

**The Forces' favourite paper**

**Spitfire in UK tour**



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**The trusted trader site to find a veteran**



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**ROYAL AIR FORCE**

Friday, March 6, 2026  
Edition No.1627

**Only 99p**

# RAF NEWS

## Arctic role for Carrier Strike Gp



See pages 14-15



**Football**  
**Is Kenny ref of the year?**

● See p23



**Rugby**  
**Three in a row for men**

● See p24



**Olympics**  
**Games was a real thrill**

● See p27



# Aid pledge for Ukraine

## UK steps up kit and training as war with Putin enters fifth year



### Staff Reporter

THE UK has announced it will urgently provide new air defence missiles and systems worth over £500 million to protect Ukraine from Putin's brutal attacks on energy sites and homes as the war with Russia enters its fifth year.

The move comes as the RAF confirmed it is providing combat helicopter training for Ukrainian pilots to bolster defences against Russian attacks.

Britain will also deliver £150 million to the Nato Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List initiative, which ensures the rapid delivery of air defence interceptors to defend Ukraine's skies.

● Continued on page 3

# BiteSize



“There are discounts at the lodge for members of the RAF Family,,

Former Sqn Ldr runs Highland hideaway for adventurous

See page 13



“Yes, she’s beautiful but she’s intelligent too...women can be both things at the same time,,

Reality TV and West End star Amber Davies plays Elle in Legally Blonde The Musical

See R'n'R pages 4-5



“This side has been successful for many years, so I won’t change things too drastically,,

New senior women’s football head coach FS Karl Craven

See page 26



## RAF News

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# CSG Downing St honour

## Staff Reporter

AIR FORCE personnel who served on the recent Pacific deployment of the UK’s Carrier Strike Group were honoured alongside Navy crews at a Downing Street reception.

PM Sir Keir Starmer and Defence Minister Alistair Carns welcomed more than 100 military personnel to No. 10 for a homecoming celebration following the return of the crews from Operation Highmast.

More than 600 RAF pilots, engineers and ground crew joined the landmark eight-month deployment across the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific, supporting F-35 Lightning operations from the Prince of Wales Carrier, travelling more than 40,000 nautical miles.

The landmark mission included multi-national exercises alongside European, US and Australian air crews.



## This Week In History



### 1936 Mono debut

THE RAF’S first monoplane, the Avro Anson, enters service with 48 (General Reconnaissance) Sqn at RAF Manston.

1971  
**Royal trainee**  
HRH THE Prince of Wales starts flying training at RAF College Cranwell under the supervision of Sqn Ldr Richard Johns.



2000  
**Puma aid mission**  
33 SQN Pumas arrive in Mozambique to support an international humanitarian aid mission following a devastating cyclone and flooding.

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

# Northern powerhouse

## Arctic show of force for Lightning and Carrier Strike Group



**POTENT FORCE:** F-35s line up ready for action on the deck of the Prince of Wales carrier, inset above



### Staff Reporter

**BRITAIN WILL send its Carrier Strike Group back to sea later this year in a major show of force across the Euro-Atlantic and High North, reinforcing Nato's deterrence amid rising Russian threats in the region.**

Operation Firecrest will be led by HMS Prince of Wales as the UK deploys the strike group across the North Atlantic and Arctic.

The mission will include world-class Royal Navy warships and RAF fifth-generation F-35 fighter jets to bolster defence and security across the region.

US F-35 fighters are expected to launch from the deck of the carrier off the US coast as the Prince of Wales journeys to the east coast of America.

The deployment will form part of Nato's Arctic Sentry mission, launched to strengthen the security in a region where melting sea ice is opening new

routes and increasing threat from hostile state activity.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "Operation Firecrest will involve thousands of personnel from all three Services of the Armed Forces, demonstrating Britain's ability to project force wherever it is needed and operate seamlessly within Nato.

"The Carrier Strike Group will exercise alongside Nato's Standing Naval Maritime Group 1, itself being led by

the UK, with HMS Dragon acting as the command ship of the Nato maritime group."

The deployment follows the success of the UK's 2025 Carrier Strike Group mission to the Indo-Pacific, which saw over 1,000 F-35 sorties and activity with more than 30 nations, and resulted in the UK's Carrier Strike Group being certified fully 'mission ready' and committed to Nato.

● See pages 14-15 for more.

# £500m to counter Russia's carnage in Ukraine

### Continued from front page

Speaking ahead of emergency talks at Nato's Ukraine Defence Contact Group meetings, Defence Secretary John Healey also announced the UK is set to deliver an additional 1,000 Lightweight Multirole Missiles critical to defending Ukrainian infrastructure and cities against escalating drone and missile attacks.

This £390 million deal builds on the deepening collaboration between UK and Ukrainian industry to transfer production and support of Rapid Ranger launchers and command and control vehicles to Ukraine.

The coming months will also see the UK deliver an additional 1,200 air defence missiles and 200,000 rounds of artillery ammunition



for Ukraine's defenders through the Air Defence Consortium (ADC).

Mr Healey said: "As we approach the fifth year of Putin's full-scale invasion, the UK and our allies are more committed than ever to supporting Ukraine.

"I'm proud of the UK's continued leadership and pleased to confirm a new half a billion pound package of air defence, including £150 million for Nato's Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List, to help Ukrainians defend against Putin's relentless drone and missile attacks."

The UK stepped up to co-lead the Ukraine Defence Contact Group with Germany, as well as the Coalition of the Willing with France, last year.

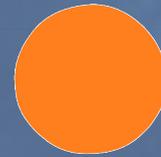
Both the Prime Minister and Defence Secretary have been clear that the UK's national security 'starts in Ukraine.'



**DRONE ATTACK:** Firefighters tackle devastation caused by Russian drones in Kharkiv  
Inset left, UK Defence Secretary John Healey with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy



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**WELL APPOINTED:** The WWII Air Force site comes with 55 acres of woodland, below

## Worth a bomb

A BOMB-PROOF WWII power station used to supply RAF Honiley in Warwickshire at the height of the conflict is up for grabs – for a modest £2 million.

While the military structure boasts no bathroom, plumbing, bedrooms or mains electricity, it does come with 55 acres of private woodland, freshwater streams and water features.

The air station, closed in 1958, was home to Spitfire, Hurricane and Mosquito squadrons during the conflict.

A spokesman for estate agent Moveli, handing the sale, said: “It’s rare to see a former RAF support building from the 1940s still standing, let alone with the opportunity to give it a new purpose.

“Sites like this connect directly back to the generation that flew from RAF Honiley and that history deserves recognition.”



# UK salute for Spitfire 90th



**AIR ICON:** The replica two-seat Spitfire operated by the Spitfire Academy will be seen across the UK to mark anniversary. Right, the original K5054 test aircraft



### Staff Reporter

A REPLICA of the first ever Spitfire will take to the skies across Britain to mark the 90th anniversary of the first flight of the RAF’s most iconic aircraft.

The prototype Type 300 K5054 Supermarine fighter designed by RJ Mitchell made its maiden flight on March 5, 1936. The eight-minute sortie flown by Cpt Joseph ‘Mutt’ Summers, from Eastleigh airfield near Southampton, heralded a new era in air combat.

Perfect from its inception, Summers is reported as remarking ‘Don’t change a thing’ to engineers when he landed.



SQN LDR LONG

To mark the anniversary, a two-seater Supermarine Spitfire bearing the original aircraft’s markings will embark on a tour of the UK next month, flying over key airfields and sites with historic connections to the aircraft, alongside current RAF jets.

The event will also pay tribute to Battle of Britain Memorial Flight pilot Sqn Ldr Mark Long, 43, who died when he crashed near Coningsby in 2024 during a training sortie ahead of his fourth season with the display team.

Organisers will be auctioning off flights in the replica aircraft to raise cash for the RAF Benevolent

Fund and the Mark Long Trust.

More than 20,000 Spitfires were built and the last fighter rolled off the production line in 1948.

It entered service with the RAF in August 1938 with 19 Sqn and went on to play a pivotal role during the Battle of Britain in 1940.

Spitfire squadrons also served in Malta, Italy, North Africa, Burma, the Pacific (including defending the Australian town of Darwin from Japanese air attacks), and with Soviet forces on the Eastern Front and Occupied Europe.

The last RAF Spitfire mission took place on April 1, 1954, carrying out photo reconnaissance and tracking Communist guerrillas in Malaysia.

## Game on for vets

### Tracey Allen

FORCES WELFARE chiefs have launched a gaming platform to help reduce loneliness and depression among the UK’s veterans community.

The RAF Benevolent Fund’s new partnership with Veterans Gaming UK will help former Forces fighters connect on a safe online platform.

The scheme is designed to reduce isolation, especially for those struggling to cope with the transition from military life to Civvy Street.

Maria Lyle, Associate Director of Operations at the RAF



Benevolent Fund, said: “We, at the RAF Benevolent Fund, are committed to ensuring anyone who has served in the RAF can access support in ways that are relevant and effective.

“UK Veterans Gaming offers a positive, inclusive online community that enables veterans to maintain connections, reduce social isolation and support their wellbeing through shared interests and peer engagement.

“This partnership reflects our commitment to using innovative approaches to enhance the lives of all members of the RAF Family in a modern and meaningful way.”



**FIGHTING LONELINESS:** Veterans gaming forum has received sponsorship from the RAF Benevolent Fund



**MILITARY PAGEANT:** Royal Edinburgh Tattoo

## Scots windfall

THE RAF Benevolent Fund has landed a £240,000 windfall from organisers of the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

The donation follows last year’s sell-out event and will be used to fund welfare programmes across Scotland.

RAFBE operations director Air Cdre Simon Harper said: “This significant donation will make a real difference to the lives of veterans, Service personnel and their families across Scotland.”

# Royal Air Force In Concert



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**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)**

# Atlas air assault mission

**UK and French Paras counter enemy 'invaders'**

**Staff Reporter**

Brize Norton

**ATLAS CREWS launched a large-scale air assault alongside more than 2,000 elite UK and French troops on the latest Nato war drill.**

The Army's 16 Air Assault Brigade, Parachute Regt and French 11e Brigade Parachutiste staged the real-time counter invasion exercise during the nine-day exercise designed to test Nato capability as tensions continue to rise across Eastern Europe.

As the Airborne Combined Joint Force (A-CJF), the two brigades have been trained and made ready to deploy together in response to global crises since 2013.

The Parachute Regiment Battlegroup took off from RAF Brize Norton in two A400M Atlas transport aircraft as the A-CJF HQ and two French battlegroups lifted from Orleans-Bricy to parachute in.

Vehicles and stores were also dropped by parachute, including

18 tonnes of rations, ammunition and equipment delivered by an RAF A400M.

Atlas captain Sqn Ldr Luke said: "Exercise Orion illustrates the effectiveness of the RAF and French partnership.

"Our A400M crews delivered long-range, precision air mobility at pace, moving paratroopers, equipment and essential stores exactly where they were needed.

"Demanding conditions is where the UK-France partnership excels. Every mission builds on our advanced capability and strengthens our shared readiness and the trust that allows us to deploy together at short notice in support of European security."

Jumping into the combat zone paratroopers spread out across the training area to target insurgent forces and establish defensive positions on the enemy's expected invasion route.

General Renaud Rondet said: "The deployment demonstrates capability of this initial entry force, ready to fight in extreme and complex environments."

**CHUTE-ING STARS:** UK Paras jump from an Atlas A400M during the Anglo-French Exercise Orion



# UK 'Chop Gun' instructors to train Ukrainian pilots

**Staff Reporter**

**ROYAL AIR Force helicopter instructors are to train Ukrainian pilots under the latest package of military support as the war with Russia enters its fifth year, the MOD has confirmed.**

The first batch of combat pilots are already undergoing tuition on the UK's Juno HT1 helicopter in a move designed to boost the country's defences against future Russian attacks, a spokesman said.

Ukrainian pilots have been receiving basic fixed-wing flying training with the RAF under Operation Interflex since 2022 ahead of graduating to the F-15



fighter and deploying to the frontline. The Government also announced £20m of new funding for emergency energy support to protect and repair the energy grid and provide additional generation capacity.

The UK has also pledged a further £5.7m to provide humanitarian assistance to an estimated 4.1 million Ukrainians who have been driven from their homes or fled the frontline since the Russian invasion.

**AIR COMBAT TRAINING:** Above, RAF instructor on a Juno HT1; left, Ukrainian pilot on the RAF fixed-wing training programme



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Bulletin



# Spit & polish

THE BBMF's Spitfire Mk Vb AB910 has returned to the skies following major maintenance work carried out by Biggin Hill-based engineers.

The 84-year-old warbird, grounded in 2023, took to the skies above Biggin Hill for its first test flight, piloted by the BBMF's Sqn Ldr Andy Preece.

The aircraft is expected to return to the BBMF's home at Coningsby following routine checks.

