

The Forces' favourite paper

Falklands War from those who were there

● See competition on page 17



Win classic films from 80s and 90s

● See competition on R'n'R page 5

ROYAL AIR FORCE

Friday, March 21, 2025
Edition No.1604

Only 99p

RAF News

Hitler's Baby Blitz and the failure of the Luftwaffe

See pages 14-15



Win!



Football Women aim for 5 in row

● See p25



Boxing Fight night at Odiham



● See page p27

Alpine IS triumph



See p28

Polar flair

Atlas & Voyager team up on Antarctic mission



Simon Mander

AN RAF Atlas has performed one of the most southerly missions the service has flown in recent years over the icy frozen wastelands of Antarctica.

The A400M deployed to Punta Arenas in Chile as a staging post then went on to meet the 1312 Flt Voyager, based at the Mount Pleasant Complex on the Falkland Islands, where it took on 18 tonnes of fuel.

Continuing beyond the 79th parallel, the Atlas made it to Union Glacier Camp at 10,000ft for a reconnaissance mission and return to Punta Arenas.

The sortie surveyed the blue ice runway that serves the outpost in the Heritage Range of Ellsworth mountains in support of the British Antarctic Survey, as part of Operation Austral Endurance.

BiteSize

“Having dinner on the top table with the Princess Royal is something I will remember for a long time”



Logistics officer Flt Lt Courtenay Smith wins RAF Carmen's Cup See p13

“I hadn't realised women flew during World War II”



Writer and actor Katherine Senior (far left) stars in the play Spitfire Girls See R'n'R p8

“RAF Boxing would not be where it is today without him”



Sgt Ben Bailly on Sqn Ldr Andy Parker (pictured) as he bows out after 23 years See p27



ROYAL AIR FORCE
RAF News

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Space tech upgrade

INNOVATIVE UK-MADE tech will help the military monitor space following a new £65 million deal.

The Borealis command, control and data processing system will help the UK Space Agency upgrade monitoring and satellite protection by processing data more quickly.

The contract with CGI UK will support around 100 skilled jobs, boosting the UK's space capabilities.

The new technology will improve military commanders' decision-making processes and support operations, both at home and overseas, a spokesman said.

Under the five-year contract, Borealis will provide software for the National Space Operations Centre, which develops and operates the UK's space surveillance and protection capabilities.

It will be a unique, UK-made system which supports military operations around the world.



SPACE MONITORING: New Borealis software will boost satellite security by increasing data processing speeds

This Week In History



1967
Tanker spill

HUNTER AIRCRAFT launch an attack to destroy 120,000 tons of crude oil spilled as the tanker Torrey Canyon runs aground near Land's End.

1945
Gestapo raid

MOSQUITOS DESTROY the Gestapo HQ in Copenhagen's Shellhaus building. A nearby school is also damaged when an aircraft crashes.



1999
Harrier Kosovo mission

HARRIER GR7s destroy a Serbian arms store with laser-guided Paveway II bombs following the breakdown of talks in Kosovo.

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



VISIT: Bishop Paul with Air Cdre Roger Elliot in the Middle East

Mass appeal

THE ROMAN Catholic Bishop of the Armed Forces, The Right Reverend Paul Mason, has visited British Service Personnel currently deployed on operations in the Middle East.

Bishop Paul joined members of the RAF's 83 Expeditionary Air Wing and US personnel at the Combined Air Operations Centre that runs coalition air activity in the region.

Speaking after celebrating Mass at the on-base Victory Chapel, he said: "There is a great interest among many young people in the Armed Forces to explore matters of faith and the meaning and purpose of their life."

Top Gun II Josh: It's crate to be back



But star of show won't be getting any more beers in

Simon Mander

AS THE hit Channel 4 series *Top Guns II* returns to the screens, *RAF News* caught up with one of the stars of the show, XI (Fighter) Sqn Typhoon pilot Josh.

With unprecedented access to RAF fighter jets, drones and Service personnel, the high-stakes drama-packed sequel flies viewers right back onto the frontline.

As tensions rise in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, the RAF has faced down hostile threats to carry out some of

its most audacious missions in decades.

Filmed primarily at Coningsby and Waddington and on operations in Eastern Europe, Cyprus and the Middle East, cameras take viewers to the heart of the battle – from secret spy missions over Syria, precision strikes against terrorists in Yemen, to intercepting Iranian drones threatening Israel.

Despite the demands of the job, Josh has taken being thrust into the public eye in his supersonic stride.

He said: "I've had to break from tradition regarding buying



JOSH: Lager than life character

a crate of beers every time I have appeared in the media due to *Top Guns*, otherwise I would be bankrupt by now.

"So instead, my reward has been heavy banter from colleagues – particularly from the other pilots on my squadron – as well as having people shout some of the more amusing quotes from the show at me across the bar.

"I knew what I was getting in for and was prepared for it. I love a bit of good natured jesting and think it is an important part of squadron morale and camaraderie, so I am always keen to dish it out – I would be a massive hypocrite if I didn't take it with the same enthusiasm.

"The most memorable moment for me has got to be completing the mission escorting the Rivet Joint over the Black Sea off the coast of Crimea.

"It was an extremely rewarding mission from a professional perspective and really felt like a vindication of the years of training and work to achieve frontline Combat Ready status on the Typhoon.

"Having the opportunity to

have the moment captured and broadcast on national TV for my friends and family and the general public to see was an incredible bonus.

"Understandably, the series focuses largely on the flying aspects of the frontline, but the hours of studying tactics, drills, briefings, debriefs, training, mission planning, and simulator sorties that cover the other 80 per cent of our time does not make for the most exciting TV. What I thought it did cover well was the impact and human side of the stresses of spending a lot of time OOA for exercises and operations.

"I hope it will encourage people to look into a career in the Forces, especially if they weren't aware of the possibilities and options open to them.

"Even for those that have no interest in joining, I think it is a great opportunity for us to boost the public knowledge and understanding of what we do for defence, the UK and our allies."

● *Top Guns II* is available at Channel4.com and on the Channel4 YouTube channel.

TOP UP: Typhoon takes on fuel from Voyager (below)



Voyager fuels the fight

VOYAGER TANKERS have been keeping the fighters in the battle alongside aircraft from across the world during Exercise Cobra Warrior.

The Brize Norton-based tankers have played a key role in the twice-a-year manoeuvres.

The 10 and 101 Sqn aircraft refuel fast jet aircraft in a simulated operational environment.

Voyager captain Flt Lt Lance Levin said: "It's different from our day-to-day training and is the largest exercise we take part in the UK.

"Air-to-air refuelling is a niche skill that the RAF and some of our international partners are capable of. We extend the range of both fast jet and air mobility aircraft and keep them in the air.

"It's a well-choreographed procedure that we as the tanker lead during the formation. It's a real team effort."



Fledgling subhunters

BRITISH AND American aircrews practised anti-submarine warfare during an exercise in Sicily.

Two Lossiemouth-based 42 (Torpedo Bomber) Sqn Poseidons supported by 46 personnel took part in Exercise Fledgling at Naval Air Station Sigonella.

The training involved graduates of the latest MRA1 conversion course keen to learn how to operate with the US Navy

and other allies to detect and track submarines on maritime patrol missions.

Crews from both countries flew in each other's aircraft to practise coordinating sorties and using sonar tracking to hone their anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare skills.

The deployment also demonstrated the unit's European transit flying readiness and ability to conduct operations.



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- Al Dyer



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Rak's legacy lives on with Nepal mission

Simon Mander

A TRUST set up in memory of an RAF Intelligence officer who died in a Lynx helicopter crash in Afghanistan has donated more than £30,000 to rebuild a school in Nepal which was devastated by an earthquake.

Odiham-based Flt Lt Rakesh Chauhan was on his third tour on Operation Telic when the Army Air Corps aircraft went down during a sortie in the south of the country, killing all five crew.

Described by Defence chiefs as 'outstanding and charismatic' the 29-year-old Air Force officer was tipped as a rising star in the intelligence community.

His family set up Rak's Trust following his death to honour his memory and have donated the funds to build six classrooms at the quake-hit Shree Shiksha Bodhini Secondary school near the city of Chitwan.

The move is part of a £158,000 redevelopment and investment programme launched by the Gurkha Welfare Trust to provide education for nearly 400 pupils from the some of Nepal's poorest communities.

Speaking to the BBC, Rak's father Kishor said: "The school will make a huge difference to the community. The younger



RISING STAR: Flt Lt Chauhan

BUILDING PROGRAMME: The new block at Shree Shiksha School, which was badly damaged during an earthquake

children didn't have very good classrooms and no carpet.

"Now, they have carpets so that they can jump about and run about and do whatever little

children do."

The Gurkha Welfare Trust's deputy field director in Nepal, Phatta Bahadur Gurung, said: "The school now is safer, it is

cleaner and it is spacious with some modern facilities like a library, so it will help to break the cycle of poverty long-term."

Flt Lt Chauhan's brother, Kesh,

added: "To have a building with my brother's name on there, that in itself is a legacy, but knowing what they will take from their school is a wonderful legacy."



Sim-ply the best

LOTTO PLAYERS can strike it lucky at the RAF Museum as the venue slashes the cost of entry to its stunning flight simulator and 4-D cinema.

Visitors will be able to get two-for-one entry on the state of the art facilities as part of National Lottery Open Week, which runs until Sunday, March 23. There is free entry and special offers at a range of Lotto-funded venues

across the UK for guests with a valid lotto ticket.

Museum Visitor Director Barry Smith added: "We're delighted to be participating in National Lottery Open Week. Like many organisations, we have benefited from Lottery funding, which has been instrumental in advancing our Midlands Development Programme."

Waddington launch for Forces kit drive

Simon Mander

A NEW defence innovation body to deliver military tech to British forces is to be launched after talks at an RAF station.

The Chancellor and Defence Secretary agreed the deal after round-table talks with industry leaders at Waddington to discuss how the new unit will operate.

Called fAirms it will be launched in the spring as part of the Government's Plan for Change programme.

The reform aims to simplify and streamline the MOD's innovation system, enabling companies to scale up prototypes rapidly.

The government will also look to enhance investment in defence start-ups using private sector money through the National

Security Strategic Investment Fund.

It will take the lessons from the rapidly changing nature of warfare, as seen in the conflict in Ukraine.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "We will back the high-growth, high-tech UK defence firms of the future, to boost our national security and make defence an engine for growth.

"Defence has a crucial role to play in economic growth across the UK - built on the foundation of the largest sustained funding increase since the Cold War - to support thousands of highly skilled jobs."

Saab Group managing director Andy Fraser said: "Saab UK welcomes the announcement that the UK Government will increase defence spending to 2.5

per cent by 2027, with a route to 3 per cent in the next Parliament.

"Saab UK has recently opened new facilities in the UK because we know that together we can achieve our aim to keep people and society safe."



TECH PROCUREMENT: John Healey



STONYHURST

AGES 3-18

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BATTLEFIELD: New Black Eagle monument marking site where 63 Sqn RAF Regiment Rapier unit fought was rededicated this month

Where Eagles dared

Simon Mander

A BLACK Eagle monument marking where an RAF Regiment Rapier unit fought during the Falklands War has been rededicated near Stanley.

The three ft square memorial – made of 1/2-inch naval steel plate painted black to represent 63 Sqn’s tactical ‘drop-zone’ – was fixed to the granite ridge on Canopus Hill.

In late 1986, under the turmoil of the closure and movement of RAF Stanley to Mount Pleasant, the original marker was removed but was later resurrected and stood in place until 2022, when it fell into a poor state and beyond repair.

The RAF Regiment’s Corps

Memorial Garden launched an appeal to replace it and a new Black Eagle, made in the UK, was flown out by the airbridge and installed.

A rededication service was held in the presence of the Governor of the Falkland Islands, Alison Blake, and RAF Regiment Commandant General AVM Mick Smeath.

Also present was Wg Cdr Martin Hooker (Retd) who instigated the first and the latest of the monuments.

The Falklands Islands’ Black Eagle exists alongside others at Honington Training Wing Headquarters and the Northolt base of The King’s Colour Sqn, which remains dual-badged with 63 Sqn.

Danes’ steeple to rise this year

Tracey Allen

WORK IS well underway on the £2 million restoration of the historic steeple of St Clement Danes Church, the RAF church in The Strand, London.

The major project is a partnership with specialist construction company Universal Stone Ltd and the church’s trustees. It is expected to be completed by the end of this year ahead of a rededication in 2026.

Specialist construction teams are currently dismantling the structure and removing the distinctive stones which are assessed by an architect for repair or replacement with Portland stone to maintain the Grade 1-listed church’s appearance. Work rebuilding the structure is due to begin in May.

Trustee Delva Patman said: “It’s an exciting project, painstaking work and a big responsibility for everyone involved.

“It’s a bit like building a jigsaw, taking it down and reassembling it but with new bits added in. There are associated works with the rebuilding such as regilding of the weather vane and the sundial will be repaired and regilded – there’s a lot going on.”

