

**The Forces' favourite paper**



**Why the Luftwaffe lost the Battle**

● See page 17

**Win!**



**Jackie Chan movie action**

● See R'n'R page 8

**ROYAL AIR FORCE**

Fri, February 6, 2026  
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**Only 99p**

# RAF News



**£650m keeps Typhoon at cutting edge**



**See pages 14-15**

**Sea angling**  
**Hooked on landing an IS double**

● See p24



**Swimming**  
**Centenary Channel challenge**



● See p25

**Olympics**  
**Aviators hit Games**

● See p27



## High stakes in Las Vegas



**Staff Reporter**  
Nellis Airbase, Nevada

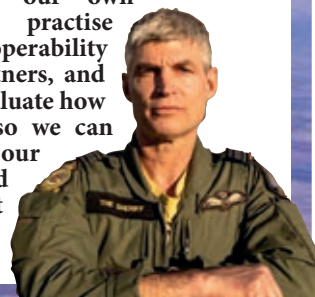
TYPHOON CREWS have launched high-stakes combat training missions in the heat of the Nevada Desert alongside US and Australian Top Guns.

A dozen RAF fighters landed at Nellis airbase ahead of taking part in Exercise Red Flag – the world's largest air combat drill, in the shadow of Las Vegas.

Sqn Ldr Zane Sennett (pictured right)

said: "Red Flag is a unique exercise. It's huge in its scope.


"This is somewhere where we can practise our own execution, practise our interoperability with our partners, and ultimately evaluate how we've done, so we can learn from our mistakes and get better at our day to day job."





BiteSize

“Until my ops, every step was painful because the cartilage in my knees had all worn away,”



CAS fund pays for private operations for Sevy

See page 5

“To find a comedy to turn our current face of gloom into an upturned grin is rare,”



Maureen Lipman to tour in new play Allegra

See R'n'Rp5

“There’ll be trunks, swimsuits and goose fat, definitely no wetsuits,”



Sports association is planning centenary Channel swim

See page 25



**ROYAL AIR FORCE**  
**RAF News**

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High North talks

THE UK and Denmark are seeking to step up security in the High North to counter the growing threat from Russia.

Defence Secretary John Healey flew out to Copenhagen for talks with Danish counterpart Troels Lund Poulsen as the two countries seek closer collaboration on Nato’s northern flank.

Mr Healey said: “In this new era of threat, now is the era of hard power, sure diplomacy and strong alliances. As JEF partners and Nato allies, Denmark and the UK are stepping up on European security.

“The UK has always played a leading role in securing Nato’s northern flank in the Baltic and High North, and we will continue to do so alongside our allies.

“We’re cooperating more to defend and deter our adversaries, at the same time as we step up support for Ukraine – because a secure Europe requires a strong Ukraine.”



**This Week In History**



**1944**  
**Gnome attack**

A STRIKE force of 12 Lancasters operated by 617 Sqn launch a low-level attack on the Gnome and Rhone aero engine factory at Limoges using 12,000lbs Tallboy bombs.



**1951**  
**Korea evac**

47 SQN Hastings aircraft begin the Japan Shuttle between RAF Changi and Iwakuni to support casualty evacuation during the Korean War.



**1998**  
**Tonka Kuwait mission**

TORNADOS FLY more than 3,500 miles non-stop as they deploy from Bruggen to Ali Al Salam air base in Kuwait on Operation Bolton.

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



# Oarsome!

## Cadets in record Atlantic row

### Staff Reporter

**A TRIO of Air Force cadet rowers stormed into the record books as they landed in Antigua after crossing the Atlantic.**

The Three Flying Fish crew of Harry Allen, 20, Anna Dunk, 19 and 21-year-old Rowan Dally completed the 3,000-mile voyage from San Sebastian de La Gomera in Spain to Antigua in 42 days to become the youngest team to ever complete the World's Toughest Row event.

Speaking after landing at the finish line at Nelson's Dockyard and being reunited with her family, Anna said: "I think I cried every day on the Atlantic for one reason or another, so it's nice to be back on land."

"Our morale was ridiculous out there. I would be having a bad day and Rowan would come out of the cabin and say something totally ridiculous and we would all end up laughing."

"The whole campaign has been to inspire other people. We have had such an incredible experience. I just want to thank everyone who has believed in us: family friends and sponsors. When we started planning this four years four years ago we had nothing."

The toughest challenge for the youngsters was spending Christmas and New Year on the high seas, they said. Harry even celebrated his 20th birthday on



**VETERANS:** Per Adua 21 crew struggled to keep up with the youngsters

the oars as they raced for the finish line.

He added: "It was amazing – such an experience. I won't ever forget my 20th birthday thanks to my two crew mates. After I opened what few presents I had, 10 or so dolphins came by and swam alongside the boat. It was the most magical moment I have ever had."

"The weather was one of the biggest challenges for us. We would be doing good speed and then the wind died off and we had to rely on muscle to push through."

Crew mate Rowan added: "I have never experienced anything like it before. The team work and passion we have built up made

it possible. At the end it stopped feeling like an adventure and more like a test. Up until about two days before we landed we still felt like novices but in the final stretch we really felt like ocean rowers."

As the event's youngest teams celebrated their record-breaking success on land, a team of four RAF veterans battled through the final stage of the race, coming in two days behind the cadets.

With a combined age of 167, the Per Adua 21 crew of Gp Capt Andy Calame, Air Cdre Matt Sowers, Wg Cdr Mike Dewar and Sqn Ldr Mark Jacklin admitted they faced a struggle to keep pace with the Flying Fish.

For Air Cdre Sowers and Sqn



**NOW WE'RE REALLY FLYING:** Cadets Anna Dunk, Harry Allen and Rowan Dally

Ldr Jacklin, the challenge was a chance to put the ghosts of a previous failed attempt to rest.

Air Cdre Sowers said: "If I was on my own I would be in panic mode, because I had team-mates we just looked at the problems and came up with the solutions."

"Big thanks to family and colleagues at work. The fact that the cadets whipped our ass doesn't bother us at all. I think we are all looking forward to using a proper toilet rather than a bucket. But there won't be a third

time. The boat seemed to break on a daily basis."

Also doing the RAF proud at the gruelling event were Cadets Ambassador Wg Cdr Emma Wolstenholme and former Jaguar pilot Johnno Hammond, who together with civvy marine technologist Stacey Rivers crossed the finish line in Antigua after 40 days and nights at sea – setting a benchmark time as the oldest mixed trio to complete the World's Toughest Row.

● See page 13

# That's the way to go, Joe

### Clare McCarthy

**LOSSIEMOUTH PERSONNEL came together to bid farewell to Station Warrant Officer Joe Mulholland, marking his last day in uniform after a career spanning 38 years.**

Regt Gunner Joe arrived at the station in 1984 and was promoted to WO on 51 Sqn in 2020, before moving into the role of SWO two years ago.

To mark his retirement, station personnel lined the route as he donned the traditional bowler hat and headed for Civvy Street.

Station Commander Gp Capt Sarah Brewin said: "It has been an absolute honour and pleasure to serve alongside WO

Mulholland at RAF Lossiemouth.

"His commitment and dedication know no bounds, and his contribution to all that the station has achieved is evident for everyone to see."

"He has been the embodiment of professionalism, courage and leadership, and he has always been a legend of the Corps for as long as we can remember. A true inspirational figure, his impact will be felt for generations to come."

"On behalf of all across the RAF, we would like to express our sincere



**BOWLER-ED OVER:** SWO Joe Mulholland is piped out of RAF Lossiemouth

thanks to WO Mulholland for his years of tireless service and wish him the very best for the future. As he would put it

himself "rounds complete!" for one final time."

WO James Stoddart becomes Lossie's new SWO.

## Have your say on ration packs

**RATION PACKS** – love them or hate them? Service food chiefs want to know what you think of the scoff sometimes offered on operations.

They need your help to improve what's dished out and to make sure it meets the demands of modern warfighting and training – and tastes good too.

Use the QR code here to take part in a survey aimed at capturing the lived experience of service personnel.



It's seeking candid feedback on how Operational Ration Packs are currently used and consumed in field environments, what works well and what doesn't.

The feedback will directly influence decisions on the future direction of ORP development and policy.





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Benevolent Fund

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



# CAS fund bears the load

## Tracey Allen

**LONG-SERVING** loadmaster MAcr Sean 'Sevy' Severn is back in business at Brize after landing £16,000 worth of funding from the RAF to pay for a life-changing knee operation.

The 58-year-old was facing medical retirement due to crippling osteoarthritis after 41 years of hauling military kit across the world. He had a two-year wait to have his left knee replaced on the NHS.

But he's back at work at the Oxfordshire station after the Chief of the Air Staff's Funding Scheme covered the cost to have another operation, to replace his right knee, done privately at the Veterans' Orthopaedic Centre in Oswestry, Shropshire – and he only had to wait a month for the second op.

Sevy said: "I feel very privileged and lucky. Being told in December 2025 that I could have the operation privately, paid for by the scheme, was the best Christmas present I've ever had.

"The op cost almost £16,000. I'm recovering well and my goal is to take part in the 2026 RAFA Cycle Ride, after having done the fundraiser in 2025."

Sevy was first diagnosed with

the condition eight years ago, forcing him to give up playing football, running and cycling.

He represented the Service at national clay pigeon shooting tournaments, but he had to give that up as the recoil from the gun caused him unbearable pain.

He said: "I was one of the top 20 in the UK in my field and was knocking on the door of an England place but had to stop about five years ago because I was no longer fit enough.

"When you pull the trigger of a shotgun it sends vibrations through your body that don't half hurt your knees."

Chief of the Air Staff ACM Sir Harv Smyth launched the scheme last year to counter long NHS waiting times for personnel needing serious treatment.

Now anyone waiting more than 18 weeks for surgical procedures can apply for funding.

Sevy said: "Until I had my ops every step was painful because the cartilage in my knee joints was completely worn away.

"Now I am pain-free, whereas before I was facing a life of either being in constant pain or having to take painkiller medication all the time – you don't want to live your life like that."

He added: "The operation has



**RECOVERY:** MAcr Severn received support from CAS Funding Scheme launched last year

given me a new lease of life. It's very rare that you get full bend in your knees back after having total knee replacements like I did," he added.

"I've probably got 80 per cent

of what I had before, but you learn to adapt. I am now hoping to engage in activities that were previously beyond my reach.

"I retire in December next year and I'm fully committed to

doing some extra service with the Reserves – hopefully these operations will allow me to do that.

"It has restored my confidence and enhanced my overall outlook on life. I feel very grateful."

## Atlas YouTube star: 'Thanks a million...!'

**IN THE LOOP:** Influencer Sam Eckholm joined LXX and 30 Sqns

### Staff Reporter

**SOCIAL MEDIA** star Sam Eckholm paid tribute to Brize Norton air crews, as his video of a low-level training flight onboard Atlas A400M through the Mach Loop in Wales clocked up nearly one million views.

The 28-year-old internet influencer was invited to join LXX and 30 Sqns to showcase the capability of the RAF transporter to his 2.5 million followers during simulated cargo drops over some of the UK's most challenging terrain.

Paying tribute to the Brize crews, he said: "Collaborating with the Royal Air Force was an absolute privilege. The professionalism, openness and pride the RAF brings to its mission made it possible to tell an authentic story about the people behind the aircraft.

"Being trusted with that access is something I don't take lightly, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to share it with a global audience."



**VOLUNTEER EMERGENCY** responders from RAF Waddington and RAF Cranwell are taking their life-saving skills on the road with a Forces-led medical charity.

Based at Cranwell, Lincolnshire Emergency Medical Response is staffed by more than 40 serving and veteran military personnel across the county, supporting the East Midlands Ambulance Service.

The team operate two fully-equipped response vehicles, funded through public donation, grants and the Armed Forces Covenant.

New recruit Fg Off Charlotte Turner said: "Seeing the incredible work the team delivers to the community, I felt inspired to join. I've completed the initial clinical course and am looking forward to starting my first mentored shifts."



# Royal Air Force In Concert



Registered Charity No. 1101767

**7.30pm Saturday 18 April**

**Lecture Theatre, Newark Academy**

**7.30pm Saturday 16 May**

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**Lincoln Cathedral**

**7.30pm Friday 29 May**

**Playhouse Theatre, Weston super Mare**

**7.30pm Saturday 26 September**

**Palace Theatre, Newark**

**7.30pm Sunday 27 September**

**Cast, Doncaster**

**7.30pm Friday 2 October**

**Epsom Playhouse**

**7.30pm Friday 16 October**

**Terry O'Toole Theatre, Lincoln**

**2026**

**[www.rafconcerts.uk](http://www.rafconcerts.uk)**



In Brief



**CHARITY BONANZA:** Chinook manufacturer Boeing supporting Forces charity

## Boeing welfare windfall

US AEROSPACE giant Boeing's funding donations to Tri-Service charity SSAFA have topped £400,000 over the last decade, the group has revealed.