# Nat nets Meribel medal haul

SERVICE SNOWBOARD ace Cpl Nat Fields stormed to victory in the Alps with a clean sweep at the Inter-Services Championships in Meribel.

The Honington-based cop, currently serving with Nato in Ramstein, dominated the event to take the overall women's title.

Now in her second year as RAF Women's team captain, Nat took up the sport after joining up and has represented United Kingdom Armed Forces (UKAF) at the British Snowboard & Freeski Championships for the last three years.



# Reds putting families first

Tracey Allen

WADDINGTON FAMILIES have landed a £11,000 welfare windfall from the station's resident Red Arrows display team.

The funds donated by the Red Arrows Trust to the RAF Benevolent Fund will help personnel struggling with housing costs and fuel bills.

Last year the trust was able to support more than 30 RAF families at the Lincs station with temporary financial support.

Sheila Brazil, Trusts and Foundations Manager at the RAF Benevolent Fund, said: "RAF personnel and their families can face sudden financial challenges due to changes in posting, deployment, illness, family circumstances or the rising cost of living.

"Thanks to this grant, the Fund will be able to provide targeted support at Waddington, helping individuals and families to manage these pressures and maintain stability during difficult periods.

"We are extremely grateful to The Red Arrows Trust for its continued generosity and long-standing commitment to the RAF Benevolent Fund.

"This support enables us to provide practical, timely financial assistance to serving personnel at Waddington, which will make a hugely positive difference."



LIFELINE: The Waddington-based display team is supporting RAFFB's family welfare programme



# Hawk Med drill

Staff Reporter

Solenzara, Corsica

FAST JET trainees joined forces with the French Armée de l'Air et de l'Espace over the Mediterranean as they prepare for frontline duty.

The next generation of Royal Air Force combat pilots launched training sorties from the Solenzara airbase in Corsica during annual Exercise Freedom Hawk, designed to hone their ability to operate alongside Nato partners.

Flying in IV Sqn Hawk T2 aircraft, instructors put trainees through Agile Combat

Employment drills as they near the end of their training with 4 FTS at RAF Valley.



A spokesman said: "Freedom Hawk is a truly collaborative effort across military and industry partners, such as BAE Systems, to provide engineering and training system support to the Hawk T2 detachment at RAF Valley.

"This small-scale training deployment provides training in overseas airspace and is a valuable opportunity for 4 FTS trainees and instructors to exercise ACE principles across the Valley Whole Force."

News



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# REVEALED:

## The secret life of RAF's German ace



**WWII MYSTERY:** Hillwood (left) with 56 Sqn colleagues 'Jumbo' Gracie (centre) and 'Taffy' Higginson

### Malcolm Triggs

RESEARCH INTO the lives of The Few has revealed that a pilot who flew with 56 Sqn in the Battle of Britain changed his name when he joined the RAF to disguise his Polish and German roots.

Peter Hillwood, who flew alongside Wg Cdr Geoffrey Page DSO, OBE, DFC\* in the Battle, was born Adolf Bergholtz in London in 1920. He was the son of Felix Bergholtz and Dagmar Rebecca, formerly Lorensen. The Bergholtz family had originated in Poland and lived in Germany.

Wg Cdr Page, who, as a 20 year-old Pilot Officer was shot down during the Battle, badly burned, became one of Archibald McIndoe's famous 'guinea pigs', and went on to become the founder of the National Memorial to the Few at Capel-le-Ferne, near Folkestone in Kent.

Genealogist Gladys Armstrong discovered Hillwood's original name while working with the Battle of Britain Memorial Trust's research team, led by consulting editor Geoff Simpson, on the ongoing task of updating the information in the Trust's Database of the Few.

Mr Simpson explained that this was the first time the pilot's name at birth had been recorded, with 'Hillwood' featuring on the Christopher Foxley-Norris Memorial Wall at Capel-le-Ferne, in the database and on the London Monument.

"German speakers will spot, of course, that 'Hillwood' is a possible translation of the German 'Bergholtz,'" he added.

There is further intrigue around the pilot, who enjoyed a successful career with the RAF and went on to become a test pilot.

In 1933, following a criminal case heard at the Old Bailey in London involving allegations of arson and fraud, Felix Bergholtz was sentenced to four years in prison.

After changing his name, Hillwood joined the Volunteer Reserve in the

summer of 1938. Because of his experience he was given the chance of six months' full-time training with the regular RAF.

After a spell back as a civilian, he was called up in September, 1939, converted to Hurricanes and later joined 56 Sqn at North Weald, taking part in the Battle of France and spending a short period on attachment with 3 Sqn.

Back with 56 for the Battle of Britain, Hillwood destroyed a Messerschmitt Bf 109 and probably another on June 30, claimed a Junkers Ju 87 probably destroyed in July and damaged a Bf 110 a month later.

Shot down on the same day in a head-on attack by a Bf 109 off Sheerness, he baled out unhurt, swam two miles towards Sheppey and was near collapse when he was spotted by two anti-aircraft gunners, who waded out and helped him in.

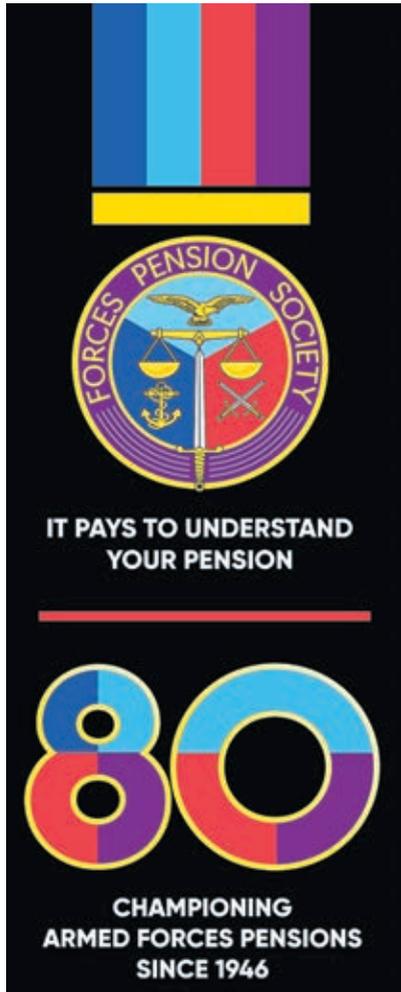
In August he probably destroyed a Bf 109 and in October he damaged a Dornier Do 17. Commissioned in January 1942, Hillwood was awarded the DFC as a Flight Commander with 127 Sqn. He was released from the RAF in 1946, as a Flight Lieutenant, and worked for Vickers and later English Electric as a test pilot.

Hillwood flew as second pilot to R.P. Beamont on the record-breaking double-crossing of the Atlantic in Canberra VX 185 in 1952, which won the Royal Aero Club's Britannia Trophy for the best performance in the air for the year. He also flew a replica Avro Triplane for the film *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines* and was a stunt pilot in the 1966 film *The Blue Max*.

He was killed in November 1966 when the prototype Islander G-ATCT, which he was flying, crashed into Ringwiell Lake in northern Netherlands while on a flight from Emden to Southampton Eastleigh airport, following a demonstration tour of Germany. He was 46 and is buried in St Mary's Churchyard, Copythorne, Hampshire.

● [www.battleofbritainmemorial.org](http://www.battleofbritainmemorial.org)

# 'Disappointment' over delays to pension service update



AS PREVIOUSLY reported, the Forces Pension Society has continuously urged the MoD to fully resource the Remediable Service Statement (RSS) rollout plan and to provide timely communications to affected members.

Following our interventions, the MoD undertook to provide an update in the New Year which it did on 6 Feb. In summary, it is an interim update stating: "Work is underway to develop a comprehensive schedule for completion.....Our next update will be issued in April 2026, with further updates to follow on GOV.UK."

There is understandable frustration/anger surrounding these delays but as our Chief Executive has stressed it is essential that the MoD publish a realistic, achievable and fully resourced rollout plan – and be open and honest with all AFPS members during this process.

Our latest Sitrep on the AFPS15 Remedy can be found here: <https://forcespensionsociety.org/2026/02/mccloud-sitrep/>

We remain busy supporting those Members who have already received their RSS through their decision making process and will keep you posted on any further updates.

Forces Pension Society CEO, Maj Gen Neil Marshall (pictured) said of this latest MoD statement: "We obviously hoped this latest update would provide some clarity on the timeline set for remaining RSS communications to be completed. In that sense, the statement is disappointing.

"For our part, we will continue to press on behalf of all those still waiting and whose future plans may be on hold.

"In the meantime, our website will continue publishing updates as they become available: [forcespensionsociety.org](http://forcespensionsociety.org)"

*\*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 [forcespension.society.org](http://forcespension.society.org)*



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# Dressed to kill

## Combat kit heads for the catwalk

**Tracey Allen**

**MILITARY KIT** is set to hit the catwalk as young designers turn used combat dress into the season's must-have fashion items and boost Forces charity funds.

Students at the Winchester College of Art fashion department have snapped up thousands of used and surplus garments including combat jackets and trousers as part of a chic upcycling scheme.

The team has even brought in Service veterans to help them produce dapper designs which pay tribute to those who have worn combat kit on the frontline and appeal to fashion-conscious shoppers.



The scheme, dubbed Operation Upcycle, will also raise £40,000 for Help for Heroes and volunteer vets will be on hand during the workshop sessions to share their personal stories of pride in the uniforms being upcycled.

James Needham, Help for Heroes' chief executive, said: "For many veterans, the uniform represents pride, identity and belonging, and when service ends, that can be difficult to replace.

"This initiative honours that history while transforming surplus military textiles into pieces that carry real story and meaning.

"It brings veterans and students together to champion sustainability and ensure the experience of the Armed Forces community is seen and heard by new audiences."

Designs will be showcased at



**COMBAT CHIC:** Design students get to work on the latest delivery of military kit

the end-of-term fashion shows and exhibitions before selected pieces move into limited production.

The surplus uniforms and combat gear have been donated by MOD recycling contractor

Ramco. Chief executive Neil Sanderson said: "Operation Upcycle was created to prove that surplus materials can create new value commercially, environmentally and socially."

# Vets' Highland Lodge rescue



**MOUNTAIN REFUGE:** Rothiemurchus Lodge in the Cairngorms was operated by the MOD until last year

**Simon Mander**

**A REMOTE HIDEAWAY** in the Scottish Highlands is appealing for military visitors after reopening as a charity run by an ex-RAF officer.

Rothiemurchus Lodge in the heart of the Cairngorm mountains had been operated by the MOD until last year.

Now the all-year round, affordable, hostel-style, self-catering accommodation has reopened under the stewardship of three veterans.

Manager Sqn Ldr Nick

McGuigan said: "The Lodge is now fully operational and occupancy has been better than expected over the winter.

"Our aims are to provide recreational activities for Regular and Reserve personnel, cadets, and other young people and those training in outdoor pursuits."

In the past, the Lodge has also provided a haven for charities that support wounded, injured, sick, disabled and disadvantaged Service people and veterans, military and civilian mountain rescue teams and children engaged in Duke of Edinburgh expeditions.

Sqn Ldr McGuigan said: "We welcome requests from individuals and groups in those sectors to stay at the Lodge and offer regular military personnel, veterans and their families discounted accommodation rates."

The Lodge has been open for 10 months and already welcomed many military families and units, regular and reservist, seeking respite and relaxation, including Climb2Recovery and Bravehound.



**SQN LDR MCGUIGAN**

## Bulletin

# Families net fund

**Staff Reporter**

**THE RAF Association** and Loughborough University have been awarded £100,000 to support the families of injured or sick serving military personnel or veterans.

The funding, awarded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust's Family Focus programme, will allow the Association and the uni's School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences to deliver the Forces' Families Resilience Programme, serving personnel and veterans.

Rory O'Connor, Charity Director of the RAF Association, said: "We're delighted to be able to expand our resilience programme to the families of wounded, injured or sick serving personnel and veterans.

"We know from our work that families often play a vital role in providing support to serving personnel and veterans, especially if they're wounded, injured or sick.

"It's essential that we provide programmes like this to ensure Forces families have the right tools to help them continue supporting their loved one."

# ARCTIC BL

## Carrier Strike Group in High North



**A400M:** Atlas has already proved it can operate in frozen conditions

**UK SUBS:** Protect vital infrastructure and provide deterrence against enemy attack



**18 SQN:** Chinooks at Royal Norwegian Air Force Base Bardufoss



**GLOBEMASTER:** Transporter is vital to UK and Nato operations



**OPERATION TARASSIS:** IX(B) Sqn Typhoon on ACE sortie in Norway

by Amy Casey

# AST

## show of force



**A**S NATO sets its sights on securing the High North amid growing Russian military activity across the Arctic regions, UK Forces are stepping up training to ensure frontline air, land and naval crews can cope with the demands of operating in the world's most extreme theatre of operations.

After proving its combat might in the Mediterranean and the South Pacific, the Carrier Strike Group will deploy to the High North later this year.