The western end of St Clement Danes is currently surrounded by an illustrated hoarding, telling



RESTORATION: Specialist teams at work dismantling damaged steeple ahead of rebuilding work due to start in May this year. Inset, the steeple before work began

the story of the church that was almost destroyed by fire in 1941 during the Blitz.

Delva added: “The next piece of work we want to do, which hopefully will follow on immediately from the steeple,

is the curtilage. Paving slabs are lifting because of tree roots underneath them.”

The church is now seeking to fundraise for work to preserve and renovate the St Clement Danes organ.

Protector team make NATO grade

Simon Mander

THE FIRST Nato graduates from the new Protector training centre got their badges of honour at Waddington.

Engineers from the RAF and Belgian Air Force went through system checks to assess the airworthiness of the UAV.

Protector International Lead Gp Capt Rich Long said: “Nato Flight Training Europe ensures the Alliance can train aircrews to meet the security challenges of today and of the future.

“These are the first patches that have been awarded to trainees, and we hope to be able to present many more in the future.”

Protector is taking to the skies under the supervision of 56 (Test and Evaluation) Sqn, supported by 31 and 54 Sqn, prior to RAF service.

It replaces Reaper and will be capable of flying in UK airspace. There are currently four in the UK, with a further three being used in the USA.



GOING PRO: Waddington Protector team after NATO badge presentation ceremony



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Kenya crew return

Staff Reporter

INSTRUCTORS WITH the RAF's Central Flying School have returned from a visit to Africa.

Fixed-wing experts flew the Grob-120A with instructors at the Kenyan Air Force Aviation Centre of Excellence, Laikipia Air Base, while the rotary-wing team flew the Mi-171E at Helicopter Command, Moi Air Base, Nairobi.

The visit focused on deepening aviation training cooperation between the two forces and enhancing pilot training programmes.

Central Flying School Commandant Gp Capt Dave Flynn was received by Kenyan Commander Maj Gen Fatuma Ahmed and presented certificates to four officers who had recently completed Instructor training in the UK.



UK backs drone deal

ADVANCED attack drones will be sent to Ukraine following a deal struck by the UK government and an Anglo-American defence company.

New contracts totalling nearly £30 million are backed by the International Fund for Ukraine and will deliver Altius 600m and 700m drones designed to monitor an area before striking targets that enter it.

Aidan & abetting

Typhoon techs lift rookie's F1 dream



FAST TRACK: Teenage karting star Aidán Young showcases his new racing gear at RAF Coningsby after landing sponsorship from the Typhoon engineering team
PHOTO: AS2 AMELIA WISE



Ed Palmer

ROOKIE RACE ace Aidán Young has landed a sponsorship deal with his local RAF station as he prepares to hit the track for the national karting championships.

The 14-year-old speed king will be proudly displaying the Air Force badge on his helmet alongside aircraft from World War II and the Typhoon Eurofighter which operates

from Coningsby, where dad WO Iain Young works as an engineer.

Aidán's hoping to follow in his dad's military footsteps and sign up when he finishes his education.

Iain said: "A lot of the kart racers are of the age where they're starting to think about their future careers, or they're of recruiting age.

"It's what makes this sport

an important place for RAF Engineering, because so many of the young people here already have an interest."

Aidán took up the sport at the age of 12 and now competes for Team Tom Day Racing. And while he battles through the motorsport ranks to become an F1 driver, he's also eyeing an RAF career.

The Forces-branded gear attracts a lot of interest from his

rivals on the track. Aidán said: "I just want to say thank you to RAF Engineering for supporting me.

"The other racers really like the gear. I'm getting asked about it all the time. What makes it stand out is that they're not expecting to see it at a kart track."

If Aidán realises his ambition to join up, he can continue karting. Several stations have their own tracks and the Service organises

the annual Armed Forces Karting Championship.

Coningsby chief engineer Wg Cdr Gemma Lonsdale added: "Motorsport is exactly the right place for us to look for the next generation of engineers.

"Seeing the RAF brand will open their eyes to a rewarding career. Good luck for the next season's racing Aidán, the new gear looks amazing."

News

See you 'phoon



ESCORT: B-52 pilot eyes UK jets on Gulf sortie



Simon Mander

TYPHOONS BASED in the Middle East have escorted US Air Force bombers on training sorties to the Gulf region.

And for the first time Iraqi Air Force F-16s flew alongside the B-52s as part of the international counter Daesh coalition, while the American aircraft dropped live munitions at ranges in several partner nations.

RAF Middle East Typhoon chief Wg Cdr Chris Pearson said: "The sorties maintain our experience flying with the USAF day and night. It demonstrates the RAF's ability to project air power in a coalition, at distance, when required."

The two USAF B-52s are currently based at RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire and flew across Europe before entering Middle East airspace during their missions.

The sorties involved two KC-135 tankers and a Voyager, all operating in coordination.

US Commander General 'Erik' Kurilla said: "Bomber Task Force missions demonstrate US power projection capability, commitment to regional security and ability to respond to any state or non-state actor seeking to broaden or escalate conflict in the region."

In Brief



Ton of love

THREE MILITARY nurses sprang a birthday surprise on an ex-RAF nurse.

Anne Burchell, who served for 12 years in Singapore, Germany and hospitals across the UK, was visited by a trio of medics to mark her 100th.

She said: "It took me completely by surprise. I enjoyed seeing the new uniform and how smart the ladies looked, as well as how confident they were."

Anne was visited at Court Lodge in Lymington by Cpls Laura Rutter, Pauline Ibarra and Elisa Iannidinardi (*with her above*). Later, she was joined for lunch by family who travelled from France, Scotland and London to celebrate with her.

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Band of the Royal Air Force College

7.30pm Friday 11 July 2025

Palace Theatre, Newark

Band of the Royal Air Force College

7.30pm Friday 19 September 2025

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Band of the Royal Air Force College

3pm Sunday 21 September 2025

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Terry O'Toole Theatre, Lincoln

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7pm Friday 17 October 2025



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In Brief

Champ passes

AIR FORCE boxing legend Dick McTaggart has died, aged 89. Hailing from a family of fight champs, he won Olympic gold in Australia in 1956 and went on to claim five RAF titles and four UKAF championships during his National Service with the Royal Air Force.



Brize logi has eyes on the prize

Alex Gill
Brize Norton

AN RAF officer has won a prestigious award for her dedication to the success of UK air operations. Brize-based Flt Lt Courtenay Smith scooped the Carmen's RAF Cup, founded

in 2001 to recognise the greatest contribution to logistics. The honour is for handling high-priority tasks whilst balancing the day-to-day running of passenger planning at the Oxfordshire airbase. She attended Plaisterers' Hall in London and was presented with the Cup by Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal.

Flt Lt Smith said: "I cannot believe I was even considered for an award, let alone win it. "The evening of the award ceremony itself was surreal. Having dinner on a top table, in London, with the Princess Royal is something I will certainly remember for a long time after I have retired from service."



MEMORIAL: 614 Sqn personnel at Llandow service to honour crash victims

Rugby crash remembered

Martin Wade

VICTIMS OF one of what was the world's worst air disaster travelled from all over Wales to remember the dead 75 years on.

A total of 80 rugby fans were killed when an Avro Tudor airliner returning from a Five-Nations game in Ireland crashed just short of the runway at RAF Llandow.

Many were on trip organised by clubs like Abercarn, Risca and Llanharan and players and officials were among the dead.

Towns and coal mines came to a standstill in the following week as thousands attended the funerals.

Inquests later found that the aircraft had been incorrectly loaded causing it to crash.

Air Officer Wales, Air Cdre Rob Woods said: "Personnel from Llandow and nearby St Athan took a leading part in the rescue and recovery operation.

"The bodies were taken to a temporary mortuary set up at Llandow where RAF Police guarded them."

One of the units stationed at Llandow was Wales' only RAF Reserve unit - 614 (County of Glamorgan) Sqn then commanded by DFC winner Sqn Ldr Bill Irving.

The current commanding officer Wg Cdr Lee Matthews said: "Sqn Ldr Irving served survived many dangerous missions and was awarded the DFC for his actions only to die coming home from a rugby match."

A flypast by three Tutor aircraft ended the commemoration attended by relatives, rugby club representatives and local dignitaries.

Reds to lead VE Day 80th



VICTORY DISPLAY: The RAF's aerobatic aces in action earlier this year, inset right and below, crowds gather in cities across the world to celebrate the end of war in Europe in 1945

Simon Mander

THE RED Arrows will lead a flypast of historic aircraft over London to launch the 80th anniversary of VE Day.

Four days of celebrations to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe start with the display and a Cenotaph dressed in Union flags.

Street parties will be held across the country with a further ceremony to mark VJ Day planned at the National Memorial Arboretum in August.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "As we mark 80 years since the end of the Second World War, our grateful nation looks forward to joining our brave Armed Forces and veterans to reflect, rejoice and remember.

Four days of events start in Whitehall with a military procession to Buckingham Palace followed by a flypast.



Nearly 30,000 ceramic poppies used in the 2014 centenary of WWI will return to the Tower of London to mark the anniversary and historic landmarks across the UK will be lit up.

The Parliament Choir will

host an Anniversary Concert in Westminster Hall followed by a ceremony at Westminster Abbey and a concert at Horseguards Parade to finish the commemorations.

The Imperial War Museum is

helping to launch Letters to Loved Ones to encourage the public to find WWII correspondence.

IWM Director-General Caro Howell said: "This devastating conflict will soon pass from living memory. Through 'Letters to Loved Ones', we want a new generation to learn about the Second World War and its aftermath."

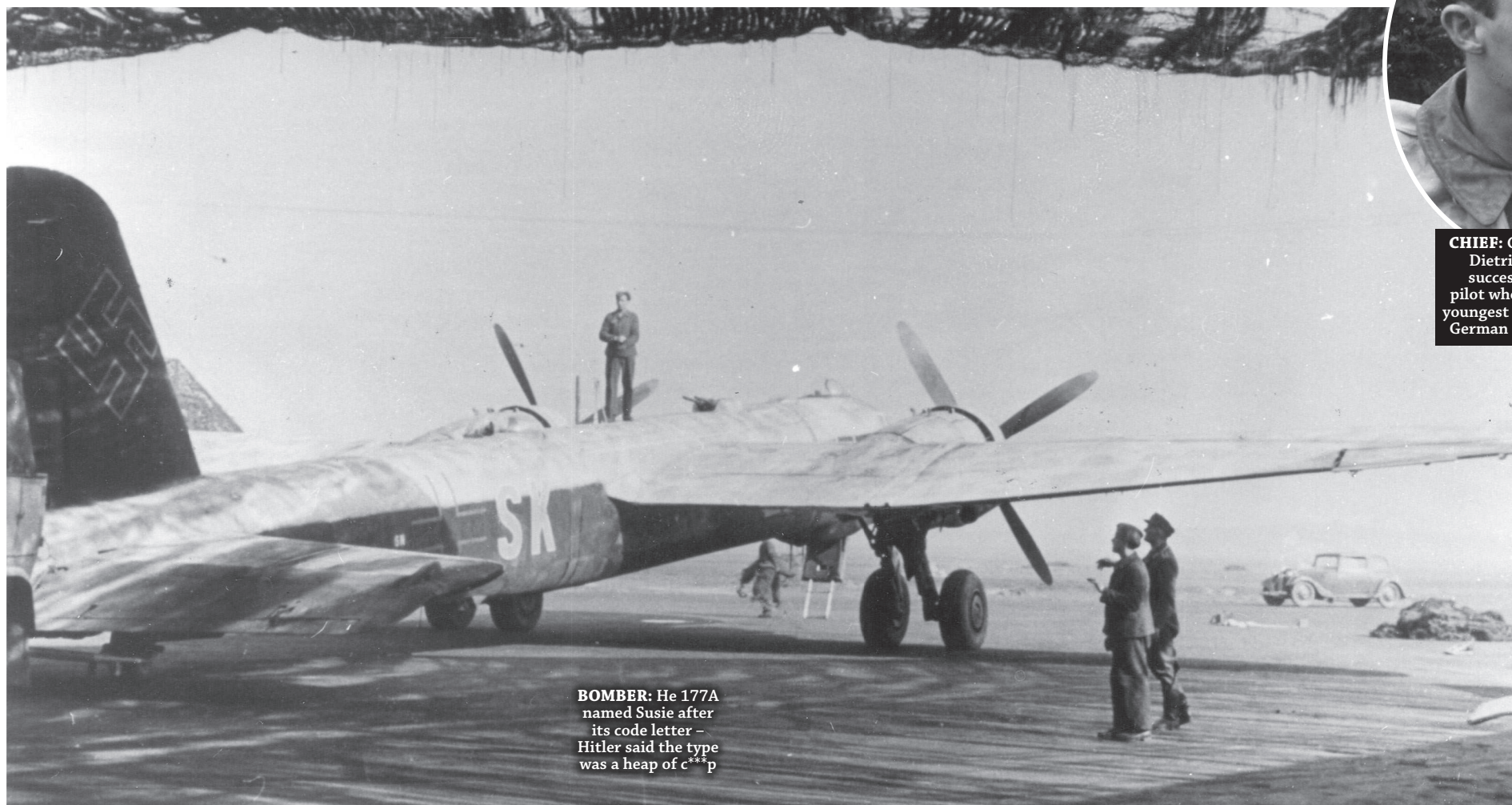
Funding will be made available through the National Lottery to host events.

