recording his arrival in Bognor Regis. However, he was soon back in a Spitfire. By the end of September, Babbage was one of the less than 200 from 'The Few' to become Battle of Britain aces.

This book centres on Babbage's wartime service. The author makes effective use of the Operations Record Books available at The National Archives, Kew and Babbage's RAF Record of Service. They provide an archival underpinning, charting his career throughout the text.

Robertson conveys the life of the fighter pilot, from the intensity Babbage sometimes experienced on the south coast in the summer of 1940, to the lulls endured later in the year and into 1941. By that stage, 602 Sqn had returned to

Scotland, initially to Prestwick. One aspect remained constant – the depressing occurrence of aircraft accidents.

Babbage's second stint in Scotland ended in June 1941. He was transferred to 41 Sqn in Yorkshire, another battle-hardened Battle of Britain unit. In late July, the squadron moved to Merston, another Tangmere satellite station. This promised excitement and a shift from defensive to offensive operations. The reality involved fighting over enemy territory in new Spitfire Mk Va and Vb, with powerful Merlin 45 engines. These rhubarb operations involved flying low and hitting targets of opportunity while ongoing circus operations consisted of coordinated bomber attacks on specific targets with fighter support.

When serving with 41 Sqn,

Babbage became the first RAF pilot to down a Focke-Wulf 190, initially thinking that the aircraft he was chasing was an American Curtis Hawk.

Babbage's subsequent two and half years as an instructor at the height of the war are covered quickly. At the end of April 1944, he returned to the frontline with 464 (RAAF) Sqn, flying the venerable Mosquito FB Mk VI fighter-bomber, designed for 'intruder' strike operations.

In the early hours of D-Day the squadron hit a French railway line. Night flying was the norm as it supported the Normandy invasion. Frontline flying for Babbage continued until September 1944, with operations against bridges, roads and railways. Reaching the rank of Wg Cdr in the post-war RAF, Babbage retired from the Service in 1964.

He died aged 59 in 1976.

This book incorporates relevant combat reports, claims summary, a glossary, endnotes, a bibliography and index, together with impressive

photographs. It tells the story at a lively pace, introducing the reader to the immensely skilled and brave Cyril Babbage.

Review by Alastair Noble

The polka-dot ace



ART: Grahame Algar's painting of Babbage being shot down by Hauptmann Mayer's Me 109, August 29, 1940



NATTY: Babbage in his trademark polka-dot cravat (Francis Wells)



SHOT DOWN: Babbage clammers ashore at Bognor after his rescue (Francis Wells)

Copies of book up for grabs



WE HAVE copies of *The Shy Assassin* to win. For your chance to own one, tell us:

Which sqn was Babbage serving with when he became the first RAF pilot to down a Focke-Wulf 190?

Email your answer, marked *The Shy Assassin* book competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by November 14.

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Armed Forces' Health Support

by Tracey Allen

Features



WELL-ATTENDED:
Remembrance Sunday
at London's Cenotaph

RAF VETERAN John Nichol has been taking part in Remembrance Sunday for the past 20 years. The former Tornado navigator, now a bestselling author, who was taken prisoner of war after his aircraft was shot down during the Iraq war in 1991, marches along Whitehall with the RAF Ex-PoW Association.

He said: "When I first started going to the Cenotaph, a lot of World War II veterans were there – now there are none as most are aged over 100. Those of us who go are the Gulf War PoWs and six or seven of us go to represent our forebears. It's really important for us to do that."

John said when he attends the National Service of Remembrance in November he sees the crowds getting larger every year.

He added: "There are more of us now on parade and the crowds

are massive, and they're cheering – it's astonishing."

His most recent book was *The Unknown Warrior* (simonandschuster.co.uk) in which he retraced the Unknown Warrior's journey home from the World War I battlefields of Northern France to Westminster Abbey for burial.

"I think about the friends I have lost in the Air Force on active service, in war. When I started my RAF training in the 1980s it wasn't unusual to lose 10 or 12 colleagues a year in training accidents, and I think of them," he said. "And of the wives, husbands and children left behind."

"I also think of the overall sacrifice made through the ages, going back to the unimaginable sacrifice made during WWI and of all of those we lost in WWII, the men of Bomber Command and those that have gone since. For me it is so important to never

“There are more of us now on parade and the crowds are massive...”

forget those sacrifices.

For the public, remembrance depends on how visible our Armed Forces are – during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars recognition of service was high in the media. It's important to keep that focus in the wider media so the public remember our Armed Forces, what they have done and will continue to do – we live in very dangerous times."

Remembrance Sunday is always an emotional day for John. He said: "For me, one of the great parts of the morning is meeting people at Horse Guards Parade at 9am, some you haven't seen for years. I always seek out Nikki Scott, whose husband Cpl Lee Scott was killed in action in Afghanistan. Nikki founded the charity Scott's Little Soldiers for bereaved military children and she will have children with her. It makes me emotional to talk about it – there you have the very visible symbol of sacrifice."

"Yes, it is emotional but it is also joyful, it is great to be there and to be part of it with

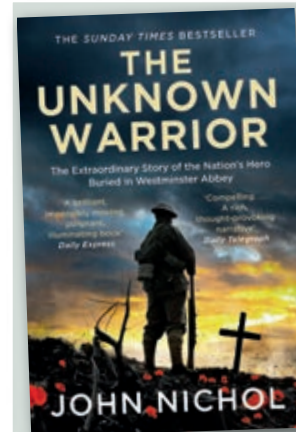
old friends. And anybody in the military will tell you that."

Even today, there are RAF personnel still missing in action. John said: "The Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre is still finding those who died in WWI and II, identifying them if they can and burying them with honour, which is fantastic. The research, dedication and the compassion that goes into that is astonishing."

SOLEMN: Princess of Wales at past Remembrance service



RAF VETERAN: Former Navigator and PoW John Nichol lays a wreath at Cenotaph in 2023



Win a signed book

THE UNKNOWN Warrior has just been published in paperback – and we have hard copies of the book, signed by the author, to win.

For your chance to own one, tell us: In which year was John Nichol taken prisoner of war?

Win!

Email your answer, marked The Unknown Warrior competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by November 14.



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Former Phantom pilot and The Major figure in history of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight

SQUADRON LEADER Paul Day, who has died aged 82, served on the RAF's Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (BBMF) for 24 years, during which time he amassed over 1,000 hours flying time in the Spitfire participating in many state occasions and displaying the aircraft at air shows.

He joined the RAF in 1961 and trained as a fighter pilot. His first appointment was to 20 Squadron to fly the Hunter ground attack fighter from RAF Tengah in Singapore.

This was at the time of the Indonesian Confrontation when aircraft were maintained at a high state of alert. Regular detachments of Hunters were sent to Labuan and to Kuching in Borneo to patrol the Indonesian border.

After qualifying as a pilot attack instructor, in 1969 he left for Muharraq in Bahrain to join 208 Squadron, also equipped with the Hunter. On return to the UK, he was one of the first pilots to train on the RAF's latest fighter ground attack aircraft, the US-built McDonnell Phantom.

Quick Reaction Alert

He was posted to Germany where he served on 14 Squadron at RAF Bruggen on the Dutch-German border. New to the Central Region of NATO, the squadron provided a much greater and diverse capability than its predecessors. In addition to its role with conventional weapons, it was also capable of delivering nuclear bombs and Day and his colleagues spent considerable time on 15-minute "quick reaction alert" in the event of being scrambled.

