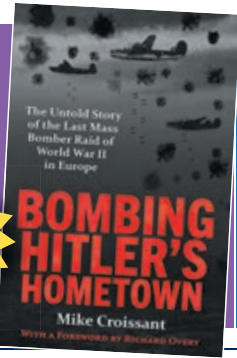


**The Forces' favourite paper**

**Last mass bombing raid of WWII**  
● See page 18



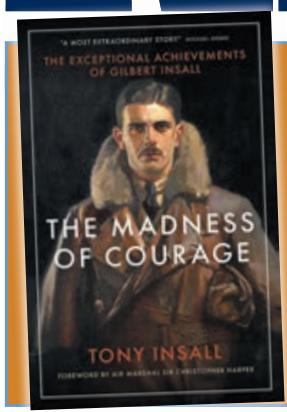
**True Blue signs off...**  
● See page 17



**ROYAL AIR FORCE**

Friday, February 7, 2025  
Edition No.1601 **Only 99p**

# RAF NEWS



**The VC winner and PoW escapee the Nazis couldn't hold**  
● See pages 14-15



**Rugby**  
**It's League Cup agony**  
● See p23



**Football**  
**White bows out at UKAF**  
● See p27



**X-Country**  
**Adams goes it alone**  
● See p28



# High stakes in Vegas

**Simon Mander**  
UK COMBAT JETS are taking part in the world's biggest annual air combat drill as Exercise Red Flag takes off in America in its 50th year. Britain, Australia and Canada are taking to the skies in the shadow of Las Vegas, from Nellis Air Base in Nevada, to hone their fighting skills during training sorties based on conflict in the Indo-Pacific region. Detachment commander Gp Capt Guy Lefroy said: "Red Flag gives our people a unique opportunity to match our capabilities against current threats."  
● More on page 3



# BiteSize

“No matter where you go in the military, you’ll feel a sense you belong,”

Cpl Sian Murphy on exchange to New Zealand See p9



“I’m sure some of my former Corrie friends will come to see the play,”

Actor Peter Ash looks forward to visiting Manchester with *Picture You Dead* See R’n’R p3



“I’m grateful to have been in the RAF to play and coach football at the highest level,”

Former Service and UKAFFC stalwart Sgt Nick de-Long (Ret’d) See p27



## ROYAL AIR FORCE RAF News

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# Draken lands deal

## Staff Reporter

AERO-GIANT DRAKEN has landed a £173 million defence contract to provide ‘aggressor’ aircraft to train Air Force combat pilots.

Draken crews will replicate the tactics and techniques of a range of adversaries on live exercises with UK personnel over the North Sea, the MOD said.

The company will operate 14 Dassault Falcon 20s, one Diamond DA42 and eight L-159E ‘Honey Badger’ fighter jets based at Teesside and Bournemouth.

AVM Mark Flewin said: “Our partnership with Draken is of fundamental importance as we continue to train and prepare all of our frontline forces to meet emerging threats across the globe.

“The training delivered, simulating threats, to date has never been more important to ensure the RAF is ready and able to support Nato and meet the threats of tomorrow.”



**ON TARGET:** Draken pilots will provide ‘Red Air’ aggressor jets including the Dassault Falcon during live training with the RAF

## This Week In History



### 1944 Gnome attack

A DOZEN 617 Sqn Lancaster bombers led by Wg Cdr Leonard Cheshire launch a low-level attack on the Gnome and Rhone aero factory in Limoges using 12,000 Tallboy bombs.

### 1970 Dowding dies

AIR CHIEF Marshal The Lord Dowding, Commander-in-Chief of Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain, dies at the age of 87.



### 1985 Band coach tragedy

NINETEEN MEMBERS of the RAF Germany Band and an RAF policeman are killed when their coach collides with a tanker near Munich.

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

## Defending Indo-Pacific on Red Flag



TRANSPORTER: Voyager on red flag

### From front page

The mission runs for two weeks after which aircraft and personnel will be sent across the USA for Exercise Bamboo Eagle to put the lessons learned into practice.

This year's exercise involves about 3,000 personnel including over 370 from the UK and up to 100 aircraft conducting large force missions.

Sqn Ldr Thomas Raeburn, a 6 Sqn pilot, said: "Red Flag provides the opportunity to plan and execute complex air missions in a high tempo and realistic environment, working alongside our allies.

"The exercise is renowned for its use of 'aggressor' forces including simulated enemy fighter aircraft, ground-based radars and simulated surface-to-air missiles – and even cyber and space-based elements that simulate threats for each mission.

"The scale and complexity of Exercise Red Flag Nellis cannot be replicated elsewhere."

RAF personnel taking part include 51 Sqn Rivet Joint aircrew, Air Operations Controllers from 19 and 20 Sqs, and aircrew and engineers from 6, 10 and 101 Sqs operating the Typhoons and Voyager.

During the Exercise, the RAF hopes to match both the RAAF and USAF in scenarios which test their ability to defend flashpoints in the Indo-Pacific region from aggression.

The USAF established Red Flag in 1975, after the Vietnam War, to rehearse aircrews for their first and most dangerous 10 combat missions before the conflict started.

# Threat of losing leg won't spoil Invictus dream

## Veteran Neil taking on Games with help of Benevolent Fund

### Tracey Allen

A FORMER airman whose leg needs to be amputated after a devastating accident is competing in the 2025 Invictus Games this month.

Ex-SAC Neil Fellingham is facing amputation of his left leg after he was run over by a car he was repairing in 2018.

His leg was broken, and he needed surgery to remove a neuroma which occurs after a nerve is partially or completely disrupted by an injury. He has been left with limited mobility and diagnosed with complex regional pain syndrome.

He said: "It now looks like my left leg is dying and I have requested to amputate. It has half the bone density of my right leg and it's not going to get better."

The former weapons technician, now 36, is taking part in the Games held in Canada from February 8-16, for internationally wounded, injured and sick Service personnel. He will be competing in adaptive sports events including wheelchair basketball and alpine skiing.

He said: "I've never done anything like this before. I was given the opportunity to try and that's what I want to do. I'm tired of thinking that I can't do something."

**"My team at work were so supportive and helping me to get by, but we realised my mobility was rapidly deteriorating and this would have an impact on my future in the RAF"**

While he was stationed at RAF Honington, Neil contacted the RAF Benevolent Fund for support.

"I reached out to the Fund during the pandemic when everything was so uncertain. I was recovering from surgery to remove the metalwork in my leg. My team at work were so supportive and helping me to get by, but we realised my mobility was rapidly deteriorating and this would have an impact on my future in the RAF," he said.

After joining the Service in 2010 and serving for more than 12 years – including a deployment to the Falklands, where he met Queen Elizabeth II, and working



UP FOR CHALLENGE: Neil with daughter Poppy, and competing at a previous event (inset)

at RAF Marham identifying faults for MBDA missiles, for which he won the Flight Safety Award – he was selected to work on ejection seats on Tornados, but sadly had to give up the career he loved.

The Fund paid for Neil to have a pedal assist e-bike and supported him and his wife after their daughter Poppy was born prematurely.

Neil said: "She was in neonatal intensive care for three and a half months. She was so small, she fitted into the palm of my hand.

"Now three, Poppy has a genetic condition which we're not sure of yet, but she is shorter than other children of her age. She needs a lot of help to breathe, and in winter we have to be especially

mindful of her lungs."

Neil has also been diagnosed with complex PTSD and has benefitted from emotional support from the Fund.

He added: "I feel incredibly fortunate to have received help through the listening and counselling service. During those sessions I realised there was a lot going on for me, career wise and personally; I was getting used to being disabled."

Neil continued: "It's been really challenging but being able to talk to the right people at the right time has really helped me. I would not be here without the help I've received from the Fund."

● The RAF personnel leading Invictus GB, see page 25.

## Iraq Hercules tragedy tribute

COMRADES gathered to remember those on board a Hercules transport shot down in Iraq 20 years ago, killing all 10 personnel.

The C130K – callsign Hilton 22 – operated by 47 Sqn, then based at Lyneham, was flying a routine mission in 2005 as part of Operation Telic when it came down 30km NW of Baghdad.

Tributes to the nine RAF and one Army personnel flying

on XV179 were made outside 47 Sqn's old headquarters at Brize Norton, where a plaque is displayed.

Commander Air Wing, Gp Capt Andy McIntyre, said: "Holding the service outside old 47 Sqn HQ is a fitting location,

"I've been reflecting on how much time has passed, and how at the time when I was a young co-pilot myself, the incident



was felt across the entire Force."

At the service, wreaths were laid from the RAF, Australian Air Force, Brize Norton and 47 Sqn.



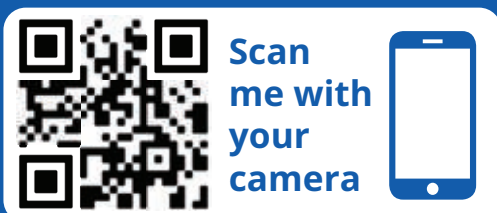
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# National treasures

## Valley team unearths historic Iron Age haul



**DIG THIS:** A 2,000-year-old chariot bridle was among the finds by amateur RAF archaeologists. Main picture, the team return to RAF Valley. Photography by Harvey Mills and below left



### Simon Mander

**LONG-LOST IRON Age artefacts discovered beneath an RAF airfield have been declared a national treasure.**

Parts of a Celtic chariot, thought to be around 2,000 years old, uncovered at Valley during an excavation have been submitted to the local coroner and will be given to Museum Wales.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation-led archaeological excavations took place as part of Operation Nightingale, to support the health and wellbeing of military personnel and veterans.

The finds are believed to form part of the famed Llyn Cerrig Bach hoard, originally discovered in the 1940s during work to extend the airfield for American bombers during the Allied war effort.

It is one of the most

important collections of Iron Age artefacts in the UK, comprising more than 150 objects deposited between 300BC and 100AD.

Among them is a decorated terret ring used to guide the reins of a Celtic chariot – one of three found in Wales.

Finder ex-Sqn Ldr David Ulke said: “To say I was over the moon is probably an understatement! I’ve been involved in archaeology for years and this was by far the most significant recovery I have ever made.”

A second discovery, a horse bridle-bit thought to date to around 60AD, is like those from the Polden Hill hoard found in Somerset.

Finder FS Graham Moore said: “It wasn’t until the final day with just 10 minutes to go that I discovered the horse bridle-bit. The team thought I was joking, but quickly realised I’d found something special.”

DIO Senior Archaeologist Richard Osgood said: “These finds are extremely exciting. The Llyn Cerrig Bach hoard is of national importance for Wales, and the United Kingdom as a whole.”

Museum Wales Curator Adam Gwilt added: “These 2,000-year-old artefacts have remained well-preserved in a shallow peat deposit.

“The bridle-bit and terret add important new information on the religious gifting of prized objects into the lake at the end of the Iron Age before, or at the time when the Roman Army invaded Anglesey.”



## Band tribute

MUSICIANS WILL perform to remember 21 colleagues who died in a road crash 40 years ago.

The Band of RAF Germany was travelling by coach when it collided with a tanker in Langenbruck, in February 1985.

Based at Rheindahlen, they were heading to the RAF Winter Survival School in Bavaria.

The accident killed 21 people – 19 RAF musicians, an RAF policeman and the civilian coach driver.

Annual services are held at Northolt and Cranwell in the memorial gardens, where each site has a monument to those who lost their lives.

This year, there will be a musical tribute on February 10 at 7pm, at the Church of St Clement Danes, London.

In December 2024, the Band of the RAF College travelled to Monchengladbach to perform the same musical tribute in the Evangelical Main Church, Rheydt. The following morning, a memorial service was held at Rheindahlen Military Cemetery.

## Cats eye Protector

PERSONNEL DUBBED the ‘Stabbed Cats’ because of their squadron emblem got a sneak preview of their latest aircraft at a Lincolnshire airbase.

Past and current members of XIII Sqn celebrated its 100th anniversary at RAF Waddington with a tour of a Protector RGL.

Among them were 20 former members of the outfit who have flown Canberras, Tornados and Reapers during its history.

**JACKPOT:** Archaeologists celebrate after locating Iron Age artefacts described as of ‘national importance’ by museum chiefs

### Staff Reporter

TRIBUTES HAVE been paid to World War II pilot and founder of the world’s largest humanitarian airline Jack Hemmings, who has died age 103.

Jack served in India between 1942 and 1946, flying Lockheed Hudson aircraft to protect the Bay of Bengal from the Japanese, and received the Air Force Cross for exemplary gallantry while flying.

Together with Air Force

## Jack Hemmings: hero and humanitarian

comrade and life-long friend Stuart King he founded the Mission Aviation Fellowship, which still operates today flying vital aid to some of the world’s poorest and most remote areas.

He earned the nickname ‘Crasher’ after a rough dirt-strip landing in Africa on a MAF sortie but went on to win the RAF’s Master Air Pilot award and became the world’s oldest pilot when he took to the skies

in a Miles Gemini aircraft at the age of 102 to raise funds for his charity.

Jack surpassed the achievement last year when he performed aerobatics in a two-seater Spitfire at Biggin Hill.

RAF Chaplain-in-Chief The



Venerable AVM Giles Legood led tributes from across the aviation world. He said: “Jack Hemmings has made an immeasurable difference to the lives of many across numerous low-income countries. Indeed, many owe their lives to him and the legacy he has created. His quiet humility,

yet determination to make a difference, is inspirational.”