Russia's military activity in the North Atlantic continues to increase. Over the past two years, there has been a 30 per cent increase in Russian navy vessels threatening UK waters.

The deployment, dubbed Operation Firecrest, will see the UK and US working side by side on Euro-Atlantic security around the North American East Coast, boosting the historic alliance between the two nations.

The Carrier Strike Group (CSG) will sail across the Atlantic to visit a US port, with US jets also expected to operate from the flight deck of Britain's HMS Prince of Wales.

The deployment will include activity under Nato's Arctic Sentry mission, strengthening the Alliance's security in a region where melting sea ice is opening new routes and increasing threats from hostile state activity.

### Operation Firecrest

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "I'm proud that we're stepping up UK leadership on High North and Atlantic security. This deployment will help make Britain warfighting ready, boost our contribution to Nato, and strengthen our operations with key allies, keeping the UK secure at home and strong abroad."

"Operation Firecrest will involve thousands of personnel from all three Services of the Armed Forces, demonstrating Britain's ability to project force wherever it is needed and operate seamlessly within Nato."

With growing concern over Russian operations in the strategically vital Greenland-Iceland-UK gap and the increased risk to critical undersea cables and pipelines, the deployment aims to send a clear message that the UK will always defend its waters and protect critical infrastructure.

Paving the way for the landmark CSG deployment is Exercise Cold Response, integrating land, sea and air forces across the High North to test interoperability and ensure

Nato remains ready to operate in real Arctic conditions.

Last year's Joint Viking drill saw around 10,000 troops from seven nations – including Norway, Canada, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and the USA – conduct complex scenarios in the Norwegian Arctic.

The RAF Regiment's Combat Readiness Force used the opportunity to test its skills at the tactical level while supporting operational-level planning alongside Allied forces.

Earlier this year Joint Helicopter Command deployed Chinook crews 200 nautical miles inside the Arctic Circle to Bardufoss Air Station, where crews are practising mountain flying and underslung load operations in temperatures down to minus 20°C – vital skills for supporting austere operations and humanitarian tasks in remote areas.

### Operation Arctic Phoenix

Meanwhile, Typhoons from IX (Bomber) Sqn took part in Exercise Arctic Phoenix and Exercise Tarassis, testing Agile Combat Employment (ACE) concepts, including dispersed operations from remote Norwegian airstrips and cross-servicing alongside Norwegian F-35As.

Spearheading the forthcoming CSG deployment will be the UK's F-35s as Lightning Force chiefs rise to the challenge of proving the world's most advanced fifth-generation fighter can dominate the battlespace in any theatre – from the blazing heat of the Middle East and South Pacific to the extreme cold of the Arctic.

To complete the full array of UK air power capability, the Atlas A400M, which has already proved its value in the frozen wilderness of the South Atlantic, completed a historic first landing on Jan Mayen, a remote Arctic island with no paved runway.

The aircraft has also supported trials of forward air refuelling points in Arctic conditions – an important enabler for dispersed operations.

### Poseidon Fleet

Operating from RAF Lossiemouth, the Poseidon fleet provides essential maritime patrol, anti-submarine warfare and sensor support during large Nato exercises, including Cold Response and Arctic Phoenix.

Just to display the RAF's resolve to put military hardware in any place, anytime, 32 (The Royal) Sqn flew into Nato's most northerly base at Bardufoss, deep in Norway's Arctic territory.

The Envoy IV CC1 took a break from its domestic duties to carry out Command Support Air Transport sorties, putting high priority military and diplomatic personnel and freight where and when they are needed.



CARRIER STRIKE GROUP: HMS Prince of Wales is due to set sail later this year

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.”

By Tracey Allen

Civvy Street **Feature**

# You can trust a vet to do the business

**H**AVING A background in the Armed Forces is highly valued if you run your own business, says a former soldier who has founded a website that helps put former military personnel in contact with potential clients.

Tony Howley launched Trust A Veteran (TAV) last autumn, which links the public with vets who now specialise in a wide variety of fields – from handymen to mental health counsellors.

Among those who belong to the TAV online community are ex-JT Kris Murray and former FS Phil Wolstanholme.

Kris served for almost 10 years as a ground equipment technician, leaving the Air Force in 2006. He has been a full-time firefighter for Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service for nearly two decades and founded KRS Fire Safety Solutions Ltd in County Durham in 2025, which he runs in his spare time.

Phil, who left the RAF in 2024 after a 23-year career as a supplier, now runs Phil K Wolstanholme Fitness in Fylde, near Blackpool, specialising in delivering fitness and nutrition programmes for older adults and people with medical conditions including diabetes, obesity and arthritis.

Kris said: “I left the military with a passion for safety, discipline and engineering. That foundation led me into the Fire Service, serving on the frontline for 19 years before founding KRS Fire Safety Solutions, using my experience to help businesses stay compliant, protected and prepared.”

“Having a military background helps to convey to clients that you are a reliable person – punctual, well-presented, honest and accountable.”

He added: “I think my time in the RAF – when I had to develop relationships and build trust quickly with colleagues when on operations and so on – has really helped me in my current business.”

An enthusiastic runner, footballer and tennis player while in the RAF, during his time with the Service, Phil gained sports diplomas which qualified him to teach fitness programmes.



**TONY HOWLEY:** Set up Trust A Veteran

He said: “Since joining Trust A Veteran things have gone really well for me – the interest from ex-military personnel has been massive. Among those I cater for are veterans, personnel from other uniformed services and air cadets.

“Everyone sees the fact that I was in the RAF as confirmation that I run a trustworthy business and deliver a reliable service. And being able to use the Trust A Veteran logo on my website helps to place faith in my business.”

After 35 years in the Army, Tony (*inset below*), who served in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan, retired as a captain on medical discharge in 2023 then set up Veterans With Vans, a property maintenance service.

He explained: “Within weeks, I was struck by how many people actively wanted to employ a veteran. That was my lightbulb moment for TrustAVeteran.com – a one-stop hub to connect with vets in business, whether sole traders or national firms, from dog walkers to heating engineers and everything in between.”

Since he founded TAV in September 2024, the platform has gone from strength to strength, generating some impressive statistics.

“We’re proud to have more than 340 veterans in business subscribed to our platform, representing businesses right across the UK,” he said.

“We have a growing online community of more than 30,000 followers and our social channels, generate an average reach of three to four million people every 90 days. Last year marked our first full year in operation – and

## Entrepreneurial ex-military personnel get boost with new jobs thanks to traders website



**SAFETY FIRST:** Ex-JT Kris Murray advises firms on fire prevention. Below, Kris in 2003 aboard a VC-10 during Gulf War II, in his RAF days



we achieved a total social reach of over 12 million people.

“With more than two million veterans and their extended families across the UK, this audience continues to expand.”

Tony stressed that every penny generated is reinvested into TAV

and he does not take a wage.

He added: “I have personally invested £25,000 to date, with a further commitment to continue to manage and grow the site completely free of charge until at least April 2027.”

The only requirement to



**PT:** Former aviator Phil Wolstanholme

join TAV is that you must be an Armed Forces veteran, and supply proof – such as a veterans’ card – when you sign up.

New joiners receive their first year of membership free, then there’s an annual fee of £75.

Tony said: “People want to employ veterans because they have such a good reputation. The Armed Forces instil values and standards throughout a career: loyalty, integrity, discipline, courage, selfless commitment and respect for others.

“These qualities are just as relevant in business as they are in service. Even simply living by respect for others helps keep you on the right path to running a successful business.”

He added: “Since we launched, TrustAVeteran.com has grown into more than a directory – it’s a community built on shared values, mutual support and the belief that veterans continue to serve long after leaving the Armed Forces.

“Every listing represents a story of transition, resilience and skill, and together we showcase the breadth of talent veterans bring to business. Our mission is to shine a national spotlight on veteran-owned enterprises, strengthen local economies and inspire collaboration across industries.”

● **Go to:** [trustaveteran.com](http://trustaveteran.com) to find out more.



# RAF News

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**RAF News**

The official voice of the Royal Air Force

# Red Flag Raptor hunts its prey



ALL EYES were on the USAF's mighty F-22 Raptor as USAF, Australian and UK Top Guns went head to head in the heat and dust of the Nevada desert during Exercise Red Flag.

Here an F-22 from the Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska takes off from Nellis to join the Red Air Aggressor Force during combat training.

PHOTO: WILLIAM LEWIS

## Graduations

# The next generation



VIP GUEST: Reviewing officer AVM Shaun Harris

THE AIR Force's next generation of leaders have graduated from RAF College Cranwell.

Reviewing officer for the ceremony for Modular Initial Officer Training Course No 39 and Commissioned Warrant Officer Course No 32 was Air Vice-Marshal Shaun Harris.

He said: "It is a huge privilege to be the Reviewing Officer for our latest Royal Air Force Officer Training Academy graduates. They join a technologically-advanced, highly-capable and agile Service, but one that will always rely on the quality of its exceptional people.

"These new leaders will be at the forefront of defending our nation, and our allies and partners, in increasingly challenging times.

"Thanks to our superb instructors, and each individual's determination and commitment, I know we are in safe hands."

The Band of the RAF College provided the musical accompaniment to the parade, directed by Fg Off Tim Hynd, Director of Music.

GRADUATION DAY: New recruits on the parade ground at RAF College Cranwell after successfully completing their course

PHOTOS: GORDY ELIAS

# There when you need her



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 **Lady Grover**  
Armed Forces' Health Support

# Lanc Nav attacked Berlin 11 times and was awarded DFM



**BOMBER BOY:** Kenneth Drury

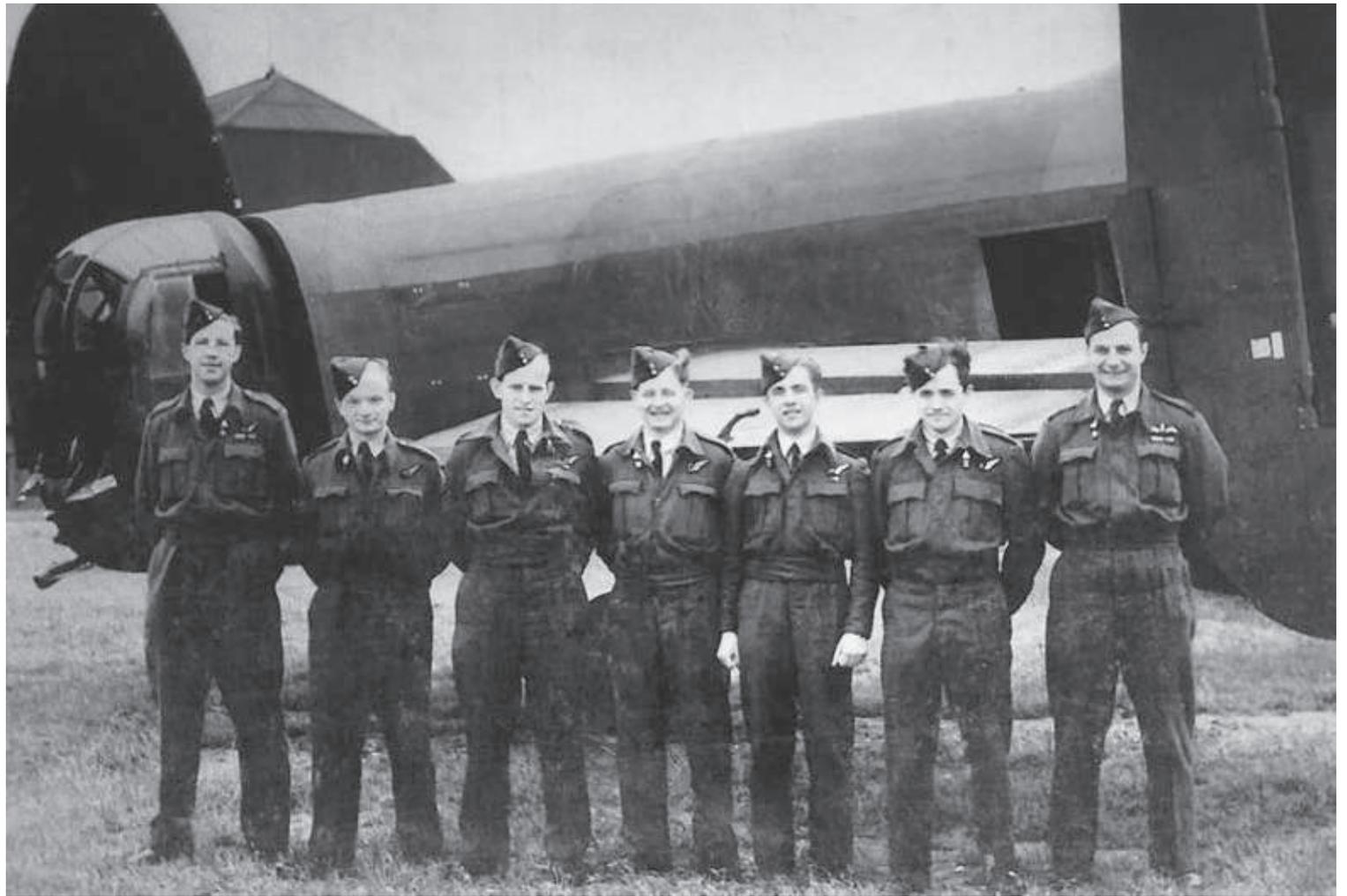
**S**QN LDR Kenneth Drury, who has died aged 102, was a navigator on Lancaster bombers who completed 31 missions over Germany, including 11 to Berlin. His post-war career included flying on the Berlin Airlift, operational missions over Malaya and flying world-wide routes in Transport Command.

He joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve in September 1941 and trained as a navigator in South Africa. He joined 100 Sqn in November 1943 at RAF Waltham, near Grimsby. This coincided with the beginning of the main offensive against the German capital in what became known as the Battle of Berlin, and which lasted until the end of March 1944.

During this period, the German night fighter defences were at their most effective and losses amongst the Bomber Command aircraft were at their peak.

Drury and his crew flew their first operation on the night of November 22/23, 1943 when the target was Berlin. By the end of the year, he had made three more visits to the "Big City". In the New Year, he attacked Stettin, Magdeburg and Leipzig in addition to further attacks against Berlin. In a period of 10 days at the end of January 1944, he returned to the German capital four times.

On the night of March 30, his Lancaster joined a force of 795 heavy bombers to attack Nuremberg. Due to the lack of cloud and a full moon, there



**LANCASTER CREW:** Navigator Kenneth Drury, third from right, with his bomber colleagues, and with his medals as an older man, inset below

was surprise that the raid was not cancelled. On the outward journey, German night fighters soon picked up the bomber stream and they inflicted the highest casualties that Bomber Command suffered in the war, with the loss of 95 bombers, 12 per cent of the force. Drury's aircraft suffered minor damage and returned after an eight-hour flight.

As Bomber Command turned its attention to attacking targets in the build-up to D-Day, Drury and his crew transferred to the No. 1 Bomber Group Special Duties Flight, where they located and dropped flares over gun emplacements, ammunition dumps and rail yards as markers for the following bombers.

Amongst his targets was the major military camp and tank depot at Mailly le Camp on May 3, when the losses were amongst

the highest over a single target with 42 of the 346 Lancasters lost. It was to be one of the crew's final missions before they were rested.

Drury and his six colleagues had flown during the most intensive period of Bomber Command's campaign when losses were the greatest. On June 27 it was announced that he had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal for: "His cheerful confidence and fearless courage which have been a magnificent example to all." His pilot was awarded the DFC.

He remained in the RAF after the war and flew long-range transport routes on the Avro York, a derivative of the Lancaster bomber. In 1949-50 he

flew 264 resupply sorties during Operation Plainfare, the Berlin Airlift, carrying essential food, supplies and humanitarian aid to the beleaguered city that he had attacked so often during the war.



From 1951 to 1954 he returned to Bomber Command to navigate the B-29 Washington heavy bomber with 15 Sqn. He was the navigator of the lead aircraft in the Washington formation for The Queen's Coronation Flypast.

From 1956 he served in Singapore on Valetta transport aircraft and flew 77 airborne resupply missions to troops in the jungles of Malaya during the campaign against the communist guerillas.

On return to the UK in 1959 he flew as a navigator on the Comet and the VC10. On the latter he became an instructor and route examiner.

In 1976 he moved to the headquarters of No. 38 Group, where he spent six years as the deputy to the Group Navigation Officer. During the final years he planned routes in support of the Falklands War. He retired as a Squadron Leader aged 60 in June 1983, having completed 12,477 flying hours.

In 2016 the French Government awarded him the Légion d'Honneur for his actions during the build-up to the Normandy landings.

He maintained a keen interest in aviation. One of his sons joined the RAF, another was an accomplished glider pilot and one of his granddaughters joined a University Air Squadron.



FROM TIME to time a new car maker comes along that shakes things up massively. So it was when Polestar arrived in 2017, gatecrashing the party like Volvo's suave playboy cousin.

Suddenly a new Swedish luxury brand was available and it wasn't long before its first space-age model started to grace the driveways of the trendiest areas.

The 2 followed the 1. The 3 followed the 2 and now, you've guessed it, say hello to the 4! That's how Polestar models are numbered, not in relation to size, so the 4 is bigger than the 2, a saloon, but smaller than the 3, a luxury SUV. Got it?

**Exterior**

It's a fast-looking bit of kit, certainly for its size. The designers have carefully crafted a set of aggressive lines, that give the 4 a muscular stance. The profile detail draws the eye to the lower body with two-tone styling and crisp contours. The effect gives the impression that the car is lower to the ground than it actually is, with streamlined side windows.

The precise, angular headlamps are mirrored below the bumper-line to give the nose a distinctive look and the bonnet sweeps away with a powerful curve, complemented by sleek front wings. Huge alloys dominate the side view. It's when you get to the back that your Spidey senses really start tingling though.

The rear lights are just as sleek and the rear bumper provides enough detail to keep it interesting, but there's something missing. While you were admiring the stunning nose, somebody has been in and stolen your rear window! You don't need it when you have cameras, that's what the designers have figured here.

**Inside**

The cabin is a very smart affair that gives the same vibes as its siblings, but there are a number of changes. The usual portrait touchscreen, in the middle of the dash, has been replaced with a landscape version measuring 15.4 inches. A new 10.2-inch driver's display sits behind the wheel supplemented by a 14.7 inch head-up display. Everything works fast and the menus are better designed than most.

The front seats are brilliantly designed and hold you in place well. The back seats are just as smart, with a reclining function.



**POWER PLAY:** Two-tone bodywork gives the impression that the car is lower to the ground and makes it look more muscular

# Polestar Phwoar!



Rear-seat passengers can easily get comfortable and you never notice that the car has no rear window because the full-length glass roof stretches back past your head. The whole cabin feels airy and spacious.

**On the road**

Without wishing to state the obvious, the Polestar 4 is pure-electric. Our test EV was the dual motor variant and, as you'd expect, it was rapid off the mark. In this car 0-62 is achieved in

just 3.8 seconds, thanks to the 536.4bhp power output. Top end is 124mph, with an official range of 367 miles on a single charge – even I managed around 300.

Through the bends of a winding mountain road, it feels heavy, but solid, with no tremors from the body or suspension reaching the cabin. The dampers do a good job of keeping things calm, with very little wind, or road noise.

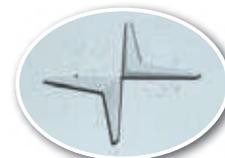
The Plus Pack adds 'Polestar Engineered' chassis tuning,

22-inch wheels, Brembo brake callipers and valve caps in 'Swedish Gold'. It tightens things up enough to allow you to really take advantage of the power on an open road.

It's not an outstandingly exciting driving experience, but it is, absolutely, what you'd expect from a large-ish performance SUEV.

Charging-wise it's pretty rapid too. Find yourself the right fast-charger and you'll boost from 10 to 80 per cent in half an hour.

**Polestar 4**



**Pros**

- Beautifully designed to look futuristic
- Nicely-crafted cabin featuring high-quality materials
- Responsive infotainment system, with crisp graphics
- Bags of standard kit

**Cons**

- You'll love or hate the lack of a rear window
- Could be more engaging to drive

**Verdict**

The Polestar 4 is a good-looking bit of kit that is as efficient on the road as you'd expect from a premium Swedish product. It's spacious and swift, certainly for a car in this segment, and has plenty to offer a family. Most importantly, it's an immense fashion statement that provides something different in a bland market. The missing back window may prove a little off-putting for some, because the camera rear-view mirror has a few drawbacks, but it's one heck of a talking point.

**Sport**

**FOOTBALL**

# Ref of Year nomination for Martin

## Kenny's in a league of his own

**Staff Reporter**

LOSSIEMOUTH'S SGT Kenny Martin has been nominated for Scottish Lower League Referee of the Year.

The Logistics Support Squadron aviator's nomination recognised his "outstanding devotion to and support of grassroots football in the community".

Martin officiates for the Moray and Banff Referee Association, covering matches from the lower leagues across the north of Scotland.

He said: "The RAF is a great platform for securing referee opportunities through the RAF FA.

"Refereeing prolongs my time and enjoyment in the game,



increases my fitness levels, improves my mental health and enables me to give back to various local communities ensuring grassroots and lower league football are catered for with an SFA-qualified referee.

"It is also enjoyable to be involved in a close-knit refereeing community through Moray & Banff Association, where support is second to none.

"This is all possible because I am given the time to adopt referee training programmes and to engage with RAF physiotherapists and Exercise Rehabilitation Instructors, which all contribute to being in the best physical condition to officiate at football games."

Voting for the 'Referee of the Year' closes on April 1, with the



**MAN IN BLACK:** Sgt Kenny Martin officiates a game

prizewinning ceremony to be held in Glasgow in September.

Details about how to vote can be found on the RAF Lossiemouth and RAF

Football Association Facebook pages.

Email [Sheila.haining@royalairforcefa.com](mailto:Sheila.haining@royalairforcefa.com) for information on how to apply to become a RAF referee.

**CYCLING**

# Ups and downs for RAF cyclists



**IT WAS** back to basics for RAF BMX as they held court at the home of British Cycling in Manchester to host a grassroots BMX Racing session.

The RAF Cycling event, open to all members of the association who have not experienced BMX racing before, saw road, gravel and cross-country cyclists put existing skills to the test on one of the toughest indoor BMX tracks in the country.

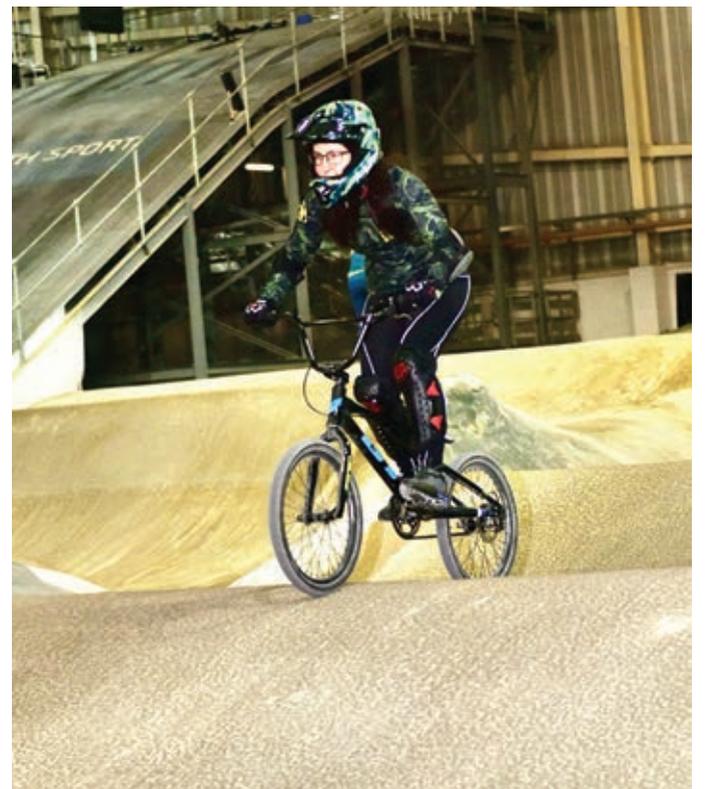
Also in attendance were the current BMX Racing Team riders to lend a hand and answer any questions.

Sgt Matt Haywood, RAF BMX OIC, said: "All riders thoroughly enjoyed the session, a few even managing to experience the Elite 8m start hill.

"By the end of the session all had big smiles and really enjoyed the experience, hopefully some might venture into the dynamic world of BMX Racing."

He added: "If any Regular or Reserve Royal Air Force would like to get involved with RAF BMX, they can find out more through our Instagram or Facebook pages."

● Visit RAF BMX on Instagram @ [rafcabmxracing](#) or Facebook @ [Royal Air Force BMX Race Team](#).



**TRIAL SESSION:** RAF cyclists

PHOTOS: SGT MATT HAYWOOD

**CRICKET**

## Experience playing at Lord's

NEXT MONTH'S IST20 Cricket will again feature UKAF's skills challenge, and teams are wanted to take part.

Last year's course attracted 70 cricketers, with the event's organisers hoping to increase attendance this spring.

A spokesperson said: "The

day costs £5 per team to enter and will be held at the MCC indoor training facility and will also include entrance to the championship itself."

● For details email Luke Holmes: [luke.holmes335@mod.gov.uk](mailto:luke.holmes335@mod.gov.uk)

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

# Officers cop a thrashing

RAF Senior Men	43
British Police	10

Daniel Abrahams

THE SENIOR men's rugby union team remain unbeaten in 2026 as they produced a crushing 43-10 win over British Police at Sixways Stadium, home of Worcester Warriors.