Educational material will be made available for schools to help young people learn about the importance of the role played by their forebearers.

The Royal British Legion's Head of Remembrance Dr Tara Knights said: "We owe it to all those from the Second World War generation to thank them for their bravery and sacrifice in the defence of freedoms we still enjoy to this day."

Feature

Operation Steinbock, the Baby Blitz



BOMBER: He 177A named Susie after its code letter – Hitler said the type was a heap of c**p



CHIEF: General Dietrich Korten, successful pilot who was the youngest German air...

Hitler's last throw why D-Day was a

DOES MASS or area bombing ever work? In theory, by terrorising the civilians, it should shred morale and the willingness to fight, turning the population against the political masters that have led them to disaster.

In practice it achieves the absolute opposite, as the Blitz on London, the destruction of Dresden, the fire-bombing of Tokyo and perhaps the daily aerial bombardment of Ukraine by Russian missiles for the past three years seem to suggest.

Even the Japanese Emperor Hirohito got to keep his throne despite the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, although he did have to admit to being a mere mortal.

Operation Steinbock 1944 is the story of the Nazis' last sustained night bomber offensive against Britain which depleted the Luftwaffe and left it unable to oppose the D-Day landings.

Historian Chris Goss explains how what became known as the 'Baby Blitz' differed from the Battle of Britain and Blitz of 1940-41. And in doing so it answers another question – why the Messerschmidt pilots, many of them veterans of campaigns in Spain and Russia, didn't slaughter the D-Day troops as they fought their way up the Normandy beaches.

The reality is that, by then, most of them were dead. Which is why this account of a long-forgotten World War II campaign is so important.



Copies to be won

WE HAVE copies of *Operation Steinbock* to be won. To enter, answer this question:

Who led the German forces on Operation Steinbock?



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



DEFENCE: A British 3.7in AA gun, the equivalent of the German 88mm

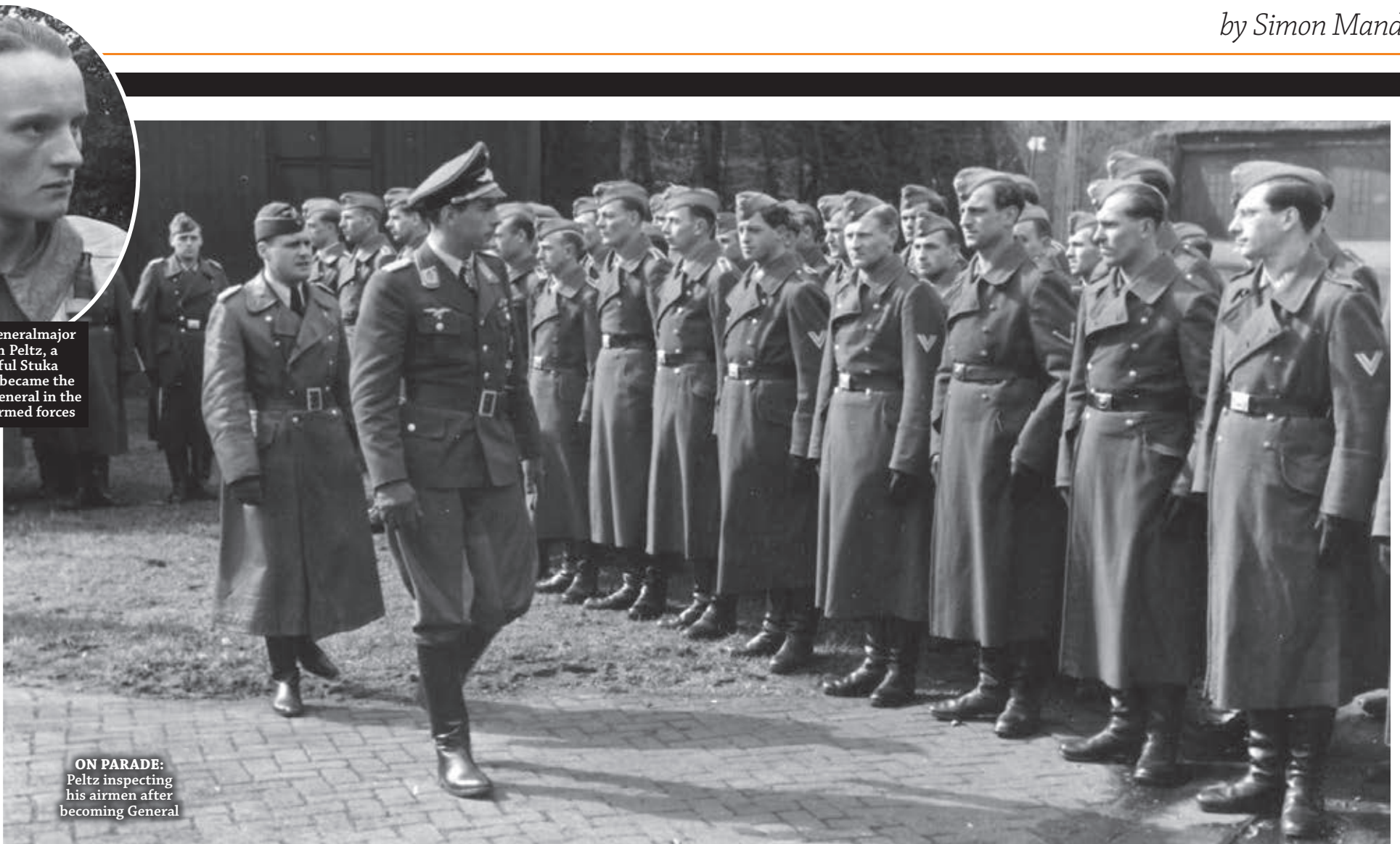
Adolf Hitler found it hard to pass up a chance of creating a military disaster and ordered bombers to be built despite being advised that fighters were what the Luftwaffe needed.

Like a bad worker blaming his tools, in a furious exchange with Chief of Staff Generaloberst Gunther Korten he said: "One gets the impression that once again

the He 177 has suffered 50 per cent breakdowns. They cannot even get as far as London.

"This heap of c**p is obviously the biggest load of rubbish that was ever manufactured. It is the flying Panther [the tank which suffered poor reliability] and the Panther is the crawling Heinkel!"

In truth, in 1944, the Luftwaffe's under-trained and hard-pressed



Generalmajor
Dietrich Peltz, a
famous Stuka
pilot, became the
first German general in the
armed forces

ON PARADE:
Peltz inspecting
his airmen after
becoming General

...of the dice...and success for Allies

bomber crews were out-thought and outfought by an RAF hardened by four years of war.

They combined the latest ground-controlled radar, powerful new night fighters like the Mosquito and advanced anti-aircraft defences, including radar-assisted guns and anti-aircraft rockets. And although most of the German aircraft were suitable for the task some, according to the author, were misused.

The Fw190 was a superb fighter but at night the pressures of flying it to London were described by some pilots as “flying into hell,” all to add just one bomb to an attack. And many of the men who flew them were decorated officers who had won the Ritterkreuz or Knight’s Cross and Eichenlaub, or Oak Leaves, in earlier campaigns including the Eastern Front.

And as for terrorising civilians, despite the 1,569 deaths during the campaign, the population, though jittery after years of apparent air superiority, didn’t panic as the

accounts of downed Luftwaffe airmen attest. Shot down in flames by a Mosquito and bailing out over Hampshire, Oblt Karl Von Manowarda said: “I landed softly in a freshly ploughed field, wearing only my socks as my flying boots had flown off.

“It was hard getting rid of my parachute as I had burns to my hands and face and a broken arm. Walking along a street I came to a small house and cried ‘Hello.’

“A man with a lamp spoke to me from the inside and asked me to go to the back of the house. He then left the house using the front door and ran into the village. Two Home Guardsmen then disarmed me and took me to the mayor.

“There I was shocked by my wounds and very politely I was directed to lie down on a divan. At once a young housewife, kneeling in front of me, began bandaging my burnt hands most gently.”

Packed with dramatic original illustrations, explanatory diagrams, 2D maps of the strategic

situation and 3D maps recreating key missions, this book tells the story of Operation Steinbock and its consequences.

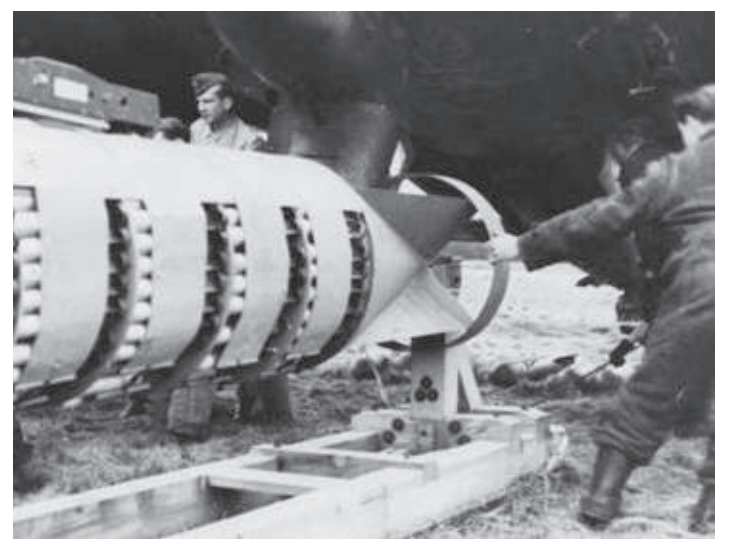
Part of publisher Osprey’s Air Campaign series, at just shy of 100 pages the slim volume is ideal for flipping through and reading in one sitting.

If it has a minor failing it is that not being familiar with the Luftwaffe rank system, structure or the importance and stature of various Nazi gongs, the general reader might find parts of the narrative baffling.

The Germans’ last air campaign over England ended in late May 1944, with the Luftwaffe having lost hundreds of much-needed aircraft and crews.

Just days later, the Allies stormed ashore across the beaches of Normandy, and the Luftwaffe could do little to stop them.

In the end, the attacks on major cities ordered by Hitler



DEADLY: A Varrelbusch container could carry 620 10kg incendiary bombs

and Goring failed because, as Steinbock supremo General Dietrich Peltz admitted: “The attacks on London and other British cities were, in my opinion, like a few drops of water on a hot stone – a bit of

a commotion but after a very short time the whole thing was forgotten.”

● **Operation Steinbock 1944** by Chris Goss and illustrated by Adam Toby is published by Osprey priced, £16.99.



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Letters

Our database of The Few is for the many

WE ARE learning more and more about The Few. In *RAF News* November 1, 2024, Malcolm Triggs explained the development of the Database of the Few and its origins in Kenneth G Wynn's iconic book, *Men of the Battle of Britain*.

We hope the database is becoming a useful tool for historians. We are uncovering and recording more and more background information on the almost 3,000 Allied aircrew who earned the Battle of Britain Clasp.

13 Sqn is 110

REGARDING YOUR article on p5 of *RAF News* No 1601 (February 7), it was actually 13 Sqn's 110th anniversary on January 10, not its 100th as the story stated.

Andrew Groves
13 Sqn (Ret'd)



FLASHBACK: *RAF News* story last November

Nationalities is one of the trickiest subjects to deal with. Various factors work against making a definitive list by countries. Recently we have changed the nationality recorded for Flt Lt J K Haviland (Plt Off Haviland, Hurricanes, No 151 Sqn in 1940) from American to British, based on a letter he wrote on May 5, 1994, now in our archives, which states: "I have gained some fame because I was born in the USA, and I am known as 'the only surviving American', although I was a British citizen at the time [of the Battle of Britain]."



SHOT DOWN: Sgt HE Black with Gwen

Ken Haviland lived into his 80s but often we are uncovering graphic and distressing detail of the heroic deaths of men in their teens and 20s.

Sgt HE 'Bert' Black was a

26-year-old Hurricane pilot with No 46 Sqn. We benefited from the efforts of his former school, Dixie Grammar School, Market Bosworth, to commemorate him, and through the school we made contact with Michael Kendrick, who knew Bert's widow Gwen, who died in 2004.

Gwen told Michael about her wedding day in 1940: "There was a pitter-patter [of gravel] on my bedroom window. I was a bit concerned but on peering out I saw Bert standing there with a beam on his face. He told me to get dressed quickly because he had arranged to pick up a special marriage licence from Leicester: we were married at St Denys's church [Ibstock] that very afternoon."