The latest package of funding will go towards SSAFA's Transitional Mentoring programme to help Service leavers cope with the challenges of Civvy Street.

SSAFA chief Air Marshal Steve Shell said: "On behalf of the beneficiaries, volunteers and staff of SSAFA, I am extremely grateful to Boeing for its very generous contribution to our work in 2026."



**FUNDRAISER:** Cpl Hayley Court

## Take a peak

MENTAL HEALTH crusader Cpl Hayley Court has launched an appeal to help the Healing Military Minds group she founded four years ago hit its £200,000 fundraising target.

The campaign is just £13,000 short of the benchmark figure and the Brize-based Reservist will be holding a sponsored climb to the peak of Snowdon in March to get funds pouring in.

● To take part in the event go to: [healingmilitaryminds.org](http://healingmilitaryminds.org).

# Bolam's Bomber awards win



**MEMORY MAN:** James Bolam with co-star Rumi Sutton. Inset above, director Martin Hemingway-Moseley on set

## Tracey Allen

A HARD-HITTING film paying tribute to the heroes of Bomber Command featuring scenes made on location at RAF Coningsby has scooped two top industry awards.

The 30-minute YouTube movie *A Memory Owed*, featuring *Likely Lads* and *New Tricks* star James Bolam, netted a double for Best Director and Best Acting Ensemble at the recent London Lift-Off Festival.

**"I have never seen a film hit me this hard"**

Bolam plays reclusive 91-year-old Stan who makes an emotional trip to a World War II airfield with his young carer Abby (Rumi Sutton) to pay tribute to his brother, who was among more than 55,000 members of Bomber Command killed during the campaign.

The film has also won praise for its historical accuracy and powerful message of remembrance from a modern viewpoint.

Speaking after collecting his award, director Martin Hemingway-Moseley said: "A *Memory Owed* is about loss, remembrance and healing centred around RAF Bomber Command. In just four weeks it



**BRAVEST OF THE BRAVE:** Bomber Command crews prepare for a mission PHOTO: AHB

received around 200,000 views and hundreds of emotional comments from ex-military personnel, families of Bomber Command veterans and historians."

Among those backing the movie are Bomber Command supporter Sir Stephen Fry.

He said: "I was impressed and moved by what a testament to Bomber Command it was,

the uncomplaining bravery and professionalism in the face of unparalleled rates of attrition deserves this excellent accolade and remembrance."

The project has also won praise from Oscar-winning director Chris Overton. He added: "It's just perfect. I have never seen a film hit me this hard. And for this to be a short film is just outstanding. This is a work of art."

*A Memory Owed* took 10 years to make and relied on public fundraising, with more than 750 sponsors pledging funds.

Other scenes were filmed at Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre.

Martin added: "We are so grateful for every donation, from £5 to £500. A lot of people who donated had family members who had served in Bomber Command and wanted to make the donations in their memory. The support we got was quite remarkable once the ball was rolling.

"It was a long journey but it has been worth it."

● To watch *A Memory Owed* go to: [youtube.com/PYtZtSvEGwo](https://youtube.com/PYtZtSvEGwo)

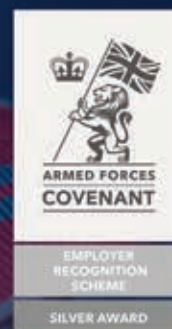


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# Typhoon steps up Gulf security

## Staff Reporter

Coningsby

**TYPHOONS OPERATED** by the UK's joint squadron with Qatar have deployed to the Middle East as the Gulf state steps up air security amid growing tensions across the region.

12 Sqn jets took off from Coningsby following a request by the Qatari government and will operate in a defence capacity under the two nation's Defence Assurance Agreement, the MOD said.

12 Sqn was formed to train Qatari fast jet pilots as part of a £6 billion deal to supply 24 Typhoons to Qatar and has regularly deployed to the area to take part in combat exercises and conduct security operations, including the last football World Cup tournament.

UK Defence Secretary John Healey said: "Qatar and the UK are close partners with historic defence ties going back decades.

"This partnership bolsters the national security of both our nations and supports stability in



**QATAR CALL:** 12 Sqn Typhoon arrives in the Gulf state amid rising tensions  
PHOTO: CPL NATHAN EDWARDS

the Gulf region.

"This deployment builds on those shared aims as Typhoon jets from our joint squadron

deploy to support its defence.

"Coming alongside our announcement of half a billion pounds investment to upgrade

our Typhoons, this deployment is further demonstration of the crucial role of these jets in reinforcing global security."



**FUNDRAISER:** Auction items include model signed by Spitfire pilot Sqn Ldr Geoffrey Wellum, DFC

## Bids for The Few

**THE UK'S** Battle of Britain charity has partnered with a specialist online auction site in a bid to raise urgently-needed funds.

The Battle of Britain Memorial Trust is hoping enthusiasts will snap up signed memorabilia to raise money for its cliff-top memorial to the Few at Capel-le-Ferne.

Items up for grabs include a diecast Corgi Spitfire, signed by seven Battle of Britain pilots, and a limited edition, museum-quality mahogany model of the Hurricane flown by Wg Cdr Paul Farnes, DFM, signed by the pilot and Sqn Ldr Geoffrey Wellum, DFC, together with a copy of Wellum's memoir *First Light*.

● The auction closes on February 10. Go to: [anoblegift.com](http://anoblegift.com)

# 'I was suicidal - now I love being a dad'

## Tracey Allen

**RAF VETERAN** Cpl Chris Platts was suicidal after suffering a devastating spinal injury that ended his 14-year Service career.

Facing financial ruin and struggling to support his family, he admits he thought of taking his own life.

Now he's planning for the future after the RAF Benevolent Fund stepped in to provide financial support.

Dad-of-two Chris joined up in 2009, serving as a Personnel Support Clerk on postings across Europe and the Gulf.

"The best part was the people. I met friends who became family. Every posting and every job was different, which I loved," he said.

That changed when he sustained a spinal sports injury during a deployment to Belgium in 2018 which plunged the family's future into jeopardy.

Chris underwent surgery



**RECOVERY:** Sports injury ended Cpl Platt's RAF career and drove him to despair

and moved back to Cranwell but the family struggled to get by on one wage. He added: "We'd gone from two wages to one, and we had nursery fees to pay.

"The Fund stepped in right away and helped cover the costs so my wife could find part-time work. It was a huge relief."

After years of trying to juggle his RAF career with his injury, Chris was medically discharged in 2023. "It felt heartbreaking – the RAF had been my life, my family."

Losing the career he loved quickly led to despair. He said: "I was in a really dark place. I was suicidal.

"But thanks to the Fund, I got counselling within weeks, not months. That support probably saved my life."

He also received funding toward a resettlement course to train as a celebrant, and is officiating at civic ceremonies.

Chris said: "The help came exactly when I needed it.

"The counselling gave me the strength to face things, and the course helped me start thinking about the future again.

"I learned how to talk about what was going on in my head, instead of bottling it up. Now we always make time to talk as a family and discuss any worries.

"Without the Fund, I honestly don't think I'd be here today.

"They gave me hope, confidence and the chance to be a better husband and dad. I can't thank them enough."





News

# CAS tribute to Burma vet Bill

## Chiefs join celebrations as WWII pilot hits 102

### Staff Reporter

**AIR CHIEFS joined the celebrations as Burma campaign veteran Bill Mansfield marked his 102nd birthday alongside four generations of his family.**

Hurricane pilot Bill marked his big day at his home in Trowbridge, where he was presented with a birthday card from the Chief of the Air Staff, ACM Sir Harv Smyth.

Air Cdre Simon Harper delivered the tribute on behalf of the RAF to thank Bill for his service. He said: "It was a profound honour to visit Bill on his birthday and present him with a personal card from the Chief of the Air Staff."

"His service during WWII helped secure the freedoms we enjoy today and meeting him was a reminder of that generation's courage and sacrifice. On behalf of the Royal Air Force, I wish him many more happy returns."

Bill signed up in 1943 and trained on the Tiger Moth biplane before graduating to the Harvard, Hurricane, Sentinel and Auster.

He initially deployed to South Africa and flew sorties across Asia, including tours in Egypt, India, Ceylon, Malaya and Burma.

Demobbed in 1947, he retrained as an engineer at Farnborough before joining BEA at Heathrow, rising to British Airways chief aero engineer.

He retired in 1989 but pursued his love of aviation, building light aircraft from kits imported from the US.

A spokesman for the family added: "We are delighted our Grandad Bill was visited on his birthday – this was incredibly special for him, thank you RAF."



**BIRTHDAY GREETING:** Air Cdre Harper joined Bill (centre), his daughter, grandchildren and great grandchildren to mark his 102nd birthday. Inset right, Hurricane over Burma

## RAF SPORTS LOTTERY

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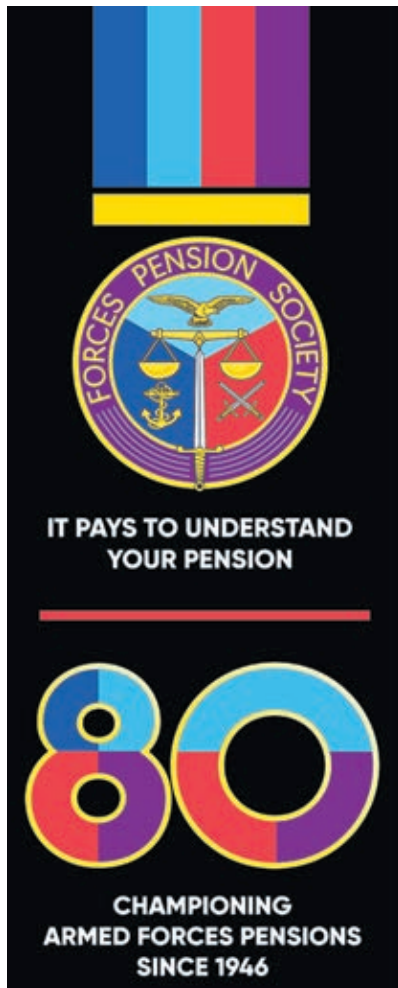
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The RAF Sports Lottery operates as a society lottery within the Royal Air Force Central Fund and is licensed and regulated by the Gambling Commission ([www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk](http://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk)). The Royal Air Force Central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



# Compliance issue leaves 'Early Leavers' out of pocket



THE LATEST AFPS Annual Report for 2024-25 shows, following a member complaint, that the pension scheme has not been meeting its obligations to Early Leavers (defined as those who served for more than three months but less than two years before leaving the Armed Forces).

Since 2006, Early Leavers have not been notified of their pension rights.

Under the Pension Schemes Act (1993), since 2006 Early Leavers should have been notified of their right to either a refund of any employee contributions (eg: AVCs/Added Pension) if made, or of their right to transfer their pension benefit to another registered pension scheme.

MoD's failure to comply with the legislation means that an estimated 60,000 leavers



● Neil Marshall, CEO of the Forces Pension Society

departed without this information. It leaves the MoD with a £40M liability and the task of contacting all those affected to advise them of sums owed to them. The MoD is now undertaking the task of confirming eligibility and delivering redress.

Forces Pension Society Chief Executive, Maj Gen Neil Marshall commented: "This is a most regrettable situation affecting a large number of former service people.

"The reasons for the MoD oversight are unclear to us at present. Equally unclear is the process which will be undertaken to correct the fault and any compensatory adjustments that might be offered.

"However, as you would expect, we at the Forces Pension Society will seek answers to our many questions and closely monitor the situation.

"We will provide regular updates on our website for all to access ([forcespensionsociety.org](http://forcespensionsociety.org)).

"Given the seriousness of the failure, we expect the MoD to address and set out its proposals to correct the problem with some urgency."



● FPS is an independent, not-for-profit membership organisation providing pension guidance to its growing membership base of more than 65,000 serving personnel and veterans.

The Society champions pensions on behalf of the whole military community and this year, celebrates its 80th anniversary. For more information about our work, visit [forcespensionsociety.org](http://forcespensionsociety.org)



**'A terrific storyteller'**  
BOOKLIST

**'A pulse-pounding adventure'**  
PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



**Action-packed fiction informed by Chris Hadfield's real-life experience as an astronaut, pilot and Commander of the International Space Station**





# STONYHURST

AGES 3-18

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[stonyhurst.ac.uk/opendays](https://stonyhurst.ac.uk/opendays)





**ALLIANCE APPOINTMENT:**  
Air Chief Marshal Sir Johnny Stringer

## NATO post

AIR CHIEF Marshal Sir Johnny Stringer has been appointed Britain's most senior military commander in Nato.

The former fighter pilot and Balkans and Iraq veteran takes up the post as Nato's Deputy Supreme Allied Commander in Europe – the first RAF officer to hold the post since 1984, and only the third in history.