Jack was a frequent visitor to air shows across the UK and formed a strong bond with the Red Arrows, who honoured him with a flypast over his Sussex home on his 102nd birthday.

Red Arrows pilot Sqn Ldr Graeme Muscat added: “It is meeting pilots like Jack Hemmings that many of us use to spur us on to continue to do great things, and we can only hope to achieve a fraction of what Jack has done.” ● See p19 for obituary



# STONYHURST

AGES 3-18

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# May the force be with you

## Allies' JEDI pact eyes NATO seas

**Simon Mander**

ALLIED NATIONS operating the Poseidon P-8 subhunter stepped up training under a new pact dubbed JEDI to allow more than 40 of the maritime patrol aircraft to operate as a single fleet.

The Joint Exploration and Discussion of Initiatives programme is designed to bring Forces from the USA, Canada, Germany and Norway together to guard Nato's European oceans.

Crews from across the five nations landed at the home of the RAF's Poseidon fleet at Lossiemouth this month to discuss operating procedures and closer cooperation.

International crews simulated P-8 anti-submarine missions to improve collaboration just weeks after a UK Poseidon tracked Russian landing ship the RFN Aleksandr Shabalin through the English Channel.

120 Sqn's Sqn Ldr Andy Barber

said: "Maritime patrol is a team game, requiring close cooperation with allies and Nato partners to ensure a coherent response to any threats we may face."

"This is why the JEDI Symposium is such an important event, allowing operators from five nations to exchange ideas and build bonds, both professionally and socially."

RAF Lossiemouth is currently home to nine Poseidon aircraft and regularly hosts partners looking to conduct exercises in the North Sea.

In 2024 a US Naval Support Facility was opened to provide a permanent hub for US forces and an agreement allows Germany to operate its own aircraft out of the Scottish airbase.

42 (Torpedo Bomber) Sqn has continued instructing Norwegian patrol crews throughout the year with aircrew from the Royal Canadian Air Force training with the squadron as Canada begins its transition to the Poseidon.



**JEDI FLIGHTS:** International Poseidon P-8 crews take part in simulated scrambles to guard European seas

## Ready steady Do-ha



UK PERSONNEL promoting security in the Gulf on Operation Kipion braved searing heat as they hit the road for the annual Doha marathon.

More than 20 members of 83 EAG, 901 EAW and JFCIS launched their fundraising run at 6am to avoid heat and humidity

as midday temperatures edged towards 30°C.

A quartet of superfit aviators completed the full 26-mile event in under four hours, while others opted for the half-distance run and a less gruelling six-mile option, raising just under £1,000 for Forces charities.

## WWII hero Stan marks a century

**Simon Mander**

A PILOT who twice joined the RAF and served across the world celebrates his 100th birthday later this month.

Model aircraft enthusiast Sqn Ldr Stan Mellor enlisted at 18 as an air gunner on the Dominie and Anson before joining the first Dakota unit and travelling to Mauripur, near Karachi. Despite the theft of his trunk, he flew on to join 232 Gp, Southeast Asia Air Force, replacing a crew who included the son of British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden.

Postwar, Stan found himself landing at jungle strips in Burma, operated by the Japanese, who had recently surrendered and looked after the aircraft.

In April 1946, he was posted to 48 Sqn at RAF Kallang Park, where he was tasked to collect an Indian party, headed by Pandit Nehru, who had been invited to a conference in Singapore by Mountbatten.

Invited to fly as Safety Co-pilot in a Dakota, Stan was forced to land the aircraft when the pilot lost consciousness.

Leaving the RAF in 1947, Stan endured 14 months as a civilian before re-enlisting. In mid-1957 he was commissioned as a Pilot Officer, joining 90 Sqn at Honington flying Valiants.

During the 1960s he flew the Victor Mk2, Canberra, Varsity, Bristol Freighter, Hercules, Jet Provost, Shackleton, Nimrod and Britannia before test flying the Vulcan B1 XA903. In 1970 he was posted to 232 OCU at Marham, where he met Royals including the late Queen and Prince Philip and was promoted to Sqn Ldr.

After leaving the RAF the second time Stan joined Marconi and in retirement has built model biplanes. You can send him a card for his birthday on February 22 c/o: Mr S Baxter, 5 Dymock Drive, Shrewsbury, SY2 6GU.



**SQN LDR STAN MELLOR**

ROYAL  
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museum

# TORNADO CHALLENGE

We are celebrating the Panavia Tornado, and the amazing stories of its pilots and ground crew.

Sign up to the Tornado Challenge and help the Royal Air Force Museum soar!

Your entry and fundraising will all go towards supporting The Royal Air Force Museum, so we can continue to share the extraordinary stories of our Royal Air Force.

Run, walk or cycle your way to the finish line. We are asking challengers to set their own distance and pledge to raise £50.

Once you hit your target distance you will get a medal, if you hit your £50 pledge then you will receive one of our amazing Tornado t-shirts too!



The challenge starts on the 31 January and you have until Friday 28 February to complete it.

Scan for more  
information





# Murphy's law on Forces bullying

**Simon Mander**

**BRIZE-BASED CPL Sian Murphy joined forces with her Kiwi counterparts Down Under as part of a drive to stamp out bullying and harassment in the military.**

The People Ops specialist travelled 11,617 miles from her Oxfordshire home station to Ohakea airbase on an exchange



programme to study how Allies target the problem.

She said: "I visited all three air bases in New Zealand, completed the Tūrangawaewae mentoring scheme at Ohakea, the School to Skies programme in Auckland and spent a week with recruits at the Command Recruit Training Squadron in Woodbourne.

"It has taught me no matter where you go in the military you will always feel a sense of belonging."



**CAMPAIGN:** Cpl Murphy, centre, with Royal New Zealand Air Force personnel during her exchange tour

# Poseidon and Rivet Joint combat deep sea sabotage threat

**Simon Mander**

**AIR FORCE maritime patrol aircraft are to form part of a new Nato unit to protect offshore infrastructure in the Baltic Sea.**

Lossiemouth-based Poseidons will deploy with Rivet Joints from Waddington following damage to the Estlink2 undersea cable between Estonia and Finland.

The move comes after Defence Secretary John Healey confirmed RAF aircraft were launched alongside Royal Navy ships to shadow a Russian spy ship in the English Channel.

Crews were scrambled after the Yantar was seen just weeks after it was caught loitering over critical undersea infrastructure in UK waters.

In November, the Russian vessel left UK waters for the Mediterranean but returned, sailing through the Channel, where it was flanked by HMS Somerset.

Mr Healey said: "My message to President Putin is clear, 'we know what you are doing, and we will not shy away from robust action to protect Britain'.

"Alongside our Joint Nato allies, we are strengthening our response to ensure that Russian ships and aircraft cannot operate in secrecy near UK or Nato territory."

After talks with Estonian and



Finnish counterparts, Nordic Warden – an advanced new AI system to alert allies to under-sea interference and help monitor the Russian shadow fleet – has been activated.

Shadow fleet ships are used to bypass international sanctions and fund war in Ukraine by

moving oil and gas to potential buyers – so far 93 Russian oil tankers have been sanctioned by the UK.

In Helsinki, Nato launched its Baltic Sentry initiative to protect undersea energy and communication cables from sabotage using frigates,

maritime patrol aircraft and naval drones.

Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte said: "Ship captains must understand that potential threats to our infrastructure will have consequences, including possible boarding, impounding and arrest."

## In Brief



## Tedder win

AIR FORCE instructors at Cranwell have won a top award for teaching.

The Tedder Academy of Leadership at the Lincolnshire station netted the Best Educator Team Award from the Worshipful Company of Educators for their leadership training.

Company Clerk Christian Jensen added: "It's great to see how a small, dynamic team can add so much value."

Academy commandant Gp Capt Emma Keith said: "The team is proactive at ensuring leadership development in the RAF is high quality, future focused and contemporary."

## Covenant ban lifted

MILITARY PERSONNEL can now have their say on the Armed Forces Covenant after defence chiefs lifted restrictions allowing them to give evidence to a government committee.

Defence Secretary John Healey granted dispensation to Service Regulars and Reserves to submit their views on how the Covenant is performing and how it could be improved to a Defence inquiry.

News



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# Afghan bomb hero signs on

**SURVIVOR:** Army veteran Paul Minter signs the Wall of Honour at Cranwell after speaking to trainee aircrew



**Simon Mander**

A FORMER soldier who lived through two bomb attacks in Afghanistan and went on to set up a charity battling PTSD has been brought in to give rookie aircrew advice on how to survive in the combat zone.

Former Household Cavalry Regiment Staff Cpl Paul Minter was invited to sign the Wall of Honour, which lists modern day Service heroes who have overcome adversity, at Cranwell's Survival, Evasion and Resistance SERE Training Centre.

Paul joined the Army at 16 and was ambushed in Afghanistan in 2006, when his tank was hit by multiple RPGs, and later he sustained an IED blast while operating from a Jackal.

Both events killed his comrades and despite being mentioned in dispatches he was medically discharged with PTSD.

SERE Training Officer Mark Fairhead said: "Paul spent most of his 18 years' service operating unsupported in Close Observation Posts.

"Highly capable, much respected and extremely experienced, he began to struggle with the paranoia and sleep

paralysis that led to depression and anxiety.

"These symptoms of PTSD culminated in an incident where Paul mistakenly restrained a man he suspected was carrying a bomb.

"On a 34-mile run he realised he wanted to help others suffering with PTSD and the seed of the idea of a charity for those who might otherwise become suicidal was sown."

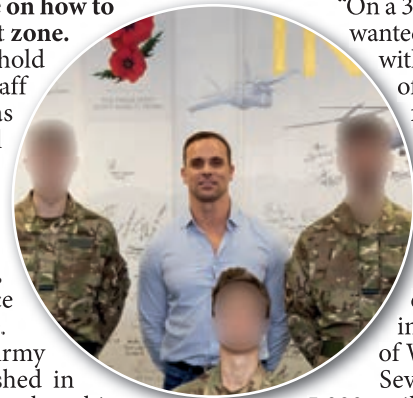
During his retreat eight friends took their own lives and Paul decided to run the entire coast of the UK including NI and the Isles of White and Man.

Seven pairs of trainers and 5,000 miles later he became a double world record holder – the first to complete that distance and the fastest to do the mainland and Isles elements.

He also became trustee of the charity 'Head Up,' that fills the gaps in current mental health services by offering early intervention and treatment.

In three years, they have already helped more than 7,000 serving personnel.

This year's challenge for Paul is to flip an 80kg tractor tyre over and over, covering a marathon distance in under 40 hours.





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# Royal Air Force In Concert

**Lincoln Cathedral VE Day 80**

Band of the Royal Air Force College

Lincoln Cathedral Choir

Compere Melvyn Prior

7.30pm Saturday 17 May 2025

**Princess Alexandra Auditorium, Yarm**

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

**Cast, Doncaster**

Band of the Royal Air Force College

3pm Sunday 21 September 2025

**Epsom Playhouse**

Central Band of the Royal Air Force

7.30pm Friday 3 October 2025

**Terry O'Toole Theatre, Lincoln**

Royal Air Force Swing Wing

7pm Friday 17 October 2025



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In Brief



APPOINTMENT: AVM Mark Hunt

## Hunt on for flight safety

FORMER COSFORD Station Commander Air Vice-Marshal Mark Hunt has secured a top job in aviation safety.

In his new role the ex-Brize Norton Chief Air Engineer will supervise eight defence regulators and branches and function as military senior technical subject matter expert.

# Atlas goes with the floe

## Crew tracks breakaway super-berg

### Staff Reporter

Mount Pleasant

A FALKLANDS-BASED Atlas transporter launched a long-range mission to track a massive ice floe which split from the Antarctic coast and is moving towards the remote Sandwich Islands in the South Atlantic.

At 1,500 square miles the super-berg is more than twice the size of Greater London and is monitored by British Forces South Atlantic on Operation Cold Stare.

A spokesman added: "The flight is a routine mission to monitor environmental and fishing activity in the South Atlantic."



ANTARCTIC ROLE: 1312 Flight Atlas casts its shadow across the massive A23 iceberg during environmental monitoring mission

POSTING: Former Hercules pilot Sqn Ldr Paul Wise will take command of the BBMF for the 2025 display season  
PHOTO: SGT GRAHAM TAYLOR



## Wise move for BBMF

### Simon Mander

A FORMER Jaguar weapons technician is to lead the RAF's Battle of Britain Memorial Flight.

Sqn Ldr Paul Wise enlisted as an SAC in 1999 and gained his commission in 2002 as a pilot, going on to fly the C-130K Hercules, the Grob Tutor and Phenom aircraft.

Known as Ernie, he has been part of BBMF since 2017 and started flying the Dakota and co-piloting the Lancaster before becoming one of the Flight's

two bomber captains in 2022.

A Qualified Flying Instructor, he has had several memorable achievements – notably dispatching airborne troops from a Dakota in 2019 over Normandy as part of the D-Day 75 commemorations.

Sqn Ldr Wise said: "It is with immense pride that we, the BBMF, continue to commemorate our heroic veterans and preserve the nation's great aviation heritage."

Current OC Sqn Ldr Mark Sugden remains with The Flight as a fighter pilot until 2026.