On October 29, 1940, Sgt Black was shot down in combat with Bf 109s. He was badly wounded and burned. Both his legs were amputated and eventually he died in hospital at Ashford, Kent,



BRITISH: Flt Lt JK Haviland was originally listed as American

on November 9. Gwen was at his bedside throughout.

Our ambition is to have comprehensive mini-biographies of every one of The Few. Please help if you can.

Geoff Simpson, Consulting Editor, Database of the Few
geoffsimpsonemail@gmail.com
battleofbritainmemorial.org

Books

Revisiting the *Courage* of Falklands warriors

ABOVE ALL, *Courage* was first published in 1985 and contained 30 groundbreaking interviews with participants of the Falklands War. It was then very raw and recent.

Max Arthur, an RAF National Serviceman and a man of many diverse trades including acting, had at his own behest and with MOD permission, interviewed more than 200 Falklands veterans over a two-year period. The book has now been reissued in paperback, as *Lost Voices of the Falklands War* (August Books, £12.99, augustbooks.co)

The interviews retain their resonance four decades on. Arthur became a master of this genre, chronicling numerous wars and major operations through oral history. He gained the trust of his interviewees. His editing was light-touch and sensitive. A recipient of an OBE in 2013 for services to military history, he died in 2019.

Arthur allowed the participants to tell their stories. This can sometimes make for unsettling reading. However, by leaving the original text unaltered, authenticity and

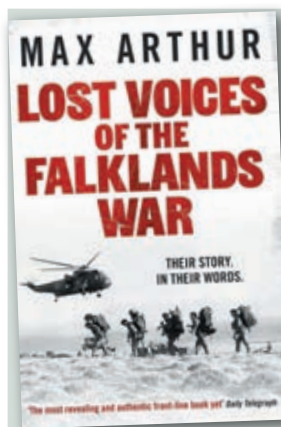


FLT LT MORGAN: Navy exchange tour

proximity are preserved.

Interviewees were describing events from their very recent past, with less scope for confusion and fading memories. South Atlantic experiences were still imprinted in their minds. Arthur insisted the spoken word was always stronger than the written word.

A vast range of emotions and behaviours were expressed as many encountered war for the first time. There is also an abiding



Copies up for grabs

WE HAVE copies of *Lost Voices of the Falklands War* to win. For your chance to own one, tell us:

Which aircraft did Flt Lt David Morgan fly in the Falklands War?

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



sense that they were fighting for each other.

The majority of interviews conducted and selected were with soldiers and sailors. Only two RAF interviews made the final cut, those with Flt Lts Alan Swan and David Morgan. The former was from the RAF's Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit. The latter was an RAF pilot who had commenced an exchange tour with the Navy, and flew Sea Harriers from the aircraft carrier *Hermes*, the Task Force flagship.

From Swan there is the most vivid portrayal of dicing

with death with various lethal unexploded bombs, frequently British-made, in the most inhospitable environments. Incredibly, Swan and his colleagues remained unscathed, at least physically.

Morgan's account opens up on the emotions of combat. There was the shock of his sudden realisation over Port Stanley that people were trying to kill him. He recounted his determination to get the Argentinian pilots for their devastating attack on the Royal Fleet Auxiliary *Sir Galahad* at Bluff Cove.



RETURN: Morgan in 2007 Falklands visit

These remain an incredibly atmospheric and informative collection of interviews. They transport the reader back into the conflict zone of 1982, with its unique mix of horror and humour. The jokes and the absurdities in the face of death were recounted with relish. Interviewees recalled that the best of life came to the fore.

The book has a glossary and a brief chronology. However, some maps, photographs and an index would be beneficial.

Arthur considered himself a catalyst. The accounts he assembled so skilfully in this volume still speak for themselves over 40 years later.

Review by Alastair Noble



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Air power expert & Defence chief Sir John Walker

AIR MARSHAL Sir John Walker, who has died aged 88, was a Cold War fighter pilot and one of the RAF's foremost thinkers on the employment of offensive air power. He filled senior positions in the intelligence community and rose to become the Chief of Defence Intelligence (CDI).

Walker entered the RAF College Cranwell in 1953 and graduated as a pilot in July 1956.

He first flew Hunter fighters in the UK and then in Germany with 4 Squadron, where he became the squadron's weapons instructor before transferring to 2 Squadron, where he flew the Swift in the fighter reconnaissance role. This was followed by a tour as a trials pilot at the Air Fighting Development Squadron of the Central Fighter Establishment, culminating in the award of a Queen's Commendation for Service in the Air.

After attending Staff College, he left for the USA where he served on an exchange appointment at HQ 12th Air Force based in Texas and where he was responsible for fighter training, at a time when USAF squadrons were heavily involved in the Vietnam War. His position also gave him the opportunity to fly various marks of the USAF's latest fighter, the Phantom.

Walker's long association with fighter and offensive support aircraft continued on his return from the USA, first co-ordinating training and exercises for Phantom and Harrier aircraft before being responsible for the development of tactics and trials of offensive aircraft at the RAF's Central Trials and Tactics Organisation (CTTO).

Jaguar

In 1973, the Anglo-French Jaguar ground attack and reconnaissance aircraft was entering service and Walker was appointed to lead the RAF's Jaguar conversion team. A year later he assumed command of the Jaguar operational conversion unit to train pilots on the aircraft before they joined a squadron. For his work introducing the Jaguar into service, he was awarded the AFC.

In February 1976 he assumed command of RAF Bruggen in West Germany, the RAF's largest operational base overseas at the time, and where he had command of four Jaguar squadrons used in the nuclear strike and attack role. His mantra was "we train in peace for war," which he displayed at the main gate to the base. Under his drive and commitment, Bruggen achieved the highest gradings in the demanding Nato tactical evaluation exercises. He was appointed CBE.

Walker's specialisation in offensive operations continued with appointments at HQ RAF Germany and a return to CTTO

in command. December 1982 saw him take up an appointment in MOD as Director of Forward Plans in the RAF's policy division, where he was responsible for reviewing the Service's requirements 30 years ahead.

In May 1985 he returned to the operational scene when he was appointed the senior air staff officer at HQ RAF Strike Command, where he also held the dual appointment as Deputy Chief of Staff Operations and Intelligence of UKAIR, a Nato role.

In April 1987 he headed for the key Nato appointment Deputy Chief of Staff (Operations and Intelligence) at the HQ of the Allied Air Forces Central Europe (AAFCE), based at Ramstein in Germany. In a multi-national

headquarters, he was responsible for the tasking and exercising of five national air forces, developing tactics and tasking for war plans. The strong contacts he made with Nato colleagues, particularly the USAF, were to prove invaluable when he moved to MOD to take up his intelligence duties.

When Walker assumed the position of Deputy Chief of Defence Intelligence in MOD in 1989, the world order was witnessing dramatic changes brought about by the fall of the Berlin Wall and an end to the Cold War that had lasted 40 years. This had significant ramifications for the organisation of defence intelligence and Walker's recent experience as a deputy chief of staff (operations and intelligence) in a Nato headquarters gave his fertile

and energetic mind ample scope to review what changes might be necessary to meet future needs.

Within a year of his arrival, war broke out in Iraq, where the intelligence requirements were very different to those that had been established to meet Nato plans. A major fallout of the war was to review the organisation of defence intelligence and Walker set about reorganising his department to cater for the new situation and to increase the intelligence in support of overseas operations outside Nato.

Some of the long-standing single Service roles such as signals intelligence, naval collection and strategic air reconnaissance were brought under central control, at times a delicate and sensitive situation

SIR JOHN:
Lateral
thinker



requiring firm directions, which Walker was well qualified to implement. The management of the collection and dissemination of intelligence, not least to the operational commanders in the field, had to be improved, and in some cases, new methods created. With his lateral thinking and no-nonsense approach, he set about making and co-ordinating the necessary changes, often in conjunction with other intelligence agencies.

In 1991 he was appointed Chief of Defence Intelligence and Deputy Chairman of the Government's Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). In his new role he oversaw the measures he had put in place earlier. The fallout from the First Gulf War continued to occupy much of his time. The emergence of conflict in the Balkans, particularly in Bosnia, the no-fly zones in Iraq and the possibility of Saddam Hussein possessing weapons of mass destruction emphasised the wider defence requirements and commitments emerging post-Cold War. Walker also created specialist cells to develop contingency plans against potential adversaries that were emerging. His foresight proved justified as some of the findings and recommendations of those studies were needed in later years.

Towards the end of his time as CDI, he was tasked to review the future shape and size of the RAF. This followed the government's 1993 Public Expenditure Survey, which required financial savings to be found in all departments, including the MOD. Some painful cuts had to be made, resulting in the closure of some airfields, the cancellation of projects and a significant reduction in manpower.

Sir John Walker was a forceful, self-confident personality with outstanding energy and drive who made a major contribution to the operational efficiency of the RAF. He was a deep thinker and prolific writer and lecturer on air power issues, in particular offensive air operations. He wrote for many learned journals and authored three volumes of Brassey's *Air Power, Aircraft, Weapons Systems and Technology* series.

What's driving pension enquiries?



AT THE Forces Pension Society, we have received a record number of pension enquiries since the start of the New Year.

The key driver of this upsurge among our membership (and no doubt in the wider military community) is concern about the resolution of issues arising from the 2015 McCloud Remedy.

To remind you, those impacted by the case are Armed Forces personnel who were in service both on or before 31 March 2012 and on or after 1 April 2015 with any break in service of less than 5 years.

They will have the option to elect whether they wish to receive legacy scheme benefits or equivalent AFPS 15 benefits for the remedy period (1 April 2015 – 31 March 2022). On 1 April 2022 all serving personnel became members of AFPS15, and all legacy schemes closed on 31 March 2022.

It was originally intended that all personnel eligible for the 2015 Remedy would receive a Remediable Service Statement (RSS) from Veterans UK by 1 April 2025.

However, the MOD and Veterans UK have had to adjust their timeline for issuing RSS: It is anticipated that members who do not receive an RSS by 1 April 2025 will receive theirs by 30 September 2025.

Veterans UK is now issuing "information" RSS' to serving members who are in scope but who are not yet due to leave the Armed Forces. They state that no action is required currently.

Record number since start of the New Year



Maj Gen Neil Marshall, CEO of the Forces Pension Society (pictured) said: "Many are understandably concerned about their position and are keen to make the best choices for themselves and their families."

"When they do receive their RSS requiring them to make an election, our Members know that our expert Forces Pensions Consultants stand ready to assist them. For those who are not Members of the Society, it's not too late to join us so they can be

prepared when the time comes. "Meanwhile, our website can be accessed for our latest 2015 Remedy situation report here:" <https://forcespensionsociety.org/2025/02/mcloud-sitrep/>

*The Forces Pension Society is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that exists to help its Members make the best pension choices. Our 66k+ membership also benefits from our representation of their interests on the formal bodies for Armed Forces and Public Sector Pensions and from our wide range of membership benefits. Visit our website at: www.forcespension society.org



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Tim Morris

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Motoring



ROAD TRIPS are more than journeys, they're life experiences. Some will stay with you forever, so what you're driving matters.

Take my career, as a broadcaster I've travelled the globe, presenting timed TV travel challenges for more than 30 years. The formats have often been similar, but each trip was unique. The amazing locations were, undoubtedly, massively important, but the machinery I was driving really made the challenges work.

I loved filming every one and these experiences taught me something very important... when you get to test something in the very environment it was designed for, the engineer's true genius, or insanity, often becomes apparent. Let's do more of that... welcome to our 'natural environment'.

Calais

Picture a warm, sunny day in Calais. The waves lap at the shore, the seagulls cry in the blue sky and you drive off the ferry in the Frenchest of French cars, the Citroën C5 X. You've taken a relaxed 90-minute trip across the English Channel, in the opulent Club Class Lounge of your Irish Ferries vessel, and are now stuffed on all the complimentary snacks.

As you leave the ferry terminal you're feeling relaxed and excited, happy that your Club Class upgrade cost you just £18 and you still have three quarters of a tank of fuel, thanks to your frugal voiture. Your road trip has been surprisingly inexpensive so far.

Plodding around the bustling roads of Calais, your C5 X runs silently on electric power and you take a quick tour, before breaking for the open road. Now you switch to petrol power and put your boot down. Effortlessly, the car accelerates to cruising speed and you glide along the straight, undulating, wide roads. You're flanked, either side, by vivid poppies, growing amid the golden crops. The sea of red and blue flowers create an almost other-worldly landscape that blurs into a meld of colour as you accelerate through it.

Your Citroën is now in its element, this is what it was designed for. You suddenly appreciate the soft suspension and how it soaks up the uneven road surface. Citroën's 'progressive hydraulic' dampers remain unique to the brand and nothing handles quite like this here, not even other Stellantis models. The efficient brakes and well-weighted steering help to make tackling the tight bends at the end of the epic straights possible. Pretty important when you've become too comfortable wafting along at hyper-speed. The comfort levels isolate you from reality on these open straights.