He will be second in command to former USAF pilot Gen Alexis G Grynkeiwich, the Supreme Allied Commander.

## Super-grad on point at Cranwell

**Clare Wildblood**  
Cranwell

FG OFF Alexandra Tyne was on point on the Cranwell parade ground – as she passed out at the top of her class.

The Officer Cadet was presented with the prestigious Sword of Honour by Air and Space chief AM Al Marshall after excelling during her Initial Officer Training at the RAF College.

The century-old Service accolade is presented to the graduate who demonstrates 'exceptional ability and leadership'.

PHOTO: ANDREW WHEELER



# Vets net world record with Atlantic triumph

**Staff Reporter**  
Antigua

**AIR FORCE veterans battled 40-knot winds and five-metre waves as they powered into the record books completing a 3,000-mile rowing voyage across the Atlantic.**

Cadets Ambassador Wg Cdr Emma Wolstenholme, former Jaguar pilot John Hammond and civvie marine technologist Stacey Rivers crossed the finish line in Antigua after 40 days and nights at sea – setting a benchmark time as the oldest mixed trio to complete the World's Toughest Row event.

Speaking as she set foot on land at Nelson's Dockyard on the Caribbean island, 43-year-old former training officer Emma said: "As National Ambassador to the 40,000-strong RAF Air Cadet organisation, I really hope this will inspire the next generation."

The eco-inspired Call to Earth crew rowed in two-hour shifts around the clock to overhaul rivals and take the title as the first mixed crew.

"Wildlife encounters were a highlight – a lone bird took to circling the boat daily, appearing like a quiet companion on the journey.

"Pods of dolphins launched themselves metres into the air as

they passed close by, which really lifted our spirits during long hours on the oars.

"Flying fish skimmed the wave crests, and we had a truly unforgettable moment when a curious six-foot blue shark calmly cruised alongside the stern before disappearing back into the deep."

Call to Earth crossed the finish line 12 hours ahead of Emma's cadet protégées The Three Flying Fish: teenagers Anna Dunk, Rowan Dally and Harry Allen.

Also flying the flag for the RAF on the high seas were the four-strong team of RAF Regt rowers Per Adua 21: Gp Capt Andy Calame, Air Cdre Matt Sowers, Wg Cdr Mike Dewar and Sqn Ldr Mark Jacklin.

The Atlantic bid wasn't all plain sailing for Call to Earth, the crew was forced to carry out urgent repairs to the 40ft boat during a 30-knot squall.

They also risked their chances of victory when they changed course after spotting a stricken turtle



**SHIPSHAPE:** From left, Emma Wolstenholme, Stacey Rivers and John Hammond celebrate as they arrive in Antigua  
PHOTOS: PENNY BIRD



WG CDR WOLSTENHOLME

tangled in plastic fishing nets.

The crew rowed to the rescue after switching off auto navigation systems and eventually managed to cut the marine mammal free.

Emma added: "I thought it was a barrel at first but I realised

that it was a large turtle and knew we could get to it. I think it must have heard us as it raised a flipper like it was calling for help.

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

Emma's triumph with Call to Earth gives her a second rowing

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

Her previous attempt to row solo across the Atlantic in 2022 ended with a dramatic nighttime rescue by a transporter ship 600 miles off the African coast after an electrical fault left her without navigation and drinking water.



# £650m to keep leth

**A Government funding pledge of £650 million to provide world-beating radar kit and technical support to the UK's Typhoon Force secures the multi-role fighter's position as the tip of the combat air spear**

## Eurofighter h hours milesto at cutting edge



**STRIKER II:** Helmet-mounted display proven invaluable to Typhoon pilots

**A**S 12 RAF Typhoons touched down at Nellis Air Base in Nevada ahead of two weeks of high-stakes combat training with the US and Australia on Exercise Red Flag, the international Eurofighter project marked its million flying hours milestone.

Bristling with a state-of-the-art weapons suite, the 30-year-old multi-role fighter will be showcasing its combat proven capabilities alongside fifth-generation F-35s across the vast Nevada training range in the world's biggest air combat drill.

11 Sqn pilot Sqn Ldr Zane Sennett said: "Exercise Red Flag is a unique exercise. It's huge in its scope. It's the 51st year that the exercise has been held and we're incredibly privileged to be a part of it. It's a unique opportunity to operate, to evaluate our tactics among our high-end allies and partners.

"This is somewhere where we can practise our own execution, practise our interoperability with our partners, and ultimately evaluate how we've done, so

we can learn from our mistakes and get better at our day-to-day job.

"In the Royal Air Force, we really want to maximise our exposure to the training on Exercise Red Flag so we've brought out 12 typhoons, across the Atlantic.

### Deadly

"We want to maximise this opportunity to expose all our pilots to this high-end, high-tempo flying. It's important to grow the force, and to grow the experience levels, particularly in the younger pilots."

Regarded as one of the world's most deadly fourth-generation aircraft, the Typhoon made its combat debut in Libya on Operation Ellamy in 2011.

Since then, it has been almost continuously deployed on operations in Iraq and Syria, Nato duties guarding allied airspace across the Baltic and Black Sea regions and Quick Reaction alert duties in the UK and Falklands.



**RED FLAG:** World's biggest air combat exercise



# al Typhoon on top

## its million flying one as it remains ge after 30 years

Equipped with ASRAAM, Sidewinder, AMRAAM and MBDA Meteor providing short and long-range air-to-air lethality, Typhoon can deploy Storm Shadow, Brimstone and Paveway, delivering battle-winning effect with pinpoint accuracy.

Deputy UK Combat Air Force Commander Gp Capt Andy Shaw said: "Typhoon is the tip of the spear, the UK's first responder to most crises."

"Typhoon is powerful – very powerful. It carries a potent weapons payload, advanced sensors and datalinks, and delivers exactly what air forces need from a modern fast jet."

"The core Eurofighter nations rely on it for most of their operational air missions. It is the UK's primary offensive air platform, and is the key component in Nato airspace security and beyond."

### Nato

"A million flying hours represents far more than time in the air. It reflects three decades of close cooperation and hard work between partner nations and industry."

"All of us who have helped to shape this aircraft over the years can take great pride in knowing that the Typhoon has never been more adaptable, or more capable."

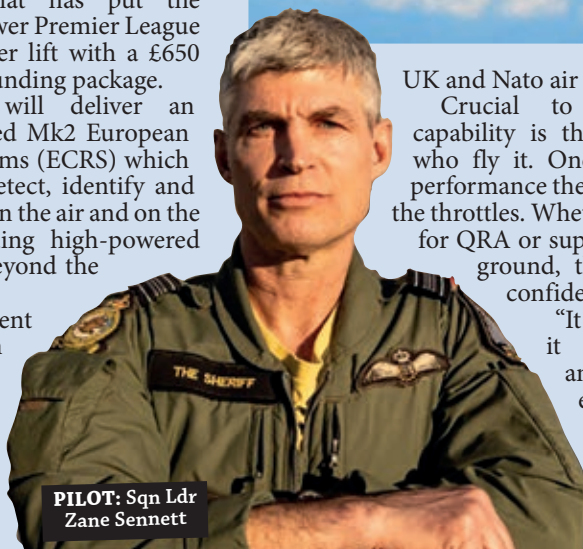
The capability that has put the Typhoon in the air power Premier League is about to get another lift with a £650 million government funding package.

The investment will deliver an additional 40 advanced Mk2 European Common Radar Systems (ECRS) which can simultaneously detect, identify and track multiple targets in the air and on the ground while providing high-powered jamming capability beyond the reach of threats.

The radar investment follows a £205 million contract for specialist engineering support from QinetiQ to upgrade the Typhoon weapon systems and keep it at the vanguard of



**UPGRADE:**  
New high-tech radar system



**PILOT:** Sqn Ldr Zane Sennett

UK and Nato air power.

Crucial to its battle-winning capability is the trust of the pilots who fly it. One said: "You feel the performance the moment you advance the throttles. Whether you're scrambling for QRA or supporting troops on the ground, the aircraft gives you confidence."

"It accelerates hard, it turns aggressively, and it manages an enormous amount of information for you. In demanding airspace, that trust between pilot and jet is everything."



**TYPHOON FORCE:** Ground crew are essential to keep the fast jets flying

**AIR POWER:**  
RAF Typhoon, and on QRA scramble, below



# There when you need her



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**V**ICTORY IN the Battle of Britain underpins the history of the Royal Air Force. It prevented the hideous prospect of invasion and occupation by the forces of Nazi Germany. More than 85 years later, the various aspects and stages of the Battle still enthuse scholars, engage readers and sell books.

In *Adlertag: The Battle of Britain Intensifies 11-13 August 1940* (Amberley, £25, amberley-books.com) Patrick G. Eriksson examines the escalation of the Battle over three days when the Luftwaffe mounted its first large raids. Each day has a chapter. The narrative builds up to Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering's designated Eagle Day – August 13. He hoped to knock out Fighter Command in four days.

The backdrop is the contrasting approaches taken by the two major German air fleets based in France and the Low Countries to achieve air supremacy over Britain. Luftflotte 2, under Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, tended to husband its bombers more carefully, shepherding them with substantial fighter support.



**LUFTFLOTTE 2:** FM Albert Kesselring



**LUFTFLOTTE 3:** FM Hugo Sperrle



**RAF TARGET:** The tangled, almost unrecognisable, wreckage of Me 110 D, W. Nr. 3374 of Stab-EGr 210, downed on August 15, 1940

#### Bomber units

In contrast, Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle, commanding Luftflotte 3, was readier to throw in his best bomber units despite having fewer fighter resources. Eriksson underlines that the strategy and tactics adopted by Kesselring and Sperrle were central to the fighting philosophies they pursued for the next five weeks of the daylight bombing Battle, until it effectively concluded after September 15.

At Luftflotte 2 there was a fighter focus, in the belief that the RAF's defeat could be achieved mainly through fighter versus fighter combat, with a reliance on the prowess of the Me 109 to achieve a kill ratio of 5 to 1 against the Hurricanes and Spitfires of Fighter Command. The range of attacks and assaults were all intended to contribute to the basic aim of destroying British fighters and Luftwaffe tactics to suck them in are described.

As the author explains, it was the Me 109 which lost out in a battle of attrition masterminded by Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding and Air Vice-Marshal Keith Park, commanding the crucial No. 11 Group. Importantly, as the Battle peaked, Me 109 numbers started

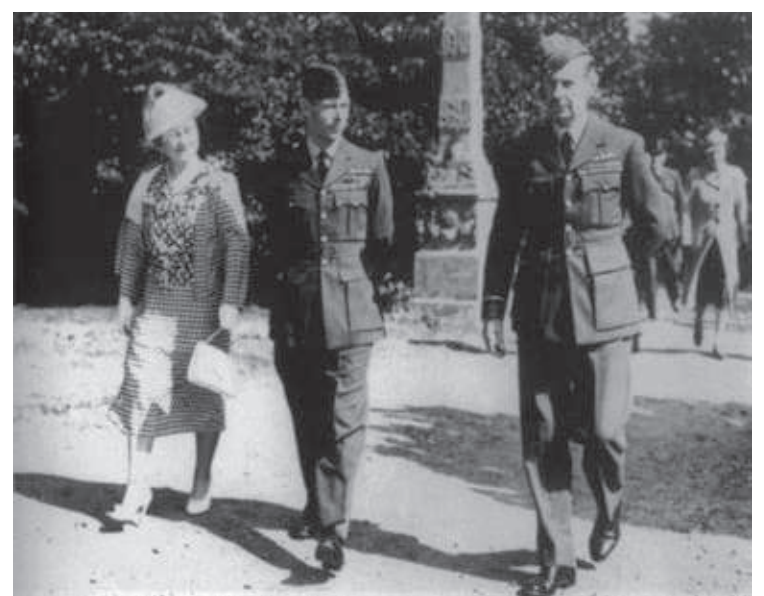
to dwindle. There were only 533 serviceable Me 109s on September 7 when the Luftwaffe diverted its daytime offensive on to London. The reduced number of fighters limited the number of bombers which could be escorted to the capital. Moreover, even during August 11-13, German bomber losses were already uncomfortably high.

This is a scholarly study. It follows the author's previous books on elements of the air war. He has consulted numerous sources, including combat reports, as well as station, squadron and published records. The many detailed footnotes are testimony to his

thorough approach. He drew on his correspondence and conversations with participants from both sides, notably with more than 100 Luftwaffe veterans. The book has many photographs and most informative maps. Helpfully, it incorporates a useful explanation of Luftwaffe terminology.

The author admits that his level of detail may be tedious for some. Others will view it as a most valuable account, as he weaves in informative asides and observations to the story. It is an hour-by-hour account of combat which highlights the many engagements and the intensity of the fighting for both sides. The vivid extracts from combat reports and great courage displayed by young men sometimes still in their teens and mostly in their early and mid-20s define these long days of summer. They also illustrate the challenges of simultaneous attacks for Fighter Command controllers.