In September 1972, Day and his navigator were selected to represent RAF Bruggen at a major NATO tactical fighter meet flown from a Belgian airfield. They achieved the highest individual score in the ground-attack role, which helped ensure that the Second Allied Tactical Air Force (2 ATAF) team beat that of 4 ATAF which included the USAF and the German Air Force.

After his time in Germany, he left in 1975 for an exchange appointment with the USAF to fly the Phantom with the 550th Tactical Fighter Training Squadron at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona. His task was to convert experienced pilots and weapon system operators to the Phantom. His rank of squadron leader was alien to his USAF colleagues, so they addressed him with the equivalent USAF rank of



THE MAJOR: Sqn Ldr Day got his nickname after serving with the USAF at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona. Here he is in the cockpit of a BBMF Spitfire PRXIX

major, and from that time, he was always known as The Major.

He returned to Coningsby from the USAF in 1979 and continued to serve on RAF Phantom squadrons until he converted to the Tornado fighter in 1984.

The BBMF was based at RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire. At the time, pilots for the Flight were drawn from the resident squadrons on the base and Day volunteered. Initially he flew the Hurricane and then converted to the Spitfire, which he went on to display at countless air shows and on many formal occasions.

He flew a Spitfire on numerous events commemorating World War II and upon State occasions, notably the annual Trooping of the Colour and The Queen's Birthday Flypast. He was the deputy leader

of the RAF formation, led by the BBMF, that flew over Buckingham Palace to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Britain in September 1990.

HM The Queen Mother

The Air Vice-Marshal leading the large formation in another Spitfire commented, "having Paul Day keeping an eye on proceedings from just behind me in the formation was extremely reassuring."

In 2002 he piloted one of the two Spitfires that flew over the cortege of HM The Queen Mother as it left Westminster Abbey.

In due course, he became the chief instructor for the Flight's fighter aircraft.

At the end of his regular service, Day remained a reserve officer and assumed

command of the Flight in 1995, a post he held for the next eight years, a period unlikely to be surpassed. For his service with the BBMF he was appointed OBE and awarded the AFC.

In 2023 he was invited to be the guest of honour at the annual banquet of the RAF Museum American Foundation held in Washington. Attended by the RAF and USAF Chiefs of Air Staff, the modest Day spoke of his experiences as OC BBMF and the many and varied situations he had to face displaying the Spitfire and Hurricane.

Day was described by his commanding officer as "utterly reliable, unflappable and the ultimate professional." The many tributes paid to him describe him as "a great boss, an inspiring leader and a great pilot."



MG IS a brand that stirs great emotion. Historically, it was a British icon that produced legends, such as the pre-war (WWII) MG TC, the post-war TD and the 1960s B-GT. The TF carried the sports car dream up to 2011 and that's where division of opinion starts.

When MG next emerged from the shadows, after a long hiatus, it wasn't focused on sports cars any more and was Chinese owned. Instead, cars like the MG3 offered customers economical family wagons that were practical, in every respect.

Buyers on a budget loved it, traditional MG enthusiasts hated it and many others didn't realise MG was still a thing.

Three generations later, the MG3 is a familiar sight on our roads and still one of the most affordable cars around.

Exterior

I'll let you decide whether its looks are your cup of tea, but I'll make one simple observation... it's got a lot more going for it than the last one.

Interior

Considering that the 3 is significantly cheaper than most of its rivals, the interior is surprisingly smart. It's well bolted together and the quality is sound. There's a hefty chunk of hard plastic in here, but it's not noticeably shabby and better than you might expect for a £19k car.

It's refreshingly simple, with plenty of physical buttons and a seven-inch digital instrument cluster. A 10.25-inch infotainment system, with built in sat nav is the only real tech and this works well. Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, smartphone mirroring come as standard.

Physical shortcut buttons,



Budget-friendly MG

below the infotainment screen, allow you to quickly control the demisters, adjust the audio and access other functions. There's also a drive rotary controller on the centre console, plus a drive mode button to keep it super simple.

The only odd glitch is that, when you're using CarPlay, you can't access the climate controls through the shortcut button, unless you first press the home button. I'm sure this makes perfect sense in China, but here,

in England, it's just a bit weird.

In terms of interior space, the latest car is both longer and wider than the model it replaces, so there's plenty of legroom up front. It's a little cramped, in the rear, for six-footers and you wouldn't want to travel too far back there, but it's on a par for the class.

The seats are comfortable and it's a good little family wagon on a run.

On The Road

It's a highly efficient bit of kit, returning fuel economy figures that nudge up to 64.2mpg. It produces a total of 192bhp from the hybrid system, which is certainly enough to make it feel spirited and will cover the 0-62mph sprint in around eight seconds. It'll beat most rivals off the line.

The suspension setup is fairly firm and body lean is well controlled, thanks to a well balanced chassis. MG's Longbridge (Birmingham) engineering team has further tuned the MG3's suspension to respond well on UK roads. They've certainly got that bit right.

The only downside being that the upright, family wagon, body

undoes all the sportiness by providing gravity with enough handles to drag it off course. This breaks its grip of the tarmac quite quickly. Steering is short on feedback and doesn't have the sharpness that traditional MG fans will crave. It is however in keeping with the class.

Around town, the MG3 plods along silently on electric. It doesn't have much EV range but, while it lasts, the silent glide is serene. The 1.5-litre, four-cylinder petrol engine and 134bhp electric motor, paired with a 1.83kWh battery, send power to the wheels through a rather simple three-speed auto gearbox, which is nice and simple.

Three driving modes – Eco, Standard and Sport, tweak the steering weight, throttle response, and power configuration, but you'll probably just keep it in its Standard mode. As I say, this is no TF, it's a small family motor, leave well alone.

What I haven't driven yet, and I would love to comment on, is the non-hybrid version, that comes with a manual gearbox. I have a feeling that would tick a lot more of the old MG enthusiasts' boxes.

MG3



Pros

- Spirited drive
- Smart interior
- Aggressively priced
- Well-equipped

Cons

- It's no hot hatch
- Some rivals more practical
- Looks an acquired taste

Verdict

The hybrid MG3 is well priced and offers a lot of car for the cash. It's not going to give you a buzz, like MGs of old, but there is enough sporty finesse to make it feel like it deserves to wear the badge. I have a sneaking suspicion that the regular petrol car will be far more engaging. I'll keep you posted on that one.



Sport

WINDSURFING



AIR POWER: Flt Lt Freddie Hunter pulls out a huge jump
PHOTO: RICHARD WHITSON

STORM HUNTER

Flt Lt goes wild in the Hebrides

INTREPID ATHLETES were forced to ride it out as the RAF Windsurfing Wave Championships in the Inner Hebrides were hit by Storm Amy.

Handling the conditions best and winning out at the annual event was Flt Lt Freddie Hunter, who took top-spot.

The advance party left Oban on a 4am ferry to beat the arrival of the Atlantic beast and as soon as they made land on the island they were straight to the beach, rigging-up kit and holding on for as long as they could before windspeeds 'got silly' (50-60kts).

Following half a day battling the elements, they returned to accommodation and battened down



RUNNER-UP: Wg Cdr 'Ruggy' Rugg

the hatches. Witnessing the power of the storm with windspeeds up to 96mph was a humbling experience.