In this environment, all the oddities of your Citroën suddenly make sense. You could, quite easily, quaff a nice glass of



Tour de force

The soft suspension soaks up the uneven road surface

Merlot as you glide through the stunning countryside, without fear of spilling a drop on your nicely-trimmed leather seats.

The ostentatious cabin, with its angular patterns, complements the passing scenery. Design detail that had been wasted on the suburban streets of England becomes clearly visible in the golden afternoon sun, appearing like an optical illusion.

After less than an hour on the road, we arrive on the cobbled streets of Saint Omer. Here we stop for lunch and recharge the batteries of our PHEV C5 X. It's not essential, but it does aid fuel-efficiency on the long-haul. It also makes bimbbling around the ancient streets far more civilised. We head up to Arras, making the best of the fast roads and stop for another comfort break/leg stretch. Then we're back on the road and bound for Paris.

Motorways

We hit the motorways, comforted by the fact that our C5 X is running on British plates and (hopefully) still immune to the millions of stealth speed cameras dotted along the route. The car proves itself to be perfectly tuned for high-speed touring, cutting an imposing figure as it powers its way through the congested traffic. Finally, we're into the melee of the capital and back on electric power, zipping from lane to lane. For such a large car, it is surprisingly agile.

We then arrive at our boutique hotel and squeeze the C5 X into a parking space,

Citroën CX 5

Pros

- Huge and stately
- Plush ride
- Luxury interior
- Competitively priced

Cons

- Handling perfectly suited to French roads only
- PHEV sits in a higher tax band than some rivals
- Boot could be larger

Verdict

The Citroën C5 X will cost more to run as a company car than some estates, but it offers impressive comfort, an upmarket interior and a slightly raised, SUV-like driving position. It's a very good car in the UK and absolutely perfect if you're thinking about touring Europe.

which is impressive, as the average space in Paris has been designed to accommodate something the size of a Renault Twizzy! Nevertheless, the C5 X is in and blending beautifully with the Parisian architecture. This car looks stately, almost presidential, gleaming in its metallic silver paintwork.

You can see why ministerial cars here have been proudly Citroën for so many years.

It's a handsome wagon, that doesn't look like anything else on the road. Its face is instantly recognisable as a modern Citroën, while its profile is sleek and powerful, thanks to nicely shaped arches and a floating roof. It looks sleek and that's no illusion. The drag coefficient is an impressive 0.29. The rear end gets a futuristic array of LED lights, with no fewer than two spoilers.

After a quick tour of the sights, a show at the legendary Moulin Rouge and a good night's sleep, we fire up the C5 X again. Now we're on the flip side, the return run. This time, we're flat out on the main routes, putting our fully-loaded £43,290, 178 bhp, 1.6-litre, PHEV through its paces.

Luxurious

France's flagship automobile, with its big, soft, seats that incorporate a 15mm layer of memory foam, continues to glide effortlessly along the motorway. The miles tick down and, before you know it, you're rolling onto your final ferry. That's it, over 10 hours on the move, more than 500 miles and a lot of seat time with the C5 X.

So what did we learn from our 'natural environment' test? Well, the C5 X is the big beast of the Citroën world. It reminds me of the old XM, in many ways. It's huge, it's luxurious and it is, undoubtedly, the king of French cars.

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FENCING

Sisters in arms have garde up



SABRE ACTION: Women at RAF Champs

Daniel Abrahams

RAF FENCING Union unveiled its groundbreaking 'En Garde Sister' project at Cosford to inspire a new generation of female athletes to the sport.

Timed to coincide with International Women's Day, the launch kick-starts a series of events throughout the year and is one of the first such female-focused events of its kind in the Service.

Women's fencing captain Sgt Georgia Welch said: "I am delighted to host a female-focused event. This is not just about introducing more women to fencing and showcasing our skills and passion for fencing, but also about celebrating the strength, resilience, and achievements of women in all fields. We hope to inspire women everywhere to pursue their dreams and break barriers, both on and off the piste."

Director of combats Cpl Daniel McKay said:

RAF Fencing focuses on attracting more women to the sport

"This is the first time we're running a women's focused event. We want to offer a safe and welcoming environment for women to come along, try a new sport and hopefully find something they have a passion for."

"We have invited along high-level members from within British Fencing to encourage more people to try the sport, coinciding with International Women's Day."

More information can be found at RAF Fencing on Facebook, by contacting air-raffencingunion@mod.gov.uk or @raffencing on Instagram.

BOXING

Cpl wants revenge against U.S

CPL BRAD Axe will be looking for revenge as he returns to the ring in a rematch for Team UK against an American opponent.

The aviator will again be part of the prestigious Transatlantic Clash II: UK v USA card, this time at Chelsea FC's Stamford Bridge ground, on April 4.

Axe (pictured) lost narrowly in last year's event, only the aviator's second professional fight.

The Cpl, whose opponent

is yet to be announced, said: "What a privilege to be asked back on the UK v USA show. I'm ready for revenge and cannot wait to put on a show."

The night, dubbed Battle at the Bridge, will feature 11 bouts between the teams captained by Spencer Oliver for the UK and Roy Jones Jr for the US.

Contact Axe on Instagram @brad_axe for tickets, priced from £60.



CYCLING



SEASON HIGHLIGHT: Men battle it out in previous RAF Championships

On the long road to Inter-Services glory

SERVICE CYCLING has set out its stall for the 2025 season, naming four teams to compete at all levels with the aim of bringing home Inter-Service crowns.

The association announced riders for both its men's and women's development and road teams, with it also taking part in its first Esports event this month.

Spokesperson FS Sarah Toms (pictured right), who recorded RAF Championships success in MTB XC, Gravel and Cyclocross in 2024, said: "The overall aim of 2025, as always, is to win the Inter-Service events in each discipline, whether or not this is possible is always a lottery, especially with team members being short-notice deployed, injured or having personal/

work commitments etc, as well as the 'on the day' team tactics, individuals' fatigue, and strengths and weaknesses on specific courses. This said, we always give the best we have."

The teams feature 16 female riders - nine in the road and seven in the development categories; while there are nine men in the road team and eight in development.

Toms added: "It is very important to establish new riders and both develop those and our existing members to better themselves and reach their goals and potential, highlighting the sport and increasing our pool of riders to compete."

Follow RAF cycling on Instagram @rafcycling.



Teams for 2025 season

Women's Road

- Sqn Ldr Vicky Webb
- Sqn Ldr Tina Hartnell
- Flt Lt Harriet Haywood
- Flt Lt Georgina Maguire
- Flt Lt Emily Crawford
- Sgt Sue Pugh
- Cpl Sarah Toms
- Cpl Kat Robinson
- AS1(T) Laura Sheppard

Men's Road

- Cpl Euan Campbell
- Sgt Rich Summerbell
- AS2 Jack Ramsbottom
- AS1 James Coates
- Cpl James Bunting
- Flt Lt Ed Calow
- Sgt Craig Summerbell
- Cpl Danny Hedley
- AS1 Benjamin Tappenden

Women's Development

- Wg Cdr Emma Duckett
- Flt Lt Emily Wymer
- Flt Lt Sarah Burke
- Flt Lt Amelia Grice
- Plt Off Rebecca Skinner
- Sgt Jen Burns
- Cpl Jasmine Jones

Men's Development

- AS2 Olly Hunt
- Cpl Ben Southgate
- Cpl Josh Bond
- Cpl Peter Lown
- Flt Lt Ronan O'Leary
- AS1 Joe Colley
- Cpl Robert Grantham
- AS1 Keiran Kirk

Would you like to see your sport featured in RAF News? Send a short report (max 300 words) and a couple of photos (attached hi-res jpegs) to: Sports@rafnews.co.uk



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GOLDEN BOY: Connor (right) brought out the big guns at Cosford. Right, bench press action, and athletes get in another lift



Cover 50 miles to help RAFA

THE RAF Association's 'virtual' fitness challenge is back for 2025. Personnel are encouraged to run, walk, row, ride, cycle or even skateboard 50 miles in a week to raise money for the Service charity.

Dubbed RAFAV50, the campaign has collected £120,000 for Air Force good causes since its conception in 2020, and this year runs from April 28 to May 4.

Organising committee member Wg Cdr Nicola Duncan said: "In 2024 we had 729 take part – running, cycling, walking, horse riding, skateboarding – we are hoping that in 2025 that will grow to circa 850.

"The money we raised in 2024 was £28,505 and it continues to grow year on year."

The challenge is 'virtual' so personnel can take part from anywhere in the world. Previous entrants have been involved from across the UK, the USA, Canada, Romania, the Falklands, Iraq, Qatar, UAE, Oman and Cyprus.

Entrants can take part as individuals or in teams, with RAFA providing fundraising tips and advice, opportunities to get involved and a RAFA V50 T-shirt.

● Visit: rafa.org.uk/v50-2025 to register. See the RAFA V50 Facebook page – facebook.com/RAFAVirtual50 – for updates.

Pressing engagement at Cosford for Connor

POWERLIFTING

Daniel Abrahams

ASI CONNOR Poole stormed to glory at the recent Bench Press Championships to kick off the RAF Powerlifting Association's year.

He recorded 86.37 points to beat Cpl Ryan Preston (80 pts) into second and ASI Oliver Croft (72.92 pts) into third at the two-day event at RAF Cosford.

Association spokesperson Flt Lt Fei Du

said: "The RAF Powerlifting Association holds multiple training camps and competitions throughout the year geared towards various skill experiences found within the sport.

"The first event of the RAF Powerlifting Calendar took place at RAF Cosford and saw athletes come from all over the UK to compete, marking the beginning of the 2025 season.

"Bench press is one of the three main lifts in powerlifting, alongside Squat and Deadlift.

It's a test of upper-body strength and displays a combination of technique, power and stability. Unlike the standard gym bench press, a powerlifter's bench press must have a controlled descent, a complete stop at the chest, followed by a lift with full lockout of the arms at the top after the referee's command to 'press'.

"These rules ensure fairness in competitions and emphasise strength and control over momentum."

FOOTBALL

Women shooting for 5 titles in a row

SERVICE WOMEN'S senior footballers are heading to Gibraltar for their last pre-Inter-Service training camp before the team set their sights on an historic fifth championship win.

The team, led by former playing star now interim head coach FS Michelle Perks, have secured four wins in their warm-up campaign, the latest being a 2-0 victory over Sutton Coldfield last month.

They will spend a week on the Rock training and play a final game, before opening their IS account against the Royal Navy.

FS Perks, who will sign off her time with the RAF and Service football after the closing IS clash, said: "We have not lost the IS since 2019. Bar about four players, everyone else has won it, and nobody has tasted defeat. That brings a certain edge, but I am conscious of making sure we don't get overconfident.

"As it's two games,

anything can happen. Lose your first game and you've lost the tournament, so we are concentrating, and everyone is buying in to what we are doing."

The team, led on the pitch by Service stalwart Sgt Cat Beaver, have scored 18 goals, conceding 11, in their six warm-up matches, losing only two, one against FS Dan McNamara's Wolverhampton Wanderers women's team, 4-1.

The 2025 IS campaign started in September last year with a 3-0 win over Walsall, before defeating Shifnal 6-3.

They also recorded two wins over Sutton Coldfield, the first being a 5-2 win in December.

Perks added: "The players take responsibility for themselves. I have made a few tweaks but in the main the girls have just rolled on from last year.

"This is my final year in the Service – my last playing season was during Covid and I only



WINNERS: Cpl Philippa Wilson in action against the Navy last year, and Sgt Beaver with 2024 IS trophy, inset left

played the Army, so I have unfinished business.

"The players are all fully focused on the two games. It shows the level of professionalism the team has reached that what is happening with me is not on their radar, they are laser-focused.

"It's been great being around the team, we are all great friends, and I am taking time to drink it all in.

"I have three matches really – Gibraltar, Navy and Army – so that's the focus for me, that and winning the IS for a fifth time."

Sport

RUGBY

Northolt training camp the perfect preparation for rugby Inter-Services

Staff Reporter

THE SENIOR women's rugby union stars took full advantage of a week's training camp at RAF Northolt, sharpening skills ahead of the highly-anticipated Inter-Services championship.

The team's backroom staff showed a lightness of foot to alter the camp – originally scheduled to include a fixture against the British Prison Service – to one with a training session with Championship South-topping side Old Albanians instead.

Sgt Natalie Knott said: "This experience was invaluable in our preparation.

"We have taken lots of lessons from this training camp, and we will make some changes going into our final warm-up game

against the British Fire Service at the end of the month."

The squad was bolstered by the inclusion of AR Daisy Aspinal, the England U20s winger who recently joined the RAF Reserves. Serving with 605 Sqn at RAF Cosford alongside her studies at Hartpury University, Aspinal's presence added an extra dimension to the RAF's attacking play, bringing top-level experience and speed to the backline.