The win, the third in a row for the senior men, saw them notch up seven tries, with a brace for captain and man of the match Cpl Zack Taylor.

Head coach WO Tom Gardner said: "It's been a great start to the year with wins against Cardiff Met, Caldy and now British Police, who really offered something different from what we have experienced so far.

"They had a big heavy pack that we handled well, and they were a better outfit than the one we faced last year - but then, we are a better outfit as well."

The aviators kicked off their try-scoring after six minutes though Cpl James Roberts, with Cpl Matt Harris and Taylor adding two more in five minutes.

Closing out the half, Flt Lt Jack O'Regan touched down just after the half-hour mark.

In the second half there was a quickfire brace from AS1 AJ McCoubrey in the 61st and 63rd minute, with Taylor rounding out



RAF MEN: On winning streak

the rout in the 81st minute. Cpl Ryan Pugh added five conversions. Gardner said: "We adapted to the challenges well on the pitch. The one thing we must do now though is have more respect for the ball and cherish possession.

"If we had done that, then there was another 15 points out there which went missing. "We had just one player aged over 30, so it's a new time for us and things are on an upward trajectory."



POWER PLAY: Hooker AS1(T) Ryan Armstrong (No.2) was one of the try-scorers

## A-team stepping up

RAF 'A'	28
Royal Navy 'A'	17

THE FUTURE of senior men's rugby union took a winning step forward this year with the resurrected A-team set-up beating their Royal Navy counterparts 28-17 at Havant.

Head coach FS Justin Coleman said: "It's been a steady season. The structure was put in place to create better depth and build the link from U23s to Senior rugby, with the A-team giving us the opportunity to expose players to a higher grade of training and matches."

Last year's defeats to Oxford and Cambridge universities, along with Army A, were the tough start Coleman and his team were looking for, with the team revealing positive aspects to their baptism of fire.

Coleman said: "If players want to take that next step, they must be comfortable playing this level of opponent, it's where the seniors are. We played the Navy game like an IS fixture, with shirt

presentations, a team meal and so on, so the players could see how things are done. I think it helped focus them more. Our mentality throughout was good."

He added: "In previous years a player's first exposure was normally in the IS game at Kingsholm for example, they will now have that exposure earlier."

The team has held training camps across the UK, from Henlow to Wittering, Stafford and Worthy Down, but Coleman thinks this has added to the side's bonding process: "It's been transient, but it's been good to adapt on the fly, it's good to get used to being uncomfortable," he said.

With the new A-team set-up looking to build over the next two to three years, a look back at the positive and negatives of the first year will be held in the coming months, along with planning beginning for summer camps.

"It has been great getting things off the ground, between myself and WO Tug Wilson - with Flt Lt Dave Manning in the Rugby Development Officer role," Coleman added.

# Six of the best for women as they gear up for IS



CPL HANNAH MCCABE: Back of the Match scored two tries

RAFRUW CAPTAIN AS1 Daisy Fahey believes the women's squad are in a 'really good place' after a thumping 36-14 win over Shelford.

Leading the aviators into the Inter-Service championships, Fahey ran in a try, adding three conversions in the six-try win, which gave development players the chance to push for IS selection.

She said: "It's amazing to see so many new faces joining the squad this year, there's a real sense of fresh energy and excitement around the group. Over the last few games, we've been building towards IS. Getting that win against Shelford was great for us, we went out there and achieved the goals we set for ourselves.

"I'm really excited to see what this team can bring throughout the season and, ultimately, to achieve our main goal - lifting the IS trophy."

Tries were scored by LCpl Kim

RAF Women	36
Shelford Women	14

Grundy, Cpl Hannah McCabe (2), AS1(T) Evie Longworth, Flt Lt Jenna-Lea Hughes and AS1 Fahey.

On a strong evening for emerging talent within the squad, McCabe was awarded Back of the Match after an outstanding performance, while AS1 Jordan Brown earned Forward of the Match.

Next week RAFRUW will make history as it fields two teams in one day for a double-header fixture for International Women's Day on March 12 against the British Police.

Before the midday kick-off at Aylesbury RFC, Fahey will be speaking with BFBS about International Women's Day, the squad, and the Inter-Services Championship.

● Follow RAFRUW on Instagram @rafrugbyunion.



ASI JORDAN BROWN: Won Forward of the Match award

BOXING

# Northern lights

## Development boxers shine bright at Lossie

### Daniel Abrahams

LOSSIEMOUTH BROUGHT the boom as it hosted a high-profile night of boxing action between the Development Squad and a Scotland Northern District Select.

The RAF team demonstrated great tenacity to secure a 6-3 overall win against fighters from Elgin Boxing Club (BC), CAIN BC and Lochee BC.

Acting as the opening event in the Air Force squad's preparation for the UK Armed Forces Development Championships in September, the evening delivered top competition.

AS1 Jack Bushell (Brize) and Alex Smith (CAIN) delivered the Fight of the Night in the opening bout, while AS1 Harry Jacques (Brize) was recognised as Best Boxer.

The opening 60kg bout saw Bushell face the experienced CAIN boxer in a highly-skilled affair, that saw the latter victorious by Unanimous Decision (UD).

Bout two, a 63.5kg weight, saw Jamie Binnie (CAIN) continue the momentum for the Northern District, earning a unanimous win over Wittering's AS1 Callum Balzaretto.

Bout three (66kg) was an all-Northern District affair, with Corey Duff Macleod winning.

AS1(T) Alex Masterman (Coningsby) delivered a confident performance, taking a UD win over Pat Naruskevicious (CAIN) at 66kg weight, while AS1 Harry

Jacques (Brize) produced a dominant performance against Findlay Milne (CAIN), again winning by UD at 73kg.

At 86kg, AS1 Mason Slender (Coningsby) claimed another RAF UD win with a slick performance against Cjay Tarbett (Lochee).

Bout 7 (67kg) saw AS1 Todd Samways (Wyton) come up against Robert McLean (Elgin), with the latter taking advantage of his sharp southpaw skills to take a UD win.

An all-out war followed next in bout 8 between Marham's AS1 Nick Smith and Elgin boxer Finlay Henderson. Both starting aggressively and trading blows, Smith eventually won by Technical Knockout. The penultimate contest at 84kg saw AS1 Alex Cross (Odiham) producing a composed UD win over James Stewart (Elgin).

Bout 10 saw AS1(T) James Durkin (RAF Marham) and Craig Mone (Elgin) close out the show, with the former winning comfortably by UD at 92kg+).

OC IX(B) Sqn's Wg Cdr Chris Pearson said: "The fixture was a resounding success, showcasing the RAF Development Squad's progress and strengthening relationships with Boxing Scotland.

"The positive feedback underscores the value of continued investment in RAF Boxing."



FIGHT OF NIGHT: AS1 Jack Bushell receives his trophy



UNANIMOUS DECISION: AS1(T) Alex Masterman (left) beats Pat Naruskevicious



ANOTHER WIN: AS1 Mason Slender (right) defeats Lochee Boxing Club's Cjay Tarbett  
PHOTOS: AS1 PALMER (RAF LOSSIEMOUTH)

GRIDIRON

# Mustangs must 'own it'

## Bid for third IS crown

PLAYER OWNERSHIP looks to be the key to RAF Mustangs repeating their dominance in this year's American Football Inter-Service championship.

RAF News Spoke with Chf Tech Paul Wakeford, assistant coach and general manager of the current IS champions, about the upcoming tournament.

"Because the last game was late last year, we've bounced from that, to this, so no camps, but things are now set for this time of year with the championships being moved from autumn," he said.

To counter this, the team has been receiving online training sessions from new strength and conditioning coach FS Adam Hennessy, going through the team's playbook and setting out work in the lead up to the pre-match camp at their new Home for Sport RAF Northolt before the opening IS game versus the Royal Navy.

Wakeford said: "The lads have really taken ownership – the offensive line have really come together as a group, chatting constantly about the nuances needed, with the experienced players taking the lead.

"It shows the progress through, we have guys doing level one coaching badges, the through line for the Service joiners through to those with years of experience and completing



LIMBERING UP: RAF Mustangs are on a mission to win Inter-Services

level one. It's pushing things forward and helps us going forward.

"We always need more coaches, and we already had the ability to adapt – we are more capable of doing that now."

With plans to build on their international ties with USAF in the coming years, the Mustangs are now focusing on a repeat IS win, to make it three titles out of four, following their 20-14 victory over the Army Jackals last October.

Wakeford said: "This year we are missing a few people, so it'll be different, but we still have a good base squad, with new blood coming in who are hearing good things about, so it's promising and exciting."

● Follow RAF Mustangs on @RAF American Football.

SQUASH

# 11 titles for Warner

SERVICE SQUASH stars produced a championships to remember at Wolverhampton Lawn Tennis & Squash club, with more than 40 entrants battling out in four categories.

The two-days of action saw Wg Cdr Paul Warner win the Open event 3-1 over AS1 Craig Stephens, with Sqn Ldr Claire Graham, beating Flt Lt Sarah Wilkie 3-0 in the ladies' event, before Wg Cdr Phil Rea won the Master event 3-2 over Wg Cdr Dave Robinson.

AS1(T) Owen O'Hara took the U25s title 3-0 from Fg Off George Hine and Flt Lt Matthew Hay won the Open Plate title 3-1 from Sqn Ldr Rich Allison.

The Open event had a very similar theme to previous years, with Warner winning for the 11th time, but Stephens had already upset the seedings by beating the no. 2 seed Oscar Hill in the semi-final.

The ladies' final between Graham and Wilkie was the first time the pair had played each other, but with Graham looking to regain the title she had won in previous years and Wilkie aiming to go one better than last year, a battle royal finally saw Graham win.

The Masters' final was a humdinger of a match between old teammates Rea and Robinson, which saw Rea race into an early 2-0 lead. Robinson, fought back to level the scores, before Rea managed to take a significant lead in the fifth game and never looked back, taking the match and the title 3-2.

The U25 final was a more one-sided affair than the others, with O'Hara retaining his title from last year 3-0 against Hine.

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

**Sport**

**FOOTBALL**

# 'I won't change winning formula'

Pledge from new chief Craven

**Daniel Abrahams**

**NEW WOMEN'S senior football head coach FS Karl Craven has a list, and he is ticking things off on his way to hopeful IS glory.**

The former assistant coach of RAF U23s and professional outfit Apollon Limassol Ladies in Cyprus is looking to 'expand the reach and grow the women's game' along with utilising the current crop of talent that is gunning for a sixth consecutive Inter-Services title.

Speaking as the side returned



from a training week in Cyprus, he said: "This side have been successful for many years so I don't want to change things drastically.

"It's intrinsically the same group as last year, but I'm also looking at holistic changes off the field, to help grow opportunities in football for women within the RAF.

"Within our meets, I've tried to draw on my experiences within the professional game to create an environment which opens up new opportunities,

such as working with sports psychologists and new training concepts all focused on gaining that extra one per cent."

He added: "I want to see growth in the women's game. I have certain targets I want to reach in the three years I have in post. The list is long, but achievable."

The team's warm-up matches have featured tough opposition including a 13-0 win over Newquay Women's FC, 4-2 loss to Wolverhampton Select XI, 2-1 defeat at the hands of a high-quality UK Fire Service and a 4-2 loss to Tier 3 Sporting Khalsa Select, before beating Tier 4 Doncaster Belles 3-0.

Craven, inset left, was pleased with

the progress towards the annual IS championship, which starts when the aviators host the Royal Navy at Lincoln City.

"I'm passionate about improving the opportunities for women to play football, with work ongoing at grassroots level it would be nice to see a Development squad introduced and a regional cup event, these can only increase the competitive football opportunities for women," he said.

"It is a lot of change, but it's all focused towards success and improving women's football in the RAF"

● Follow the team on Instagram @rafladiesfootball.



**PLENTY TO SMILE ABOUT:** RAF Women scored 13 against Newquay to get their campaign off to a flying start in Cornwall

**ATHLETICS**

# Sefton winner Chloe claims Champs title

**HOT ON the heels of the Sefton Brancker, Halton hosted the RAF Cross-Country Championships, which saw Cpl Chloe Richardson and Sgt Robert Wood emerge victorious.**

RAF Cranwell triumphed in the team event as Cpl Adam Baker, Cpl Conor Pacey, Cpl Nathan Howells and Flt Lt Rebecca Ennals came home first.

The annual event saw a field of 91 athletes from 23 units compete in a day of outstanding performances and close finishes.

The women's race, held over a challenging seven-kilometre course, saw Sefton Brancker winner Richardson claim another commanding victory with a time of 28 minutes and 41 seconds, while AS1 Lucy Rycroft continued her impressive form to secure second place in 29:43.

Sgt Catherine Cory completed



the podium with a time of 31:19. AS1 Lucy Williams finished fifth overall to take the U23F title, with Sgt Lucy Kershaw placing seventh to win the FV35 category and Sqn Ldr Jo Johnson rounded out the

top 10, claiming the FV45 title.