# Regt join NATO bio-chem drill

### Simon Mander

CHEMICAL WARFARE specialists from the RAF Regiment took part in Nato's first dedicated command and control exercise for years.

Gunners gathered with more than 100 experts from 13 countries, including Austria and Korea, to be put through their paces in Crete's Souda Bay.

UK detachment commander Flt Lt Chris Bond said: "In this ever more challenging environment, weapons of mass destruction are an increasing concern and it's essential that our training and preparedness is on point."

Britain's Counter Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Command and Control effort on Exercise Aeolus was led by the Regiment's six-strong Combat Readiness Force, who rehearsed and honed their skills in a series of simulated alerts.

CBRN Cell Controller Sgt Brendan Plane said: "Operating alongside other Nato nations, with multiple CBRN injects, allowed the whole Cell to gain experience in a variety of situations, which we can now utilise back at our own units."

In addition, three of Honington's force protection



team acted as Nato mentors while exercising staff came from Marham's HQ 3 Force Protection Wing, 2623 Sqn RAuxAF and Brize Norton's II Sqn RAF Regt.

Cpl Dave Dobson, who worked in the Nato Exercise Control Cell, said: "This opportunity to train alongside our partners is fundamental to the Alliance in today's world and forges stronger bonds."

"It's been an amazing and

fulfilling experience, introducing newer members of the RAF to the Nato C-CBRN community develops our capability and commitment against the threats we all face."

Nato now intends to run the event annually each December, a spokesman added.

RAF C-CBRN capabilities are also due to participate in Exercise Toxic Trip 25 at Orland airfield, in Norway, in September.

**Feature** by Tracey Allen

**DESTINED FOR GREAT THINGS:** Cecil, Jack and Gilbert Insall in about 1904. The boys were from a well-to-do family, with father Gilbert Snr a professor of dentistry at the University of Paris before setting up a private practice



# Gilbert VC win PoW escape the Germans couldn't

Amazing story of an incredible impressive siblings, as to acclaimed intelligence his

**GILBERT INSALL** was an exceptional man who came from a remarkable family. He holds a unique record – the only person to have both won a Victoria Cross and escaped successfully from a German prisoner of war camp during World War I.

He went on to serve in the RAF for his whole career, retiring in 1945 as a Gp Capt.

His younger brothers, Jack and Cecil, were also high achievers. Jack served in the same squadron as Gilbert, 11 Sqn, but lost an eye in an accident, which ended his intended flying career. He was largely responsible for setting up the RAF section of the Imperial War Museum, opened in 1920, then moved to the Air Historical Branch of what was then the Air Ministry, making a major contribution to writing the history of the war in the air.

Jack was instrumental in commissioning a stunning portrait of his brother by Edward Newling that appears on the cover of a fascinating new biography of

Gilbert, *The Madness of Courage* by Tony Insall, his great-nephew (bitebackpublishing.com).

Tony, a critically-acclaimed intelligence historian and author of five books, said: “As part of his work at the IWM, Jack, my grandfather, oversaw several portraits Newling painted of VC winners. Jack’s involvement in that really makes the book even more personal – my grandfather reached out all those years later to put his brother on the cover of his grandson’s book.”

Youngest brother Cecil trained as a pilot on airships in the Royal Flying Corps and spent time on anti-submarine patrols over the English Channel.

Tony (*inset below*) explained: “While flying a balloon when low over the Channel, Cecil nearly came a cropper as a destroyer was trying to blow up a mine just underneath him.”

In the early 1930s Cecil, who spoke fluent German and French, worked



for the Passport Control Officer (a front for the Secret Intelligence Service) in Berlin.

Tony added: “Much of Cecil’s work involved examining the visa applications of those who wished to travel through or to British territory. Many were German Jews wishing to emigrate to Palestine or to Britain. He was in the last group from the embassy to leave Berlin after war had been declared on September 3, 1939.”

Tony said: “The brothers were a remarkable trio, and what Gilbert did stands out because it was really remarkable.”

*The Madness of Courage*, as bestselling author Michael Dobbs says ‘reads like a relentless thriller.’ It describes how, forced to land behind French lines after engaging a German fighter, Gilbert ignored intensive shelling in order to repair his aircraft overnight and return to base. A few weeks later, after he was badly wounded by anti-aircraft shrapnel, he was shot down and captured. And a distinguished career

in prison breaking began.

At Heidelberg prison camp, he dug a tunnel more than 40 yards long, removing and concealing five tons of earth in the process. At Crefield, near Düsseldorf, he hid among piles of boxes on a cart transporting prisoners’ luggage to storage. After his transfer to Ströhen prison camp, Gilbert and several companions concealed themselves in a claustrophobically small space they had excavated under the floor of a bathhouse and stayed there for 17 hours, enduring the heat of a summer’s day while a fruitless search for them was carried out. They eventually emerged the next morning and reached Holland a few days later, in September 1917.

During his research Tony found, in archives in Germany, details of the interrogation of German prisoners that revealed how aircrew were ill-prepared for capture and interrogation and how the Germans exploited it, leading later on to a change in British policy.

Tony explained: “Aircrew



1968: Gilbert at a reception to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the RAF

were briefed properly from early 1917 onwards, and that process ultimately led to the setting up of M19 in WWII.”

The Insall brothers were from a well-to-do, close family. Their father, Gilbert senior, had been a professor of dentistry at the

# Insall: Prisoner & Escapee Germans didn't hold

credible man and his  
inspired by his critically-  
acclaimed author great-nephew



**MEDAL:** Gilbert is presented with his VC by George V, Sept 26, 1917

**DISGUISE:** Gilbert in clothes he wore for one of his escapes

University of Paris before setting up a successful private practice. The siblings all studied at the Anglo-Saxon school in Paris and all grew up to be bilingual.

Tony said: "Gilbert could not have managed to plan and execute his escapes without assistance from his family, then based in Paris. In the first years of conflict the War Office provided no assistance or advice to Servicemen to help them prepare for the consequences of capture. And, before the beginning of 1917, there was no British organisation to provide escaping equipment or advice either. So, prisoners wanting to escape had no official support. Fortunately, in some cases, families were able to provide help. My family played a significant role and found some clever ways of working out ways of communicating safely with each other without attracting the attention of German censors. They were able to provide nearly all the escaping equipment he required, mainly maps, files and compasses – though, also, remarkably and with French assistance, a large pair of wire cutters, which were successfully smuggled in to him."

Gilbert's father was active in lobbying

## Win a copy of the book



**WE HAVE** copies of Tony Insall's excellent book to win. For your chance to own one, tell us:

*What was Gilbert's rank when he retired from the RAF in 1945?*

Email your answer, marked **The Madness of Courage competition**, to: [tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk](mailto:tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk) or post it to: **RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by February 21.**

**Win!**

officialdom on his son's behalf and in raising public awareness about some of the harsh conditions in which prisoners were held, and their punishment.

"When Gilbert was sentenced to five months in solitary confinement, in a cell measuring nine feet by six feet, with restricted light, Gilbert senior drew attention to it by writing to *The Times*," Tony explained.

"He also arranged for questions

to be asked in Parliament and wrote repeatedly to the Foreign Office Prisoners of War Department. This encouraged others to do the same. It was against this background that the government decided to negotiate with Germany over changes to the treatment of prisoners, leading to the Hague Agreement of July 1917, whereby such extreme punishments were discontinued."

Gilbert was given a permanent

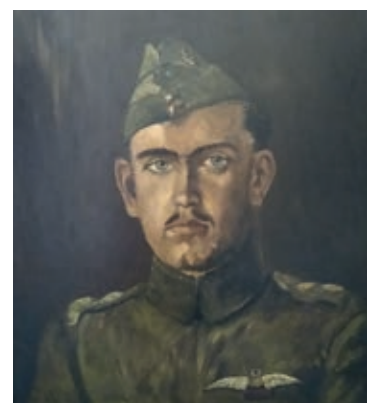
commission in the RAF, in August 1919.

Tony said: "He had one further operational posting in a war zone – to Iraq to command 70 Sqn. He received a Mention in Despatches for 'distinguished services rendered in connection with operations against the Akhwan' in the Southern Desert, Iraq, between November 1927 and May 1928."

During his flying career Gilbert was one of the first to use aerial photography for archaeological purposes and discovered the Bronze Age site at Woodhenge in 1925.

In 1969 his medals were stolen from his home in Yorkshire. Although they were found and returned in 1970, the incident affected his health, said Tony. Gilbert died in February 1972, aged 77. His funeral was held with full military honours.

Tony said: "To my great regret I could not go to his funeral as I was in Africa working as a Voluntary Service Overseas teacher when he died.



**PICTURE PAINTS A THOUSAND WORDS:** A portrait of Gilbert painted by a French prisoner in Fort Prinz Karl, Ingolstadt, which Gilbert posted to his family in Paris from his next prison camp, Heidelberg. He used the package as a means of sending a long, concealed message home

"Gilbert never talked about his wartime experience so I never had a conversation with him about it. I wish I had been able to ask him, when he was a young man, 'how did you approach this?' He perhaps would have said 'I just got on with it', because that's what you did in those days."



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**Avril Jolliffe**  
 Director General  
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# Reds tech Gary's quarter of a century keeping aces airborne

# Diamond Geezer



DIAMOND SEASON: Cpl Gary Cavanagh with Reds Hawk bearing 60 decal



YOUNG AIRMAN: New recruit Gary (bottom left) at the start of his career, January 1980

## From cleaning up pigeon droppings to looking after Hawks



SHOW TIME: The Reds over the Niagara Falls during their 60th anniversary tour of Canada last year



EARLY DAYS: Gary (right) in 2000 at the beginning of his service with the Blues

### Tracey Allen

**THE RED Arrows' longest-serving member is stepping down after 25 years maintaining the distinctive Hawk jets which have thrilled airshow crowds for decades.**

At 62, Wearsider Cpl Gary Cavanagh was barely a toddler when the RAF aerobatic aces first took to the skies.

Last year he played a key role as the team celebrated its landmark Diamond anniversary with a showstopping tour of Canada.

Now Gary says he is moving on after a Service career spanning 45 years. He said: "The RAF gave me a life. It gave me a chance and it's been outstanding. But my contract comes to an end next year and it feels the right time to hand over."

"Although, not liking being idle, I'll have to find something else to occupy the time."

Gary's Forces journey started with the chance sighting of a recruitment advert when he was just 16.

He added: "I'd seen a recruitment ad and it looked exciting. I wanted to be a part of that. I didn't see the point of staying at school at the time, I wanted to get out, learn new skills and earn money."

"I had to wait nine months for my engineering course to enter service with the RAF so I started

a government Job Creation Scheme with the maintenance team at Durham Cathedral.

"Cleaning pigeon fouling to reduce weight on the main belfry tower reinforced my desire to join the RAF and made me think I really needed to do something different."

His Service career began as an

airframe mechanic, completing initial technical training at Halton before being posted to Linton-on-Ouse, to work on the Jet Provost MK3A and MK5A.

Gary then returned to Halton and qualified as an airframe technician in 1984 before a posting to Honington in 1985 with the introduction of the

Tornado GR1. One of his roles on the mighty Tonka was carrying out extensive modification as the RAF prepared for Operation Desert Storm during the first Gulf War.

Always a great ambassador for the Royal Air Force, Gary was selected in 1997 to be the manager of the Armed Forces

Careers Office in Lincoln.

"I really enjoyed working at the Careers Office – other than the Red Arrows, it's the best job I've had."

"Every person walking through the door was different. We had everyone from a former Russian submariner who'd settled in Lincolnshire and wished to sign up, to an ex-French Foreign Legionnaire," he said.

The new millennium marked a new chapter for Gary and the opportunity to get back to engineering with an offer to join the Arrows working on the Hawk T1.

Over the last two decades he has amassed an encyclopaedic knowledge of the agile fast jet. Turning down promotion to Chief Technician in 2005 to remain with the team, he transferred to full-time reserve service in 2007.

His contract with the team expires in 2026. "It's been the pinnacle of my career," said Gary, who received an AOC's Commendation for his work in 2016 and was voted, by his peers, as 'Blue of the Year' four years ago in recognition of exceptional output.

"You get huge reward, and it's humbling when you see people's reaction to the Red Arrows during a display or big flypast," he added.

# The last mass bombing raid



DESTROYED: Linz rail yards



LINZ: Führer addresses crowd

## Hitting Hitler where it hurt

**I**N THE waning days of World War II, the American Fifteenth Air Force set out to destroy one of Nazi Germany's most vital remaining assets – the crucial transportation hub in Linz, Austria.

It would be the last mass bomber raid of the war in Europe, a story untold until historian and retired CIA officer Mike Croissant discovered it.

By late April 1945, with Allied armies closing in from three sides, Linz was home to a massive rail network brimming with thousands of rail cars stocked with war materiel.

It was also the town that Adolf Hitler claimed as home and had long intended to remake as the cultural capital of Europe. Inevitably, it was one of the most heavily defended targets remaining on the continent.

Croissant's uncle Ellsworth Croissant was a bombardier in a B-24 Liberator heavy bomber over Linz on April 25, 1945. He survived the mission and the war without a scratch but was killed in a plane crash in the US just after the war ended.