Once the fallen trees were cleared up the next day they got back to it – in sustained winds of 40-50kts, making the most of their high-wind equipment to carve-up waves and jump high into the air.

The main party of the RAF windsurfers arrived once the winds had calmed enough for the Oban-Tiree ferry to sail once again, and training and competition went full ahead in the remainder of the week.

The competition was held at Crossapol beach, with a more manageable 25-30kt wind and reasonable swell providing excellent conditions.

Kit selection was vital and, as ever, perfectly timing the run-in with wave sets was crucial to hit the biggest waves and allow the biggest jumps and turns.

A full day of competition was needed to break out this year's closely contested event, but in the end it was Flt Lt Freddie Hunter who took the top spot, followed by Wg Cdr 'Ruggy' Rugg and Flt Lt 'Trigger' Rigg.

Cpl Amy Chambers won the ladies' fleet and Fg Off 'Simmo' Simmons took gold in the novice fleet.

Simmo said: "It was wild out there, the storm almost blew me off my feet, but what a result to get out and win."



TOP NOVICE: Fg Off 'Simmo' Simmons gave a good account

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

Gravel's glorious



RACE START:
Ready for the off



PACE-SETTER: Eventual winner A/Cpl Thomas Stegeman

CYCLING

IT WAS a glorious result as RAF riders dominated the second annual Inter-Services Gravel Championships at Sherwood Forest.

The event took place over four laps of 15km combining technical single track, berms, sand and fire roads.

The race started fast with five riders taking the front, and aviator A/Cpl Thomas Stegeman setting the pace for much of the first three laps, with the five-man group staying together.

On lap 4, after successive attacks on the first few climbs, Stegeman managed to force a gap, the group splintering behind.

The gaps held until the end of the race resulting in an RAF sweep of the podium, with Stegeman first, Sgt Rich Summerbell second and Cpl Peter Lown third.

After a very close race culminating in a sprint 400m from the finish line, Cpl Sarah Toms took the win for the Royal Air Force in the female category.

As a result of the combined performance of every member of the team the RAF took the overall team prize, ahead of the Army and Navy.



CPL SARAH TOMS: Leading the way for the women

Special day's a perfect fit for rookie PTIs



FITNESS

RAF PTI apprentices showcased their skills by organising a training session for more than 120 trainees for National Fitness Day.

The event, at Cosford, featured a circuit designed to promote the importance of staying in shape and its role in maintaining operational effectiveness.

One participant said: "The PTI apprentices did an outstanding job. The event was not only challenging and fun but also very informative. It's clear they're passionate about what they do, and their enthusiasm was infectious."



LET'S GET PHYSICAL: PTI apprentices with the trainees
PHOTOS: CPL NATHAN EDWARDS



RAF:
Battled to
the end

French are on a high

Senior men Crunched

RUGBY UNION

Sports Reporter

TWO LATE tries for the RAF were little consolation as they were well beaten by their French counterparts in the annual Le Crunch match at the Stade André Moga in Bordeaux.

Cpl James Roberts and Flt Lt Jacob Seddon both crossed the whitewash deep into the second half, but by then the French had already got the game sewn up.

After dominating early on, the hosts kept the scoreboard ticking

French Air Force	48
RAF Senior Men	12

over and were away by the break, leading 27-0.

There was little change in momentum in the second half, save the RAF consolation scores, with the French running out convincing 48-12 victors.

RAF Head Coach WO Tom Gardner said: "In terms of the season, we are investing in youth again because if they are good enough, they are old enough."

"I certainly believe when my



journey is over as the head coach I'll leave a 40-man squad that can compete year in, year out.

"The French result wasn't the best for us, but the training benefit of getting lads in camp

early in the season will hopefully pay off in the new year.

"We had seven under 23s and 14 players in total under 25, which will be an exciting prospect when they are all 27-28.

"We are deliberately stacking our opening block with tough opposition, because that's the only way we'll raise our bar early doors and build the edge we'll need when it really matters."

A first for Marham as Lightning Ladies take to pitch



TEAM TALK: Lightning Ladies

RAF MARHAM made history as the station's first ever Ladies 15s rugby team took to the pitch, welcoming a side from the University of East Anglia.

The Lightning Ladies were established at the start of summer, initially playing sevens at the RAF Akrotiri Festival of Rugby in June. Since then, they have gone from strength to strength, growing the squad and working hard both in training and behind the scenes to prepare for this milestone match.

With supporters from the station and the local West Norfolk Women's RUFC cheering from the sidelines, the game got underway. The teams were evenly matched, with the Lightning Ladies showing clear improvement throughout and demonstrating the solid foundation

Lightning Ladies	10
University of East Anglia	19

they have built over the past eight weeks to become a competitive side. The East Anglia Uni team narrowly secured victory, with a final score of 19-10.

Lightning Ladies captain AS2 Stevens said: "All the ladies who played put in an amazing shift on the pitch and I could not have been prouder to captain such an incredible group. The support that came down to watch and cheer us on hasn't gone unnoticed either, and we're so grateful people came to watch our first game."

Player of the match was Lightning's Cpl Duff.



HISTORIC: First ladies' 15s game at RAF Marham

Sport

DARTS

Arrows takes flight in RAF

RAF NORTHOLT got the better of a weakened High Wycombe to take their inter-station clash 8-4.

The captains drew the fixtures and it was a strong opening line-up with Fg Off Mike Howley pairing up with WO2 Jules Lingard-Nelson and AS1(T) George Alford facing Flt Lt Daz White. With music pumping and a lively crowd watching on, the first darts were thrown. Mike and Jules exchanged big scores while George and Daz struggled to find consistency on the trebles. Mike held his nerves to run out a 2-0 victor while George won his match in a much closer 2-1 battle. An impressive start for Northolt's big guns.

This form continued in the third match despite Sgt Shane Shanewood taking the opening leg with the highest checkout of the night (91) against Northolt's Cpl Jordan Knott. RAF High Wycombe eventually got a

point on the board as Sqn Ldr Al Stephenson brushed aside AS1(T) Ethan Davison. The comeback continued as Chris Ptak was also quickly despatched 2-0 but Northolt dug in and produced some solid resilient performances to take the last three singles matches. Cpl Iain Curlett, AS1s Hubert Chaushary and Robbie Marrs all ran out 2-1 winners and despite the arrivals of WO Gregg Williams for the Flight Club, it was too little too late and Northolt took an unassailable 6-2 lead into the double fixtures.

A bright start from Gregg and Shane pulled a quick point back for High Wycombe but the formidable pairing of Mike and George was strong enough to seal the vital point needed for the victory on the night. High Wycombe did win one more double match thanks to Jules and Al but the final point of the

evening went to a well-deserved Northolt pairing of Chris and Iain.

"This has been amazing. I cannot believe that these lads have played a match against another station already. When we started putting the club together we told people that we hoped to play other units in the future. We did not think that would be within six months," said Howley.

White praised the fledgling outfit at Northolt. He said: "These events do not just happen, they

take organisation and planning. What Northolt have put on tonight is special in such a short period of time.

"RAF Darts was only recognised in February this year. We [Flight Club] have been self-funded at High Wycombe for four years because we are all passionate about playing. We had a lot of players missing tonight but we were never not going to turn up. Northolt deserved their 8-4 victory tonight and we look forward to hosting them in the New Year".



In brief

FORCES EQUESTRIANS will be battling it out at Wincanton Racecourse in the McCreery Military Hurdle for Military Amateur Jockeys, on Thursday, December 4.