Some familiar themes are revisited. These include German intelligence failings, such as attacking the redundant Bekebourne airfield near Canterbury, and overestimation of the capabilities of their aircraft and pilots. The author highlights



**ROYAL SUPPORT:** King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visit Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding at Fighter Command headquarters, Bentley Priory, September 1940

the vulnerability of the Ju 87 Stuka dive-bomber and the heavy losses of the clumsy two-seat, twin-engined Me 110 fighter. The fuel limitations of German fighters over Britain posed another problem for their pilots. A further factor hampering the Luftwaffe was the unpredictable, often poor weather which made its task all the harder. Nevertheless,

the damage caused, for instance at Detling on the 13th, shows the carnage the Luftwaffe could inflict on the RAF. However, it failed to land the knock-out blow.

Ultimately, the German effort during these days, ridden by contradictions at the highest levels, failed in the face of Fighter Command and inclement weather.

*Review by Alastair Noble*



#### Copies up for grabs

WE HAVE copies of *Adlertag* by Patrick G. Eriksson to win. For your chance to own one, tell us:

**Who commanded Luftflotte 3?**

Email your answer, marked *Adlertag* book competition, to: [tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk](mailto:tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk) or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by February 20. Please include your full postal address.

**Win!**



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."





Tim Morris



BEACH LIFE



PACIFIC AQUARIUM



RETRO SHOPS



JAPAN GARDEN

THE CALIFORNIAN coastline is hard to beat for year-round sun and Long Beach sits in the perfect spot. Blue waters, great waves for surfing and one of the most vibrant cities in the world, right on the shoreline, create something not to be missed.

I've spent a lot of time in the States and, as a Brit, I've always felt welcome, but Long Beach is more welcoming than most. In comparison to the big city madness of LA, which is a very short drive away, Long Beach has more heart and a small-town feel to many of its districts. It has character in a way that other cities just can't match.

Take Belmont Shore, for example, with its scenic shopping and dining strip on 2nd Street. Here you'll find attractions like Filipino-inspired cookies and brownies at Foodologie and Domenico's, the oldest restaurant in the city. This is the place that started the southern Californian tradition of loving pizza and Italian cuisine.

Long Beach is a city with intriguing architecture and plenty of sights to see. It's also become a Hollywood favourite in recent years, with film crews on location shooting things for much of the time. Take Vincent Thomas Bridge and the Docklands area that featured prominently in *Gone in 60 Seconds*, or Cordova Apartments, on 3rd Street, Mia's home in the musical hit *La La Land*.

#### Relax

With golden sunshine, pristine beaches and plenty of open spaces, it's very easy to switch off in Long Beach. There are, however, two things that should not be missed. Firstly, book a cruise through the canals around Naples Island in Long Beach's Belmont Shore neighbourhood. Gondola Getaway operates several authentic Italian gondolas, navigated by gondoliers who have trained in Venice ([gondolagetawayinc.com](http://gondolagetawayinc.com)).

Secondly, visit the Earl Burns Miller Japanese Garden, one of the most beautiful retreats in Long Beach. This hidden gem is a wonderful escape from the modern world. Stroll through the picturesque grounds, feed the koi fish, or enjoy yoga in a quiet corner. The garden is on the campus of California State University Long Beach.



JAPANESE GARDEN

# Longing for Cali..

Reservations are required to visit, but admission is free ([csulb.edu/earl-burns-miller-japanese-garden](http://csulb.edu/earl-burns-miller-japanese-garden)).

#### Adventure

With a vibrant sports scene and excellent night-life, Long Beach has plenty of action to keep you entertained. Granada Beach is a popular beach volleyball and kitesurfing spot, where you can rent all manner of water-sports kit with ease. There are wildlife-watching cruises available, or you can experience the best that the Pacific Ocean has to offer, without leaving dry land.

Aquarium of the Pacific is one of the top attractions in Long Beach and Southern California's largest aquarium. The experience comes with augmented reality features, and a live daily show schedule ([aquariumofpacific.org](http://aquariumofpacific.org)).

For a great night out, head for drinks and live music at Alter Ego, a bar and lounge that plays homage to its history as a nightlife destination since it opened in 1926 ([fairmont-breakers.com/dine/alter-ego](http://fairmont-breakers.com/dine/alter-ego)).

#### Stay

The Hyatt Regency sits on a beautiful waterfront spot across from Grissom Island and the Queen Mary. It's close to the heart of all the downtown action and is the only 4 Diamond Award-winning hotel in the area. All 531 rooms and suites offer ocean, or harbour views. It's tailored towards business guests, but it's also a good fit with families on vacation.

A harbour view twin-double in February will cost circa \$308 per night, breakfast excluded. Cheaper rooms and dates are available, plus special offers. Valet parking costs \$49 per night ([hyatt.com/hyatt-regency/en-US/lgbri-hyatt-regency-long-beach](http://hyatt.com/hyatt-regency/en-US/lgbri-hyatt-regency-long-beach)).



HYATT HOTEL

#### Eat

Long Beach is a melting pot of cultures and flavours, reflected in the city's eclectic mix of restaurants. Head back to Belmont Shore for breakfast, with style, at Breakfast Republic. Situated in a relaxed neighbourhood, the Republic is a friendly little place that serves a unique take on American breakfast food. Shrimp and grits, eggs benedict, omelettes, pancakes, and a lot more are on the menu to start your day with a bang.

Try lunch at Gaucho Beach, located right on the sand at Alamitos Beach, near downtown. Enjoy stunning views of the water, while you savour a range of Argentinian-inspired dishes ([gauchobeach.com](http://gauchobeach.com)).

A worthy alternative for lunch is The Attic, located in a historic Craftsman house in the Belmont Heights neighbourhood. The menu here offers farm-to-table cuisine with Cajun flair and Southern comfort food dishes. It is a very popular brunch spot among locals, and they are known for their iconic mac & cheetos, delicious eggs benedict and cocktails ([theatticonbroadway.com](http://theatticonbroadway.com)).

Finally, there are three strong contenders for dinner and, in my book, one clear winner.

Firstly, Nettuno, inside the Fairmont Breakers hotel is part of a \$150 million restoration project. The historic building that houses it, on Ocean Boulevard, was the first luxury hotel in the city, built in 1926. Celebrities, including Charles Lindbergh, Rita Hayworth and Elizabeth Taylor have all stayed here. Nettuno offers a menu inspired by authentic Italian home cooking ([fairmont-breakers.com](http://fairmont-breakers.com)).

Next is Ammatoli, on E 3rd St. This is a restaurant with an upmarket, exclusive vibe. The



RELAXING: Taking a ride aboard an authentic Italian gondola around Naples Island

menu is impressive, focusing on cuisine from the Levant. The restaurant's owner, chef Dima Habibah, was a James Beard Award semi-finalist for Best Chef in 2024, and Ammatoli is, not only a local favourite, but has been recognised in the Los Angeles Times' list of 101 best restaurants multiple times ([ammatoli.com](http://ammatoli.com)).

So here we are, my personal favourite and a clear winner for

authenticity, dinner at Lola's Mexican Cuisine on E 4th Street. Situated across the street from a classic 1920s cinema, this is the real deal, a family-owned restaurant on Retro Row. The menu of authentic Mexican recipes has been passed down through generations and Chef Luis Navarro's Oaxacan mole dishes are the best in the world. My favourite spot in Long Beach ([lolasmexicancuisine.com](http://lolasmexicancuisine.com)).



LOLA'S





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Gp Capt John Heron OBE

**Obituary**

# Harrier pilot was OC of Falklands station

## Display expert flew with French and US Air Force

**GP CAPT John 'Jock' Heron, who has died aged 89, was a former Hunter and Harrier display pilot who later commanded RAF Stanley in the Falkland Islands.**

He joined the RAF as a flight cadet at the RAF College Cranwell in 1955, where he trained as a pilot. His first appointment was to 43 Sqn at Leuchars, where he flew the Hunter in the day fighter ground attack role. During this tour, he was appointed as the solo display pilot.

In 1961 he moved to Stradishall with No 54(F) Sqn for a second Hunter tour, where he was the Squadron Weapons Instructor after attending the Fighter Combat School at West Raynham. A further posting took him to Binbrook in 1963 as the Hunter trials pilot on the Air Fighting Development Squadron, part of the Central Fighter Establishment, where he also flew the Lightning and, when detached to the French Air Force, various marks of the Dassault Mirage 3.

In 1965 he was selected for an exchange appointment with the United States Air Force at Nellis Air Force Base near Las Vegas, where he was an instructor pilot on the Republic F-105 Thunderchief, thus within a 12-month period he had flown three contemporary Mach 2 fighters with three Air Forces from three countries. During his tour at Nellis he was privileged to fly the last F-86F Sabre in the USAF before the type's retirement in 1966.

He returned to the UK in 1967 to take up an appointment in the Ministry of Defence Operational Requirements branch as a Squadron Leader Staff Officer on the MRCA (Tornado) project.

After a spell as a lecturer on the Joint Warfare Establishment at Old Sarum, he resumed flying duties as a Harrier flight commander on No. IV(AC) Sqn at RAF Wildenrath. During this time, he was the RSFG Harrier display pilot. He returned to the MOD in 1975 as the Harrier



**GP CAPT HERON:** Varied career

air staff officer, where he was responsible for enhancing the operational capability of the RAF Harrier Force.

He served in Whitehall until 1978 when he was promoted to Wg Cdr and returned to Germany to command the Operations Wing at RAF Gutersloh, where he flew both the Harrier and the Wessex helicopter. In 1980 he was posted to HQ RAF Germany at Rheindahlen. He was appointed OBE in 1981 for his work on the Harrier.

He returned to the UK in 1982 to command RAF West Drayton, where he remained until 1984 when he was posted to the Falkland Islands to command RAF Stanley for four months. On his return he became Gp Capt Operations at Headquarters Strike Command, where he was responsible for shaping the RAF command and control organisation in the new NATO bunker. He remained at High Wycombe until his early retirement from the RAF in the spring of 1987, when he joined Rolls-Royce in Bristol as its Military Affairs Executive. His duties with the company involved close liaison with the flying units of all three Services and with the MOD policy, operational requirements and air staffs, with the aim of ensuring a smooth communications flow between the company and the Armed Forces.

He retired finally in



**DETACHMENT:** Heron also flew Mirage with the French Air Force

October 1998 but maintained his Service links through the RAF Historical Society, where he was vice-chairman. At Filton he was a leading light and trustee of Aerospace Bristol and a vice-president of the Rolls-Royce Heritage Trust. His activities were recognised

with the presentation of a lifetime achievement award on behalf of Aviation Heritage UK, and the Rolls-Royce Heritage Trust.

He served on the committee of the RAF Historical Society for over 25 years and was its vice-chairman from 1999 until

2023, when he became interim chairman as the society was transitioning into the more recent times. His prodigious contribution was recognised by the award of the Air League Medal, making him just the fifth recipient of this prestigious award in the society's history.





# Smooth operator's

## BIG on value too



### C3 Aircross

#### Pros

- Comfortable ride
- Third-row seating in a supermini
- Competitively priced

#### Cons

- Not quick
- Rivals sharper to drive
- Some cheap plastic

#### Verdict

THE C3 AIRCROSS is easy to love. It's a very comfortable family wagon, with compact exterior proportions and 7-seat versatility. It's easy to park, a doddle to use in traffic and has a cracking manual gearbox. Rivals offer plusher interiors and more flexible seating, but the C3 Aircross gives you a lot of practicality for not a lot of cash. It's certainly worth a test drive.

## 7-seat option for petrol and hybrid models

**THE NEW, second-generation Citroën C3 Aircross is a looker, in a plus-size kind of way.**

It's unapologetically boxy and an obviously family-focused affair, but its dimensions are neat and everything is well proportioned. This revamp is still, essentially, a slightly larger variant of the standard C3 supermini. The car is based on Stellantis' proven Smart Car platform and is available with petrol, hybrid or all-electric power. Looking for its USP? Well, the Aircross is a rarity in this class because it can be ordered as a 7-seater. Seven seats... in a supermini? Oh, yesss. Just like its Frontera cousin, the petrol and hybrid versions of the C3 Aircross can be upgraded to seven seats for an affordable £765. You can only have the EV with five seats, due to the space required for the batteries, but we can't have everything.

### Interior

The cabin will be familiar with anyone who has driven the standard C3 hatchback because it's

identical, in almost every respect. A nice, fabric-wrapped, two-tier dashboard grabs the eye and the simple 10.25-inch touchscreen allows easy interaction with the infotainment system. The screen is reasonably responsive and graphics are sharp. There are even a few physical buttons underneath the screen to allow for climate control adjustment, without having to take your gaze off the road.