Learning about his uncle's life through wartime letters and discussions with his relatives, Mike stumbled upon the story told in *Bombing Hitler's Hometown* (August Books, augustbooks.co), published next month.

The author interviewed more than 50 survivors of the raid who described the fierce anti-aircraft artillery fire which tore holes in aircraft and men in shocking numbers.

Fifteen bombers and scores of men fell from the sky as Austrian civilians on the ground also struggled to survive beneath the bombs during the deadly climax of Hitler's war.

Drawing on unique first-hand accounts, official primary sources and unpublished personal papers, Croissant has produced what Richard Overy calls in the foreword "a vivid account [that] reminds us of the costs for all involved."

The story follows the airmen who struggled to make it back to base in heavily-damaged aircraft and those who were shot down.

Among the most brutal scenes from the



SURVIVED RAID: Bombardier Ellsworth Croissant

book are those surrounding Dale Shebilsky, a radio operator who was wounded over Linz and gave himself up to Soviet forces after his aircraft made a crash landing in Hungary.

Rather than treating him with the respect and care due to a member of an Allied nation's military, the Soviets proceeded to torture Shebilsky as an accused German spy.

Croissant also provides groundbreaking scholarship on a previously untold story of the repatriation of freed Allied prisoners of war from the port of Odessa in the Soviet Ukraine, a city now in the headlines due to Russia's war on Ukraine.

Under the Yalta agreement, the Allies agreed to hand over POWs freed from German captivity to their home countries' authorities, and, on the continent, Odessa served this role. More than 70 survivors of the Linz mission were among the more than 36,000 Allied soldiers, sailors and airmen returned to their home countries' control via British naval vessels from Odessa.

Unlike most authors of the air war, Croissant addresses the effects aerial combat had on the men in the decades that followed. Most of the veterans he interviewed suffered from some degree of post-traumatic stress, and very few of them spoke about their experiences.

Croissant (*below*) spent a decade producing a vivid account of the terror of air combat and the courage and compassion of those who lived through it, described by General David Petraeus as 'an extraordinary story – and a thrilling page turner'.



TORTURED: Shebilsky



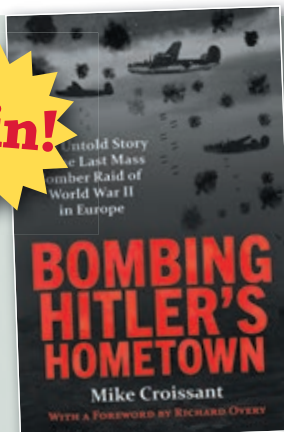
RAID: US B-24 Liberators over Linz, April 25, 1944

YOU COULD win a copy of *Bombing Hitler's Hometown*. For your chance to own one, answer this question correctly:



What relation was Ellsworth Croissant to author Mike Croissant?

Email your answer, marked Bombing Hitler's Hometown 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 February 21.



**BACK IN THE HOTSEAT:** Aviation charity co-founder Jack Hemmings becomes Britain's oldest Spitfire pilot, aged 102, after a flight from Biggin Hill on February 4, 2024

PHOTOS: JONATHAN BUCKMASTER

# 'Lovely Jack': charity founder & champion of the world's poorest

## Jo Lamb

**HUMANITARIAN AND Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) co-founder Sqn Ldr Jack Hemmings has died aged 103.**

Jack was one of the early British pioneers to take a light aircraft from London to the remotest parts of Central Africa, in 1948, launching a charity that has grown to become the world's largest humanitarian air service.

He was awarded the Air Force Cross for exemplary gallantry while flying and later received the RAF's Master Air Pilot award in 2017. He is also believed to be the oldest British pilot to perform aerobatics and take control of a spitfire, in 2024.

Kate, Jack's wife, who lives at their home in Horam, Sussex, said: "Lovely Jack. The phrase tripped off the tongue of so many people who met him for the first time. Indeed, those were my words after our first encounter.

"His drive was humanitarian, providing hope and relieving human suffering. Oh, my lovely Jack, this world will be very strange without you, but you've left it a better place for having

lavished 103 years of love into it."

Fearless, unwavering, and passionate about aviation, Jack fervently promoted the positive potential of flight into his centenary as well as reaching the most isolated with humanitarian help.

Red Arrows pilot Sqn Ldr Graeme Muscat met Jack at various airshows and the Reds honoured Jack with a flyover above his Sussex home in 2023, on his 102nd birthday.

Graeme said: "It is meeting pilots like Jack Hemmings – and witnessing the positive impact he has achieved through aviation – that many of us still working in this field can use to spur us on to continue to do great things, and we can only hope to achieve a fraction of what Jack has."

Jack was a committed supporter of MAF throughout his life – seeing the air service grow from one wooden Gemini aircraft in Africa to a fleet of around 120 purpose-built light aircraft operating in more than 25 low-income countries to deliver aid, disaster response and facilitate relief work among the world's most isolated communities.



**EARLY CAREER:** Jack in his RAF days

MAF now flies to more destinations than any other non-governmental air service and employs more than 1,000 staff; many of them from local, low-income communities.

Chief Executive of MAF-UK Donovan Palmer said: "I was struck by Jack's humility and deep devotion to those living in isolation and the possibilities that aircraft present to help them. Jack's life will have impacted more people across the world than he will ever know."

Jack's charitable achievements and dedication to support

vulnerable communities extended beyond MAF.

Social entrepreneur and Humanitarian NGO Executive Runa Khan first met Jack in 2000, when he travelled to Dhaka and volunteered to help convert a river barge into a pioneering floating medical facility, the Lifebuoy Friendship Hospital.

Runa said: "At the age of 79, Jack not only became the first volunteer of Friendship, but took on one of the most demanding and crucial roles at the time. His help cannot be underestimated, he brought not only technical expertise but also humility, and moral fortitude. His impact extends far beyond the ship he helped create; his actions, a catalyst for a movement that continues to change lives to this day. Jack Hemmings embodied the very essence of what it means to serve others."

RAF Chaplain-in-chief, The Venerable AVM Giles Legood added: "Jack Hemmings has made an immeasurable difference to the lives of many across numerous low-income countries. Indeed, many owe their lives to him and the legacy

he has created. His quiet humility, yet determination to make a difference, is inspirational."

Always determined to inspire younger generations and ignite their potential, Jack volunteered with the RAF Air Cadets, ran a Sussex youth group and engaged with local schools.

Adding his handprint to an aircraft-shaped mural on the rear wall of Seabrook Primary School in July 2024, Jack said: "MAF is the Good Samaritan of the skies, and it's a pleasure to see children learning about how aircraft can do a lot of good in a world full of problems.

"I've never got into an aircraft and regretted it. I love flying because I have a feeling of detachment from all the problems of the world. Seeing aircraft used as weapons of war – as we did as young RAF airmen – reminds me of MAF's initial purpose: to use aeroplanes to bring peace and hope to needy places."

Jack leaves behind his son Adrian, wife Kate, and grandchildren William, Beatrice and Olivia. All of them describe him as a truly inspirational figure.

**Obituary** Wg Cdr Jack Harris OBE, DFC

# Lanc pilot survived 37 missions & lived until the age of 104

## Risked seven extra sorties for sake of his flight engineer

**W**ING COMMANDER Jack Harris, who has died aged 104, flew 37 bombing operations as the pilot of a Lancaster, for which he was awarded the DFC. He later served in the Far East and in NATO.

He joined 550 Squadron, based at North Killingholme near Grimsby, at the beginning of September 1944. This coincided with Bomber Command's return to Germany after a period of operations in support of the Normandy campaign. Germany's industrial centres became the main interest and Harris and his crew bombed targets in the Ruhr. Over Emmerich, their Lancaster was badly damaged by anti-aircraft fire and lost fuel. Harris managed to coax the aircraft back to base, where he made a safe landing.

### Operation Hurricane

On October 14, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, the C-in-C, launched a huge attack against Duisburg, Operation Hurricane, when more than 1,000 bombers attacked the target in an early morning raid. That night, he sent out another 800 bombers to complete the attack. Jack Harris and his crew were involved in both. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, they attacked the German gun batteries on Walcheren Island, which had been preventing the opening of the crucial port of Antwerp.

By January 1945, the primary targets became Germany's oil industry, in particular the synthetic oil plants at Gelsenkirchen, Wanne Eickel, Leuna and Homberg, all of which Harris and his crew attacked.

By the middle of January, Harris was due to be rested after completing 30 operations, but his flight engineer had missed seven of them due to an injury. Harris and some of his crew decided they would carry on until their colleague had completed his 30<sup>th</sup>. During this extended period, the crew bombed Goch in support of the British 2nd Army and on February 13 they

flew on the infamous Dresden raid, being airborne for almost 10 hours. They flew one more operation and were finally rested. Throughout their time on 550 Sqn, they had never returned early and had always hit the primary target.

### 550 Squadron

John Harris, always known as Jack, was born on September 21, 1920 in Gillingham, Kent and was educated at Gillingham County Secondary School, where he played many sports, a lifetime interest. He passed the Civil Service examination and began work in the intelligence department of the Air Ministry.

He had always had a passion for flying and regularly visited the nearby Shorts aircraft factory at Rochester. Although in a reserved occupation, he volunteered for the RAF and was accepted for training as a pilot in October 1940. On completion he left for Canada, where he became a navigation instructor and where he accumulated an invaluable 670 hours flying time. On his return to England, he converted to the Lancaster and joined 550 Sqn.

At the end of his operational tour, he became an instructor on heavy bombers. He decided to remain in the RAF and converted to Dakota transport aircraft before heading for the Far East in 1949. A guerilla war, the 'Malayan Emergency' had broken out and Dakotas dropped supplies to Army patrols in the jungle. He was mentioned in despatches. He later commanded 542 Sqn, a photographic reconnaissance squadron operating the Canberra. The squadron sent a detachment to Singapore to support the Malayan Emergency.

### OBE

In the late 1950s he served in the Air Ministry reviewing RAF operational requirements for transport aircraft and helicopters. At the time, the RAF's long-range fleet was based on wartime types and

needed modernising. In due course the Britannia and the VC 10 were introduced into service. In June 1960, his work in this area was recognised when he was appointed OBE.

After service in Germany and at the HQ NATO at Fontainebleau, where he was responsible for photographic reconnaissance squadrons, he returned to the Air Ministry for his final appointment before retiring in 1967.

### Comrades

He became the Secretary General of the British Hospitals Export Council, an organisation based in London promoting the export of British hospital and medical equipment, an appointment that involved worldwide travel. He retired in 1982.

Harris never forgot his wartime comrades and was instrumental in establishing the

550 Squadron Association, becoming its secretary and then its president. Some 60 years after they had last been together, he met up with the flight engineer who had been the cause of his extended tour of operations.

In retirement, Harris was involved in the theatre at Tunbridge Wells, where his wife produced amateur plays. He played golf into his 80s and was playing bridge until shortly before his death.

Jack died on January 9. He was widowed twice, and married his third wife, Angela, in 2018 when he was 98. He is survived by two daughters from his first marriage.

DFC: Wg Cdr Jack Harris OBE





Tim Morris



# Mazda's small SUV goes big on style and quality

MAZDA HAS always had a knack of creating models that form a niche in the market and hold on to it doggedly. The CX-5 is no exception. Since it was launched back in 2012, well over three million of them have been sold in Europe alone. It's evolved over the years but its main appeal remains the same; it's a great-looking small SUV that drives brilliantly.

## Exterior

The latest generation car still sits on the basic platform that made the first-gen CX-5 such a success, but the body is now lower, longer and sleeker. Slim, angled, headlights, Mazda's latest signature grille and a lengthy bonnet give it a meaner look at the front, while new rear lights and a chunky back end complete the package. It is a good-looking car, with a nice colour range.

## Interior

The original CX-5 was spacious, but felt a bit bland inside. The latest car is a rather different beast. It's stylish and modern,

with a sleek infotainment screen that protrudes from the top of the dash, aluminium-look air vents and a sharp trim strip that runs across the width of the car.

The infotainment system is operated by a rotary controller on the centre console, which is much easier and safer to operate on the move than touchscreen rivals. Menus are properly intuitive and don't overwhelm you with options, while Apple CarPlay/Android Auto connectivity makes it a doddle to sync to your phone.

The 10.25-inch screen, which is standard across the range, is super wide and has crisp, good-looking graphics. There are even physical climate controls... we like simple.

The CX-5 is a five seater, with plenty of space inside. Knee-room in the back is good, the boot is a healthy size and there are little handles back there so you can flip the seats down from the tailgate. Useful. There is no seven-seat option, but that won't trouble most buyers.

If you like to sit high up, you'll appreciate the standard driving

## Pros

- Handles well
- Nicely equipped
- Smart interior

## Cons

- Rivals have more luggage space
- No seven-seat option

## Verdict

The Mazda CX-5 is a brilliant family SUV, in

## Mazda CX-5

many ways. It handles well and is versatile enough to cope with the pressures of family life. It lacks the practicality of a seven-seats option, but it's well-priced, very well-equipped and classy inside. A good all-rounder that's worth a test drive.

position, but a good amount of adjustment means you can also make it feel more car-like, without too much effort. An adjustable lumbar support comes as standard and the steering wheel offers ample movement.

## On The Road

The CX-5 has great body control for a car in this class and, as a result, has more grip through the bends than most rivals. The steering is quick, accurate and naturally weighted. It even gives you a decent amount of feedback,

which is a rare prize in a medium-sized crossover.