The session provided the RAF women with a chance to test their set-piece execution and phase play against high-level opposition, an opportunity that Forwards Coach Knott believes will pay dividends as they build towards the Inter-Services campaign.



NORTHOLT: Honing skills

BMX

Backers put RAF BMX riders in frame for success

RAF BMX were in the frame to kick-start their season at Manchester International Cycling Centre.

As part of the team's training sessions at the British cycling HQ, they also held team kit and bike frame presentations.

New season and team

sponsor DC Cycles have loaned some ICE Element F-22 frames to AR Bailey Heath and Off Cdt Pete Watson.

Team manager Sgt Matt Haywood said: "I took delivery of the frames and kit and we used the training event to present them to our new riders."

The team were also sporting new race gear including race plates from long-time sponsor Potter Racing Products, USA.

Haywood added: "Watch out for the team this season on the British Cycling National Series."

● Follow RAF BMX on Instagram @RAFCABMX



RARING TO GO: RAF BMX stars



COOL AS ICE: Riders with F-22 Frames loaned by sponsor DC Cycles

BOXING



FIGHT NIGHT: (Clockwise from above) Light-heavyweight Sgt Cam Lewis (left) overcomes Tom Ledwidge from Bulkington ABC; Cpl Mark Pilgrim is declared the winner in his bout; and Cpl Jen Sabine lands a big blow

Knockout launch for Odi100 celebrations

Flying centenary bouts

Daniel Abrahams

RAF ODIHAM fighters kicked off celebrations of 100 years of military flying from the Hampshire village with a spectacular nine-bout event against Service and civilian opposition.

The card saw seven of the station's fighters step up against boxers from RAF Marham, Bulkington ABC, Guildford City Boxing Club, Windrush Valley ABC, Yeovil ABC and 26 Engineer Regiment.

The aviators wore 'Odi100' T-shirts before each bout to mark the occasion.

There were two wins for the station: Cpl Mark Pilgrim in the 74kg middleweight category beating Spr Woolger from 26 Engr Regt, and Sgt Cam Lewis at 80kg light heavyweight defeating Tom Ledwidge from Bulkington ABC.

All the fighters left everything in the ring, demonstrating heart, skill and determination before a crowd of 700 personnel and RAF Boxing Association (RAFBA) representatives.

The evening was seen online

by more than 2,000 viewers via the station's YouTube platform and the club's Instagram livestream.

AS1 Rob Hewak from RAF Akrotiri provided a third RAF victory, beating middleweight Spr Richards from 26 Engr Regt.

OIC boxing on the station Flt Lt Alicia Morgan said: "The Odiham boxers began preparation for the night with a two-week training camp. They pushed their limits with intense hill sprints, mobility drills and hard sparring sessions, ensuring they were in peak condition for fight night. Conditioning sessions were relentless, building the endurance and resilience needed to step through the ropes.

"While the night may not have delivered the results the team hoped for, it was an undeniable success in bringing the RAF boxing community together. The support from the station, RAFBA and the wider audience showcased the strength and unity of the sport within the Forces. The event was a true testament to the fighting spirit of RAF Odiham – win or lose, we continue to stand tall."

Final bell rings for Sqn Ldr Andy Parker

THE ODI100 event rang the final bell on the 23-year Service boxing career of Sqn Ldr Andy Parker.

The association stalwart coached and worked the corner for his station team one last time, following a long stint which has seen the association reach unprecedented new heights.

A leading light in the Service sport, Parker achieved numerous landmarks: notably creating a Centre of Excellence for Boxing at Odiham, holding the RAFBA Executive Secretary role, managing UKAF boxing and winning titles including the prestigious Lord Wakefield Novice Boxing Championships at 64kg in 2005.

"It's safe to say RAF Boxing would not be where it is today without his massive contribution," said RAF boxing media officer Sgt Ben Baily.

The gloves man took up the sport for the first time with the RAF in 2002



YOUNG STAR: Andy Parker the boxer

while stationed at St Mawgan, three years later recording his Wakefield's win, with the station also taking the Senior Team Trophy that year.

While at Coningsby, Parker took his first step into coaching and, having hung up his gloves, took up the manager role of the station's

STALWART: Sqn Ldr was coach and team manager

team, transforming it from a relatively dormant club to one that produced top-level boxers within the Service. He also organised an overseas tour – the first in 15 years for the association.

During this time he also coordinated two festivals of female boxing and led the recruiting campaign and development pathway for Elite Boxers. These moves saw the Service hold its own with the full-time teams of the Army and Navy.

Still at Odiham, Parker supported the management and development pathways of two National Champions and GB silver medallists and saw Cpl Arran Devine through to Elite Athlete Status.

Having been selected as the UK Armed Forces Team Manager, he then coordinated the first UKAF event at the Haringey Box Cup in 2022.

His final major achievement was to lead the RAF Odiham team to the Major Unit Trophy at the Lord Wakefield's in 2023.

5 RAF Sport

pages of



BOBSLEIGH:
Silver linings

Daniel Abrahams

TWO DAYS of near domination saw the RAF's ice sports stars return home with all but one team gold from the recent Inter-Services championships in Lillehammer.

The famous ice track in Norway, which hosted the 1994 Winter Olympics, saw the skeleton team smash all-comers to win both men's and women's team and individual golds, while luge took the men's team, individual and sprint golds, and the women bobsleighters took the team gold, individual silver and bronze, with the men's team securing silver and individual silver.

Event OiC Flt Lt Keith McLaughlin said: "It was an incredible few days for the teams, every athlete in each discipline stood tall and produced exceptional performances."

"These outstanding results reflect the athletes' determination, consistency and faith in their coaching staff, highlighting their commitment to excellence and signalling a bright future."

Sgt John-Paul Kibble sealed a hat-trick of individual golds in the luge with a combined time of 1:48.359, while the women's event saw a fabulous third for Cpl Ailsa Dermidy.

Luge team manager Fg Off Luke Farrar said: "To win the men's title was great. The team win and individual win is testament to Sgt Kibble's work rate."

Skeleton

"For the women's team, who are progressing well, to produce a third was great on such a difficult track up against a very competitive field."

The men's skeleton saw Flt Lt Rhys Thornbury winning his 10th individual title after battling Army slider Aarran Holmes into second with a combined time of 3.34.50, + 6.02 ahead of the Army man, with RAF slider Flt Lt Daniel Mills taking third, for a 19th men's team title in a row.

The women's team saw Flt Lt Nicole Burger take individual gold with a combined 3.40.68, +3.94 ahead of RN slider Rachel White, coupled with team gold.

Thornbury said: "It was a successful IS for us, to come away with the women's team going one better than last year to win and to see the men's titles come home, also with a fabulous third from novice slider Flt Lt Daniel Mills, is brilliant. All five of our sliders were in the top seven, so that's another stamp of success."

Bobsleigh

In the bobsleigh Cpl Shanwayne Stephens took the men's individual silver, pushed by AS1 Levi Wiffen (3.29.07), while AS1 Ash Colvin, pushed by Flt Lt Joanna Hatter (3.41.44), secured the woman's individual silver, and Fg Off Lucy Tickell, pushed by Cpl Hayley Gilbert, took bronze (3.44.62).

HAT-TRICK HERO: Luge star Sgt John-Paul Kibble
PHOTOS: SGT DAZ GOODYER and CPL JAMES BRADMAN



Golden days



MEDALS GALORE: Luge athletes (l-r) Flt Lt Danny Burke, Flt Lt Scott Steele, Cpl Ailsa Dermidy and Sgt John-Paul Kibble. And skeleton star Flt Lt Nicole Burger on start line, right



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Connor's strong-arm tactics: p25

R'n'R

Making waves – Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake

● See
page 3



Win Clooney-JLo
romance on Blu-ray
● See page 5

Film Review: page 3 + Reader Announcements: pages 6-7 + Puzzles: page 8



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

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



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

**COMBAT
STRESS**
FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH



Film review
La Cocina (15)
 In cinemas March 28



LA COCINA:
 Things reach boiling point

Hell's kitchen

THE BUSTLING kitchen of a busy Times Square restaurant becomes a battleground where line cooks and servers navigate a chaotic energy that can barely be contained. Amidst the madness, Mexican chef and rabble-rouser Pedro (Raúl Briones) is reeling from a fight with another chef, while waitress Julia (Rooney Mara), pregnant with his baby, contemplates an abortion.

Presented in crisp black and white but often distorted through glass partitions, lobster tanks, and steel reflections, the film's frenetic energy and relentless pacing turn the kitchen into a pressure cooker itself. High-energy exchanges become

cacophonous whilst the work stress becomes a catalyst for other tensions. This space, divided into workstations, is a melting pot of nationalities – a glimpse into the immigrant working class, quite literally kept underground. For many, losing this job means deportation, a looming threat that weighs heaviest on Pedro, whose rebellious streak has landed him in management's crosshairs.

Despite the mounting pressure, these workers are brothers in arms, united by the onslaught of the lunchtime rush. They trade insults in their respective languages with rough camaraderie, their only reprieve found in the fleeting moments of a smoke break.

The film submerges us so deeply in the stress of the kitchen that stepping out – whether onto the packed restaurant floor or into the fresh air – feels like a relief. For anyone who has worked in a kitchen, as filmmaker Alonso Ruizpalacios clearly has, the details ring true: the kitchen porters sneaking scraps from plates, chefs sipping from secret cans of booze, and the endless torment of the ticket printer.

With its unrelenting energy and lived-in details, *La Cocina* simmers with tension, boiling over into an all-too-real portrait of those keeping New York city's restaurants running.

Review by Sam Cooney
4 out of 5 roundels ●●●●

Galleries

William Morris Gallery
 Morris Mania/Women in Print

The enduring legacy of designer Morris

TO CELEBRATE the 75th anniversary since its opening, this year the William Morris Gallery will present two major exhibitions – *Morris Mania* and *Women in Print: A Century of Textile Design*.

Running from April 5 to September 21, *Morris Mania* illustrates the extraordinary versatility and enduring prevalence of Morris's work in popular British culture.

Donated objects from the public's homes will join a diverse selection of works from the William Morris Gallery collection and other national institutions, including a rose-patterned seat from the 1980s British Nuclear Submarine Fleet, Willow pattern Nike trainers, and couture fashion inspired by Morris's designs.

A Museum spokesperson said: "Presented together within an eclectic installation, the exhibition will reflect on Morris's cultural significance as well as asking questions around methods of production and environmental sustainability.

"A newly-commissioned film by Natalie Cubides-Brady will be presented for the first time within the exhibition, splicing together clips of Morris's patterns in TV and cinema, from *Gogglebox* and *University Challenge*, to *My Fair Lady* and *Paddington*, to uncover the genealogy of Morris's designs

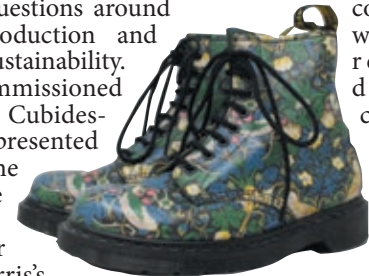
on screen."

In October the Gallery will present *Women in Print: 150 Years of Liberty Textile Designs*. Curated in collaboration with Liberty to celebrate the design house's 150th anniversary, the exhibition will honour the exceptional contributions of women textile designers over the past 150 years, as seen through the history of Liberty fabrics.

The spokesperson explained: "Beginning with May Morris and the role of women designers in the Arts and Crafts movement, the exhibition traces the evolving influence of women in textiles, showcasing works by iconic designers such as Jessie M. King, Lucienne Day and Althea McNish, whose designs have played a crucial role in shaping Liberty's renowned prints and continue to inspire new fashionable creations."

The William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow, East London, houses the world's largest collection of work by the revolutionary designer, craftsman, writer, social activist and conservationist.

● **Go to:** wmgallery.org.uk for more.



STRIKING: Dr Martens boots and, top, Japanese Waving cat, both with Strawberry Thief design © William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest



Theatre
Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake
 UK tour

Swan Lake re-Bourne at 30



GENRE-DEFINING: Male ensemble replaces the traditional female corps-de-ballet

TO MARK its 30th anniversary, *Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake* is touring the country until October 4.

The ground-breaking production of Tchaikovsky's masterpiece caused a sensation when it premiered three decades ago. In this major revival the next generation of dancers bring the show to new audiences across the UK.

Making their debuts as *The Swan/The Stranger* are rising stars from Bourne's New Adventures dance-theatre company: Harrison Dowzell, Jackson Fisch and Rory Macleod, alongside James Lovell, Leonardo McCorkindale and Stephen Murray as *The Prince*, Nicole Kabera and Ashley Shaw as *The Queen*, Katrina Lyndon as *The Queen and the Girlfriend*, and Bryony Wood as *The Girlfriend*.