It's fairly easy to get comfortable and everything is well laid out. The digital dial display sits nicely above the small, squared-off steering wheel. The instrument display is simple and legible, even if the rev counter does appear to have been stolen in the pure petrol. Why?

There are just two trim levels to choose from, base-spec 'Plus' and top-spec 'Max'. 'Plus' doesn't come with sat-nav, as standard, but does give you wireless Apple

CarPlay/Android Auto, so you'll be able to use your favoured maps provider. Top-spec 'Max' trim adds a wireless charging pad for your phone and the nav kit.

Many of the materials used

'Flower Power' in my book.

### On The Road

Our entry-level Citroën C3 Aircross Plus came with a 99bhp 1.2-litre petrol engine with a six-speed manual gearbox. The feisty little, three-cylinder engine delivered surprisingly punchy output – enough to make the Aircross feel spirited and more than enough for everyday family jaunts. We're talking 0-62mph in 10.6 seconds, a top end of 111mph and a combined fuel consumption figure of around 45mpg. It will set you back £21,105, on the road.

My favourite attribute of the petrol is the manual gearbox, which is silky smooth, with a precise shift.

It's not a quick car, but its well enough designed to give a decent sensation of speed and it holds the road better than the last generation.

Body-roll is fairly well



VERSATILE:  
7-seat option

are of decent quality, but the top of the dash and the door panels are noticeably finished in scratchy plastics. It's not all bad. The tone, in here, is more 'funky' than 'plush', with contrasting lighter trim dotted around and some interesting labels, carrying inspirational slogans like 'be cool', or 'be happy'. It's all very 60s

controlled through fast corners too.

It's not sporty and you won't get any feedback through the steering wheel, but you won't find it hard work on a run either. Around town, it's a nimble companion because the steering is well-weighted for negotiating city life. Standard fit on all trim levels of the C3 Aircross is the 'Citroën Advanced Comfort Suspension'. The system is fitted with hydraulic stops that absorb impacts, then spread the energy more equally. The result is a surprisingly refined ride.

Stellantis has, so far, decided to keep this feature as a Citroën exclusive too, so Citroën retains its reputation as being a class leader for ride quality.



## Sport

## SQUASH

# India tour great prep for Inters

## Hoping to build on success of Masters

**Daniel Abrahams**

RAF SQUASH is hoping its recent overseas tour to India will pay dividends in next month's Inter-Services championships.

The association achieved Masters team success in last year's IS, and with an impressive semi-final finish in the first edition of the Indian Air Force International Squash Championships in New Delhi, AS1 Craig Stephens believes the Service is well set for the coming tournament.

He said: "The trip to India was hugely beneficial leading into the squash season. The team event was akin to the Inter-Services in format and competitive spirit, giving the squad invaluable experience after the off-season."

"Reaching the semi-final while playing in unfavourable conditions and against strong, unknown competition has left



**NEW ALLIANCE:** RAF players with Indian Air Force squash association members

the RAF squash team in great stead for the upcoming IS.

"We were successful in the Masters team event last year, beating both the Army and Navy

5-0. The Army won the men's, ladies' and U25 events, so we will be looking to put the pressure on and challenge for those titles this year, alongside retaining our



**RAF CHAMPS 2025:** AS1(T) Oscar Hill battles it out against Sqn Ldr Phil Rea

Masters title.

"We selected a team of players, at short notice, to represent the RAF in the best light, both from a sporting and engagement perspective, and their participation was endorsed by the Chief of the Air Staff's International office."

Facing two teams from each of the Indian Air Force, Indian Army and Sri Lankan Air Force, the aviators reached the semi-final, while the individual event saw Wg Cdr Paul Warner make it

to the quarter-finals before losing to the eventual winner in a tough match.

Stephens added: "A key achievement from the visit was the positive influence the championships had on the IAF-RAF relationship."

The Inter-Services are being hosted by the RAF at Wolverhampton Lawn Tennis & Squash club on March 18-19.

● Follow RAF Squash on Instagram @rafsquash.

## FLYING

# Golden wonder Pete celebrates 50 years of RAF flying



**PETE:** Fast jet pilot

"FITNESS AND discipline" are the keys to a successful flying career, according to Flt Lt Pete Allan VR(T) who recently celebrated 50 years since his first RAF flight.

Allan, 69, said: "You must try to stay healthy and make the best effort you can to keep going – doing something which you love, which for me is flying."

"I cannot fly the cadets anymore, being over 65, but I flew more than 2,000 cadets in my time, and still love to help with cadet briefings; they love to see the discipline required in performing the flying task properly, and the cadets coming through are full of enthusiasm, even if some of them are a bit nervous."

"I still act as Duty Pilot for the unit and fly Dual as a Checking Officer, so there is still a flying contribution to be made to the fantastic 6 Air Experience Flight/



**TWO TUTORS:** Flt Lt Allan flew over 2,000 cadets, after service on Jaguar Force (top right)

Oxford University Air Squadron."

Allan, who joined the RAF as an Acting Pilot Officer in 1976 with Yorkshire UAS at RAF Finningley, served to retirement at age 55,

spending most of his career on the Jaguar Force, before joining 6 AEF/Oxford UAS at Benson in 2012 as a Volunteer Reserve.

He added: "When I was 16, I saw



the Red Arrows displaying over Brighton and that inspired me to join up. The thrill from then has remained, and I love passing on experience to the younger generation of cadets and personnel."



## Sport

### SEA ANGLING



FS NOEL DILNOT: With spotted ray catch



PUSHING THE BOAT OUT: Winning Inter-Services sea angling boat team with their trophy

# DOUBLING DOWN ON INTERS QUEST

All-conquering anglers won't rest on their laurels

### Daniel Abrahams

SERVICE SEA fishing is angling for further success in 2026 after results last year saw it become the dominant military force in the sport.

The rarefied air in which the association found itself came about as it clinched both the Inter-Services Shore and Boat Championships – only the sixth time the double has been achieved by any Service since records began.

Having made RAF Valley, the spiritual home of Service sea angling, a fortress, the RAF team showcased skill, strategy and resilience throughout both disciplines.

Sea angling lead Sgt Lee Brackenbury said: "While individual brilliance often shines at Inter-Service level, last year's successes were built on a collective effort, adaptability and a winning game plan."

"Our double victory cements our reputation as the dominant force in UK



SEA-SONED PROFESSIONALS: RAF anglers on the water and Sgt Lee Brackenbury with greater spotted dogfish, left

Having seen a close battle for the boat event at its home ground of Holyhead, Brackenbury is under no illusions about this year's Royal Navy-hosted competition.

"It is set to be the most difficult yet," he added.

The team is also aiming to participate in more open civilian competitions, which host national

and international anglers.

"Our aim this year is a big push on recruitment and development," said Brackenbury. "We have an event every May for 'newbies' which we are firming up the details for."

● Follow RAF Sea Angling on Facebook @ Royal Air Force Angling.

### MOTORSPORT



RARING TO GO: Atkinson &amp; Middleton

## Sidecar duo revved up for title bid

THE SERVICE'S sidecar duo are aiming to carry on their winning ways after releasing their testing and racing schedule for the coming year.

After closing out last season with two wins in the final round of the British Sidecar Championship, Cpl Rob Atkinson and Sgt Mark Middleton are now gunning to be title contenders this time around.

Atkinson said: "We've worked incredibly hard over the off-season, with a number of significant upgrades to the bike, and we're both feeling ready for the challenge ahead. Ending last season on a high by winning both races in the final round gave us real momentum."

The pair will kick off this year with testing at Brands Hatch in Kent on March 13-15, before completing their testing at Darley Moor in Derbyshire on April 17-19.

The BSC racing starts for real with round one at Donington in Leicestershire on May 15-17, then Knockhill in Dunfermline on June 19-21. They reach the halfway point of the season at Snetterton, in Norwich, on July 3-5.

Atkinson said: "We have a fantastic team of serving RAF personnel around us and our loyal sponsors Mecsia and RAF Engineering are back on board for 2026, so we're excited to see what the new season brings."

"With strong teams travelling from Australia, France and Germany to compete in the UK, the competition will be tough, but the RAF Sidecar Team will arrive as one of the favourites for the title this year."

"We enjoyed good support trackside and from within the service last season, and would appreciate that again this year, but if people are not able to see us live, then they can catch us on TNT Sports as the championship unfolds."

● Follow the team on Facebook @RAF Side Car.





**IT'S NOT YOURS:** Water polo action  
PHOTO: CPL SALLY RAIMONDO



**HARD TO MASTER:** Backstroke  
PHOTO: CPL SALLY RAIMONDO

## SWIMMING

# Swimmers to Channel 100 years of heritage



International marathon relay is the highlight of centenary celebrations

## Daniel Abrahams

**IN AND out of the pool** RAF Swimming will be making a bigger splash this year and it celebrates its 100th anniversary with a jam-packed roster of events.

Whether it's a cross-Channel relay, Olympic swimmer visits, hosting this year's Inter-Services championship, or the bespoke anniversary baggy cap for former and current association members, 2026 is sure to keep the sport in the public eye.

Chairman Sqn Ldr Stephen Brassington (*inset right*) said: "We had values set out in 1926 which we have stuck to; fitness and morale-boosting esprit de corps. In the main the discipline in 1926 was the 25-yard dash, we have now grown to four disciplines: swimming, diving, open water swimming and water polo.

"We are deeply proud to have taken the initial aspirations and built on them,



and this year will really highlight that and our bright future."

RAF Cranwell will host the opening anniversary event on March 27, as part of the Inter-Unit championships, with Olympic bronze medallist Cassie Patten in attendance.

Patten, who won marathon 10km bronze at the Beijing Games in 2008 and a World Championship silver medal in the 10km open water event in Melbourne, will take part in a Q&A session, with VIPs later hosted by Inter-Service breaststroke champion and 12 Sqn Typhoon pilot Flt Lt Matt Smith at Coningsby, with a tour of the Typhoon simulator and visit to the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight hangar.

In May, the swim fraternity will host their French and German counterparts in an-IS style championship.

June will see the most eye-catching event as the Service's open water swimmers host a cross-Channel relay race competing against German Air



**POWER:** RAF swimmer in competition  
PHOTO: CPL PHIL DYE

Force counterparts, replete with goose fat and basic swimming costumes.

Brassington said: "The cross-Channel relay is our blue riband event. We have a history in cross-Channel swimming, setting records with solo swimmers – there is a world record for the crossing from Belgium to England (De Panne to Dover) in 1992.

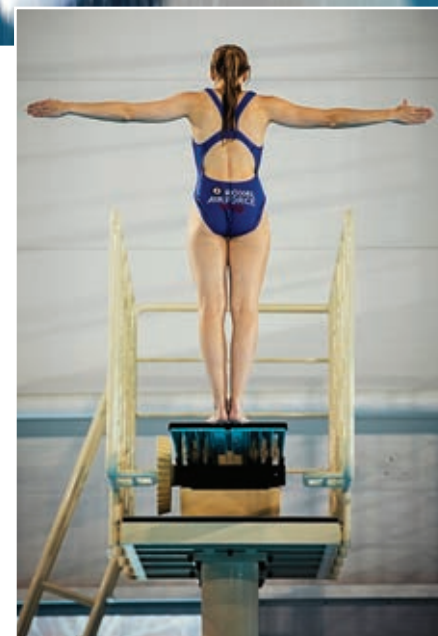
"Competitors have agreed to swimming in trunks and outfits, no wet suits, goose fat will be in use. Old school athleticism involved no wet suits."

The relay will feature two support boats, with both teams aiming to be in the water at the same time. Each member of the six-swimmer team will compete for an hour, or a mile, before swapping.

The diving and water polo teams will host events in September.

Brassington said: "Both our male and female water polo teams are looking to face off against the home nation teams, while the divers are working with GB Diving to finalise a joint-hosted event.

"We close out the year with our annual dinner in September, where there will be a



**LIAISON:** There will be an event with GB Diving

presentation of baggy caps and a brooch for female personnel, to past and present association members.

"We hope this year, which has been brilliantly supported by Babcock, will kickstart new interest in the association and sport."

**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](mailto:Sports@rafnews.co.uk)**



## Sport

### RUGBY LEAGUE

# Challenge Cup blow

## Weather kiboshes team's competition



**STOICAL:** Sgt Hutchinson (3rd right) and his squad

### Daniel Abrahams

**SERVICE RUGBY league will be praying to the weather gods next year after their round one Challenge Cup fixture postponement led to their withdrawal due to operational commitments.**

The team's opening clash with NCL Premier team Heworth was put back – the second year in a row they have been hit by changed fixtures – then they were unable to field a team for the rearranged clash, eventually leading to them having to drop out of the competition.

Frustrated head coach Sgt James Hutchinson said: "We're disappointed to have to withdraw from the Challenge Cup this year. We had a strong squad together for the original date and were confident and looking forward to the challenge of facing Heworth but, unfortunately, due to a number of operational commitments we were unable to field a team the following week. I suppose that's part and parcel of Service life.