The men's 10km race delivered a nail-biting finish, with just 12 seconds separating the top three runners. Wood emerged victorious in 32 minutes and 38 seconds, narrowly edging out Flt Lt Chris Davies, who finished second in 32:40.

Cpl Adam Baker took third in 32:50, also securing the MV40 title.

AR Bruce Evans claimed the U23M title in sixth, with Wg Cdr Matt Whitfield taking the MV50 category coming ninth.

Event spokesman Cpl Carl Tucker said: "The event showcased the exceptional talent and determination of RAF personnel, with all competitors demonstrating outstanding athleticism and team spirit. Congratulations to all participants and winners."



**DOING THE DOUBLE:** Cpl Chloe Richardson  
PHOTO: LUKA WAYCOTT

**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)**

# 5 RAF Sport

pages of



## Rookies step it up at Lossie

See page 25



### FOOTBALL



CAPITAL EFFORT: AS1 Bobby London

## 'It's out of our hands'

### Daniel Abrahams

IT WAS case of 'after the Lord Mayor's show' for the Service's Under-23s footballers as they stumbled to a 0-0 draw in their second IS clash.

Having won in style in the championship opener against the Royal Navy (1-0), the aviators knew a win against the Army would seal the title for the first time in six years, but could only produce a lacklustre display at New Saints FC in Oswestry.

It leaves the title hanging in the balance with one game remaining, Army v RN.

"It was a very frustrating game for us. I never felt we played anywhere near our potential and, in truth, we were probably fortunate to come away with a draw, with the Army the better side overall," conceded RAF head coach FS Tom Richardson (pictured inset above).

"The fact that we are disappointed with this result shows the progress the group has made."

The opening half saw the aviators start slowly, with the Army on top for large tracks of it.

A stunning defensive intervention from AS1 Scott McCallum saw the ball clear the bar as he intercepted an Army cross from the right, off the toe of the on-rushing forward.

A wayward pass from 6 minutes later in the final third let the Army in again, but a poor cross saw the chance fizzle out.

## Draw with Army leaves IS title in balance for U23s

After 22 minutes AS1 Remzi Kilicaslan saw his goal-bound effort cleared after he capitalised on a poorly punched clearance from Will Palmer in the Army goal.

Three minutes later a stunning box to box pass from AS1 Jake Staunton found AS1 George McCowie in the inside left channel, but he could not control the ball and the onrushing Army keeper cleared the chance on the edge of his penalty area.

Richardson was then forced to shuffle his pack after centre-back AS1 Bryan Parfitt was injured trying to clear an Army attack.

A clash of heads between RAF captain AS1 Rio Ward and Army keeper Palmer a bit later resulted in the Army losing their keeper during the half-time break, with Ward doing his best Terry Butcher head bandage impression for the remainder of the game.

The second half produced similar fare until a possible penalty was not given after McCowie was clattered by replacement Army keeper Ben Griffiths.

From being in the aviators' hands, the championship now goes down the wire. If the Army beat the Navy by two goals or more, they win the Inter-Services.



### ALPINE

# Olympics was a dream come true

... and you can achieve yours too

### Daniel Abrahams

SERVICE SKELETON star Flt Lt Nicole Burger has called on personnel to chase their dreams after making history at the Milano Cortina winter Olympics.

Burger, who finished 25th in the women's skeleton, and was coached at the Games by RAF skeleton OIC Flt Lt Rhys Thornbury, said: "To represent myself, my country and the RAF at an event like this is something that will stay with me forever.

"I am grateful for every moment, the support back home, and the chance to make history. Dreams do come true - all I can say to everyone is keep chasing yours."

Burger, who completed four runs over the two days of competition, was the first South African athlete to appear in the discipline, forming part of a five-athlete team.

Having qualified 31st in the World to make Games selection, she closed out day one +4.66 seconds behind Austrian slider Janine Flock at the Cortina Sliding Centre, Cortina d'Ampezzo.

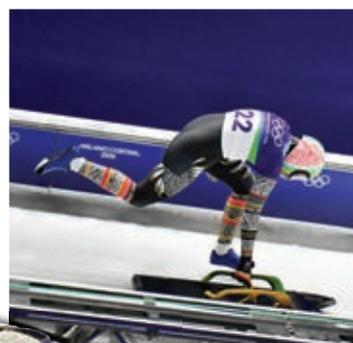
After the close of action on day two the aviator sat 25th with Flock taking gold, with the aviator producing her fastest run at her fourth attempt (58.98) to sit a combined 9.16 seconds off top spot coming in 24th.

Flt Lt Thornbury said: "Nicole did well to qualify for the Olympics in just her third international season. This was always going to be a hard event for her having never raced a 4-heat international race.

"What makes her efforts even more impressive is that she couldn't attend the international training period, missing around 30-40 training runs on the Olympic



HISTORY-MAKER: Flt Lt Nicole Burger prepares for a run at Cortina, with coach Flt Lt Rhys Thornbury by her side PHOTOS: WG CDR ROB WATKINSON



track. This meant we got to the Olympics with no training runs under our belt.

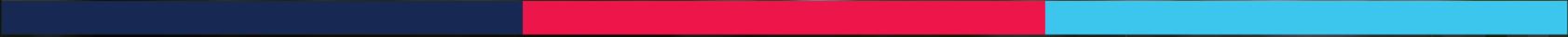
"It was a challenge start to finish but one she gave her all to and one she can

be proud of and build upon for future World Champs events and the 2030 Winter Games."

Burger, inset below left, who was roared on by the most colourful contingent of fans at the event, said: "To compete at the highest level of sporting competition, to see the Olympic rings and know that I made it, is incredible. I still don't think I've processed what's happened.

"Seeing those five interlocking Olympic rings gave me goosebumps and an overwhelming sense of belonging to something much bigger than myself.

"Now the future for me is the Worlds in 2027, where I want a top 15 finish, and then ultimately to be competitive in the 2030 Olympics."



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# TO **EVERY WOMAN** WHO WORE THE UNIFORM

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# R'n'R



**In the pink –  
Amber Davies in  
Legally Blonde**

● See  
pages  
4-5

**BREW+**  
**BAKE!**



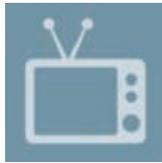
## **IT'S TIME TO BREW AND BAKE FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH.**

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

**COMBAT  
STRESS**  
FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH



TV

# Honey trap

**T**HE BBC has revealed casting for *Honey*, with filming now underway on the new six-part darkly comedic Cold War thriller romance.

The series, made by Sid Gentle Films Ltd, goes deep undercover in 1980s East Berlin to explore a shadowy world of counter espionage and risky but irresistible relations.

Leading the cast are Ann Skelly (*House of Guinness, The Nevers*) who plays Martha Schmitt, Nate Mann (*Masters of the Air & Licorice Pizza*) as Kurt Fischer, Jannis Niewöhner (*Munich: The Edge of War, Napoleon*) as Friedrich Bauman, and Rory Kinnear (*The Diplomat, The Lord of the Rings: Rings of Power*) as Graham Anderson.

Executive producer Sally Woodward Gentle said: "Everyone says that they couldn't be more excited by the cast they have assembled but Ann, Nate and Jannis are the real deal. We are beyond thrilled by their inherent talent, intelligence and intuitive brilliance. They shine. And Rory Kinnear! I am in love."

In East Berlin in 1982 Martha

## Cold War drama with dark comedy heads to the BBC

(pronounced Marta), 24, is a deep cover agent for MI6. Surrounded by enemies and constantly under threat of her cover being blown, she tries her hardest to avoid detection by Friedrich, the new Stasi Head of Counterespionage against British Targets, Berlin Office.

Finding herself caught between Friedrich and the reckless, arrogant (and incredibly attractive) CIA operative Aaron Neeland (posing as Kurt Fischer), she is blind-sided by desire in this Cold War menage-a-trois.

The risk of being garrotted or incarcerated is nothing compared to the horrifying ordeal of falling in love. Allowing yourself to be

vulnerable and bearing your heart and soul? She'd rather have her fingernails pulled out.

AND ITV has announced that Kerry Godliman (*Whitstable Pearl, After Life*) and Nina Singh (*Art Detectives, Virdee*) are to star as Dalziel and Pascoe in a contemporary reimagining of the beloved British detective series, based on the books by Reginald Hill.

The series centres on the relationship between seasoned Detective Inspector



LOVE INTEREST: Kurt (Nate Mann)



DANGEROUS GAME: MI6 agent Martha (Ann Skelly) with Graham (Rory Kinnear)

Andrea Dalziel (Godliman) and the newly-qualified, by-the-book perfectionist Detective Sergeant Paige Pascoe (Singh).

Godliman (*below, left*) said: "I'm so chuffed to be playing the assertively charming Detective Inspector Andrea Dalziel.

It's a juicy role as she's such an interesting personality - accomplished at her job, warm, but also direct to the point of being abrasive. Weary and warm-hearted. Lots to get my teeth into."

Singh (*below*) added: "It's an absolute honour to be playing Pascoe to Kerry Godliman's Dalziel. I find Kerry hilarious, so I know at times I'll struggle not to be laughing."

Reginald Hill's books were previously adapted into a highly successful television series, starring Warren Clarke and Colin Buchanan, which aired on British television for 12 series from 1996-2007.



### Theatre

**Derren Brown**  
UK tour

**DERREN BROWN:**  
*Only Human*

## More chances for Brown to alter your perceptions

**H**E'S A master of mind control and psychological illusion and Derren Brown's latest stage show *Only Human*, which opened in April last year, has proved so successful extra dates have been added for 2026.

The tour was extended to include a further 20 cities and towns throughout the UK and in Ireland this year.

Brown said: "I've toured with different shows for 20 years and it's such a joy. *Only Human* seems to be going down very well, and people are keeping the show secret for which I'm very grateful. I'm delighted the show is continuing into 2026 and it's going to be a joy to take it into Ireland and places we couldn't get to in 2025."

*Only Human* is Brown's 11th live show. His productions have garnered a record-breaking five Olivier Award nominations for Best Entertainment, winning twice - the largest number of



nominations and wins for one-person shows in the history of the Awards.

*Only Human* extra dates include Hull New Theatre (March 17-21), Liverpool Empire Theatre (March 24-28), Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury (April, 7-11), Ipswich Regent Theatre (April 14-18), De Montfort Hall, Leicester (April 21-25), and Wycombe Swan (April 28 to May 2). The tour culminates at Royal & Derngate, Northampton on July 25.

● **Go to: [derrenbrown.co.uk](http://derrenbrown.co.uk) for all venue and ticket information.**



### Film Review

**The Good Boy (18)**  
In cinemas March 20

**A** VIOLENT and volatile teenager wakes from a club crawl drug-binge to find himself shackled in a family's basement in Jan Komasa's dark satire about troubled youth.

Tommy (Anson Boon) is lairy and unpredictable, a frightening combination that makes him a threat to everyone and anyone. That is until he finds himself at the mercy of a strange family, chained to the ceiling of a dank room beneath a country manor.

His captors are an odd bunch, led by road safety manager Chris (Steven Graham), who oversees proceedings as if running a brutal DIY rehab. Graham plays against type with a southern accent, toupee and a pretty mild manner, at least until he gets the taser out.

His wife Kathryn (Angela Riseborough) is pallid with long black hair and mostly mute. She appears in rooms like a spectre of the darkness that has befallen them. What exactly has caused this family's derangement isn't explained, but we get a sense, especially through their son Jonathan (Kit Rakusen) - a cheerful but creepy young boy who is only too happy to have someone new to play with.

Tommy is a particularly nasty character: when shown videos from his social media

There'll be hell toupée if Tommy annoys Chris!



HOUSE OF HORRORS: Tommy (right) finds himself at the mercy of a very odd family

# Taming teen terror Tommy

of his terrorising behaviour, rather than show remorse, he is delighted with himself. When he is punished for misbehaving, it will test your sympathy.

Komasa treats the absurd premise with seriousness, giving practical consideration for how prisoner Tommy is to move through rooms of the house, especially if he's to be rewarded

for good behaviour with a film. Details like this add a weight to the tension, grounding the insanity.

Starting at full throttle, the shock starts to wear off as you get used to the family. Still, it's a nasty little film with a sense of humour, played perfectly by a committed cast.

**4 out of 5 rounds** ●●●●  
*Review by Sam Cooney*



**Theatre**  
**Legally Blonde**  
 UK & Ireland tour

# Reality and West End star hits t

# Amber's Blonde mom



**SUPPORT:** Hannah Lowther plays Elle's best pal Margot, and sometimes takes the lead role

**T**HE WEST End and Broadway hit *Legally Blonde The Musical* is now on a UK and Ireland tour, starring *Strictly Come Dancing* 2025 finalist Amber Davies as Elle Woods – the role made famous by Reese Witherspoon in the award-winning 2001 film.