For concessionary tickets, including lunch, go to thejockeyclub.co.uk/wincanton/events-tickets/afternoon-racing-december/tickets/?promoCode=MIL25

Army are on the ropes



GREAT START: AS1 Harry Jacques from Brize Norton won opening bout
PHOTO: CPL CONNOR TIERNEY

BOXING

RAF BOXING took the honours at Coningsby as its fighters beat Army opponents in four of six bouts.

Held in 29 Squadron's hangar, the night was organised by Flt Lt Mark Kaberry and a team of dedicated volunteers.

There was no shortage of physical fitness and determination on display as the audience was treated to some quality rounds.

Gp Capt Paul O'Grady, the Station Commander at Coningsby, said: "There's a direct correlation between sport and our world-class operational output, as sport encourages and develops competition, courage, camaraderie, commitment, team work and mental and physical stamina which is essential for our personnel; and we've seen plenty of that with the skilful, gritty and professional performances we've witnessed this evening.

"But the power of sport also brings Station personnel together at events such as this to help engender a fantastic esprit de corps and unity which is central to life in the RAF."

It was a good night for the aviators and for RAF Coningsby in particular. Team Blue won four of the six bouts, with Coningsby's AS1 Alex Masterman taking home the best boxer award, and the award for best bout.

5 RAF Sport

pages of



French prove too strong for RAF's young rugby squad

See page 25

AWARDS

Hooked on success

Angler Steve and cyclist Sarah net top RAF honours

Staff Reporter

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

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

Speaking at the glitzy awards ceremony at the RAF Club, Sports Board Director Air Cdre Richard Fogden said: "All of the nominees are at the pinnacle of their sports."

"Across our 56 associations, from Archery to Volleyball and all points inbetween, we believe all can benefit from participation and achieve success at each and every level of competition."

Coarse angling team captain Sgt Reid takes the title after more than a decade of dedication to the sport, which has seen the Air Force clinch successive Inter-Services titles.

Steve overhauled Awards front runners AS1 Sam Murray who powered to Inter-Services glory in the cycling time trials ending



WOMEN'S CROWN: Cpl Sarah Toms

the Navy's four-year dominance, and Motorcycle racer Cpl Kenneth Macleod who scored multiple podium places, keeping the Service in the fight for this year's championship.

Sportswoman of the Year Toms has balanced operational duties with top level performances in the saddle at cycling events across the UK, excelling in track, road and time trials against Army and Navy rivals.



SGT STEVE REID: Has the Sportsman of the Year title in the bag

She edged ahead of RAF triathlete Flt Lt Harriet Haywood who tasted success on the Forces, UK and international stage, forging a reputation as one of the Service's top endurance athletes.

Also in the running for the Women's crown was archery hot shot Sgt Eleanor Spinks, who has risen rapidly through the sport's ranks since picking up the bow in 2021 to become a contender in Forces and civilian events.

Lifetime Achievement awards were presented to swim star Sqn Ldr Trevor Down, sports aircraft ace Richard Dawe, netball stalwart Gp Capt Dawn Murty and cresta supremo Wg Cdr Joshua Wilson.

Air Cdre Fogden added: "Our sports stars couldn't do what they do without the support of their families, friends and line managers – they are all the unsung heroes of RAF Sport."

The winners

Sportsman

- Sgt Steven Reid

Sportswoman

- Cpl Sarah Toms

Administrator

- Cpl Daniel McKay

Sports Official

- Sgt Scott Glanville

Sports Team

- RAF Rugby League

Civilian Volunteers

- David Smith (Rugby Union)
- Cameron Hazeldine (Ice Hockey)

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

- Swimming: Sqn Ldr Trevor Down
- Sport Aircraft: Mr Richard Dawe
- Netball: Gp Capt Dawn Murty
- Cresta: Wg Cdr Joshua Wilson
- Powerkiting: FS Ian Savage
- Athletics: WO Frank Chapman

HEAD OF RAF SPORT AWARD

- Marham Bulls & Lightning Ladies

THE RAF CENTRAL FUND UNIT AWARD

- RAF Gibraltar – Op Gusto



MOTORBIKE ACE:
Cpl Ken Macleod



ARCHERY QUEEN:
Sgt Eleanor Spinks



TRIATHLETE:
Flt Lt Harriet Haywood

READY FOR CIVVY STREET?

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

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

**HLP for
HEROES**

**Help for Heroes is here for
anyone who's worn the uniform**
and your family, whatever challenges you might face.

helpforheroes.org.uk/get-help



SCAN ME

R'n'R



**Win Battle of
Britain book ● p5**

A hero's journey – The Lightning Thief

● See
pages
4-5



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

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



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

**COMBAT
STRESS**
FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH



Ballet
Nutcracker in Havana
UK tour

Nutcracker turns Latin

DANCE SUPERSTAR Carlos Acosta's new production *Nutcracker in Havana* – on tour until February 2026 – takes the ever-popular festive ballet and moves the story to the Cuban capital. A celebration of joy, life, love and family, the show gives the Tchaikovsky classic a new spin.

Performed by more than 20 dancers from Carlos' Havana-based company Acosta Danza, the production retains the classic story of a young girl transported to a magic world while incorporating the culture, history and music of Carlos' home country of Cuba.

A world-renowned dancer who has performed with companies across the globe including 17 years with The Royal Ballet, Carlos (pictured right) has choreographed previous productions including *Carmen* and *Don Quixote* and felt *The Nutcracker* was ideal for reinvention.

"I have performed so many

versions of *The Nutcracker* and I think that putting it in Havana creates a production which is totally different from any other production out there," he said.

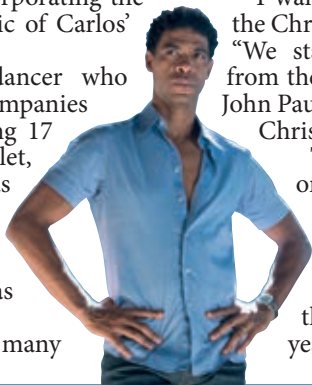
"This is not going to be a European feel where you are in a Victorian mansion and everything is period, this is much more Cuba now."

The *Nutcracker* is set amid a family party on Christmas Eve and yet as a child growing up in Havana Carlos was unable to take part in such festivities.

"I wanted to give the Cuban people the Christmas they never had," he said. "We started to celebrate Christmas from the coming to the island of Pope John Paul II in 1998 because before that Christmas was banned."

The production also touches on the Cuban diaspora, the thousands of people who fled the island into exile.

"The magician, the Drosselmeyer character, is the uncle who left for Miami 30 years ago and has now returned



HAVANA BALL:
Nutcracker dancer

to Havana with lots of presents and then he brings this kind of magic with him," Carlos added.

The ballet, at Aylesbury's Waterside Theatre until November 1, then touring the UK, also has new orchestration of the classic Tchaikovsky score by Cuban composer Pepe Gavilondo.

"When we started to work on the show, I started to play in my mind that we could re-work the score to incorporate Cuban rhythms," explained Carlos. "That was going to be a significant change because the audience will hear *Nutcracker* and Tchaikovsky in a completely different light with conga rhythms, guaracha, son – the music of Havana."

The show's producers and Carlos, who is director of both Acosta Danza and Birmingham Royal Ballet, hope to draw in new audiences to dance.

"The show has been created to tour beyond just the largest theatres to audiences in places that don't normally get the benefit of having a *Nutcracker*," said Carlos.