"What was particularly frustrating was the

referee declaring the game on as of 0930 Saturday morning, only for both teams to turn up and see that it was quite clearly never going to be on.

"The official needed to make a much better decision, which would've saved our lads a lot of travelling from all around the country."

He added: "We fell foul of a frozen pitch in round one last year, which saw us having to make two trips down to Aldershot to get the game on against the Army, so hopefully the weather will be kinder to us in 2027."

Looking towards the coming season, Hutchinson said: "Up next for us is our first regular season game in April with the opponent to be confirmed. That's the start of our Inter-Service preparation, with a game every month up until September.

"Our first team manager, Sgt Tom Moor, is working incredibly hard behind the scenes to ensure we get the right level of opposition at the right times, to give us the best chance of regaining the IS crown this year."

● Follow RAF Rugby League on Instagram @\_rafrugbyleague.

### BASKETBALL

## Hoop stars to get in SHAPE with Oz tour

**ALDERSHOT IS the initial target for the RAF's UKAF basketball stars as they prepare for a bumper year of action at the forefront of the Tri-Service set-up.**

The team had a standout year with wins against SHAPE in the AIRCOM Games and its stars will compete for their individual Services in the IS competition at the home of the British Army in May. There will also be an overseas tour to Australia as they focus on a return SHAPE fixture in September.

A UKAF spokesperson said: "The team's year was marked by growth for aviator personnel thanks to the strategic guidance of Flt Lt Craig Percival and Wg Cdr Christopher McIntyre. The organisation has taken significant steps toward building a sustainable and competitive future.

"Sqn Ldr Percival's pivotal role in strengthening the women's side of the programme has seen team numbers grow from seven in the first year to 13 in 2025, with all athletes attending trials and tournament events."

AS1 Nadine Abbey, AS1 Stephanie Cornell, Cpl Rachel Kerr, Sgt Grace Turton and AS1 Rachel Cathro all had standout years.

Wg Cdr McIntyre championed a long-term development strategy centred on identifying and investing in young talent.

The approach produced immediate results as the heavily RAF-loaded men's team, under the leadership of Flt Lt Jamie Rodwell, secured a victory over the SHAPE team.

The AIRCOM tournament saw impressive displays from Rodwell, Sgt Ashley Hands, AS1 Oliver Tate and Cpl Gabriel Cousins, with Cpl Brandon Dzaro top three-point shooter across the tournament.

UKAF are set to use their tour to Australia in September to compete against the Australian Defence Force as a key part of



**MEN:** Success at SHAPE



**WOMEN:** Ranks are growing

the preparation for the 2026 SHAPE International Basketball Tournament, offering players valuable experience and testing the progress made under the current leadership.

● Follow UKAF and RAF basketball on Instagram @ukaf\_basketball and @rafbasketball.

### CYCLING



**CPL TOM WHITWORTH:** Men's Open Senior winner in the RAF Championships

## It's Whit-worth the effort for Tom

**THERE WAS a battling Inter-Services second place for the RAF's cyclocross riders behind the Army at a rain-soaked Hillingdon House Farm course.**

In its second year, the combined cyclocross road/Inter-Service championships event boasted a jam-packed field of more than 50 riders and had to be rerouted after heavy rain in the previous 24 hours made a river-crossing unsafe.

The new section took in several steep grassy banks, with the rest of the course becoming a slog after a couple of laps and

resembling a mud bath. Racers were faced with tricky descents and other hurdles requiring a huge effort from all competitors.

Cpl Sarah Toms, event OIC, said: "Prior weather conditions made for a tough race, with sappy ground throughout making pedalling tough going. Lots of running also made for some very heavy legs.

"Racing was great with strong competition in the Army and the RAF – a proper muddy, tough, traditional cross race."

Despite losing the team IS event to the Army, there were

notable successes in the RAF championship event which was held at the same time.

Cpl Tom Whitworth won the Open Senior, with Sgt Rich Summerbell coming second and AS1(T) Stegeman third.

The women's event was won by Toms, with Cpl Laura Sheppard and Sgt Jen Burns coming second and third respectively, while in the Vets Open Wg Cdr Keiran Jarret took first, Peter Lown second and AS1 Paul Beattie third, with Sgt Lucy Kershaw winning the Veteran women's event.



# 5 RAF Sport

pages of

ICE SPORTS



## Sea anglers out to hook some fin very special at IS

See page 24

# IT'S GAME ON

FLT LT Nicole Burger has become the first South African woman to qualify for the Winter Olympics in skeleton.

The RAF Benson slider told *RAF News*: "It's surreal and deeply personal for me. It's the culmination of years of chasing an unlikely dream, starting from my rugby sevens days in the UK, discovering this wild sport through the Royal Air Force, and then committing everything to sliding headfirst down ice tracks at 130+ km/h.

## Aviators hoping to put on a show in Italy

"There were moments of doubt, especially coming from a country where winter sports aren't on the radar, with limited resources, sponsorship challenges, and people doing double-takes at the idea of a South African skeleton racer. Personally, it's a massive source of pride, not just for the achievement, but for proving to myself that I belong on this global stage.

"For the RAF supporting me every step of the way, and giving me the opportunity to chase this dream – I can't thank them enough. My friends and colleagues from around the UK, who are constantly supporting me when I'm in different time zones, means more than they realise."

Burger (*pictured*) is sponsored by the Royal British Legion, essential to fund qualifying races in America, Canada, South Korea and Europe. She competes in as many races as possible, to gain time on the ice.

"I race nearly every week during the season as it's cheaper than buying training time on the track," she said. "It's the only way I can maximise ice time with the resources and budget available to me. It's hard on the body and mind. As soon as one race finishes, it's straight to packing the car and then driving/flying to the next race to begin again.

"If the funds were available to just



train without the race pressure, stress and constant adrenaline every week it definitely would be a more pleasant scenario, but unfortunately this is the lifestyle for all the small nations and self-funded athletes. But we have fun and make do."

Burger will be one of 25 women skeleton athletes competing at the

Olympics in Milano Cortina, Italy, from February 13.

She said: "This Olympics is about gaining experience and competing with the best, but bring on 2030, that's where I will have clearer goals on where I want to be.

"I have lots of family and friends coming to support me over in Italy, so I can't wait to see everyone there cheering at the start and for some celebrations at the end!"

RUGBY



**PUT YOUR SHIRT ON US:** England's Amy Cokayne (*left*) and Scotland's Sarah Bonar (*centre*) present their World Cup jerseys to Provost Marshal Gp Capt Sam Bunn

## Cop a load of this

PERSONNEL AT the Air Security Force HQ at RAF Honington got shirty this week after rugby union stars Flt Lts Amy Cokayne and Sarah Bonar presented them with their World Cup jerseys.

The internationals – both in the RAF Police – play alongside each other for the Service but faced off for England and Scotland respectively in last year's tournament's quarter-finals.

Cokayne, who went on to win the competition with the Red Roses, said: "These Rugby World Cup jerseys are presented as a thank you and acknowledgment of the continued support we receive."

Bonar added: "Your encouragement and backing make it possible for us to represent the RAF Police at the highest level and on the world stage, and we are extremely grateful."

A spokesperson for the RAF Police said: "The framed shirts will be installed in the ASF HQ corridors, where they will be prominently displayed for staff, visitors and dignitaries to admire. The gifted display celebrates the strong links between the athletes and the RAFP community, recognising both their achievements on the world stage and their contribution as role models within the wider Armed Forces family."

● Follow RAF Rugby Union on Instagram @rafrugbyunion.

## Cpl Alex Cartagena's got plenty in reserve

CPL ALEX Cartagena has secured his first Winter Olympics spot as part of Team GB's bobsleigh set-up to do battle for gold in Milano Cortina this month.

Having helped Team Hall throughout the IBSF World and Europe Cup, securing an impressive sixth in the final standings, the aviator was selected as Travelling Reserve for the Games.

He said: "At no point in the season was selection guaranteed, I did fear it wouldn't happen.

"Travelling Reserve is the official title, but we have named it 'utility'. I need to be ready to go whatever is needed, which is sort of what I have been doing all season. I have, and had to be, reliable on all racing set-ups for the left-hand side of the sled, so I will have to do that again."

He added: "I was on GB Two team which was cut. That should have been the end of the road for me last season, but I was taken on board and trained with the best and now race with them."



Since his selection Cartagena (*pictured below*) has been caught up in the Games preparation frenzy, with media calls and kit collection before heading off to training camp and then Italy.

He said: "The last few days have been a whirlwind of kit collection and media calls before returning to Bath for training, then off to Innsbruck, before going to Königssee, Germany to train on the track there, then signing in for the Games in Italy, then returning to the Olympics after training in Innsbruck again."

The aviator did find time to take his mum Gill and dad Chris out for dinner to announce his selection, where his mum broke down in tears on hearing the news.

He said: "It was lovely to share the news with my family. I have been well supported by 14 Sqn, Wg Cdr Karl Bird has been superb.

"I have proved the doubters wrong and backed up the faith shown in me by others."

● Follow Team Hall on Instagram: @bobsleighbrad



# READY FOR CIVVY STREET?

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

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into civvy life?  
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got a plan for it.**

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anyone who's worn the uniform**  
and your family, whatever challenges you might face.

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# R'n'R



Win Jackie Chan's latest on Blu-ray ● p8

## Ballet muse... Carmen's in town

● 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.





## Cinema

Cinema Made In Italy

BFI Southbank, March 4-8

# Film fans are onto a winner

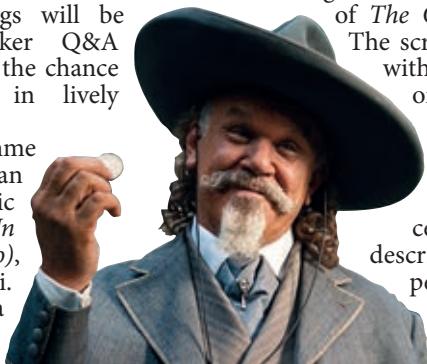
## Festival features the best of Italy

**CINEMA MADE In Italy will return to its new home at BFI Southbank in London for its 16th edition next month.**

Film lovers will be able to sample some of the best recent productions from Italy, in a diverse programme that takes place from March 4-8.

As always, screenings will be followed by film-maker Q&A sessions, giving viewers the chance to become engaged in lively discussions.

The 2026 programme includes 10 new Italian films plus the 1959 classic *The Facts of Murder* (*Un Maledetto Imbroglione*), directed by Pietro Germi. The legendary Claudia Cardinale stars in this



classic, restored thriller about two crimes that unfold in the same Rome apartment.

The opening night film is renowned opera director Damiano Michieletto's first feature, *Primavera*, starring Tecla Insolia and Michele Riondino, recently seen in Billie August's TV mini-series adaptation of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The screenplay was co-written with Ludovica Rampoldi, one of Italy's leading screenwriters, known for *The Traitor* and *Gomorra*.

Set in the early 18th century, *Primavera* is described as an enthralling period drama inspired by the life of composer Antonio Vivaldi.



**CLASSIC:** Claudia Cardinale in *The Facts of Murder*

Rampoldi will also be presenting her directorial debut *A Brief Affair* (*Breve Storia d'Amore*), starring Valeria Golino (*The Morning Show*), a suspenseful psychological thriller where two couples find their lives inextricably – and dangerously – entwined. The award-winning actress is also the lead in Mario Martone's literary biopic *Fuori*, about noted Italian feminist writer and political activist Goliarda Sapienza (author of *The Art of Joy*) and Nicolangelo Gelormini's dark fable *Giola* (*La Gioia*), about an introverted teacher and her dangerously manipulative pupil.

And John C. Reilly (*Stan & Ollie*) – pictured left – stars in the playful Euro-western *Heads or Tails?* (*Testa o Croce?*), hailed as a surreal, frequently hilarious take on the spaghetti western about a couple on the run.

The five-day film festival is organised by



**PRIMAVERA:** Inspired by the life of Vivaldi

Cinecittà, and the British Film Institute (BFI), with the support of the Italian Cultural Institute in London. The films were selected by Adrian Wootton, CEO of Film London.

● Go to: [whatsonbfi.org.uk](http://whatsonbfi.org.uk) for screening dates and times.

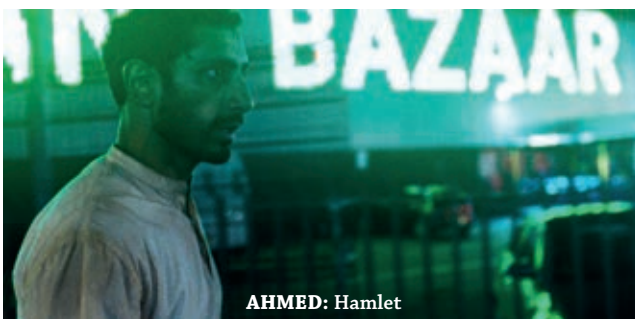


## Film Review

Hamlet (15)

In cinemas now

# Asian Hamlet misses mark



**AHMED:** Hamlet

**RIZ AHMED** plays the titular prince in Aniel Karia's *Hamlet*, relocating Shakespeare's tragedy into London's South Asian community: trading ruffs and swords for strip clubs and substances.