Described as the ultimate feel-good rom-com, the stage show is based on the movie which follows Elle on her transformation from 'It Girl' fashionista to legal ace at Harvard Law School, all in the name of love.

Elle must prove she is more than blonde ambition, swap the changing rooms for the courtroom and learn that 'being true to yourself never goes out of style.'

In the story, Elle is president of the Delta Nu sorority at the University of California, and her sorority sister Margot has her back from the start. Musical theatre and TikTok star Hannah Lowther *SIX*, West End), plays Margot and alternate Elle Woods at certain performances.

### Girl's girl

Hannah said: "I feel like she [Margot] is the ultimate girl's girl. All of the Delta Nu girls are just there to support each other, which is important because we need to show women supporting women and not trying to tear each other down."

Best known for winning *Love Island* in 2017, Amber, who attended the Urdang Academy performing arts school in London, has starred in West End productions of *The Great Gatsby* and the musicals of *Back To The Future* and *9 to 5*.

The extensive *Legally Blonde* tour visits various venues including Milton Keynes Theatre (March 10-14), The Alexandra Birmingham (March 31- April 4), Oxford's New Theatre (May 26-30) and Norwich Theatre Royal (September 22-26), finishing at Brighton's Theatre Royal on January 2, 2027.

Amber revealed that the role of Elle had been on her wish list for a long time. "I've actually been singing the material since college," she explained. "These are songs that I've always loved to sing and it's always been a dream role. In terms of the trajectory of my career it's one of the biggest female roles in musical theatre when it comes to



**COLLEGE CAPERS:** Hannah (left) with other cast members

time on stage and the responsibility of playing her, because the whole show is about her. I feel like the role has come into my life at a good time.

The 29-year-old added: "You need stamina and you need life knowledge for a part like this, so now is the perfect time for me to play her. If it had come any earlier I would have been too young. Then there's the story itself. It's such a powerful story and I feel so lucky that I get to tell it in my own way."

She described Elle as 'a force to be reckoned with' adding: "She is a woman who is everything. Yes, she's beautiful but she's also intelligent, and women can be both things at the same time. She's so underestimated, and I love her story arc within the show. She's got fire and she's so determined. She's salt of the earth. First and foremost, she is a very loyal, kind friend and I really want to hone in on that. She's a firecracker."

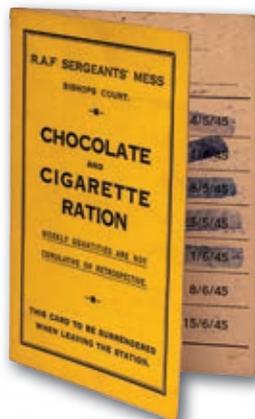


## Exhibitions

### War Craft

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (until August 23)

# The art of war at Fitzw



**W**AR CRAFT, a new free display at The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, on now until August 23, explores the human experience of war through objects made, adapted and treasured in moments of conflict. From mementoes of fallen comrades to items created to occupy idle hands, the display reveals stories of ingenuity, hope, survival and loss amid the devastation of war.

A spokesperson said: "Bringing together a wide-ranging selection of objects and artefacts made and kept by soldiers, civilians and prisoners

of war, War Craft presents deeply personal responses to conflict across centuries and continents.

"Spanning from the Napoleonic Wars to the ongoing war in Ukraine, the display seeks to humanise the inhumanity of war by foregrounding individual acts of making, remembering and resilience."

The spokesperson added: "The display features remarkable examples of 20th-century converted coins that reveal intimate connections to conflict. How's Your Poor Feet (inset, 2nd right) is a rare engraved



message sent from Britain to a loved one serving at the front. Also in the exhibition is a WWII RAF chocolate and cigarette ration card (far left) and a WWI 'trench art' lighter (left) stamped F.H.Evans, RFC (Royal Flying Corps)."

War Craft also features drawings and prints by major artists J.M.W. Turner, Paul Nash and John Singer Sargent, and poetry by war hero and leading poet of WWI, Siegfried Sassoon.

Dr Richard Kelleher, Senior Curator of Medieval and Modern

# The books ent



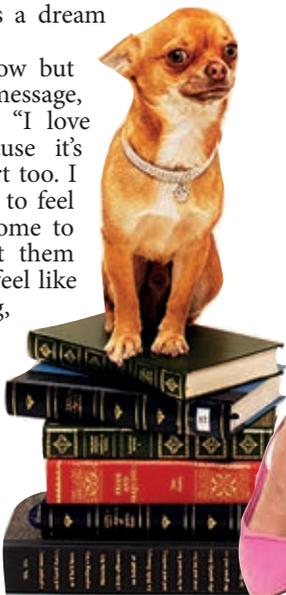
“When it comes to being underestimated, I can definitely relate to her in that way, as well as how she’s judged in other ways,” Amber revealed. “People think, ‘Oh, she’s blonde, so she’s not intelligent enough.’ I’ve had to contend with similar stuff. When I first got given a leading role in the West End it was like, ‘She’s from a reality show, she can’t be good enough for the stage.’ Although my story is different to hers, I feel like I can actually draw on my own life experiences for this show.”

## Movie

She added: “I love everything about the movie, from Reese Witherspoon’s performance to the fashion aspect of it. With the musical, we’re setting it in the modern day and it’s like a collaboration of theatre and fashion, which is a dream for me.”

It’s a feel-good show but it carries a serious message, as Amber explained: “I love *Legally Blonde*, because it’s funny but it’s got heart too. I really want audiences to feel for Elle when they come to see the show. I want them to care for her and I feel like there’s such a strong, powerful message in there. It’s as simple as ‘Don’t judge a book by its cover’, which happens every single day in life.”

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



**LEGAL DREAM:**  
Amber  
as Elle

# William Museum

Money at the Fitzwilliam Museum, said: “The objects in this display, crafted from found materials and battlefield waste, were made by ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances associated with conflict and its consequences.”

“They offer personal and meaningful insights into how soldiers, civilians and prisoners of war created objects as a way of coping with the stresses of daily life. Making often



served to occupy the mind and hands, but it also played an important role in recovery and convalescence for the injured, and in sustaining morale, identity and hope for prisoners of war living in conditions of uncertainty and confinement.”

● Go to: [fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk) for further details.



**Music**  
**Scouting For Girls**  
New album



**NEW LP:**  
These  
Are The  
Good  
Days

## Good Days for Scouting For Girls

**CHART-TOPPING,** multi-platinum selling Scouting For Girls will release their new album *These Are The Good Days* on March 27.

It’s the follow-up to 2023’s *The Place We Used To Meet*, which became their highest-charting record in eight years. The trio behind the mega-hits *This Ain’t A Love Song*, *She’s So Lovely*, *Elvis Ain’t Dead* and *Heartbeat* still command a huge, loyal following – this year’s headline tour is already almost sold out.

The new single from the forthcoming album is *Don’t You Go Solo*. Now Hollywood-based, vocalist/pianist Roy Stride explained of the string-laden Sixties-influenced pop song: “It’s a bit of an outlier on the record.

But one of the reasons I’m out here in LA is to work on films. I’ve got a song in an animated film that’s coming out next year – a Disney-esque musical called *Spiked*, about a hedgehog.

“And this song was written around the same time that I was working on the film. I just wanted to create a fun, almost musical number, but with big cinematic strings and a Sixties sound.”

The album was entirely



**SUNNY DISPOSITIONS:** Scouting For Girls are known for positive, jolly songs

written and produced by Stride and recorded between studios in California, Dublin and the UK, with fellow founding members and lifelong friends Greg Churchouse (bass) and Pete Ellard (drums).

Stride added: “The album’s full of the sunny optimism and joy that’s always been such a big part of Scouting For Girls. Almost 20 years on from *She’s So Lovely*, we’re somehow

selling more tickets than ever, as people keep coming out for that unique connection and joy you only get from the magic of live music.

“I hope this record adds to the soundtrack – it’s packed with the positivity, fun and sunshine that people have always associated with Scouting For Girls.”

● Go to: [scoutingforgirls.os.fan](http://scoutingforgirls.os.fan) for more information, including tour details.



**Theatre**  
**Eric and Ern**  
Garrick Theatre, London

## Michelle Erns guest spot for comedy tribute

**MICHELLE COLLINS,** is to join a performance of *Eric and Ern* at London’s Garrick Theatre later this month as the special guest star.

Celebrating the 100th birthdays of Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise and their legendary comedy partnership, the West End show is one of a series of special performances which have recently been announced for *Eric and Ern*, the new play from Ian Ashpitel and Jonty Stephens, the Olivier-nominated duo behind the critically acclaimed West End hit *Eric & Little Ern*.

Collins, best known for her roles as Cindy Beale in *EastEnders* and Stella Price in *Coronation Street*, said: “I’m absolutely thrilled to be joining the West End celebration of Morecambe and Wise’s centenary. Eric and Ern are true icons of British entertainment and to be part of a show honouring their legacy – especially at the Garrick Theatre in the West End – is a real privilege. It’s a wonderful way to celebrate comedy that has brought joy to generations.”

*Eric and Ern* visits the Lowry, Salford from March 24-28, goes to the Garrick



**CLASSIC SKETCHES:** Ashpitel and Stephens as Eric and Ern

on March 29 and to Morecambe Winter Gardens on May 16 for a unique performance coinciding with Eric Morecambe’s birthday weekend.

The play takes audiences back to the times when whole families would huddle around the telly to watch the *Morecambe and Wise Christmas Specials*.

Michelle has enjoyed a career spanning more than four decades, appearing in numerous TV shows. She won an international Emmy for her portrayal of Marigold in *The Illustrated Mum*.

● Go to: [thelowry.com](http://thelowry.com), [nimaxtheatres.com](http://nimaxtheatres.com) and [ticketsource.co.uk](http://ticketsource.co.uk) for more information on the upcoming performances of *Eric and Ern*.

● The show on May 16 will include an afternoon talk with Eric Morecambe’s children, Gary and Gail Morecambe.



**SOAP ROYALTY:**  
Michelle Collins



## Your Announcements

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

### Death

**WALKER** Keith Sqn Ldr, passed away peacefully on February 22, aged 91. Keith was a Canberra, Valiant and Victor bomber pilot for a number of years and later became a flying instructor on the Jet Provost, a training aircraft of that era. Upon leaving the RAF, like many pilots, he pursued a career with civil airlines.

A man with a finely tuned sense of humour as his writings showed, he credited the late Dick Hayward, a Victor bomber captain, with teaching him all he knew about the aircraft. Enquiries to Mrs Pat Walker on: 01904 795150, Alan Mudge and Lesley Hayward-Mudge on: 01760 337514 or email: [bombhead055@gmail.com](mailto:bombhead055@gmail.com)

### 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.

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

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

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

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

The Association is looking to recruit new members. If you are interested in joining, or would like more information about the anniversary events, please contact Les Weston via email: [lesalma9001@gmail.com](mailto:lesalma9001@gmail.com) or you can call on the following number: 0753 1523456.

**THE** 23 Squadron Association is pleased to announce its intention to hold its Association Dinner on Saturday, October 10. The event will provide a valuable opportunity for former members of 23 Squadron to reconnect, share memories, and celebrate the proud history of the Red Eagles. The Squadron Committee cordially invites all previous personnel who have served with 23 Squadron —

across all eras and roles — to register their interest and request further details, including venue details, timings, menu and booking instructions via the email address: [red eagles23sqn@outlook.com](mailto:red eagles23sqn@outlook.com)

### Reunions

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

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

### Fundraising concert

**THE** ROYAL Air Force Music Charitable Trust's 2026 fundraising concert tour starts on April 18 with a special big band concert held in the Lecture Theatre of Newark Academy featuring Royal Air Force Swing Wing with guest jazz trumpet soloist Nathan Bray — well known for playing with Ronnie Scott's Big Band.

On May 16 the charity presents a concert in Lincoln Cathedral performed by the Band of the Royal Air Force College with compère Melvyn Prior, featuring music from renowned composer John Williams. Concerts will follow with the Central Band of the RAF and the Band of the RAF College in Weston-super-Mare, Epsom, Newark and Doncaster. The 2026 tour will end with another RAF Swing Wing big band concert at the Terry O'Toole Theatre in Lincoln on October 16.

Go to: [rafconcerts.uk](http://rafconcerts.uk) for further information.

## Obituary

# Four decades of faithful service

**IT IS** with deep sadness that we announce the passing of **WO Terence Holmes, aged 88, known to family and friends as Terry — a highly respected RAF veteran whose distinguished career spanned nearly four decades of dedicated service.**

Terry joined the RAF in 1955, embarking on a lifelong commitment to duty, professionalism and public service.

A specialist RAF Fireman, he quickly earned a reputation for calm leadership and technical excellence.

In 1965, Terry (pictured inset and below) was selected for The Queen's Flight, undertaking helicopter support duties as a Fireman.

His outstanding performance led to a second selection in 1973, where he assumed responsibility for helicopter support operations, reflecting the trust placed in him at the highest levels.