All CX-5s get something called G-Vectoring Control, which takes a little bit of torque away from the front wheels when you turn in. This shifts weight forward over the front axle. As you accelerate through and out of the bend, the torque is smoothly restored, shifting weight backwards to aid stability. Clever.

A range of engines is available, driven by good old-fashioned logic. Mazda doesn't

use turbochargers to artificially boost the performance of its petrol engines. Instead it simply fits its cars with larger-capacity, naturally-aspirated petrols that are big enough to power the cars to which they're fitted. The downsides are, of course, fuel economy and taxation. The upsides, predictable power delivery, no need to thrash the living daylights out of a tiny 1.0 litre and no dangerous flat spots at the wrong time.

Our test car was the CX-5, 2.0, 165ps, two-wheel-drive, Homura. The stats were: 0-62mph in 10.7 seconds, a top end of 125mph and combined fuel economy of 43.5mpg. You're not going to break any land speed records and you'll have to wind it up to around 3000rpm to get a shift on, but the larger, more durable engines are still our preferred choice against small turbos for cars in this class.

There are rivals that are more agile and more comfortable out there, but the CX-5 has a lot going for it and it handles well enough to make you smile. That's worth a lot, in our book.

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RUGBY LEAGUE

# Challenge Cup woe... but could it be a good omen?

Army	22
RAF	16

**Daniel Abrahams**  
Aldershot

THERE WAS late Challenge Cup heartache for the RAF men's rugby league stars at Aldershot as they lost 22-16 to the Army having led for 70 minutes of the rescheduled tie.

The aviators arrived at the match without key players including Sgt Liam Bradley and just a warm-up session before the game as preparation – but were quick out of the blocks and battled until the final whistle.

Speaking after the clash, head coach Sgt James Hutchinson said: "I think the best team lost to be honest. We had a couple of drops in concentration, they scored against the run of play twice, which led to our heads going down and it's very difficult to counter that if it happens."

"They have that individual flair which is hard to control through a tough clash like this – they tried to keep us at bay and then we made a couple of errors, and they hit us twice."

He added: "I cannot question the commitment – we didn't meet in the week due to work commitments, so we had a little run out this morning and that was it. We were missing key players and had a few injuries during the game as well, so we knew it would be tough."

"We lost last year at this stage in a tight game to the Royal Navy, and



**AIR DEFENCE:**  
Army player is tackled by three aviators at Aldershot  
PHOTO: SBS

then went on to have a great Inter-Service so, in an odd way, this bodes well. We have 10 players to come back for September, and we'll have a strong squad for the real challenge."

In bitterly cold conditions at the Aldershot Garrison Stadium

the aviators took the first-round cup clash, rescheduled due to a frozen pitch seven days earlier, to the hosts, leading after 12 minutes 6-0 through an AS1 Ben Symon try on the Army right.

The score had been coming

with the RAF seeing one effort disallowed and forcing several Army defensive errors – as well as seeing the hosts drop a high ball when inside the RAF try line.

It took the hosts until the half-hour mark to score; the aviators

leading 10-0 a try on the wing saw the score 6-10 at the break.

Eight minutes after the restart the RAF led 6-16, with the hosts coming back into it on the hour 16-16, only for the late scores to see them drop out of the Cup.



**WE'RE JAMMING:** Board skills on display at Prevail Skatehouse, Poole

SKATEBOARDING

## Get on board with growing sport

THE SERVICE'S skateboarding fraternity's push to become a recognised sport will see it run monthly jam sessions throughout the year under the title 'Skate-alive in 25'.

After a bumper 2024, which saw success in the UK Ultraskate endurance event and increased membership numbers, the association shows no sign of slowing down.

The year kicked off with the first jam at Adrenalin Alley in Corby and this will be followed by regular events at Creation Skatepark, Birmingham; Prevail Skatehouse, Poole; and XC Climbing and Skatepark in Hemel Hempstead.

RAF skateboarding social media manager Cpl Will Drummee said: "With jam sessions scheduled throughout the year, the team aim to

bring in new members.

"The association offers serving personnel the opportunity to pick up a board, meet new people and potentially try a new sport, all in a relaxed and friendly environment."

The team will battle it out for military bragging rights over October into November, with the return of the Inter-Service Skate Jam.

Drummee added: "Additionally, the team will compete in the UK Ultraskate once again – a 24-hour event, testing endurance, stamina and teamwork as each team aims to clock up as many miles on a skateboard as we can."

● For further details on the jam sessions email: [Charlie.Turnbull206@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Charlie.Turnbull206@mod.gov.uk) or visit: [@royalairforceskateboarding](https://royalairforceskateboarding.com) on Instagram.

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



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# THE UNDEFEATED

## RAF trio lead GB Invictus in the first ever 'double' games

**Daniel Abrahams**

THREE MAY well be the lucky number for GB Invictus as a triumvirate of RAF personnel lead the charge in Vancouver at this month's games.

Team captain Cpl Stephen Hooper (Ret'd) and vice-captains Flt Lt Gemma Barnes (Ret'd) and Sqn Ldr Neil Thomas are at the helm for the seventh tournament.

Hooper told *RAF News*: "We've constantly been told by high-ranking military and games personnel that we are the most together team they've witnessed. That is a great compliment to all involved."

"When we stand out there our shoulders will be back, our chests out – it's going to be on another level."

Hooper, the most junior-ranked team captain in the event's history, leads the team for the first ever winter/summer games.

Medically discharged in 2021 with PTSD, Moral Injury Syndrome and Recurring Depression, the former RAF snowboarder said: "During my dark times I had given up. I loved snowboarding, but my board has stayed hidden, now it is out for the Games."

"So many focus on the medals and competitive side of things, but we have personnel who struggled making eye contact before this, now they're competing at Invictus."

"Our focus as captains is to build on those moments, where our team overcome their own personal competition or challenge."

Hooper, who competed at Invictus in Dusseldorf, pinpoints a photograph from those 2023 games that trace the transition he has undergone. "If I look at the team photo, I'm hiding in it," he said. "This time I'll be at the front, no hiding anymore."

He added: "We have team members who could not go into a shop or were triggered if they heard someone whistle – they'll be standing on a start line soon, with the world looking on."

Hooper is competing in



**FACING HER DEMONS:** Flt Lt Gemma Barnes is back on the slopes after suffering serious injuries skiing



**MURDERBALL:** Training for the brutal wheelchair rugby event

snowboard slalom, rowing and wheelchair rugby in Canada.

Barnes was medically discharged in 2020 with severe leg injuries after working as a physiotherapist at Headley Court.

She said: "We've all been dealt a rubbish hand to get here, so it's powerful to be here together as one tight team – and being one of three RAF captains feels special."

"It's amazing to see our Service represented in this way and it's lighting up the signal that there is something positive on the other side of a bad injury or medical discharge."

Following two accidents, one in skiing, Barnes is heading back to the slopes to overcome her demons, competing in sit-ski, skeleton and rowing.

She said: "I came out of the Service in 2020 in the middle of Covid. I was on my own, had lots of surgery and became isolated. The world was upside down and I had no sense of belonging, anywhere. A friend said try Invictus, I did, and this is the first time I have felt I fit."

"My first big injury came about because of skiing, so skiing feels like it ended my career. To be able to move past it and go on to the slopes with sit-ski is massive."

Thomas had an epiphany through the Games in dealing

with his injury and the mental health challenges.

He said: "I hadn't realised how much it had taken out of me, hiding my injury, to be seemingly able to function normally in the world."

"It was only when I began being around people struggling with the same thing that I felt I could be myself."

"In my career, I always liked helping other people, but it was drifting, I was losing myself. The vice-captain role has brought that back somewhat."

"It's not only what I bring to the team, but also about utilising it for myself, and that was noticed by others who knew I could get that part of me back."

"It's humbling to be considered. It was a huge boost when I got the call."

"With all three of us being RAF, we bring different things, it makes for great banter – we tell all non-RAF we are involved because it's the most complicated Games so far [with winter and summer sports] so they needed us in charge to make sure it went properly."

● Follow the Invictus Games on Instagram @invictus25 and Forces News: forcesnews.com



SQN LDR THOMAS

CPL HOOPER

FLT LT BARNES

**Sport**

# Players impress boss Gardner in the gloom at Cardiff Met Late penalty heartbreak

**RUGBY UNION**

**Daniel Abrahams**

**DESPITE A late 29-28 defeat in the fog at Cardiff Met University, RAFRU head coach FS Tom Gardner says his team is where it should be.**

The game, which started with a minute's silence to mark the passing of former RAF head coach WO Steve Worrall (Ret'd), saw both teams produce some terrific running rugby.

The aviators, having taken the lead 0-7, sat 26-28 ahead in the dying minutes before Cardiff kicked the decisive late penalty in the gloom at the Cyncoed Campus in Wales.

Gardner said: "There was a good tempo, both teams wanted to express themselves. It was an enjoyable day and we put a marker down of where we are, which is exactly where I want us to be.

"It was foggy, but nice conditions to play in. We left about five scores out there, so the lads are frustrated, but they need to be patient – they will get there."

He added: "I am pleased across the board. We went through four

nice tries, we used 25 players, so everybody got game time. The lads have freedom inside our framework and they are thriving in that, so we must be proud of what we did."

Having seen his side produce some exciting rugby, with tries from L/Cpls Kieran Jenkins, Connor Morris, Cpl Zack Taylor and Flt Lt Jacob Seddon, Gardner added: "The Met kicking for the sticks late on is a massive mark of respect. The game was tight and competitive, they went for the win by kicking not running, which shows we earned their respect."

Facing Fijian Olympic sevens gold medalist Gareth Baber's (Met University head of performance) across the touchline, Gardner and his backroom staff also spent the day with the Met coaching set-up and hope this could lead to an annual fixture.

Gardner said: "To put ourselves up against a good rugby programme which has five or six teams, with well-drilled players, and to pit our wits against people of that standard and calibre is a proud moment."



**CLOSE CONTEST:** Cardiff Met University scraped the win after being behind for much of the match

**FOOTBALL**

# Man U date for RAF Elite coach

**WOLVES WOMEN'S football manager Sgt Dan McNamara believes his team's FA cup fifth round tie with Manchester United is vindication of the RAF Sports Federation's Elite Athlete programme.**

McNamara, who has managed the Women's National League Northern Premier team for the last seven seasons, said: "It's a buzz being in the FA Cup draw. I feel it is my way of paying back the faith shown in me by the Air Force with its Elite Athlete Scheme.

"Everyone who made that possible, this is for them in a way.

"I'm now getting to show what Wolves women's team can produce. It's an amazing opportunity. I'm very lucky to be in this position."

McNamara's Wolves have produced a goal-fest in the opening four rounds of this year's English Women's FA Cup, netting 31 times.

The side beat Asfordby Amateurs 7-1 in the first round, followed by an 8-1 win over Sporting Khalsa in November, a 14-0 thumping of Shrewsbury, before beating Cheltenham Town Ladies 2-0.

Speaking about the clash against the current cup holders at SEAH Stadium on February 8, the aviator said: "I'm not planning on us making up the numbers. Yes, this tie is a dream come true, but this is not about them coming to Wolves and getting to the next round.

"We can and will make it competitive. We have



**CUP RUN:** McNamara's Wolves Women now face Man Utd

players who want to go further in the Cup, but they will also benefit from playing against the players United have.

"It's exciting for everyone involved. We'll have hundreds of schoolgirls here watching their heroes facing the best in the country.

"To have a last-16 glamour tie like this is down to the hard work of everyone at the club."

● Follow Wolverhampton Wanderers women's team on Instagram @wolveswomenfc.

**EQUESTRIAN**

# Showjumpers on a high after success at Olympia

THE SERVICE'S equine association is hoping the fabulous second place at the London International Horse Show, Olympia will spark further success this year.

Speaking about Flt Lt Michelle Randall and WO Keeley Martin's efforts at the event, which saw Randall second, Chair of RAF showjumping Wg Cdr Haley Norris said: "Having two RAF riders in the final was an incredibly proud moment.

"They truly rose to the challenge of competing in such a prestigious venue and this provided the perfect springboard for the exciting season ahead."

Randall added: "To have the opportunity to step into the International Showjumping arena was an honour and to finish in second place, I couldn't have asked anymore."

Taking part in the Uniformed Services Showjumping Championship, members of the Armed Forces and Police Service compete



**WO MARTIN:** 'Privilege' to be at show

in three earlier rounds to earn points in the Qualifiers League. The top eight riders then battle it out at the LIHS final.

WO Martin said: "It was an absolute privilege to ride into the Olympia arena. The whole atmosphere was quite spectacular, joyous and a truly incredible experience."

The first RAF Equestrian Championships qualifiers will be held April 14-16, venue to be confirmed.

● Follow RAF Equestrian on Instagram @raf\_equitation.

# WE THREE KINGS



**FIVE ALIVE:** UKAFFC take the Kentish Cup for the fifth time in six tournaments

## The RAF coaches who have helped UK Armed Forces football to reign supreme for a decade

### Daniel Abrahams

**THE RESIGNATION** of Cpl Daryl White as UKAFFC head coach completes a decade of unprecedented success for RAF personnel in the top job of Service football.