"I hope everyone will come. I hope this production pulls from different sectors of the population, from the Latin world, the classical world, the contemporary world, because it's a melting pot of everything."

Interview by Diane Parkes

● Go to: nutcrackerinhavana.com for more details.



Music
Sam Fender: People Watching
Re-release

Mercury king Sam upgrades

THIS YEAR's Mercury Prize-winner Sam Fender has announced details of a deluxe release of his critically-acclaimed third album, *People Watching*.

It has eight new tracks including a collaboration on *Talk To You* with Elton John, Sam's friend and long-term supporter, on piano.

In addition to the four tracks that originally featured on Sam's limited edition Record Store Day vinyl-only *Me and The Dog* EP, three new, previously unheard tracks, also feature: *Talk To You* (feat. Elton John), *Fortuna's Wheel* and *The Treadmill*.

Sam said: "*Talk to You* was written during the *People Watching* sessions at British Grove Studios. It's a song about the end of a long relationship – about the regret, the mistakes and the lessons that come with it. It's that feeling of losing your best friend, and coming to terms with that."

"I was playing around with the riff



FENDER:
Guitar man

and thought what I need is a really good pianist and then hmmm, I wonder who I can call? And of course, who better than Elton John?"

Speaking about *Talk To You*, Elton said: "Sam was writing and recording in a studio in West London and called to say he'd written a song with a piano riff that he thought would sound great with me playing it. I couldn't resist, and it was so much fun playing it for him. I truly love Sam. He's been a friend for many, many years and it's incredible to see him grow into being a truly world-class artist."

Released in February 2025, *People Watching* sold more than 100,000 copies in its first week in the UK alone. It then outsold the rest of the top 10 combined, becoming the fastest-selling album by a British solo artist since spring 2022. Its release was followed by a slew of sold-out stadium dates in the summer.

● Go to: samfender.com for more.



Cinema
Frankenstein (15)
Cinemas now/Netflix from Nov 7

It's Frank-ly marvellous

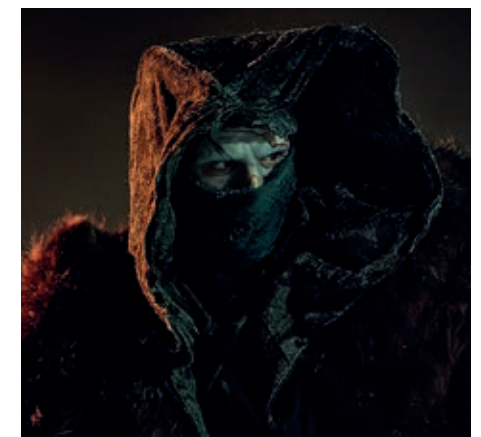
MARY SHELLEY'S classic gothic horror novel is brought back to life once again in Guillermo del Toro's empathetic *Frankenstein*.

Long gone is the green zombie with neck bolts, stuttering forward with his arms raised. Frankenstein's monster (Jacob Elordi, *Priscilla, Saltburn*) is instead introduced as a ferocious beast – unstoppable and intent on murdering his creator.

The unconscious body of Victor Frankenstein (Oscar Isaac, *Dune*) is picked up by a Danish vessel trapped in the ice when the creature of his labours comes hunting. This gives us a chance to hear his story – from a young boy (Christian Convery) under the strict tutelage of his father (Charles Dance), to a radical young thinker (Isaac) determined to harness electricity to reanimate the dead and thereby conquer death.

Isaac plays Baron Frankenstein as English, chewing every syllable and at times leaning into the arch campiness of the character. He takes an interest in his brother's love interest Elizabeth (Mia Goth), who bears a striking resemblance to his own mother, and died when he was a child.

It is during Frankenstein's experiments that del Toro's taste for the macabre is on full display, elevating these sequences with



BEASTLY: Jacob Elordi as Frankenstein's monster

a sense of delight – a montage of cadavers being chopped up has never felt so gleeful. The locations, set design and props feel affectionately chosen, grounding the film with a strong sense of place.

If it were not already clear that this is the perfect marriage of filmmaker and source material, the second half confirms it, shifting the story to the creature's perspective. With a history of films that champion monsters, including his Oscar-winning *The Shape of Water*, del Toro crafts a tale in which Elordi offers a tender portrayal of a newly-born beast who experiences the worst of human rage and violence, often scapegoated for others' wrongdoings and hunted relentlessly.

Though a little bloated and losing some of its visceral splendour under an assault of digital effects, *Frankenstein* is exactly what you'd hope for with a master monster-movie maker at the helm.

Four out of five roundels ●●●●

Review by Sam Cooney



Theatre
The Lightning Thief:
The Percy Jackson Musical
UK tour

Vasco goes from infatuated fan to the leading man

THE *LIGHTNING Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical* is continuing its UK tour, bringing the hit stage adaptation of Rick Riordan's bestselling novel to audiences across the country.

Leading the charge (and wielding the lightning bolt) is Vasco Emauz (*Back To The Future: The Musical*) as the one and only Percy Jackson, joined by Kayna Montecillo (*Starlight Express*) as the wise and fearless Annabeth and Cahir O'Neill as everyone's favourite satyr sidekick, Grover.

Producer Paul Taylor-Mills said: "This show is full of energy, humour, and heart – whether you're a long-time fan or new to the world of Camp Half-Blood, you're in for an unforgettable adventure."

Percy Jackson's story has been adapted into both films and a major hit TV series for Disney+. When New York City teenager Percy discovers that he is the half-blood son of the Greek god, Poseidon, his life takes a dramatic turn as he is plunged into a world much bigger than he could possibly have imagined.

With newly-discovered powers he is unable to control,

an unwanted destiny and a whole textbook's worth of mythical monsters on his trail, he must learn what it means to be a hero. The future of the world hangs in the balance as Percy and his friends embark on an epic, edge-of-the-seat adventure.

Growing up in Portugal, Vasco has Percy Jackson to thank for teaching him English. He saw the 2005 *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* movie first but then his brother told him he should read the book on which it was based, since the film was only a very loose interpretation of it.

"I read it and I just got obsessed," Vasco recalled. "I went on to read the Portuguese versions of all the books in the series, then when I fell behind on the translations I sat with a dictionary next to me and started reading the English versions. I loved them so much that I couldn't wait for the next Portuguese translation to be released. That's basically how I learned English."

He added: "It makes for such a brilliant adventure on stage. It's a coming-of-age story for Percy, a hero's journey, and full of fantastic fight scenes."



POWER
Vasco
as Per
Jackso

TALENT: Show's cast

The show's young star is thrilled to be playing Jackson, saying: "I really love him as a character and I think a lot of people will see themselves in him. Throughout our lives we've all maybe felt misunderstood or lost. On his journey Percy finds where he belongs and finds his value as someone who is worthy of love."

Vasco applauded Jackson's resilience and determination. "He

doesn't let anything stop him from achieving his goals," the actor said, adding that he sees a lot of himself in the character. "I'm also quite resilient but when I was younger I never felt like I had a place where I belonged and I didn't really feel understood. Now I'm a bit older, I'm a lot more self-assured and I know who I am."

This is only his second professional role, after he landed

the lead as Marty McFly in *Back to the Future The Musical* at London's Adelphi Theatre. "It was a pipe dream to be in London doing musical theatre, let alone leading a whole show," he beamed.