In 1979, Terry was posted to Brunei, where he was seconded

to the Sultan of Brunei Armed Forces.

For five years he served with distinction as Fire Advisor to the Sultan's Armed Forces, providing expert guidance and leadership in developing fire and emergency services capability.

Returning to the UK in 1984, Terry was posted to RAF Brize Norton, followed by an overseas posting in 1988 to RAF Wildenrath. In 1989 he was assigned to RAF Kinloss, during which time he undertook a six-month detachment to the Falkland Islands as Force Fire Officer, overseeing fire safety and operational readiness in demanding conditions. He subsequently returned to Wildenrath as Station Fire Officer until the station's closure.

Terry retired from the RAF in 1992, concluding an exemplary career marked by leadership, resilience and unwavering commitment to those he served alongside. Throughout his service, Terry was recognised with numerous honours and medals, reflecting both his operational contributions and long, faithful service.

Beyond his professional achievements, he was known for his integrity, generosity of spirit and deep camaraderie with fellow Servicemen and women.

He passed away peacefully in Ely, Cambridgeshire, surrounded by family.

Terry will be remembered with great respect and affection by his loved ones, colleagues, and the wider RAF and Fire Service communities.

Blue skies and tailwinds.

**Jenny Holmes**



## Sign up for virtual challenge

NOW IN its sixth year, the RAFA V50 challenge has grown into an event that sees more than 2,500 people take part, netting a staggering £142,000 for the charity to date.

Organiser Flt Lt Victoria Young said: "The 'V' stands for virtual, because wherever you are in the world, you can take part. How you complete your 50 miles is up to you — walk, run, cycle, hike or even roller skate. You can mix and match activities to fit

around your lifestyle, making it truly your challenge, your way."

She added: "This year's challenge runs from April 27 to May 3. Go solo or team up with friends, family or colleagues. However you choose to take part, the Association will support you every step of the way with fundraising tips, advice and your very own RAFA V50 T-shirt to wear with pride."

● Go to: [rafa.org.uk](http://rafa.org.uk) to find out more or search RAFA V50.

### How to use our service

There is no charge for conventionally-worded **birth, engagement, marriage, anniversary, death, in memoriam seeking** and **reunion** notices. For commercial small ads contact Edwin Rodrigues on: 07482 571535.

We cannot, under any circumstances, take announcements over the telephone. They can be sent by email to: [tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk](mailto:tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk) or by post to: **Announcements, RAF News, Room 68, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE.**

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**RACING AHEAD:**  
Cars are the stars at charity events

## Classic car duel for SSAFA

PETROLHEADS SHOULD make tracks to London Scottish House, SW1 on March 26 for The Greatest Car Company Debate, in aid of Armed Forces charity SSAFA.

The debate, and an auction, are part of A Driving Force for SSAFA 2026 (ADF26), which takes place in August, when 60 cars, each with a two-person team, will drive from Dunkirk to Bosnia and back with the goal of raising £100,000 for the charity.

Auction prizes include supercar lunch experiences, a Caterham motorsport drift experience, Chanel sunglasses, yacht days and parachute jumps.

A SSAFA spokesperson said: "An unmissable evening, the debate brings together several of the UK's most passionate automotive personalities, manufacturers, dealers, racing drivers, YouTubers and more, and promises to be a classic duel, a grudge match like no other, taking the audience back 60 years to the heady days of Le Mans '66 and Ford v Ferrari."

● Go to: [eventbrite.co.uk](http://eventbrite.co.uk) to book tickets.

## Family fun for half the price

THE RAF Museum in both London and the Midlands are among the hundreds of National Lottery-funded venues nationwide offering free entry, discounts and special offers throughout National Lottery Open Week – to say thank-you for the £32 million raised for good causes every week by National Lottery players.

From March 7-15 a valid online or retail National Lottery ticket, Scratchcard or Instant Win Game will unlock a low-cost day out at the museums in Hendon, North London and Cosford.

Visitors during the special week can enjoy flying entertainment for the whole family, with 2 for 1 tickets on flight simulator and 4D Theatre rides, said a spokesperson for the RAF Museum, Midlands.

They added: "Experiences include flying with the Red Arrows in the amazing 4D theatre, combining motion picture with physical effects. Or you can feel the speed and agility of the Eurofighter Typhoon onboard the flight simulator,



**SPECIAL OFFER:**  
Museum visitors can enjoy 2 for 1 flight simulator tickets

with a pilot's eye view from the cockpit. It's guaranteed family fun for thrill-seekers of all ages."

Barry Smith, Director of Visitor and Commercial Development at RAF Museum, said: "Like many organisations across the UK, we have directly benefited from National Lottery funding, which has played a vital role in progressing our Inspiring Everyone: RAF Museum Midlands Development Programme, helping us to reimagine what we can offer at

our Midlands site.

"This transformative project will bring significant changes to the Midlands site, including an immersive exhibition exploring today's RAF, a new Learning Centre, and new Collections Hub, delivered alongside a regional engagement programme.

"We're incredibly grateful to National Lottery players for the difference they make to organisations like ours."

● Go to: [rafmuseum.org](http://rafmuseum.org) to plan your visit.

**ROYAL AIR FORCE**

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# R'n'R



## Prize Crossword

No. 404

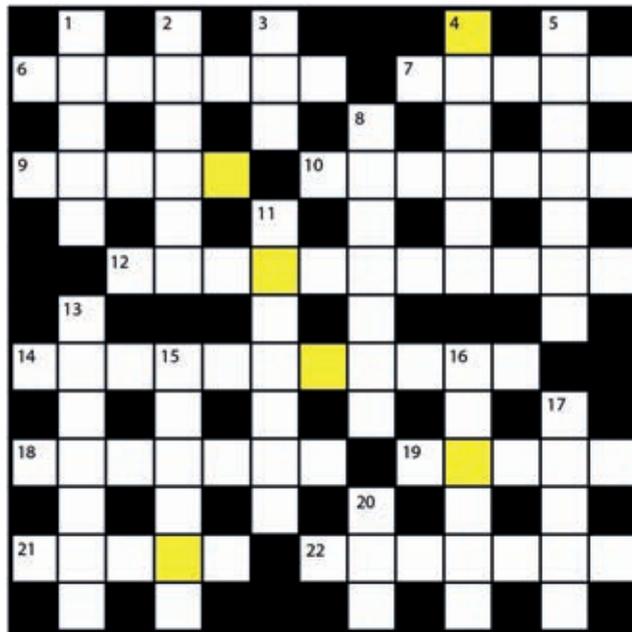
Solve the crossword, then rearrange the six letters in yellow squares to find an overseas aircraft

**Across**

- 6. Scarper from where plane lands around April 1st...(3,4)
- 7. ...then scarper from the first ships (5)
- 9. Outlaw gangster is entirely predictable (5)
- 10. Shrink, liverish once I depart, maybe (7)
- 12. Sack squadron? They're vital when sparks fly! (4,7)
- 14. Meagre blots mixed up on RAF plane (11)
- 18. See 20 Down
- 19. Exercise inside extra insulation (5)
- 21. Take it as easy, as Frankie suggested in the 80s (5)
- 22. 100 join kangaroo on RAF transport (7)

**Down**

- 1. RAF big cats? (5)
- 2. Sausage Sally gives French friend (6)
- 3. See 20 Down
- 4. See 20 Down
- 5. William Tell and Robin Hood's feet (7)
- 8. Veteran singer is hard to care for (7)
- 11. Study Twain in country (7)
- 13. In centre of isle, piper upset by Cinderella's loss (7)
- 15. Aggressive bird destroys Caped Crusader (6)
- 16. Continent whose currency needs exercise (6)
- 17. Initially, Leonard injured very exposed respiratory organ (5)
- 20. And 4 Down, 3 Down, 18 Across. Lossiemouth's 6 Sn fly a nothing presence around (3,6,3,7)



**Solution to Crossword No. 403**

Across - 7. Tripod 8. Capone 10. Athlete 11. Cobra 12. T.Rex 13. Seine 17. White 18. Cats 22. Eaten 23. Ooh La La 24. Benson 25. Cliche  
 Down - 1. Stealth 2. Fighter 3. Gored 4. Falcons 5. Bombs 6. Delay 9. Desert Fox 14. Chinook 15. Balance 16. Ashamed 19. Derby 20. Atone 21. Chile  
**RAF station - High Wycombe**

Prize Crossword No. 403 winner is: J Harris, Gloucestershire.

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

.....

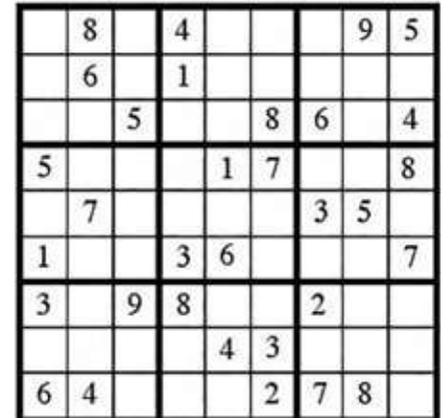
Overseas aircraft: ..... Crossword No. 404



## Prize Su Doku

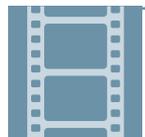
No. 414

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 March 20, 2026. The winner of Su Doku No: 412 is: K McCarthy London.

**Solution to Su Doku No. 413**



## Film Review

**The Testament of Anne Lee (15)**

In cinemas now

# The Manc Shaker founder

**A SELF-PROCLAIMED** prophet brings her teachings from Manchester to America, laying the foundations of the Shaker movement, in an 18th century musical epic from the team behind *The Brutalist*.

Amanda Seyfried is phenomenal at the centre of this film as Anne, a woman shaped by repression and loss. Married to Abraham (Christopher Abbot) a man with unusual sexual proclivities and having lost several children, in both childbirth and infancy, Anne's view of sexuality will become divine revelation, quite literally.

Drawn to the fevered chanting of nearby Quakers, Anne absorbs their spiritual intensity before adding her own twist of celibacy. What begins as grief becomes doctrine, and not before long she is worshipped by a growing flock as the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Although labelled a musical, it's not filled with your typical song and dance numbers. The music flows out of the group's spiritual fervour and is inspired by traditional hymns. It is in these scenes that the film bursts into life, transferring the ecstasy of Anne's fervent sect as her followers move through the frame synchronised, repeating phrases and throwing their arms heavenward. The effect is enchanting and hypnotic.

Beyond the music, sharp sound design and painterly 35mm cinematography give

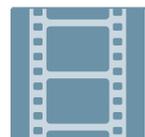


**VISIONARY:** Anne Lee (Amanda Seyfried)

the film a rich texture. Directed by Mona Fastvold and written with partner Brady Corbet, it shares DNA with *The Brutalist*. Both follow visionaries as they cross the Atlantic in search of meaning, drawing others to them with their vision. Here it is spiritual, rather than architectural - although the Shakers did establish themselves with intricate woodwork and furnishings.

*The Testament of Anne Lee* is austere, immersive and quietly radical - a look at how private suffering can transform into collective faith.

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



## Film Review

**100 Nights of Hero (12A)**

In cinemas now

# The handmaid's tale

**IN THIS** light and airy romantasy, a himbo hunk pursues the affections of a virginal queen, with only her storyteller housemaid to run interference.

Based on a graphic novel, which in turn is inspired by Middle Eastern folktale *The Arabian Nights*, Julia Jackman's adaptation quickly tries to convince you of its quirky personality through its design and an insistent, stilted comedy. A queer fairytale not short of quirkiness.

Set in a medieval world created by Kiddo (Safia Oakley-Green), but taken over by her misogynist father and self-imposed godhead Birdman (a fleeting Richard E. Grant), the story follows Cherry (Maika Monroe) as she is wed to prince Jerome (Amir El-Masry) with all the attention of the kingdom trained on her to produce an heir. Expectations are drawn out however, by the prince's apparent lack of interest, retreating nightly to his own room and offering all manner of excuses.

What follows is a wager between the prince and his visiting beefcake of a friend Manfred (Nicholas Galitzine): to seduce the queen within 100 nights of his absence. However, eager Manfred doesn't account for maid Hero (elfin Emma Corrin), whose own affection for the princess leads her to defend Cherry from their guest's insistent advances. Hero's method is to tell a story so captivating that it completely distracts him from his mission.



**DEVOTED:** Hero (Emma Corrin, left) is very fond of her mistress, Princess Cherry (Maika Monroe)

Hero tells stories, well mostly one long story filled with cliffhangers, about three sisters presumed to be witches simply because they are literate. One sister, Rosa (pop-star Charli XCX), is married off, her experiences in the story resonating with Cherry as night after night, her internal predicaments are played out through this imaginative tale, involving a rebellious secret society of storytellers.

In spite of its style and layered narratives, it all feels a little too cute and obvious. It's ironic that a film about the power of story should feel so whimsical and weightless.

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