White bowing out comes a month after he guided the team to a fifth Kentish Cup win in six tournaments in Stroe, Holland, beating France 1-0 and Holland 2-1.

In a seemingly perfect ending, Navy star and team captain CPOPT Danny Kerr RN scored the winning goal against France, while Army man Cpl Greg Peel then aviator AS1 Joe Spalding scored to seal the final win over the hosts.

The win sees UKAF unbeaten in the tournament for a decade under the management of White, Sgt Nick de-Long (Ret'd) and FS Dyfan Pierce (Ret'd).

De-Long kicked off

the 10-year run with a victory in Portsmouth as assistant coach in 2014, before winning the tournament for a historic UK three years in a row with his assistant coach FS Pierce, who became head coach in 2020.

On the latest Kentish win, White said: "If there is a best way to finish it, this was it. The French had four professional players, they were on a different level, so it was tough but so good to win it."

White, who became involved with the UKAF set-up after meeting de-Long on a FA Level One coaching course in 2016, added: "I think this was a moment that lasted a decade.

"To get it to where it is now is fabulous and I don't see things tapering off, this should be the springboard for more."

Along with the Kentish Cup success, White, de-Long and Pierce have won four of the five Military Friendship Trophy matches against the Irish Defence Forces held since 2019 with UKAFFC.

On the decade of RAF-driven success, de-Long, said: "I'm grateful to have been in the RAF to play and coach



WHITE



PIERCE



**THE HOLY TRINITY:** (left to right) UKAF football chiefs Cpl Daryl White, FS Dyfan Pierce (Ret'd) and Sgt Nick de-Long (Ret'd)



**OUR CUP FLOWETH OVER:** UK Armed Forces Football Club players and staff celebrate their latest triumph in Holland

football at the highest level and then take on the UKAF role in 2016. They were prosperous times, with great people and some big nights.

"It's a special opportunity to play for the shirt; privileged and honoured are words that ring true, and for Daryl to see it out in style is amazing."

Pierce – whose time in charge was hit

by the Covid epidemic, meaning the team did not play a game for 18 months – said: "I was really fortunate to have such an amazing experience in the military, if someone had told me it would be like it was I would have snapped their hand off, so many great memories – it was tough to leave it all. So many good people were involved throughout.

"My time in charge was chaotic with Covid and a lot of change personnel-wise, but that was the challenge, and it was a pleasure to rebuild the set-up. I knew I would have Daryl as my

second in charge, that was a no-brainer, and look at what he has gone on to achieve."

White added: "UKAFFC are now a showpiece team. It is the elite level and plays a part in defence engagement, that is how big it has become.

"We could go anywhere and hold our own, we are one of the best teams in military football."



DE-LONG

Follow UKAFFC on Instagram @ukafffootball.

# 5

## pages of the best of **RAF Sports** action



See p26

## Riders gearing up for season

### ATHLETICS



**SECOND-PLACE:**  
Cpl Adam Baker, left  
PHOTOS: LUKA WAYCOTT

# Halton return for Sefton Brancker

### Daniel Abrahams

THE 93RD Sefton Brancker cross-country race at RAF Halton kicked off the Service sport's first event of the year with a battling second place for the Air Force.

The aviators fielded depleted teams in both the men's and women's races against Civil Service, Fire Service and Police opposition, for the prestigious trophy.

Cpl Adam Baker, who came home second, and eighth for Flt Lt Kim Adams (inset), were the highlights for the RAF as the Service made a welcome return to hosting the blue-ribbon event.

Baker came home runner-up in 35 mins 32 secs over the 3.5-lap 10k course, behind Civil Service athlete Jack Miller, who won in



34:54, with James McRae (Civil Service) in third.

Baker said: "It was tough. I tried to get in some early breakaways because I felt confident. I had never raced these guys before, so when Jake broke away, I just knuckled down. It was tricky, especially in the muddy corners."

Men's team captain Flt Lt Mike Kallenburg said: "Adam had a fantastic race off the back of the Air Com cross-country win before Christmas. It's good that he has maintained that form."

"He is a red-hot favourite for the RAF Championships and hopefully he will be at the forefront of the Inter-Services."

"We had a few injuries for the Sefton, so we are extremely proud of the result and hope to be back to full strength come the Inters."

Opening the day in the women's event, lone RAF runner Flt Lt Kim Adams saw Police runners dominate. They took the top three places, with Baker coming home eighth in the 7.5km race.



## It's Game on for Invictus

INVICTUS GAMES athletes got in some late training at Tamworth Snowdome ahead of the 2025 event at Vancouver,

Canada, this month. The GB team is being led by a RAF trio headed by Cpl Stephen Hooper. See p25.

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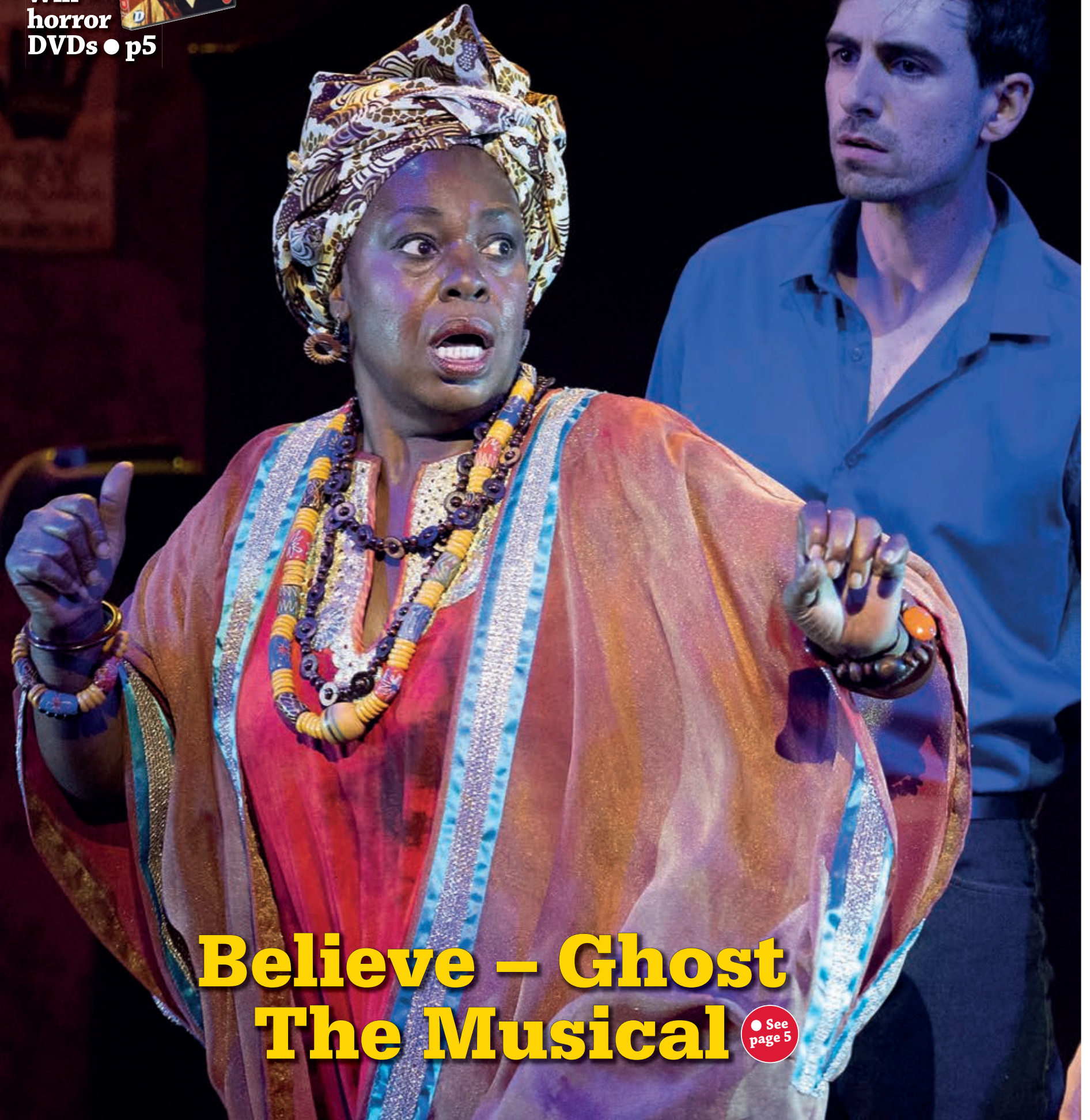


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# R'n'R



Win  
horror  
DVDs ● p5



## Believe – Ghost The Musical

● See  
page 5



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

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**Theatre**  
Picture You Dead  
UK tour

# Corrie star forges new path

**FORMER CORONATION STREET** star Peter Ash says he's been looking forward to treading the boards in the new stage adaptation of bestselling thriller writer Peter James's novel *Picture You Dead*.

It opened at the High Wycombe Swan on February 6 and is on a nationwide tour until July 26.

The actor, who won the 2024 National Television Award for Best Serial Drama Performance for his moving and memorable portrayal of Motor Neurone Disease sufferer Paul Foreman in *Corrie*, said: "It's been a while since I did a theatre tour, probably 10 years. It's very exciting and it'll be good to visit theatres across the country."

Peter bows out of the tour in mid-May as he wants to be at home for his son, aged 15, who is sitting his GCSEs.

He explained: "He's in his final year at high school, a very important year for him, and I want to be there for him in his hour of need."

*Picture You Dead* features

James's popular policeman, Supt Roy Grace, star of the hit TV adaptations *Grace* (starring John Simm as the Brighton-based copper). The play is the seventh stage adaptation of James's *Grace* series, making it the most successful modern-day crime stage franchise since Agatha Christie.

Once again set in Brighton, DSI Grace investigates a cold case that leads him to the secretive world of fine art, but beneath the respectable veneer lurks a dark underworld of deception and murder.

When one unsuspecting couple unearth a potentially priceless masterpiece, they discover that their dream find is about to turn into their worst nightmare, and only Grace can stop them from paying the ultimate price.

Ash plays master art forger David Hegarty, inspired by real-life former forger David Henty, who James met after being introduced to him by former Commander of Brighton and Hove Police Graham Bartlett.



**ART IMITATING ART:** Peter Ash, left, with reformed forger David Henty

Henty was previously jailed for passport forgery and, while in prison, took up painting. He discovered he had a rare gift – he could copy the work of any painter, from Rembrandt to Banksy.

"Henty's reformed now and he's very much based on the character I play," said Ash.

"Hegarty, my character, is a very talented guy and he knows it. He's warm, friendly, charming and now copies painting legally,

and that's where he comes into the story.

"A couple, the Kiplings, find this really old piece of artwork, potentially a masterpiece, and they come to Hegarty for advice. Eventually they decide to get a copy made because the artwork's so valuable.

"Without giving too much away, some shady characters get involved and it's up to Roy to stop the bad guys."

The cast also includes George Rainsford reprising his role on stage as DSI Grace, Fiona Wade, Jodie Steele, and from May 20, Ore Oduba as Stuart Piper.

Ash said he's particularly looking forward to taking the play to the Lowry in Salford in April. He added: "That's my home and we have a bit of time the following week so I'll be able to stay at home for a good two weeks, which will be lovely. I'm sure a nice crowd of my ex-*Corrie* colleagues will come to see the play."

*Interview by Tracey Allen*

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



**Film review**  
The Last Showgirl (15) + Pamela Anderson recorded Q&A

In cinemas from February 10

## Anderson puts on a great show

**PAMELA ANDERSON** is perfect in *The Last Showgirl* as seasoned Las Vegas performer Shelly who must plan for her future when the show she's been in for a 30-year run, *Le Razzle Dazzle*, abruptly closes.

She's a dancer, now in her fifties, although still beautiful, and she needs to repair a strained relationship with her college-age daughter Hannah (Billie Lourd), who often took a backseat to Shelly's showgirl family while growing up.

Directed by Gia Coppola (granddaughter of Francis Ford Coppola) whose previous films include *Mainstream* and *Palo Alto*, *The Last Showgirl* is a sympathetic portrait of the lives of Shelly and her best friend Annette (a superb performance by Jamie Lee Curtis), a former showgirl now working at the same club as Shelly as a cocktail waitress and burdened with a gambling addiction.

There's a particularly poignant scene where Annette, in her waitress's uniform, dances by herself on a table in the club but no one takes any notice of her.

Kiernan Shipka (*Madmen*) and Brenda Song (*The Social Network*) are immensely watchable as Jodie and Marianne respectively, much younger dancers whose attitudes to their jobs – Jodie, only



**OLD-SCHOOL GLAMOUR:** Anderson as 'Shelly'

19, doesn't take it seriously, and Marianne, is hardened to it – contrast with Shelly's romantic view of *Le Razzle Dazzle* and its heritage, the Lido cabaret in Paris.

The show means everything to her, despite Hannah, after watching it, calling it "a stupid nude show."

Former professional wrestler Dave Bautista delivers a thoughtful performance as Shelly's former lover Eddie, who also runs her stage show.

The film is just 85 minutes long but it packs a punch, musing on the sadness of glamour inevitably fading over time and providing food for thought about what happens when the show is finally over.