Bourne said: "It's hard to believe that our *Swan Lake* is now 30 years old and even harder to acknowledge that we are now casting most Swans

and Princesses who were not even born at the time of the show's premiere.

"Many dancers have grown up with this production and dreaming of one day dancing in it, so I was particularly excited to announce this line-up of young performers"

The genre-defining event is still best known for replacing the female corps-de-ballet with a menacing male ensemble, which shattered convention, turning tradition on its head.

First staged at Sadler's Wells in London in 1995, *Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake* took the dance theatre world by storm, becoming the longest running full-length dance classic in the West End and on Broadway. It has since been performed across the globe, collecting more than 30 international accolades including an Olivier Award and three Tony Awards.

● **Go to:** new-adventures.net/swan-lake for full tour details.



Theatre
Dear England
National tour



BACK OF THE NET: Players celebrate a goal in stage show *Dear England*

'Southgate' scores treble as hit show takes to the road

THE NATIONAL Theatre has announced a tour of its smash-hit production *Dear England*.

Written by the multi-award-winning stage and screen writer James Graham (*Sherwood*, BBC One; *Quiz*, ITV) and directed by the Almeida Theatre's Artistic Director Rupert Goold (*Patriots*, *King Charles III*), *Dear England* tells the story of Gareth Southgate's revolutionary tenure as the manager of the men's national football side.

The England team has the worst track record for penalties in the world, and manager Southgate knows he needs to open his mind and face up to the years of hurt to take team and country back to the promised land.

“To put the national game on the stage of the National Theatre and then in the West End back in 2023 was an utter dream”

Playwright Graham said: “I am beyond delighted and grateful that *Dear England* is heading out on a nationwide tour across England. To put the national game on the stage of the National Theatre and then in the West End back in 2023 was an utter dream.

Now, to head out on tour feels like winning the treble.

“As someone from a community that had limited access to culture growing up, I’m especially aware of how vital it is to share work of such a scale beyond the capital.

“And as a lifelong theatre and England fan, the chance to tell a story about the beautiful game and through the prism of Gareth Southgate’s transformative term has been a privilege.

“I think he has been a remarkable leader, and it fills me with great excitement and joy that we get to share Rupert’s euphoric and entertaining production, with all its incredible movement and music, once more with audiences around the country.”

Dear England is now on at the National in London until March 24, then has a four-week run at the Lowry, Salford, from May 29 to June 29, before a nationwide tour kicks off this autumn, running until March 2026. Tour venues include Nottingham, Leeds, Southampton, Milton Keynes, Oxford and Liverpool.

The cast of the production currently at the National, then The Lowry, features Gwilym Lee Bohemian Rhapsody (*SAS Rogue Heroes*) as Southgate with Gamba Cole (*The Outlaws*) as Raheem Sterling and Gunnar Cauthery (*War Horse*) as Gary Lineker. Casting for the tour is to be confirmed.

● **Go to: dearenglandonstage.com for further details.**



Theatre
Dear Evan Hansen
UK tour

Evans above: what a pickle Hansen is in

THE NOTTINGHAM Playhouse production of the award-winning musical *Dear Evan Hansen* is currently on a national tour.

The Broadway and West End phenomenon is in Chester and Wimbledon this month then goes to various venues until July 5 including Sheffield, Cardiff, Norwich, Aylesbury, Birmingham, York and Edinburgh.

Evan is an anxious high school kid who wants nothing more than to fit in. But on his way to fitting in, he didn’t tell the whole truth. And now he must give up on a life he never dreamt he’d have. As events spiral and the truth comes out, Evan faces a reckoning with himself and everyone around him.

Ryan Kopel (*Newsies*) plays Evan, alongside Lauren Conroy (*Into The Woods*) as Zoe Murphy, Alice Fearn (*Wicked*, *Come From Away*) as Evan’s mum, Heidi and Helen Anker (*Mamma Mia!*) as Cynthia Murphy.

The musical has partnered with The Mix, a digital charity for under 25-year-olds. A spokesperson for the production said: “The show deals with sensitive topics, very relevant to young people today, and this partnership will ensure that anyone affected by the issues explored in the show knows where



MUM’S THE WORD: West End star Alice Fearn (far left) plays Evan’s mum Heidi

to find support.”

When West End star Fearn first heard the haunting score, she was hooked. She recalled: “*When Dear Evan Hansen* started in America, it was one of those productions that released the album before the show had actually opened. That album quickly became a phenomenon over here too, everyone was listening to it.”

It was around that time Fearn was first contacted about possibly playing Heidi Hansen.

She explained: “I auditioned for the role when the show was

coming to London in 2019. I’d like to think I was far too young at the time as they said, ‘No, no, no...’ to me playing the mum. Although I didn’t get the part then, that was my introduction to Heidi and I did get to grips with the script during that audition process.”

Now 40, Fearn is “dipping her toes” into what she calls the start of her “mother era,” something she is enjoying immensely. “I’m known for singing big massive roles but if someone asked me to go back and do *Wicked* now I don’t think I would because I don’t have the energy I had at 33,” she said.

“I base jobs on their enjoyment factor, which includes the people I’m working with. In *Dear Evan Hansen* everyone is absolutely adorable, the cast are lovely and funny, we all share the same work/fun ethic, there is a great team behind the scenes and a fantastic band, all these things make this a good job.”

When Evan’s classmate Connor Murphy, struggling with drug abuse and depression, scrawls his name across the cast on Evan’s broken arm, it is assumed Connor and Evan must have been close friends when, a short time later Connor takes his own life. It’s a deceit Evan initially goes along with, and as events spiral and the truth comes out, Evan faces



MATINEE IDOL: Zoe (Lauren Conroy) with afternoon 'Evan' Sonny Monaghan



PERFECTLY CAST: Ryan Kopel as Evan, whose broken arm is central to the musical's plot

a reckoning with himself and everyone around him.

Helen Anker plays the bereaved parent, a role she admits is "incredibly emotional". Anker, who had watched the 2021 movie of the musical before taking on the part of Cynthia, said: "If you enjoyed the film then you'll find the stage play has so much more impact. When we had our first read through of the script I realised just what a strong play it is, the dialogue is so meaty and great to perform, and then, of course, with the music on top of that, it's phenomenal."

Fearn agreed: "It's such a powerful score that the story is elevated by that music, whether it's a rock beat, the strings or an acoustic guitar, they all add to the emotional intention of a moment, moulding story and music together perfectly."

The emotional nature of the piece is not just confined to the stage, for audiences too it is a heart-wrenching study on the need to belong.

"Audiences have been amazing and every audience is different, that is the joy of theatre," Anker added. "Without exception, you can tell they are listening and we are so close to them at points that we can actually see they are crying. The subject matter is close to so many people's lives, especially if they have, or have had teenagers affected by it. That's the great thing about parents

and children coming to watch the show together, it allows them to open that conversation and if by doing that we help just one person every show, we've done our job."

At its heart, however, *Dear Evan Hansen* retains an important vein of hope, as Fearn is keen to highlight.

She said: "We are not trying to sugar coat life. People go through times where they feel like they don't have a place in the world and parents do struggle. Even if you don't recognise yourself in these characters, chances are you will recognise people you might know because these are real people and real problems all around us in society right now. While we might be going through the darkest period of our lives, there's always a way to find a place in the world where we can live for tomorrow."

Fearn has two Evans in her life: Ryan Kopel stars in the production, while at matinees, the role is played by Sonny Monaghan.

She added: "It is very different when I'm on stage with Ryan to when I'm on stage with Sonny and I love them both. It's lovely for me to have those different interpretations to interact with, especially as I get both on the same day... I just have to keep up with them."

Interview by Liam Rudden
 ● **Go to: evanontour.com for tour dates.**



Music
Morcheeba
 New album

Band to mark their 30-year trip

TRIP-HOP royalty Morcheeba are set to make a blistering return with their new album *Escape The Chaos*, out on May 23. It's the band's 11th studio album and follows their 2021 release *Blackest Blue*.

Escape The Chaos features the new single *We Live and Die*, which will be released as Morcheeba's first-ever seven-inch single on Record Store Day, April 12, to celebrate the band's 30th anniversary. They were formed in London in 1995 by vocalist Skye Edwards and brothers Paul and Ross Godfrey.

Skye said: "For me, *We Live and Die* is about my duration in the band and the music world and life in general. The lines become blurred after all this time. In a way, it's a homage to the 30 years of being in Morcheeba – which is 60 per cent of my existence."

Family is key to their longevity. At an early album session in Dublin, Ross and Skye were joined by her son Jaega on drums and her husband Steve Gordon on bass, both mainstays of their live band.



ANNIVERSARY: Skye and Paul, and their new album

"It felt more like the old days of recording when we laid down those tracks," said Ross. "We were actually in a room playing the songs together."

Adding to the family affair was Ross' wife, French singer Amanda Zamolo, who contributed lyrics and vocals on the track *Pareidolia*, having previously worked with the band on the albums *Deep Dive* and *Blaze Away*. The title track closes

the new album.

"This whole record is a process of trying to reconnect with what really matters, whether it's what's in your heart or with the world, putting your feet on grass and feeling the earth beneath you," added Ross.

Known for their captivating live shows, the band are set to announce a run of dates soon.

● **Go to: morcheeba.uk for more information.**



Films
Dragnet (PG) & Out of Sight (15)
 Both on Blu-ray (Fabulous Films Ltd/Spirit Entertainment)



Relive the *Fabulous* decades

AS PART of the *Fabulous* series, the Blu-ray releases of *Dragnet*, starring Dan Aykroyd and Tom Hanks, and *Out of Sight*, with George Clooney and Jennifer Lopez, both feature a bonus double-sided fold-out poster of all-new artwork created by Rich Davies.

Dragnet is a hilarious 1987 box office blockbuster that pays homage to the famed original police radio and TV dramas of the 50s and 60s.

The film is directed by Tom Mankiewicz (*Diamonds Are Forever*, *Live and Let Die*, *The Man with the Golden Gun*) and co-written by Aykroyd and Alan Zweibel (*Curb Your Enthusiasm* producer).

Aykroyd plays Joe Friday, nephew of the original series' star of the same name.

He originally wanted his *Blues Brothers* co-star Jim Belushi to play opposite him, but he was unavailable and Tom Hanks was cast as Pep Streebek instead, joining Aykroyd to rescue the City of Angels from the machinations of a power-mad Reverend and corrupt Police Commissioner.



DIRECTED BY Steven Soderbergh, and adapted from Elmore Leonard's book, *Out of Sight* stars Clooney as Jack Foley, the most successful bank robber in the country. On the day he busts out of jail, he finds himself stealing something far more precious than money – Karen Sisco's heart. Unfortunately for Jack, she's a Federal Marshal. Now, they're willing to risk it all to find out if there is more between them than just the law.

Clooney said of the 1998 film: "It was the first time where I had a say, and it was the first good screenplay I'd read where I just went 'That's it'. Even though it didn't do very well box office-wise, it was a really good film."

You could win a copy of each of these great films on Blu-ray. For a chance of winning one, tell us:

Who directed *Out of Sight*?
 Email your answer, marked Fabulous 80s Blu-ray competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: *RAF News*, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by April 4. Please mark on your entry if you prefer to win *Dragnet* or *Out of Sight*.



Your Announcements

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

Reunions

309 Entry RAF Hereford C Flt 4 Sqn Cooks, April 1967–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 in 2025. Please email: David.tibbett@ntlworld.com

30 Sqn RAF Association. Reunion and Dinner, April 25-26, 2025. Please contact Tony Main at: 30sqnassnchair@gmail.com. All previous Sqn members welcome.

45TH Entry RAF Hereford Suppliers. 63rd Reunion June 27-28 at Barns Hotel, Cannock. Contact Dave Bell, Hull: 01482 377625.

103RD Entry RAF Halton Apprentices Reunion October 17, 2025 at the The Park House Hotel in Shifnal, TF11 9BA, 7pm. Contact Mick Woodhouse on: 07811 401040, email: mickwoodhouse1946@gmail.com or through: 103rd-entry.org.uk

28TH entry RAF Cosford, June 1956 to November 1957. Trade Group 19. How many of us left? Contact: David Slough via email: d.slough@outlook.com

Associations

CALLING all those associated with the mighty 39 Squadron! The 39 Sqn Winged Bomb association is now in its second year and continues to expand. Bringing together Canberra and Reaper era friends and families, serving and retired with an informal gathering on

April 5 at the King's Head pub in Navenby followed by a formal event at the RAF Club, Mayfair in November. For further information or adding to the quarterly newsletter, email thewingedbomb@gmail.com.

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

WHAT do you know about the 2 Halifax RAF Sqns 346 and 347 which flew from RAF Elvington near York in World War II? Why not join the Sud-Ouest France Branch of RAFA to find out more? You will be welcomed with open arms or un Accueil Chaleureux! For further details contact Terry Dennett at Admin@Rafsudouest.fr or call: 0033546953889

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

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

RAF Physical Training

Instructors Association holds an Annual Dinner and AGM over a weekend, plus locally organised events.