Immediately we are shown the effectiveness of this update, as the prince washes his father as part of a cremation ritual. From here, the familiar details are reworked: the late King of Denmark is instead the CEO of Elsinore, no longer a castle but a construction company. Yet despite these changes, Shakespeare's language remains largely intact.

It is this commitment that proves to be most challenging, despite having being done many times

before – including Kenneth Branagh's famously unabridged adaptation in 1996. The talent of the cast is clear but the efforts to make the story contemporary, and make it relatable for a certain diaspora, seem to be undercut by the language. The result is a film that feels at odds with itself.

Where the film truly succeeds is in moments where dialogue quietsens down. The opening cremation ritual is one, as is the brilliantly staged play performed during the lavish wedding of Hamlet's widowed mother Gertrude (Sheeba Chaddha) and uncle Claudius (Art Malik), in which Hamlet's accusation of his uncle plays out as a dance to the entire reception.

The famously introspective "To be or not to be" soliloquy is delivered as Hamlet recklessly speeds through the city in his BMW, doubling down by making literal the suicidal contemplation beneath the words. The film is built firmly around Ahmed's Hamlet, with other characters, such as Polonius (Timothy Spall) and Ophelia (Morfydd Clark) largely falling by the wayside.

Impressively directed and thoughtfully conceived, this version of *Hamlet* may offer some viewers a compelling new way into Shakespeare's tragedy. For others, it risks becoming yet another barrier to entry.

**2 roundels out of 5** ●●●  
**Review by Sam Cooney**



## Film Review

H is for Hawk (12A)

In cinemas now

# Foy hawk tale fails to soar

**A**FTER THE sudden death of her father, a Cambridge academic retreats from scholarly life and adopts a goshawk in *H is for Hawk*, the film adaptation of Helen Macdonald's hugely popular memoir.

Having some experience with falconry, and dismissing the peregrine as "a lady's bird", Helen (Claire Foy) opts instead for the wildest and most volatile option available. A goshawk, it transpires, is a creature calmed not by affection but bloodshed. Before she is ready to hunt, however, there will need to be an adjustment period for Mabel (the softer the name, the deadlier the bird, apparently).

It quickly becomes clear that Helen is looking for an escape. Haunted by tender memories of her father (Brendan Gleeson), she withdraws from both her academic responsibilities and human connection, channelling her grief into the obsessive training of Mabel. By using a real goshawk, these scenes carry an immediate tension, allowing for moments of improvisation that feel raw and unmanufactured.

Without cinematic trickery, each small step forward feels genuinely earned, and we share in Helen/Foy's achievements. Yet the grief Helen is attempting to process remains largely internalised, though we see its fallout. Dishes stack up, bird droppings trail across the floor, and raw



**ENIGMATIC:** Foy as Helen with goshawk Mabel

meat occupies the last remaining space on the kitchen counter.

The hunting sequences are shot with kinetic energy and offer brief flashes of exhilaration, but *H is for Hawk* ultimately struggles to sustain momentum. Despite its committed central performance, the film settles into a muted, restrained rhythm that too often feels inert.

What should be a piercing meditation on grief and control instead becomes, at times, oddly stale. There is something special and enigmatic in here though, particularly in Claire Foy's performance, but it demands patience.

**Three out of five roundels** ●●●  
**Review by Sam Cooney**





**Music**  
Happy Mondays  
UK tour

# "We're Happy to still be here"

## Mondays on road to celebrate Pills 'n' Thrills

**I**N CELEBRATION of the 35th anniversary of their classic album *Pills 'n' Thrills And Bellyaches*, 'Madchester' legends Happy Mondays are heading out on a 22-date tour starting next month.

The band's frontman Shaun Ryder, Bez (freaky dancing and percussion), Mark Day (guitar), Gary Whelan (drums), Dan Broad (MD/guitar/keys) and Firouzeh Berry (backing vocals) will perform the album's highlights, including the massive hit singles *Step On*, *Kinky Afro* and *Loose Fit*, plus other hits and fan favourites, such as *24 Hour Party People* and *Hallelujah*.

Starting in Newcastle on March 13 and finishing in Belfast on April 24, the tour includes dates at The Roundhouse in London (March 27) and a hometown show at Manchester's O2 Victoria Warehouse (April 11).

Joining the tour as very special guests at all dates are The Farm and Northside, who were both on



**MONDAYS:** Heading back on the road 35 years after classic album was released

the bill for the Mondays' famous 1991 concert at Elland Road in Leeds.

Happy Mondays became the pioneers of the Madchester sound after signing to Tony Wilson's Factory Records in the late '80s, blending their love of funk, rock, psychedelia and house with the sounds of the UK's emerging rave scene.

Before the tour kicks off, Shaun Ryder and Bez look back at the madness, music and miracles of still being Happy Mondays.

When revisiting *Pills 'n' Thrills And Bellyaches* now what hits them first – the sound of it or the madness around it?

Shaun said: "Because we got back together with the Mondays in 1999 – and we've been doing

it ever since – I've been playing those songs for so long that it all just becomes second nature. I mean, you know, we go out on tour, and we do tracks off the first album, *Squirrel and G-Man*, we do a couple off *Bummed*, and then we do the *Pills 'n' Thrills and Bellyaches* stuff.

"So it all sort of flows together now, you know what I mean? I don't sit there thinking, 'Oh, this is that iconic album,' even though everyone else does. To me, they're just our tunes. But it still sounds good – proper good – like it could've been made today."

And 35 years on which moment in the live set still gives him the biggest buzz?

"Well, that's changed loads over the years," he said. "I mean, I've gone through phases where I've absolutely hated everything – hated touring, hated myself, hated the lifestyle – and then phases where I've loved it and then hated it again. But now? Now I just enjoy it more than ever. It's mad. I get a buzz now more than I did when we were kids. Maybe it's because the sex and drugs have

gone – all that madness – and now it's just the rock 'n' roll road. And I'm enjoying the road. You get older, and you appreciate the crowds more, the band more, the songs more. I get a buzz off the whole thing every night, and I never expected that."

When thinking back to the Mondays' wildest days, what moment still feels completely unreal?

Bez answered: "The unreal thing is simply that we're actually still in the band – all the Happy Mondays – after all this time. That's the bit that blows my mind. If you'd thought back all those years ago, when we set out as young fellas chasing a dream, causing chaos everywhere we went, you'd never have imagined we'd be here now as 60-odd-year-old fellas, planning gigs and getting the band back together again. That is unreal. That's the moment. Just being here, still doing it, still being the Happy Mondays. The fact that we survived it all, physically and mentally, is unbelievable."

Shaun confessed: "I still can't remember any of the lyrics I wrote –



**BEZ:** Dancing and percussion  
**PHOTOS:** PAUL HUSBAND



**Ballet**  
Carmen  
UK tour

## Acosta's Carmen marks 180 years since s



**ANNIVERSARY:** Acosta Danza company was formed in 2015

**F**OLLOWING ITS UK premiere in July 2024, Acosta Danza has announced a national tour of ballet superstar Carlos Acosta's adaptation of Bizet's famous opera *Carmen*, 180 years after Prosper Mérimée's eponymous story was first published.

Don José falls in love with Carmen and sacrifices everything to be with her. When Carmen becomes infatuated with the toreador Escamillo, she loses interest in Don José, whose love quickly turns to murderous jealousy.

Acosta's new version, which starts its tour on April 8 at Richmond Theatre, retains the story's universal and timeless themes in a stripped back setting, said a spokesperson.

Acosta said: "I am delighted to be touring my production of *Carmen* in 2026. For this full-length ballet I had

the pleasure of being reunited with the original creative team of Tim Hatley and Peter Mumford as well as being joined by Nina Dunn who has augmented the production value of the work by introducing some really amazing visual projections.

"Bringing all these elements together alongside the memorable score of Shchedrin and Bizet makes for a vibrant and exciting production. I also take great joy and pride in seeing my amazing Acosta Danza dancers flourish as we continue to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the company."

The melodies of Bizet's *Carmen* have secured the opera's hold on the popular imagination – Escamillo's *Toreador Song*, Carmen's *Habanera*, Don José's *Flower Song* and many passages for orchestra and chorus are among the

most widely known pieces of Western classical music.

Acosta was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1973. After a late but dazzling start in ballet at the age of nine, he became English National Ballet's youngest ever principal dancer, at 18. He joined the Royal Ballet in London in 1998, where he became an audience favourite.

He was awarded a CBE for his contribution to dance in 2014 and retired from classical ballet two years later. In 2015 he founded his company, Acosta Danza, and has been the director of the Birmingham Royal Ballet since 2020.

The show visits five venues – Richmond, Aylesbury, Manchester, Brighton and Woking, finishing on May 9.

● **Go to:** [acostadanaza.com](http://acostadanaza.com) for more details.





not a chance. If you take the autocue away, forget it. I'd be starting a song with the second verse, mixing lines up, putting the chorus where the middle eight should be, all sorts. Now I know why — it's my ADHD, dyslexia, all the things I've got going on in my head. Back in the day, I had laminated sheets of paper on the floor, and even then, I'd still get lost. Once I got an autocue, around 2000, that was it — finally, I could keep up. "People go, 'But you wrote it!' And I say, 'If you wrote a book, try getting onstage and reading it perfectly under lights with 5,000 people staring at you!'. Some people have photographic memories — I don't. We played with Bowie in the early '90s, and even he had a massive lyric screen he'd glance at. If it's good enough for Bowie, it's good enough for me."

Shaun and Bez are now also well known for their appearances on the hit Channel 4 show *Gogglebox*, which introduced them to a new, younger audience.

Shaun said: "They watch us for 20 minutes, then check out the music,



**ROCK 'N' ROLL SURVIVOR:** Shaun Ryder

and the next thing you know, they're at the shows. That's one of the main reasons we do TV — it brings in new fans. Our fanbase now goes from 10-year-olds to people in their 90s."

**Interview by Carl Marsh**

● **Go to:** [happymondayofficial.co.uk](http://happymondayofficial.co.uk) for full tour and ticket details.



## Exhibitions

### Frida: The Making of an Icon

Tate Modern (June 25, 2026 to Jan 3, 2027)

# Calling all Kahlo enthusiasts

**T**HIS SUMMER Tate Modern will present the first major exhibition to explore how Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) became a global icon and a key influence on a generation of artists.

*Frida: The Making of an Icon* will trace Kahlo's extraordinary rise from a relatively unknown painter to a worldwide cultural phenomenon. Developed in collaboration with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, this landmark show will examine how Kahlo's art and life have inspired generations of artists across diverse media, movements and communities around the world.

Rarely seen self-portraits will be among more than 30 works by Kahlo, exhibited alongside photographs and personal artefacts.

A Tate Modern spokesperson said: "This exhibition demonstrates Frida's impact on art history, presenting her work in dialogue with modern and contemporary artists from across the globe who have drawn influence from her aesthetic, identity and biography. Together they reveal how Kahlo's story continues to be reimagined and reclaimed by new generations, cementing her place as one of the most influential figures in the history of art."

Highlights will include a selection of Kahlo's most iconic self-portraits, including *Self-Portrait (With Velvet Dress)* 1926 and *Self-Portrait with Loose Hair* 1938, through which she embraced her Mexican heritage, queer self-image, feminist ideals and experience as a disabled woman, the spokesperson added.

The heart of the show will focus on the surrealist connections between Kahlo and her contemporaries. The spokesperson explained: "While Kahlo famously rejected the label, her work revealed striking parallels with the movement, leading its founder André Breton to declare her 'a self-made Surrealist'."

"Following her first solo show at Julien Levy Gallery in New York in 1938, Breton invited Kahlo to exhibit in Paris, where the French national collection acquired her self-portrait *The Frame* 1938. Tate Modern will present this work and other highlights including *Diego and Frida* 1929, *Survivor* 1938, *Memory (The Heart)* 1937 and *Girl with a Death Mask* 1938.

"Shown alongside paintings and photographs by



**FRIDA KAHLO:** *Untitled [Self-portrait with thorn necklace and hummingbird]* 1940. Nickolas Muray Collection of Mexican Art

Latin American artists including Kati Horna and Leonor Fini, Tate Modern will examine their shared fascination with motifs informed by surrealism, including masks and skeletons, and a fixation on death and dreaming," the spokesperson added.

The exhibition will culminate by exploring Kahlo's transformation into a global brand that extends far beyond her art, encompassing her image, style and persona. Featuring more than 200 objects generated by the mass-market production of Frida Kahlo merchandise, a room of 'Fridamania' will look at the rise of her commercial legacy.