The tour of *The Lightning Thief* runs until March 21, 2026.

Kayna said of her character Athena: "She's very ambitious and smart, and she has confidence in her skill set. She expects a lot



Exhibitions
Tate Britain
Nov 27 to Apr 12, 2026

The fire and water of British

NEXT MONTH Tate Britain opens the first major exhibition to explore the intertwined lives and legacies of Britain's most revered landscape artists – JMW Turner and John Constable.



J.M.W. Turner, *Caligula's Palace and Bridge, exh. 1831*. Inset right, *Self Portrait* c. 1799. Both images courtesy of Tate.

"Radically different painters and personalities, each challenged artistic conventions of the time, developing ways of picturing the world which still resonate today," said a Tate Britain spokesperson.

"Staged across the 250th anniversary years of their births, this exhibition will trace the development of their careers in parallel, revealing the ways they were celebrated, criticised and pitted against each other, and how this pushed them to new and original artistic visions."

The exhibition, running from November 27 to April 12, 2026, features more than 170 paintings and works on paper, from Turner's

momentous 1835 *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons*, lent by Cleveland Museum of Art and not seen in Britain for over a century, to *The White Horse* 1819, one of Constable's greatest artistic achievements, last exhibited in London two decades ago.

Born only a year apart – Turner in London's crowded metropolis and Constable to a prosperous family in the Suffolk village of East Bergholt – their contrasting early lives will begin the exhibition. Turner was a commercially-minded, fast-rising young star who first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1790 aged just 15.

By contrast, largely self-taught Constable undertook sketching tours to create early watercolours like *Bow Fell, Cumberland* 1807 and demonstrated a fierce commitment to perfecting artistic techniques, not exhibiting at the Royal Academy until 1802. Having both emerged amid an explosion in popularity of landscape art, the two were united however, in their desire to change it for the better, the spokesperson explained.

By the 1830s, both Turner and Constable became recognised for taking landscape painting in bold new directions. The stark differences between their work spurred art critics to pit them against one another and to



Edited by Tracey Allen

Journey



ATHENA: Kayna Montecillo

of herself and she wants the best for herself, as do I. She's such a strong woman. If there's anyone young girls would want to look up to, it's always going to be someone who is strong and confident in themselves."

Co-star Cahir O'Neill described his character Grover as "such a shy, loving, heartwarming character and you can't help but fall in love with him."

"I read *The Lightning Thief* and found it so funny and just a delight. I

couldn't put it down, and the musical adaptation takes it to a whole other level," he said.

He's had to get used to wearing goat legs for the role. Cahir added: "They're actually quite comfy and there's a lot of padding in them, so during rehearsals people would sometimes lie on my legs and take little naps!"

● Go to: percyjacksonmusical.com for all tour dates.

h landscape art



John Constable, *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, c. 1829. Image courtesy of Tate. Inset, left, *John Constable* by Ramsay Richard Reinagle c. 1799. NPG 1786. © National Portrait Gallery, London. cast them as rivals. In 1831 Constable played into this, placing his and

Turner's work side by side at the Royal Academy exhibition. This showing of Turner's *Caligula's Palace and Bridge* next to Constable's *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, prompted comparisons between the sun-drenched heat of Turner's mythical Italian scene and Constable's damply atmospheric Britain; they were 'fire and water'.

The spokesperson added: "Now placed head-to-head at Tate Britain, the artists' most distinctive and impressive paintings will highlight how they made landscape a genre worthy of grand canvases and prime importance."

● Go to: tate.org.uk for more.



Books

Battle of Britain Remembered

pen-and-sword.co.uk

Battle of Britain's final chapter

THE SUMMER of 1940 marked a pivotal moment in World War II. Following the Fall of France, Britain and the Commonwealth stood alone against the threat of Nazi Germany. With the prospect of invasion looming and Hitler's forces undefeated, the outlook appeared bleak. As the new Prime Minister Winston Churchill predicted, "the Battle of Britain is about to begin."

Under the leadership of Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, the Luftwaffe sought to destroy the RAF and secure aerial supremacy, but Fighter Command's young aircrew – immortalised by Churchill as "The Few" – resisted with great determination.

Over 16 weeks, from July 10 to October 31, 1940, nearly 3,000 aircrew fought, with 544 losing their lives. Their sacrifice was supported by the RAF, Allied forces, and the civilian population, all playing vital roles in the struggle.

In his eight-volume series, historian Dilip Sarkar explores



LAST WORD: BoB Remembered

the Battle of Britain with a meticulous evidence-based approach. Drawing on primary sources, Sarkar challenges popular narratives while providing comprehensive day-by-day accounts of every raid, squadron action, and strategic operation, including Bomber and Coastal Command activities and

the impact on the Home Front. Produced in collaboration with the Battle of Britain Memorial Trust, the series offers the most up-to-date research available.

This final volume, *Battle of Britain Remembered* (pen-and-sword.co.uk) focuses on how the Battle has been commemorated over time and examines its cultural and historical significance. Concluding with a comprehensive directory of memorials, museums and sites related to the Battle, the book serves as an essential guide for those interested in exploring these locations and connecting with the dramatic events of 1940.

You could win a copy – for your chance to own one, answer this question correctly:

How many volumes are there in Dilip Sarkar's series about the Battle of Britain?

Email your answer, marked Battle of Britain Remembered book competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by November 14.



Music

Olly Murs

Bonkers

OLLY MURS has released the single *Bonkers* from his forthcoming new album *Knees Up*, which comes out on November 21.

"This is the first album in years I've made authentically for me – it's daring, fun, a bit bonkers – and the most buzzing I've felt about music in a long time," he said of the record.

"My fans have been there through everything over the last 15 years, and I can't wait for them to hear something fresh and fun from me. Time for a cheeky little *Knees Up*!"

The album will be available on transparent green vinyl, standard CD, deluxe CD (which comes with additional live tracks *Troublemaker*, *Heart Skips A Beat*, *Save Me* and *Dance With Me Tonight*), and Lanyard CD, available only to fans who pre-ordered the album at Olly's summer live shows.

Bonkers has "the old Olly vibes but a 2.0 version" the singer-songwriter and TV personality said. Written by Olly, Ed Drewett, Sky Adams and James New, the track is described as a big slice of happiness. And Olly has every reason to be happy after celebrating the birth of his second



NEW ALBUM: *Knees Up*

DADDY COOL: Olly now has two children

Bonkers for a Knees Up

child earlier this month.

It's been quite a year for Olly as his massive sold out UK tour celebrated 15 years of success with the kind of infectious pop that's become his trademark.

For *Knees Up* Olly has gone back to those heady days and revisited his roots on his new album, the eighth of his career.

● Go to: ollymurs.com for more information.



Your Announcements

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

Seeking

SEEKING Flt Lt Bev Webb who was the station MO (Medical Officer) at RAF Wyton in the 70s, 1972-74. Any information will be gladly received. I was on Tactical Supply and we spent many weekends flying at Panshangar in the two Auster aircraft they had. Please call Maurine Boakes on: 0116 2849332 or contact me on Facebook.