Please contact RAFPTIA Honorary Secretary Denise Street-Brown on: ptisec@outlook.com for membership enquiries. To become a member of the Association you will have had to have successfully passed the RAF Physical Training Instructors Basic Training Course. The Association was formed in 1996 to bring together serving and retired PTIs.

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

SUAS – have you been a member of Southampton University Air Squadron as a student or staff member?

If so, please join our Facebook page, 'Southampton UAS Association' or email: 6FTS-SUASAdmin@mod.gov.uk to join our association community so that we can welcome you back

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

Lost

LOST – a small gold pendant of an aircraft, bought at Skinners in London in the 1970s, of great sentimental value. Has anyone got a replacement for this article? Please contact Mrs B Green: 01427 752635.

How to use our service

There is no charge for conventionally-worded **birth, engagement, marriage, anniversary, death, in memoriam seeking** and **reunion** notices. For commercial small ads contact Edwin Rodrigues on: 07482 571535. We cannot, under any circumstances, take announcements over the telephone. They can be sent by email to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or by post to: **Announcements, RAF News, Room 68, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE.**

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RAFA pays tribute



HONOUR AND PRIVILEGE: The Standard bearers at Mr Larke's funeral

THE BECCLES RAFA Group, with their members and Standard, attended the funeral of Jeffrey Peter Larke at Waveney Memorial Park and Crematorium in Ellough, Suffolk, earlier this month, at the request of the family.

Brian Vousden, president of the RAFA group, said: "We were honoured and privileged to be asked to attend to represent the Royal Air Force and RAFA and

arranged for the Standards and members of the Royal British Legion, Beccles and also RBL Loddon Branch together with the Royal Navy Association, Beccles, to join and support us for the service, for which we thank them all.

"Members of the Royal British Legion Suffolk Region also attended.

"We gave thanks to the role played by Jeffrey in his service to our nation."

Military Tattoo aids Fund

THE RAF Benevolent Fund has received a £70,000 donation from The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

The donation will help RAF veterans and their families during their time of need, said a spokesperson.

"This includes grants towards job loss, ill-health and bereavement, unexpected home repairs, home adaptations and mobility aids, daily living costs and grants to top up domiciliary or residential care fees," the spokesperson added.

BoB memorial service

EACH YEAR the Royal Air Force commemorates the Battle of Britain and those who flew and fought in the air and on the ground, at a service in Westminster Abbey.

The RAF Ceremonial Office is seeking to improve its knowledge of this unique demographic and to offer places at the formal Battle of Britain Thanksgiving and Rededication Service, this year planned for Sunday, September 21, and in subsequent years.

We would very much like to hear from the widows, family descendants and any other family members of those who participated in the Battle. If you are a family member, or know someone who is, please write to: Mrs Michele

Small, Ceremonial Office, Bentley Priory Building, RAF Northolt, Ruislip, Middlesex, HA4 6NG, providing details of your relationship to your relative who served in the RAF between July and October 1940 and your email address and a contact phone number.

Additionally, for the purpose of allocating tickets, please also send your full name, home address, date and place of birth, and passport or driving licence number (at any time and without notice or justification the RAF reserves the right to void tickets and refuse entry to Westminster Abbey before or on the day). This information is also required for any additional guests who wish to attend the Service with you – thank you.



Your Announcements

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tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk

Thrift ladies' puppy love

IT WAS 'chocs away' when the volunteer ladies from the RAF High Wycombe Thrift Shop, accompanied by Wg Cdr Andy Calder, visited the Hounds for Heroes site in Hampshire, 16 months after raising £5,000 to help train a new puppy, writes *Laurence Parker*.

Hounds for Heroes provides specially-trained assistance dogs to serving or ex-Armed Forces or Emergency Services personnel who have become physically disabled through illness or injury. Through a competition, one Thrift Shop member had the privilege of naming a puppy.

The shop sponsored 'Biggles.' He has yet to be partnered but is now fully grown and progressing well with his training.

As part of the visit, the 'Thrifties' were given the opportunity to hear more about the important work of Hounds for Heroes, meet some of the team that run the charity, and speak to the founder, Allen Parton.

The visit highlight was the chance to meet the star of the show, Biggles, and to present



TOP DOG:
 Allen Parton
 with Biggles

another small donation.

Wg Cdr Calder said: "Meeting Biggles was a real treat, but knowing that he will go on to make a real difference to

someone's life is an amazing feeling and I think we all felt very proud and humbled to be a part of the incredible work done by Hounds for Heroes."

WAAF veteran is 100

A WAAF veteran from Poland who suffered terrible hardship as a young woman during World War II has celebrated her 100th birthday.

In February 1940 Władysława Kondracka and her family were exiled to Siberia by the Russians.

Władysława remembered: "We were in barracks, where there were bunks made of wooden planks and 10 families in one barrack. The conditions were awful - there was so much hunger, a lack of drinking water and lots of bedbugs and vermin. We worked in the forest, regardless of the weather conditions."

Her father volunteered for the Polish Army after the war broke out and left their family of seven. She never saw him again.

The family managed to escape from Siberia and eventually

made it to Uganda. Władysława bravely left her family to set out alone and, after 45 days, reached England by ship.

After three months of military training and an English Language course, she passed an exam to join the WAAF.

She was based in Hucknall near Nottingham, providing ground support, where she met her husband Stanislaw, a radio telegraphist with 300 Sqn. Their son Ryszard was born in 1946.

In 1991, Władysława (inset, with her medal) was awarded the Cross of Combat Deed in the West by the then President of the Republic of Poland and was promoted to the rank Retired Lieutenant in 2002.

The RAF Benevolent Fund has helped Władysława financially so that Ryszard could hire a carer and pay for general day-to-day items, which he said "has been a great support."



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R'n'R



Prize Crossword No. 381

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

Across

- 1. Father's favourite pop stars (4)
- 8. Sails around Aspen rinks (10)
- 9. Getting rid of Diana's favourite Teletubby, Sally (8)
- 10. Hit single by 1 Across is nothing, bang average (2-2)
- 12. No side returns inventive chap (6)
- 14. Underground tunnel (6)
- 15. Kind of delivery right into tree (6)
- 17. Cracks cows (6)
- 18. Some bad zebras face chopper (4)
- 19. Maybe the Spanish editor killed time (8)
- 21. West Side heroine, high-flier and Defence Minister (5,5)
- 22. Number in Northern Ireland join North-East (4)

Down

- 2. Puzzled to be more extreme editor (10)
- 3. Find a nincompoop and make it snappy (4)
- 4. Guy who knew how to fly (6)
- 5. Points of view favoured by early Mercians (6)
- 6. Brass key which unlocks RAF defence system (3,5)
- 7. At first only seven lost out. Capital! (4)
- 11. Shed the French, not returning plane... (10)
- 13. ...and shed awful, nasty woman (3-5)
- 16. The man, a beginner, bumped into RAF headgear (6)
- 17. Stereotypically she's blushing over good spanner (6)
- 18. RAF partners upset Mary (4)
- 20. Was being PM paradise for him? (4)

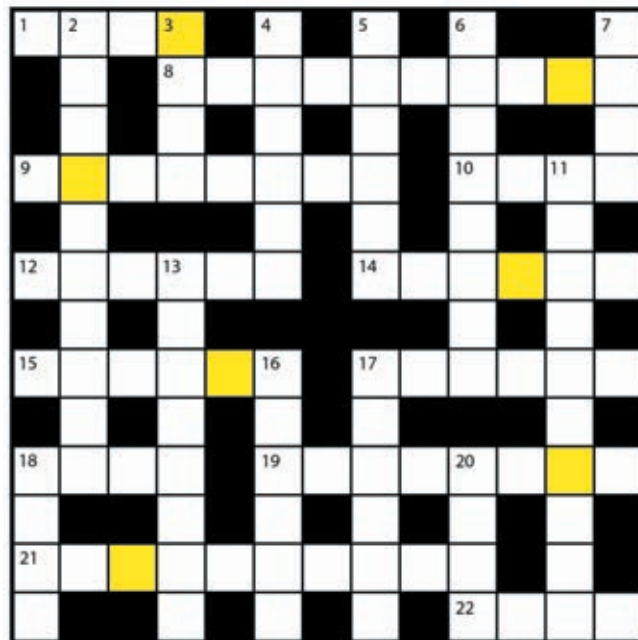
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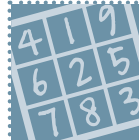
.....

RAF word: Crossword No. 381

The winners of our Prize Crossword and Prize Su Doku puzzles will receive a recent top military title – please send your entries to the address printed in the adjacent Su Doku panel, to arrive by April 4, 2025. Prize Crossword No. 380 winner is: Andrew Bunting, Fareham.



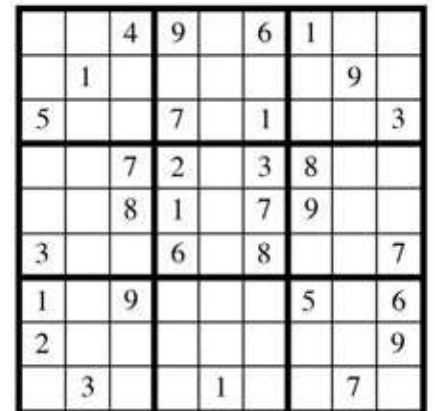
Solution to Crossword No. 380
Across – 7. Of Late 8. Granby 10. Grenada 11. Pilot 12. Earp 13. Amble 17. Curry 18. Solo 22. Quaff 23. Austria 24. Aweary 25. Popeye
Down – 1. Goggles 2. All Ears 3. Stray 4. Grapple 5. Knell 6. Wyatt 9. RAF Marham 14. Duxford 15. Boarder 16. Voyager 19. Squad 20. Cadet 21. Ascot
RAF plane – Vampire



Prize Su Doku No. 391

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

Solutions should be sent in a sealed envelope marked 'Su Doku' with the number in the top left-hand corner to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP14 4UE, to arrive by April 4, 2025. The winner of Su Doku No: 389 is: Nicholas Kenney, Merseyside.



Solution to Su Doku No. 390

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



Theatre Spitfire Girls UK tour

WWII's female pilot pioneers

SPITFIRE GIRLS, a new play by Katherine Senior, has just started a major UK tour. It was inspired by the extraordinary true stories of the women who dared to fly during World War II and the incredible bond that tied them together.

Marking the 80th anniversary year of the end of World War II, the production has been developed with support from the National Theatre Generate Programme.

It's New Year's Eve 1959 and decades after answering the call, two women separated by the war meet again as the rain hammers down on the windows of The Spitfire pub.

As we hear their story, we're transported back to a time when female pioneers defied expectations and soared through the skies.

The play is described as an untold story of strength, courage and loss, but above all else, hope. Laura Matthews (*One Man, Two Guvnors* and *London Assurance* (National Theatre), *Pride* (Proud Films) will play 'Dotty' and Katherine Senior (*The Rivals*, *Look Back in Anger*, *Travels with my Aunt*) and



STARRING ROLE: Playwright Katherine Senior (inset top and above, left) with consultant Candy Adkins and actor Laura Matthews

Rosalind Steele (*Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (West End), *The Provoked Wife* and *Venice Preserved* (Royal Shakespeare Company), *Shakespeare in Love* (Bath Theatre Royal and tour) will share the role of 'Bett'.

Spitfire Girls premiered at MAST Mayflower Studios on March 20 and goes to a further

nine theatres around the country including New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich (April 1-5), The Dukes Lancaster (May 6-10), Chipping Norton Theatre (May 14-17) and Darlington Hippodrome (May 27-31).

Laura trained at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School and, along with extensive theatre work, has

appeared in *Call The Midwife*, *EastEnders* and *Doctors* on television.

Rosalind is also a singer, musical director and composer, and has recently written music for a short film.

Katherine is an actor, writer and co-founder of theatre company Tilted Wig. She was

long-listed for the Women in Theatre Lab playwriting prize 2024 as one of the UK's most promising female playwrights.

She first had the idea for *Spitfire Girls* in 2016 and spent several years researching the Air Transport Auxiliary and its female pilots.

She said: "I couldn't believe that I didn't know women flew during the war. How did this pass me by?"

"I made a conscious decision not to use the real pilots in my play. Out of respect for any living family or friends and without the actual people being alive to confirm the exact sequence of events, I felt I would serve the story better to be inspired by them."

Among those Katherine spoke to was Candy Adkins – who is a consultant on the production – the daughter of ATA pilot Jackie Moggridge, and ATA pilot Mary Ellis, who was 100 at the time.

Katherine added: "People have said to me that this is a great story to inspire young girls today, which I hope it is, but my three young children are all boys and I like to think that it will inspire them too."

● **Go to: tiltedwigproductions.com for full tour details.**