Through the licensing of her likeness and partnerships with major brands, Kahlo's image has been propelled into mainstream culture, appearing on everything from T-shirts and tequila bottles to Barbies and perfume.

● **Go to:** [tate.org.uk](http://tate.org.uk) for more details.

## story began



**PASSION:** Production of *Carmen*



**Theatre  
Allegra**  
UK tour

**D**AME MAUREEN LIPMAN is to star in the world premiere of *Allegra*, a new comedy by Peter Quilter, which tours the UK from May 12 before going to the West End.

The actress, whose roles include Evelyn Plummer in *Coronation Street*, will be touring the country for the first time in 20 years, opening at Brighton's Theatre Royal in the week she celebrates her 80th birthday.

She said: "To find a comedy which can turn our current face of gloom into an upturned grin of happiness, is rare. *Allegra* is about a woman who is relentlessly upbeat — in more ways than one. Ibsen it isn't."

*Allegra* is full of joy — so

# Lipman is touring again at 80



**'ALLEGRA':** Lipman PHOTO: JAY BROOKS

much of it that she cannot stop herself from bursting into song. At home, in the street, even in shops and restaurants. Sometimes the music is only a fantasy in her head. But at other times, it results in a loud and disruptive performance that causes chaos in the village where she lives.

Allegra's brother, Ronen, and her carer, Anna, must somehow control her eccentricities and avoid angry visits by the local policeman. But is this possible without destroying the great happiness that fills Allegra's heart?

The play is described as a moving comedy with spectacular song and dance

sequences, but is also a touching and emotional examination of how, sometimes, the most beautiful of minds can start to disappear.

Quilter said: "Maureen is one of the great theatrical treasures of this country, and to have her bring *Allegra* to life is a joy and an honour."

After its week-long run in Brighton, the show goes to the High Wycombe Swan (May 18-23) then visits Aberdeen, Malvern, London Richmond Theatre, Windsor and Glasgow before culminating at Bath Theatre Royal from June 20 to July 4.

● **Go to:** [westendtheatre.com](http://westendtheatre.com) for full tour information.





## Your Announcements

You can email photos for announcements on this page to:  
[tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk](mailto:tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk)

### Death

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



**Flt Lt Gary West**

### Associations

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

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

with other upcoming events for 2026.

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

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

### Reunions

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

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

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

All welcome to attend the Trade Group 11 Association reunion on Friday, March 20 to Sunday, March 22. The venue will be The Marriott Delta Hotels, Mellors Way, off Woodhouse Way, Nottingham Belfry, Nottingham NG8 6PY. Further details on the website: [tg11association.com](http://tg11association.com) where information can also be found on how to join.

## Get a load of special events

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

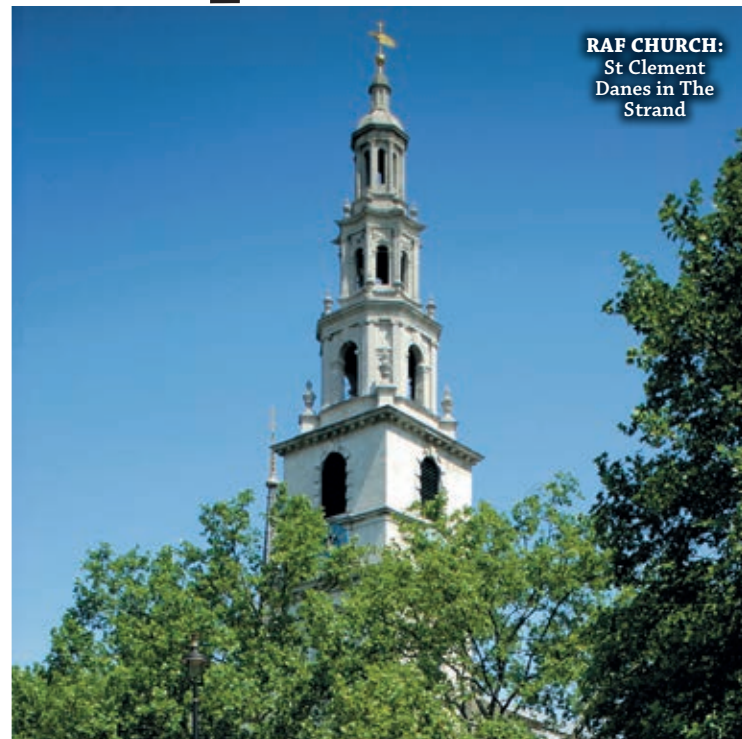
The Association will be holding a Gala Dinner at the RAF Club on Saturday, May 9 followed by a service of commemoration at the RAF church, St Clement Danes in The Strand, central London, on Sunday, May 10, followed by lunch.

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

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

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

The Association is looking to



**RAF CHURCH:**  
St Clement  
Danes in The  
Strand

recruit new members. If you are interested in joining, or would like more information about the anniversary events, please

contact Mr Weston via email: [lesalma9001@gmail.com](mailto:lesalma9001@gmail.com) or you can call on the following number: 0753 1523456.

## Fine dining for Benson

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

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



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

### How to use our service

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## Students walk for vets

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

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

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

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

● Go to: [justgiving.com/page/young-leaders-charity-ambassadors-4](http://justgiving.com/page/young-leaders-charity-ambassadors-4) to donate.





FEARLESS FOUR: The Project Fire and Ice team

PHOTO: ©SSAFA

## Sell-out success for SSAFA

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

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

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

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

## Charity extends holiday help

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

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

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

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

The spokesperson added: "The funding supported



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

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

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

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



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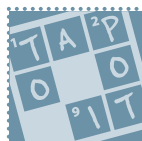
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# R'n'R



## Prize Crossword No. 402

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

### Across

1. Sadly it's a girl, we hear (4)
8. Aubergine dish aiming para off course (10)
9. Film franchise has heavenly battles (4,4)
10. Say hello to successful moment (4)
12. RAF plane featuring on 'Star Trek' (6)
14. Sanctions even outside performances (6)
15. Doctor takes singular southern RAF planes (6)
17. Tips us up during exercises (3-3)
18. God that Hercules often ridiculed, at first (4)
19. Just the girl for quiche (8)
21. Learned Ian can make your heart race (10)
22. See 7 Down

### Down

2. Final act was ultra-harsh, perhaps (4,6)
3. Once an incentive for Harry Kane (4)
4. Prescribe some liquor Dai needs (6)
5. Tangle paper handkerchief (6)
6. Has might producing RAF Operation (8)
7. And 22 Across. Calm Pooh disturbs in RAF practice area (4,4)
11. Leave with enthusiasm (3-2-3-2)
13. Island birds, presumably (8)
16. Raisin without a ruler (6)
17. Type that is subject to RAF attack (6)
18. Kate ruined hard wood (4)
20. Sailor, the Spanish son subject to fratricide (4)

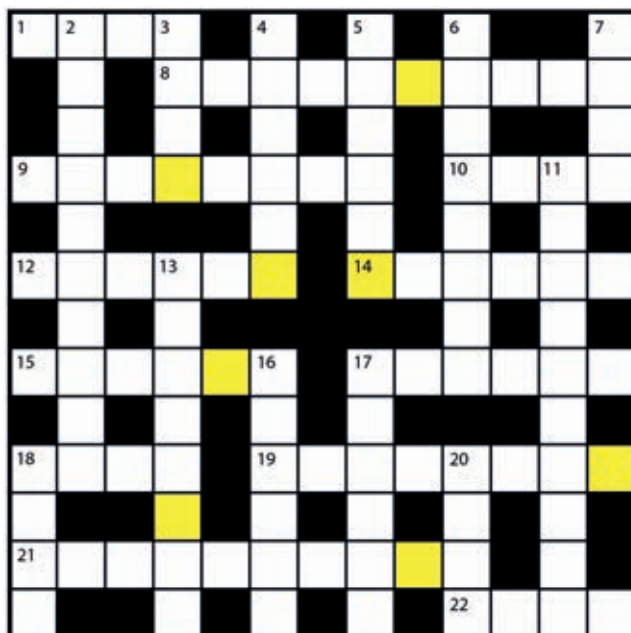
Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

RAF job: ..... Crossword No. 402

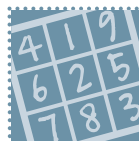
The winners of our Prize Crossword and Prize Su Doku puzzles will receive a recent top book title – please send your entries to the address printed in the adjacent Su Doku panel, to arrive by February 20, 2026.



### Solution to Crossword No. 401

Across – 7. Exempt 8. Batter 10. Veteran 11. Realm 12. Hawk 13. Beret 17. Alpha 18. Dear 22. U-boat 23. Leeming 24. Orkney 25. Benson  
Down – 1. Heave-ho 2. Bestows 3. Spire 4. Harrier 5. Atlas 6. Crime 9. Underhill 14. Blitzes 15. Melissa 16. Brigand 19. Tutor 20. Wokka 21. Fever  
RAF word - Exercise

Prize Crossword No. 401 winner is: MJ Wade, Swansea.



## Prize Su Doku No. 412

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

Solutions should be sent in a sealed envelope marked 'Su Doku' with the number in the top left-hand corner to:  
RAF News,  
Room 68,  
Lancaster Building, HQ  
Air Command,  
High Wycombe,  
Bucks,  
HP14 4UE,  
to arrive by February 20, 2026.  
The winner of Su Doku No: 410 is: Colin Jones, Didcot.



### Solution to Su Doku No. 411

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



## Competition

### The Shadow's Edge (15)

On digital now, 4K Ultra HD and Blu-ray from Feb 16 (Trinity CineAsia)



# Chan's still a man of action



FILM LEGEND: Martial artist and actor Jackie Chan

**A**CTION CINEMA icon Jackie Chan stars in the recent box office hit *The Shadow's Edge* – and you could win a copy on Blu-ray.

In this critically-acclaimed movie Chan takes on a notorious criminal gang, unlike anything he's faced before. When a cyber-criminal gang disappears with billions, evading capture by outsmarting the police's formidable "Sky Eye" surveillance system, they desperately enlist the help of a legend.

Wong Tak-Chung (Chan), a retired tracking expert, mentors rookie officer He Qiuguo (Zhang Zifeng, *Aftershock*, *Upcoming*) and rebuilds an elite surveillance unit. Their mission: to track down the elusive "Wolf King," Fu Longsheng (Leung Ka Fai Tony, *Election*, *Cold War*), the mastermind behind the heist. As the police close in, the thieves

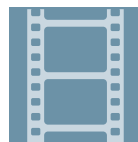
spring a trap of their own. Brains clash, loyalties are tested, and the ultimate cat-and-mouse game is about to begin...

From award-winning writer-director Larry Yang (*Ride On*, *Mountain Cry*), Chan and Ka Fai Tony reunite for the first time in 20 years, following their collaboration on *The Myth*.

For your chance to win a copy of the film on Blu-ray, simply tell us:

**What is the name of the award-winning writer-director of *The Shadow's Edge*?**

Email your answer, marked The Shadow's Edge Blu-ray competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by February 20. **Please include your full postal address with your entry.**



## Film Review

### Giant (15)

In cinemas now

# Making of Prince Naz

**R**OWAN ATHALE'S modest sports biopic looks at the rise of Prince Naseem Hamed, one of the most rousing figures in British boxing, and his lifelong relationship with coach Brendan Ingle.

'Naz' is instantly identifiable through his combination of technical skill and cockiness: flipping over the top rope, taunting opponents in his signature leopard-print shorts. Amir El-Masry does well to capture the boxer's limitless charisma, but the film begins much earlier, with Naz as a child growing up in 1980s Sheffield.

Young Naz (Ghaith Saleh) lives with his Yemeni family, who run a corner shop and are subjected to racist abuse from their neighbours. When he artfully escapes an attack from schoolkids with nimble footwork, he catches the attention of local boxing trainer Brendan (Pierce Brosnan).

A transplant from Ireland – Brosnan lays the Dublin accent on thick through a painted tooth-gap – Brendan fancies himself a scout, recruiting kids from the dancefloor to the ring where they can learn to defend themselves.

Although Naz is too young to fight, his movement sets him apart, and Brendan



PROTEGE: Naseem (El-Masry) and Ingle (Brosnan)

takes him under his wing.

The film tracks Naz's rise from Brendan's perspective. What begins as a surrogate father-son relationship, with Brendan stoking the young fighter's arrogance as a weapon, gradually becomes something he can no longer contain. By the time Naz reaches superstardom, Brendan is cast out.

Clearly the film has a great sympathy for Brendan, but the price of this is that Naz becomes one-note, leaving El-Masry to do little else outside the ring other than posture and gloat. The boxing scenes are competent and clear, and so it is a shame that the dialogue feels so staged and unreal.

*Giant* is a biopic that has a propulsive energy, but is undone by flat characterisation and that one-note approach.

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