**Four roundels out of five** ●●●●  
*Review by Tracey Allen*



**Theatre review**  
Calamity Jane the Musical  
On tour: calamityjanemusical.com

## Whip-crackin' good fun

**YEE-HA!** Calamity Jane's in town and is guaranteed to chase the winter blues away.

West End star Carrie Hope Fletcher shines in the lead role as Calam' (as the *Deadwood* locals call her) in this excellent stage production of the classic 1953 film that memorably starred Doris Day and Howard Keel.

It's a comedy, an action-packed drama and a love story all rolled into one, featuring a first-class cast who all play instruments while singing and dancing to famous tunes including *The Deadwood Stage* (*Whip-Crack-Away*), *The Black Hills of Dakota* and *Just Blew in from the Windy City*.

Fletcher (the sister of McFly's Tom Fletcher) delivered a show-stopping performance of the Oscar-winning song *Secret Love* that had the audience enthralled when I saw the production at Aylesbury's Waterside Theatre.

If you haven't seen the film and don't know the story, it's all about the gunslingin', big-mouthed gal from Dakota territory who, despite acting tough, has a crush on the dashing Lieutenant Danny Gilmartin and enjoys trading insults with her good friend 'Wild Bill' Hickok. When the *Deadwood* men all fall in love with stage star Adelaid Adams from Chicago, Calamity goes to the Windy City to fetch her, but brings back her maid Katie Brown instead.

After an initial stumble, Katie proves a hit with the locals, especially Danny and Bill. But Calamity struggles with jealousy...who does she really love?



**TRADING INSULTS:** 'Wild Bill' and Calamity Jane



**MAID KATIE:** Soon a hit with *Deadwood*'s menfolk

There's great chemistry between Fletcher and Vinny Coyle as Bill, with strong support from Luke Wilson as Danny and Seren Sandham-Davies as Katie.

In fact, the whole cast are fantastic and they're a joy to watch.

I'm sure, like me, you'll be singing those unforgettable songs all the way home.

**Five roundels out of five** ●●●●●  
*Review by Tracey Allen*



**Theatre**  
**Murder on The**  
**Orient Express**  
 UK tour

# All aboard Christie's Or

**A** GATHA CHRISTIE'S *Murder on The Orient Express* has been called one of the crime-writing doyenne's greatest literary achievements.

A new production of the ingenious murder mystery is now on a nationwide tour until May 3, with stage and screen star Michael Maloney (*Belfast*; *Young Victoria*) as Christie's famous Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot.

The cast also includes Bob Barrett (*Holby City*, *And Then There Were None* UK tour) as Monsieur Bouc, Debbie Chazen (*Romeo and Juliet*, *The Globe*) as Princess Dragomiroff, Christine Kavanagh (*An Inspector Calls*, *A Room With A View*) as Helen Hubbard, and Paul Keating (*The Who's Tommy*, *West End*; *EastEnders*) as Hector MacQueen.

The show visits venues including Southampton's Mayflower Theatre (February 18-22), Milton Keynes Theatre (February 25 to March 1), Nottingham's Theatre Royal (April 1-5) and the Cheltenham Everyman (April 29 to May 3).

Barrett said of the production: "It's funny, exciting and adventurous, and it'll also make you think. When I did *And Then There Were None* people left going 'It's a lot to think about' or 'I need to talk about what happened and all of the characters.'"

Maloney added: "But hopefully if we get the speed and the pace right, people won't be able to think fast enough during the show itself. It will be a night of intrigue with a great denouement."

Barrett explained: "Monsieur Bouc is the man who runs the train, he's very passionate about it and his best friend is Hercule Poirot, so he's very supportive towards him. Poirot is a genius and Bouc isn't, so he's often a sounding board and there's a little bit of Sherlock-Watson in it. Sometimes Bouc pushes back and



**CRIME TO SOLVE:** Hercule Poirot (Michael Maloney)  
 PHOTOS: MANUEL HARLAN

he questions things, then at other times he just watches as Poirot weaves his magic and goes 'How extraordinary!' There is a great bond between the two of them."

Maloney said: "There are some very interesting scenes going on around Poirot in which he just observes and I think he's quite a lonely person. In order to be on top of his game, to take care of his little grey cells, he has to distance or isolate himself from being too involved with people – so that he can objectively see what their characteristics are, what their behaviours are and what

they're up to full stop, really.

"But yes, he and Monsieur Bouc are old friends and in fact we've made up a bit of a backstory for them, where they fought together in the First World War and Bouc saved Poirot's life after he was invalidated out to England and ended up in Torquay – as the type of Belgian refugee that Agatha Christie would have seen during her childhood there."

Poirot has been portrayed by many actors over the years – mostly notably David Suchet on TV and Kenneth Branagh, Albert Finney and Peter Ustinov on the

big screen. How does Maloney make the character his own?

"When you play a role, it will naturally become your own but I carry the memory of everybody that I've watched play him with me. I don't try to compete with them and I like to acknowledge what they've done," he explained.

"I've really enjoyed all their performances but I think David Suchet in particular has dominated the national consciousness because he did it for about 20 years on television, so when people say 'Poirot' they automatically think of his appearance, his persona



**Theatre**  
**DocDoc**  
 Bromley and Southend

# Doctor's practice farce is simply quackers



**WRITER:** Laurent Baffie suffered OCD

**T**HE UK premiere of the worldwide hit comedy play *DocDoc* is on at the Churchill Theatre, Bromley until February 15, then at the Palace Theatre, Southend from February 18-23.

In the farce, which pokes fun at our idiosyncrasies and foibles, Doctor Cooper, a renowned specialist in obsessive-compulsive disorders, is running late. Meanwhile, he has a waiting room filled with patients desperate to be treated. First up there's Fred with a bad case of Tourette's, and behind him a growing queue of more and more challenging compulsions.

Practice Assistant Anna attempts to keep on top of the mounting chaos while we wait for the doctor to arrive but, with his extended absence,

the group has no other option than to try their own version of group therapy, with hilarious consequences.



**HUDSON-FOX**

The *DocDoc* cast features Sophie Bloor (*Gay Pride and No Prejudice*) as Lili, Gareth Brierley (*The Diplomat*) as Fred, Ryan Early (*Coronation Street*) as Lee, Joanna Hudson-Fox (*Emmerdale*) as Blanche, and Leon Stewart (*Wish You Were Dead*) as Otto.

French writer Laurent Baffie – who has experienced obsessive-compulsive disorders himself – is also a radio and television presenter, actor, theatre director and film-maker. He began writing sketches for other comedians in 1985, and went on to become known for his bold and provocative improvisations on television.

In 2005, he wrote *Toc Toc* (retitled as *DocDoc* for the UK), a huge success not only in France but all over the world, especially in Spain and South America. *Toc Toc* has been seen by more than 4,300,000 people and has won numerous awards.

Spanish writer and theatre and film director Julián Quintanilla wrote the English version of *DocDoc*. His work as a Molière Award-winning adaptor of French plays has earned him worldwide recognition, with his texts premiered in more than 20 countries.

The production has a partnership with small UK charity No Panic, which supports people living with panic attacks, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorders and other related anxiety disorders, and their carers.

● **Go to:** [docdocplay.co.uk](http://docdocplay.co.uk) for more information.



Edited by Tracey Allen



# Orient Express



**SIDEKICK:** Poirot is assisted by old friend Monsieur Bouc, played by Bob Barrett (right, with Paul Keating as Hector)

it was blissful and the second time was a longer tour so we shared digs. What's lovely about it as well is that there is a sort of element of Hamlet-Horatio in the Poirot and Bouc relationship, and there are a lot of references to Hamlet in this play."

Maloney described *Murder on The Orient Express* as 'one of her [Christie's] all-time greats.'

He added: "Her writing is very dependable. You have a world created for you, which you can observe from the audience and still feel non-threatened by but yet you're intrigued by the terrible goings on in other people's lives, which is the function of theatre a lot of the time anyway. The engine of the play, the plot by Christie, is a very good one."

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

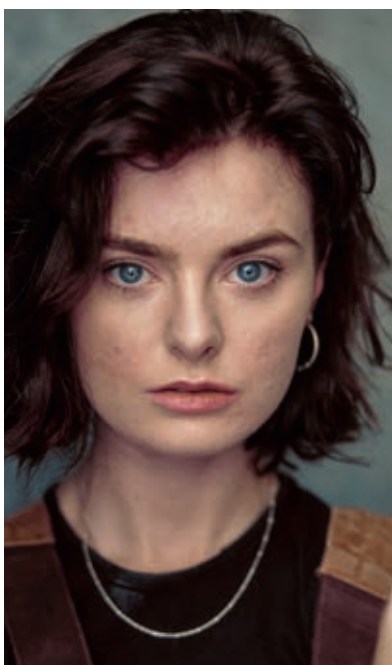
and his acting of the role. To veer far away from that would not be right but because it is a stage production there is more expression involved and there is slightly more passion involved. We cannot be dependent on the television close-up, we have to project ourselves, and there is also room for losing your temper and getting exasperated, as well as being utterly charming."

Barrett and Maloney have great rapport – this tour is the third time they have worked together.

Barrett said: "Previously we were in *Hamlet* together. The first time, he was Hamlet and I was Rosencrantz, then I was Horatio to his Hamlet. Both times



'LEE': Ryan Early



'LILI': Sophie Bloor



## DVDs

**The Last Voyage of the Demeter (15) & Beezel (18)**  
4K Ultra HD, Blu-ray & DVD (Dazzler Media) & Blu-ray, DVD & download (Dazzler)

# Something sinister lurks below

**B**ASED ON a single chilling chapter from Bram Stoker's classic novel, *Dracula*, *The Last Voyage of the Demeter* is a terrifying new addition to the Dracula legend.

Directed by André Øvredal (*Troll Hunter*, *The Autopsy of Jane Doe*), the film chronicles the doomed journey of a merchant ship ferrying 50 mysterious wooden crates from Carpathia to London. As they set sail, the crew soon discover they are not alone on board: at night they are stalked by a hidden passenger whose monstrous thirst for blood turns the trip into a harrowing nightmare of tension, terror and unfathomable evil.

**BEEZEL** IS an unsettling new horror, told over six tumultuous decades, in which three unwitting guests of a cursed New England home stumble upon a sinister secret dwelling beneath its floors – an eternal witch with an



**LAST VOYAGE:** Passengers being slain

insatiable thirst for the souls of the living.

A creepy chronicle of increasingly sinister legends and dark history, the movie offers a series of narratively linked vignettes, exploring the influence of an ancient evil upon several generations of the same family.

Assembled from disparate types of "found footage", the film presents its varied stories across multiple formats, from Super-8, to VHS, to the HD digital camera of a mobile phone, not simply suggesting the passage of time, but also the changes in how people record, interact

with, and interrogate their own experiences through the years.

*Beezel* was created by filmmaking duo Aaron Fradkin and Victoria Fratz Fradkin of Social House Films, dubbed one of the fastest growing creators in horror, with their popular short films going viral.

We have copies of these two scary titles on DVD up for grabs. To be in with a chance of winning one, tell us:

**On which classic novel is *The Last Voyage of the Demeter* based?**

**E m a i l your answer, m a r k e d Horror Films competition, to: [tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk](mailto:tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk) or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by February 21.**

Please mark on your entry if you prefer to win *Beezel* or *The Last Voyage of the Demeter*.



## Theatre

### Ghost The Musical

UK tour

# True love never dies

**T**HE MOVIE *Ghost* is one of cinema's biggest all-time hits. Starring the late Patrick Swayze, alongside Demi Moore and Whoopi Goldberg, it was the highest-grossing film of 1990. It won an Oscar for screenwriter Bruce Joel Rubin, who adapted his screenplay for the musical version, currently on tour around the UK.

Written by multi-Brit Award winner Dave Stewart (Eurythmics) and Grammy award-winning Glen Ballard, with a script by Rubin, *Ghost The Musical* brings all the romance and magic of the classic story to life on stage.

The production stars Rebekah Lowings (*The Sound of Music*) and Jacqui Dubois (*People, Places and Things*) as Molly Jenson and Oda Mae Brown respectively. Josh St. Clair (*Frozen*) plays Sam Wheat and James Mateo-Salt (*Bonnie and Clyde*) is Carl Bruner.

Walking back to their apartment late one night, a tragic encounter sees Sam murdered and his girlfriend Molly alone, in despair and utterly lost. With the help of a phony storefront psychic, Sam, trapped between this world and the next, tries to communicate with Molly in the hope of saving her from grave danger...

A smash hit across the globe, *Ghost The Musical* features The Righteous Brothers' *Unchained Melody* alongside many top songs co-written by Stewart.

The show is at the Mayflower Theatre,



**THAT'S THROWN HER:** *Ghost The Musical's* take on the original film's sensual and much-mimicked pottery scene

Southampton (February 11-15), Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff (March 4-8), Sheffield Lyceum Theatre (March 11-15), The Alexandra, Birmingham (April 3-6) and Hull New Theatre (April 29-May 3).

Further tour dates will be announced.

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



## Your Announcements

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

### Death

**DAWSON** Moira, former Fleet Air Arm Air Mechanic, wife of ex Warrant Officer Frank Dawson (SEFIT) Passed away peacefully after a long illness on January 10, aged 82. Beloved wife of Frank, much loved mum to Wendy and Keith, doting grandmother to Willow and Iona. RIP Moira.