SEEKING memorabilia relating to the Victor bomber, in particular hanging china/porcelain wall plates. If you can help please contact Dick Squire on: dick.squire4@gmail.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

CALLING all former TG11 comms personnel, T/phonists, TPOs, Tels, Wop Spec, TCOs, TCCs, TRCs and any comms titles that may have superseded the aforementioned. All are welcome to attend the Trade Group 11 Association reunion to be held on Friday, March 20 to Sunday, March 22, 2026. The venue will be The Marriott Delta Hotels, Mellors Way, off Woodhouse Way, Nottingham Belfry, Nottingham NG8 6PY. Further details if required can be found on the TG11 Association website at tg11association.com.

If not a member, details can be found on how to join.

Associations

591 SU Association. In its 72nd year of existence, 591 Signal Unit has established an Association (better late than never!). Its aim is to foster esprit de corps and comradeship, to promote and maintain the ethos and heritage of this incredible Signals Unit. Ex-members and currently serving ex members of 591 SU are invited to visit the Association's website at: 591suassociation.co.uk for membership details and news of the next annual reunion along with other upcoming events for 2025.

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

RAF Catering Warrant Officers' and Seniors' Association: all serving or retired TG19 WO or FS and all former Catering Branch Officers are invited to join the RAF CWO&SA. We meet twice yearly with a vibrant gathering of retired and serving members. For more information please email: janedjones6@btinternet.com. The first year of membership is free.

RAF Armourers past and present: RAF Association's Branch aims to provide welfare support and comradeship for all who have served or currently serve as an RAF Armourer. See: rafaarmourers.co.uk or please email the committee: plumbersrest@outlook.com.

THE Association of RAF Women Officers (ARAFWO) is a lively, friendly, world-wide networking group. Please visit our website: arafwo.co.uk.

Mums step out for Fund

A GROUP of mums from RAF Lossiemouth walked five kilometres to raise more than £1,500 for the RAF Benevolent Fund earlier this month.

The fundraising challenge involved 11 mothers from RAF families walking the distance around the station with their babies.

The walk was followed by coffee and cake in the Ben's Den soft play facility at St Aidan's Church, RAF Lossiemouth, which was funded by the RAFBF.

Diane Rutter, an Air and Space Operations Manager at the P8 Tactical Operations Centre at RAF Lossiemouth, who manages the flight planning and mission coordinator teams and has been serving for 20 years, said: "Our group of mums have taken part in several activities whilst on maternity leave such as yoga, 'Sweaty Mama' fitness classes and 'Toddler Bloom' sensory classes, which have all been generously funded by the RAF Benevolent Fund.

"This has naturally created a friendly and supportive network of new mums. It's also been fantastic for our babies to interact during the activities.

"We decided to take on this challenge to give a little something back to the Fund to



FIT MUMS: Lossiemouth walkers with their babies

say thank you."

Diane added: "The Fund does such fantastic work for serving families which really makes a difference at a station as busy and operationally focused as Lossiemouth.

"Many partners are deployed regularly, which has left some of us mums on our own. Forming our friendship group has eased feelings of isolation and provided support.

"For me, it's a treat to have a

coffee made for me after yoga!"

She continued: "The event was a great success and enjoyed by all. The mums all baked delicious cakes for station personnel and their families to enjoy for a small donation. We also had a raffle for a Johnstons of Elgin Cashmere scarf which was kindly donated."

The team of mums have raised over £1,600 for the Fund so far, exceeding their target.

● Go to: justgiving.com/team/moray-mums to donate.

RAFAKidz wins top award



PRESTIGIOUS: The team attended a glittering awards ceremony in London

RAFAKidz HAS been named Nursery Group of the Year at this year's Nursery World Awards.

Josie Mapes, Executive Director of RAFAKidz, said: "We are absolutely thrilled to receive this award and be recognised by the early years sector in this way."

Created in 2019 by the RAF Association, RAFAKidz is designed to meet the needs of military and civilian families in the community around RAF stations.

Free Friends concert

THE CENTRAL Church of the RAF, St Clement Danes in The Strand, London, is holding its annual Friends Concert on Thursday, November 27, starting at 6.30pm.

The event features the Central Band of the RAF and the Choir of St Clement Danes (professional opera singers in their 'spare' time), and will include exciting new and well-loved musical favourites. Refreshments are available after the performance.

More than 150 people have

already requested tickets for this free concert (donations to support the work of the Friends are welcome), said concert coordinator Simon Denny.

He added: "The concert combines outstanding musicianship with the chance to connect with the RAF family, it is a wonderful opening to the build up to Christmas."

● RAF News readers can request tickets by emailing: concert@fscd.org.uk

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Radio appeal for military charity

ARMED FORCES charity SSAFA has been chosen for this year's prestigious BBC Radio 4 Appeal, narrated by broadcaster, adventurer and writer Ben Fogle.

The nationwide broadcast highlights SSAFA's work supporting serving personnel, veterans and their families and shares the moving story of Dean, an ex-Serviceman whose life was turned around thanks to the charity.

After leaving the Armed Forces, Dean struggled with his mental health and found himself homeless. With nowhere to turn, he reached out to SSAFA, who stepped in with practical, emotional and financial support. The charity helped him secure stable housing, access specialist care and rebuild his confidence for a better future with his young daughter.

Dean said: "I'd been to war zones, but the biggest battle was at home – I felt worthless. I was broken. If it wasn't for SSAFA, I wouldn't be here."



NARRATOR: Ben Fogle tells veteran Dean's story for the BBC Radio 4 Appeal in aid of SSAFA

Ben Fogle narrates Dean's story and explains how SSAFA's work changes lives.

The BBC Radio 4 Appeal gives listeners the chance to hear Dean's journey in full, while also learning about the thousands of others SSAFA supports every year – from young soldiers facing

unexpected challenges to families coping with the demands of Service life and older veterans in need of companionship and care, said a spokesperson for the charity.

Ben said: "Dean's courage on the battlefield is unquestionable – but his bravery in admitting he needed help and reaching out to SSAFA is just as inspiring. It's an honour to tell his story. I hope listeners will support this Appeal so more veterans like Dean can find their way back."

Steve Shell, CEO of SSAFA, said: "We are honoured that the BBC has selected SSAFA for this year's Radio 4 Appeal.

"Dean's story is a poignant reflection of the struggles faced by some of those in our Armed Forces community – and the transformative impact SSAFA can have when people reach out for help.

"It is terrific that Ben Fogle narrates Dean's journey and illuminates the vital support we provide.

"We hope this appeal inspires people to support us, so we can continue to be there for every veteran, serving member, and military family who needs us."

The Appeal is available on BBC Sounds – bbc.co.uk/sounds.

● Go to: ssafa.org.uk for more information.

BFBS to launch AI skills programme

THE BRITISH Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS) has been awarded a £66,884 grant from The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to deliver an AI skills programme exclusively for military partners, helping them develop digital skills, grow career opportunities and strengthen employability in an increasingly tech-driven world.

The programme, the first of its kind and part of the BFBS Academy, launches in January. It will combine flexible online learning participants can complete in their own time, in addition to monthly live evening webinars and four one-off in-person workshops across Cyprus, Catterick, Blandford and Edinburgh.

Jackie Collins, Head of Social Media at BFBS (Academy & Creative) who will oversee the programme's delivery, said: "The grant is a game-changer for military partners."



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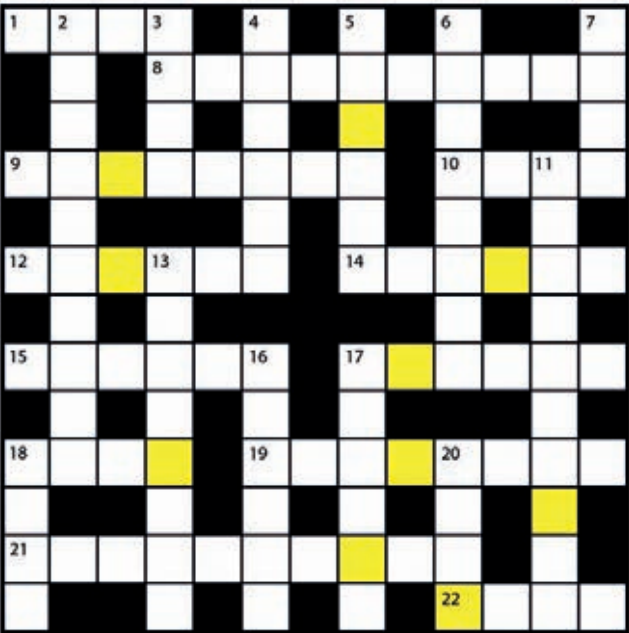
Prize Crossword
No. 396

Solve the crossword, then rearrange the 10 letters in yellow squares to find an RAF word.

- Across
- 1. Football Association think the Italian will do badly (4)
 - 8. Topical Ali maybe can't tell the difference between left and right (10)
 - 9. And 10 Across. Hear Kirk's tip about RAF legend (3,5,4)
 - 10. See 9 Across
 - 12. Sounds like Shakespeare is banned (6)
 - 14. Scottish frill on back of the neck (6)
 - 15. To be agile, I leave short-coated hound (6)
 - 17. Table fowl with nothing left out (6)
 - 18. Knock unconscious on street: French won, we hear (4)
 - 19. See 13 Down
 - 21. Beef dish on RAF plane (10)
 - 22. Costume given to Georgia (4)

- Down
- 2. Uncertain about evil Batman (10)
 - 3. Bird left biblical boat (4)
 - 4. Aped policeman that is decisive at first (6)
 - 5. Sid returns: he is short of plates (6)
 - 6. Sort pair out where planes land (8)
 - 7. First fighters launched after keen anti-aircraft fire (4)
 - 11. Activity a Voyager provides (10)
 - 13. And 19 Across. Tell him, declaring about Spitfire designer (8,8)
 - 16. Fur from former queen belongs to me (6)
 - 17. Or go back to art gallery circle (6)
 - 18. Scattered Cain or Abel around west (4)
 - 20. Suggestion of some thin trees (4)

Name:
Address:
.....
.....
RAF word: Crossword No. 396



Prize Crossword No. 395 winner is: Margaret Gilliland, Cheltenham,

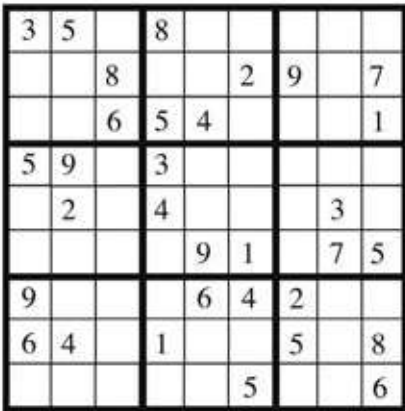
Solution to Crossword No. 395
Across – 7. Venice 8. Borrow 10. Atlanta 11. Dance 12. Oink 13. Scene
17. Louse 18. Anna 22. Atlas 23. Enamour 24. Marham 25. George
Down – 1. Aviator 2. Angling 3. Scant 4. Dowding 5. Drone 6. Sweet 9.
Lancaster 14. Horsham 15. On Board 16. Harrier 19. Gamma 20. Glory
21. Cadet
RAF system – Sky Sabre



Prize Su Doku
No. 406

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 November 14, 2025. The winner of Su Doku No: 404 is: DG Fraser, Aviemore.



Solution to Su Doku No. 405



Film Review
Ballad of a Small Player (15)
In cinemas and on Netflix now

Farrell on losing streak

COLIN FARRELL plays a baccarat gambler skirting by on what credit is afforded to him and hungry for one big win, in Edward Berger's latest.

Lord Doyle is a curious chap, wearing bright suits, sporting a pencil moustache and playing hands of cards whilst wearing 'lucky' yellow gloves, despite his current run. It quickly becomes apparent that, despite his peacock appearance and fancy hotel room, Doyle is a con man struggling to get his streak back. And though he may think of himself as a foreign ghost in Macau, the Vegas of the East, he has caught the attention of some.

Farrell plays Doyle with a dodgy English accent, which combined with his insistent charm and an ever-present flop sweat, signal that something is not quite right. Doyle's bad fortune will catch up with him when his hotel insists that he pay his bill, at the same time that he is tracked down by Cynthia Blithe (Tilda Swinton) who is looking for a lot more. His only bit of luck is in the connection he shares with Dao Ming (Fala Chen), who seems to see something beneath his veneer, or maybe she just feels pity.

Ballad of a Small Player has more of a comedic sensibility than



LORD DOYLE: Riding his luck in Macau

Berger's previous award-winning Conclave, stemming from the goofy character at the centre, and an equally cartoonish Swinton in pursuit. The score, however, carries the same self-seriousness of the film about electing a new Pope, with familiar stabs of orchestral strings. It is the combination of these elements that makes it hard to keep up with the film's tone. The gambling itself should be a source of great excitement but the game of baccarat plays essentially like a game of higher or lower, where no additional cards are drawn, or bets made – which sucks out all of the tension.

Much like the slippery Lord, pinging from one casino to another, Ballad ends up lost and hard to pin down or even care about.

Two roundels out of five
Review by Sam Cooney



Theatre
The Party Girls
Oxford Playhouse

Party's over for sisters

THE MITFORD girls have been an endless source of fascination ever since their headline-grabbing activities before World War II.

The aristocratic sisters' lives are the subject of Amy Rosenthal's excellent new drama The Party Girls, which has just finished a UK tour.

I saw it at the Oxford Playhouse on a packed Tuesday night – doubtless these glamorous women had extra appeal for a local audience as they lived, famously, at nearby Swinbrook, then Asthall Manor.

The play focuses on five of the six sisters, leaving out Pamela because of her lack of political involvement. Its title refers not just to their high-profile socialising but, of course, to their strongly opposing political views. The beauty Diana, played exquisitely by Elisabeth Dermot Walsh, was notoriously married to the fascist leader Oswald Mosley and forthright Jessica, aka Decca, (a superb Emma Noakes) was defiantly communist.

The drama opens with Decca meeting the American Jewish lawyer Bob Treuhaft (Joe Coen)



HITLER-OBSESSION: Unity Mitford (Ell Potter) PHOTO: MARK SENIOR

in the early 1940s in Washington, then flashbacks to the 30s with the siblings, including unstable, eccentric Unity who adored Hitler, squabbling at home in Oxfordshire while developing their political differences.

It then moves to 1969, where successful novelist Nancy (a compelling Kirsty Besterman, exuding a winning Kristin Scott Thomas/Lesley Manville vibe) is dying of cancer. Besterman has the witty, caustic elegant eldest

sister down to a tee.

It helps if you're familiar with the sisters' myriad nicknames for each other and their habit of adapting the English language to their own lexicon, otherwise the dialogue could get confusing. I recommend the hit TV series Outrageous as a good Mitfords introduction.

Let's hope this play gets a West End run – it certainly deserves it.

4 roundels out of 5
Review by Tracey Allen