### Reunions

**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

**CALLING** all former TG11 T/phonist, TPOs, Tels, Wop Spec, TCO, TCC, TRC, all are welcome to attend the TG11 Association reunion to be held Friday, March 21 to Sunday March 23, 2025, at the Marriott Delta Hotels Nottingham Belfry, Mellors Way, off Woodhouse Way, Nottingham NG8 6PY. See website: tg11association.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.

**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. d.slough@outlook.com

**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.

### Associations

**TO** all members and supporters of the RAF Association, Beccles and Southwold Area RMG, the New Year will bring challenges for us all, so please remember your less agile colleagues who would appreciate a voice on the telephone now and again. President Brian and the RAFA Committee, RAF Association, Beccles and Southwold Area RMG.

**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. See: rafaarmourers.co.uk or please contact the committee via email: plumbersrest@outlook.com.

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

**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: rafadappasn.org; or contact the Membership Secretary on: 07866 085834 or the Chairman on: 01933 443673.

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

**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.

### BFBS course for veterans

**APPLICATIONS** are open for BFBS Academy's fully-funded production managers course. The programme equips participants with the skills needed to thrive in one of the media industry's key roles, said a BFBS spokesperson. Graduates will earn a UAL Level 4 Professional Diploma in Technical and Production Practice for the Creative Industries.

The course runs for eight months from September 2025, at BFBS's headquarters in Chalfont St Peter. No prior media industry experience required. BFBS covers all course fees and provides a £10,400 tax-free bursary over eight months to support living costs and accommodation. Go to: academy.bfbs.com/pmcourse apply by April 11, 2025.



**IT'S OFFICIAL:** The team responsible for bringing the History Room to RAF Honington with Station Commander Wg Cdr Max Hayward, second left, and SWO WO Paul McGuire, third right

## Keeping history alive

**WHOLE** FORCE station personnel at RAF Honington came together recently for the official opening of the RAF Honington History Rooms by Station Commander Wg Cdr Max Hayward.

Over the past 12 months, a team of dedicated volunteers have converted the disused former dispersal room into a space devoted to the aviation history of Honington, from its creation on May 3, 1937 to the final RAF 13 Sqn Tornado departing on February 1, 1994.

The widely varied past of Honington under both the RAF and the US Army Air Force gives visitors a fascinating insight into the important Suffolk air station.

Wg Cdr Hayward said: "I am extremely grateful for the time and dedication that all the

volunteers have shown towards achieving success in providing the station with a unique record, now being brought together and preserved for the benefit of the station and wider community."

WO Mark Margrave, OIC History Room, said: "Many people from across the station, past and present, have made this happen through donations, the use of vehicles, financial advice, ordnance certification and just simply lending a hand to move the multitude of items that we have here in the History Room.

"We are always on the lookout for interesting articles and tales directly associated with the station and whilst we may not have the space, we do intend to keep the story 'alive' with regular refreshes and updates to displays currently presented."

## 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.

### How to use our service

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

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**EXEMPLARS:**  
 Cpl Piddington  
 at work and,  
 inset below,  
 FS Churchill

**Honours for St Mawgan duo**

**TWO RAF St Mawgan personnel have been awarded prestigious commendations in the New Year's Honours List.**

Full-time Reserve Service community information officer FS Justin Churchill receives the Air and Space Commander Commendation and Cpl Chelsie Piddington receives the Chief of the Air Staff Commendation.

FS Churchill was praised for his excellent work in community support at the Cornwall station.

His citation said that, in 2022, when the Station Command

Support Officer's post was unmanned due to sickness, FS Churchill stepped up to fill the gap.

It added: "Working outside his previous area of responsibility on areas critical to our personnel and their families, he maintained the vital information service from his own role, alongside managing the welfare house provision.

"Without his intervention over an extended period, the Service personnel, their families and wider community would have been detrimentally impacted."

Cpl Piddington, a part-time volunteer reserve Logistics Supply specialist with 505 (Wessex) Sqn RAuxAF, currently deployed at Waddington, was awarded the RAF Supplier of the Year trophy in 2024.

Her citation for the Commendation said she is "an inspirational role model for all PTVRs and has excelled in all areas. Her unparalleled dedication, work ethos and unrelenting success mark her out as a remarkable individual fully deserving of the award."

**Nutty runs for friend**



**SUPER-FIT:** Hockey star Cpl Sam 'Nutty' Nutt is running a marathon a day for charity

PHYSICAL instructor Cpl Sam 'Nutty' Nutt is marking a decade since his friend committed suicide by running 7,723 miles along the UK coastline.

The 28-year-old RAF Cranwell rehabilitation instructor has already completed 2,800 miles of his journey in 107 days of running.

A RAF hockey first team stalwart, he has been involved in the team's seven-in-a-row Inter-Service titles.

Cpl Nutt is raising money for men's mental health charities by completing around a marathon a day.

He started his running efforts while serving in the Falklands and then decided to carry it on to honour his friend.

During his Falklands tour last year, Nutty ran 70 miles from Mount Pleasant Complex to the Island's capital Stanley and back to raise money for the RAF Benevolent Fund and MIND UK.



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# R'n'R



## Prize Crossword No. 378

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

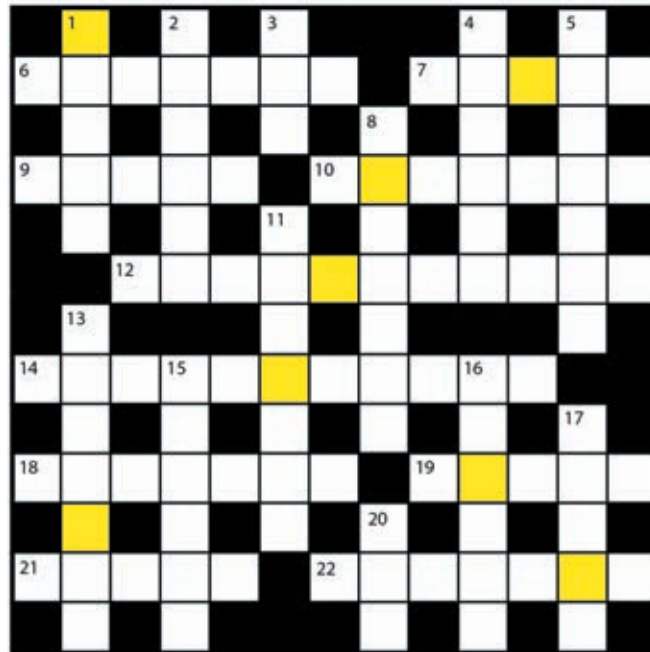
### Across

- 6. See 12 Across
- 7. Cake-maker uses pointless glass container (5)
- 9. Bottled-up Arabian spirit (5)
- 10. Flop turns up hit single on RAF job (7)
- 12. And 6 Across. Ruined a specified form worn for RAF award (6,5,2,5)
- 14. Pilot status desired by a Democrat, maybe (6-5)
- 18. After an embargo, The Godfather faces axe (7)
- 19. Medic uses single reaper (5)
- 21. A sailor returns RAF aircraft (5)
- 22. Arsenal's RAF operatives? (7)

### Down

- 1. Mostly moderate on many occasions (5)
- 2. Sign of stone in one (6)
- 3. Card found in Vienna cenotaph (3)
- 4. Conflict witnessed in this city (6)
- 5. Reminder about Inland Revenue's biography (7)
- 8. One pier built by trailblazer (7)
- 11. Feeling about electronic movement (7)
- 13. Was tomb desecrated by marsupials? (7)
- 15. Batman disturbed chicken (6)
- 16. Courage sweetheart left out (6)
- 17. Guard loses head on way in (5)
- 20. Pitcher just uses gloves, initially (3)

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 February 21, 2025. Prize Crossword No. 377 winner is: B Jackson, Surrey.



### Solution to Crossword No. 377

**Across** – 1. Gnat 8. On The Whole 9. Siddeley 10. Tiff 12. Valley 14. Sahara 15. Hostel 17. Hawker 18. Asia 19. Air Force 21. Dragonfire 22. Nude  
**Down** – 2. Navigators 3. Toad 4. At Play 5. Beryls 6. Chat Show 7. Beef 11. Far-fetched 13. Lethargy 16. Learnt 17. Harris 18. Aide 20. Oven  
**RAF station** – *Coningsby*

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

.....

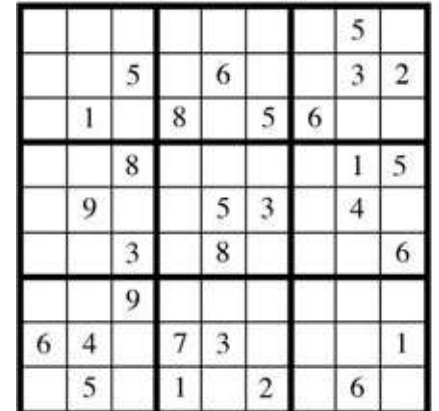
RAF station: ..... Crossword No. 378



## Prize Su Doku No. 388

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

Solutions should be sent in a sealed envelope marked 'Su Doku' with the number in the top left-hand corner to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP14 4UE, to arrive by February 21, 2025. The winner of Su Doku No: 386 is: Mr C Jones, Didcot.



### Solution to Su Doku No. 387

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



## Film review Into the Deep (15)

On digital platforms and DVD (Signature Entertainment)

# Dreyfuss gets teeth into new 'Jaws'

ON THE anniversary of her father's death in a shark attack, Cassidy (Scout Taylor-Compton) decides to face her fear by diving for treasure in the very same stretch of water – however, the predators underwater will soon prove to be the least of her worries.



**DREYFUSS:** Can't stay away from shark movies

At this particular moment off the coast of Madagascar, a lot is happening. A news report tells us that 80kg of heroin has been stolen from local authorities and that there are active pirates in the area. But for now, Cassidy's concern is coping with her deep-seated trauma of getting back into the water. This she does with support from her husband Gregg (Callum McGowan) as well as spiritual guidance over the phone – but mostly through flashbacks – from her grandfather Seamus, played suitably by Richard Dreyfuss. Who better to provide wisdom on oceanic dangers than the actor who portrayed the oceanographer hired to handle the Amity Island shark crisis in *Jaws*?

and her group cross paths with gun-toting pirates led by a ruthless leader (Jon Seda). Forced to dive and retrieve a sunken payload of drugs, Cassidy must choose between the bullets above or the sharks below – neither offering much of a chance for survival.

*Into the Deep* is an incredibly ambitious project given its scale and budget, hinging heavily on digital effects to create the constant threat of patrolling sharks. The results are mixed. When sharks and humans share the screen, the effects can look unconvincing. Perhaps for this reason, the inevitable attacks are often obscured, which can leave them feeling confusing and underwhelming.

In the later stages of the film, some surprisingly well-executed fight choreography appears out of nowhere, injecting a bit of energy. But, of course, most of the action on the boat leads to limp bodies falling into CGI-infested waters.

*Into the Deep* doesn't offer much to chew on but delivers the schlocky fun you'd expect from a shark film.

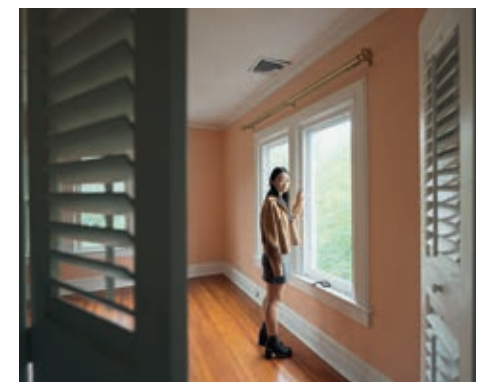
**Two roundels out of five** ●●  
 Review by Sam Cooney



## Film review Presence (15)

In cinemas now

# Ghost's a Payne for Rebekah



**BEING WATCHED:** *Chloe*, played by Callina Liang

WITH A small cast and just one location – a swish but somehow soulless family home – Steven Soderbergh's latest film is a chilling ghost story that delivers several jump-in-your-seat moments.

Soderbergh (*Erin Brokovich*, *Magic Mike*) is also the movie's cinematographer and we see everything from the ghost's viewpoint as the handheld camera follows the action.

Lucy Liu (*Charlie's Angels*) plays unlikeable matriarch Rebekah of the Payne family, who move into the seemingly des-res with depressed dad Chris (Chris Sullivan) and their children – student swimming star and Rebekah's obvious favourite Tyler (Eddie Maday) and his younger sister, the sensitive Chloe (Callina Liang).

Not long after settling in, Chloe feels a presence in the new home, objects scarily move in her bedroom by themselves, and Chloe thinks it might be the spirit of her recently-deceased best friend.

There's a well-maintained atmosphere of tension throughout as things get darker, especially once Chloe starts a secret romance with Tyler's friend Ryan (West Mulholland), who isn't what he at first appears to be.

It's a good cast, with Liang particularly outstanding as troubled Chloe and Liu believable as the ambitious parent who drinks too much and has an unhealthy preference for her unpleasant son. But there's some unexplained stuff about Rebekah – making secret phone calls, deleting emails, Chris accompanying her to a work conference probably because of a male colleague – that's confusing. And Chris is distracted by some potentially worrying legal matter that also remains unexplained.

And, although Chloe says the ghost wants to help and it protects her at first, it fails to save her from danger later on.

The film's ending is unexpected and shocking. *Presence* is creepy and compelling.

**Three out of five roundels** ●●●  
 Review by Tracey Allen