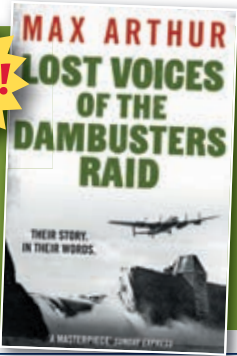


**The Forces' favourite paper**

**Daughter in tribute to DFC father** **Win!**  
● See page 17



**Dam raids in first person** **Win!**  
● R'n'R page 5



**ROYAL AIR FORCE**

Friday, April 18, 2025  
Edition No.1606

**Only 99p**

# RAF News



**The nuke test airmen who flew into *HELL***



See pages 14-15

**Angling Duo land pairs event**



● See page 25

**Football Five in row for women**



● See page p27

**Boxing Fighters net UKAF titles**



● See page p28

# Lightning sea strike



**Simon Mander**

F-35 LIGHTNINGS are set to exercise with allies worldwide with the launch of the UK's largest maritime combat drill dubbed Operation Highmast.

Operating from the deck of HMS Prince of Wales, the deployment will showcase the full force of UK airpower, spearheaded by Marham-based F-35Bs, Air Chiefs say.

● Continued on p3



# BiteSize

“We honour the commitment and sacrifice of former members of the Sqn,”

The Very Rev Dr Simon Jones as 51 Sqn's Standard is laid up in Lincoln Cathedral  
See p9



“I've spent a lot of time in the Highlands. It was a bit of a homecoming,”

Liza Goddard stars in new play *The Croft*, a ghost story set in Scotland  
See R'n'R p4-5



“I knew they would get the job done. I trust them,”

Women's football manager FS Michelle Perkins as team wins fifth Inter-Services title in a row  
See p27



## Coalition steps up



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

### RAF News

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### Simon Mander

BRITAIN AND France convened a defence ministers' meeting in Brussels to support Ukraine.

Operational discussions for a multinational reassurance force will progress with 30 defence ministers at the latest Coalition of the Willing meeting.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "We cannot jeopardise the peace by forgetting about the war, and must step up our support for Ukraine – both in today's fight and the push for peace."

"Our commitment is to put Ukraine in the strongest position to protect its sovereignty and deter future Russian aggression."

Mr Healey and German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius will chair the 27th meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group of around 50 nations which raised an extra 1.5 billion euros in military aid in February.

The UK is providing £4.5 billion of military support for Ukraine this year – more than ever before.



**WILLING PARTNERS:** CDS, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin (second from left) and Defence Secretary John Healey (third left) joined European leaders and military chiefs in Brussels  
PHOTO: MOD

## This Week In History



1945

### Meteor raids

616 SQN Meteors carry out ground attack sorties against Nordholz airfield. The mission is the first European operation by RAF jets

### 1919 Handley training

THE NO.1 School of Navigation and Bomb Dropping begins training flights around the UK from Andover using a pair of Handley Page 0/400 aircraft, with refuelling stops at Waddington.



1967

### Hercules UK debut

THE HERCULES enters service at Colerne. 36 Sqn begins re-equipping with the transport workhorse at Lyneham three months later.

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



## Hornets buzz in

SPANISH fighter jets have arrived at a Norfolk RAF base for military manoeuvres as Nato crews hone their war-fighting drills across Europe.

Six F-18 Hornets touched down at Marham to take part in Exercise Ramstein Flag, involving more than 90 aircraft operating from 12 Allied air bases supported by over 15 nations in the Alliance's biggest European air exercise.

As part of it, Scotland-based Typhoons are practising air-to-air refuelling with Voyager tankers to show how the RAF can support Europe-wide operations.

Aircraft from 1(F) Sqn are flying into Danish, Dutch and German airspace in coordination with European Air Traffic Control.

UK, Dutch, Danish and US F-35 jets joined forces with French Rafales, Hellenic F-16s, Finnish F-18s, Swedish Gripens and German Eurofighters for combat training across Nato airspace.

AM Johnny Stringer (pictured inset, right) said: "Nato air power underpins the deterrence of Europe. We always have to fight for and gain access to the air environment – that is vital."

"We have to make sure we can get access for our sister land and naval forces into any terrain where an enemy would contest us or would seek to invade. The air power contribution both to defence and securing access is vital."



PLANS: The new Digby blocks

## Digs for Digby

WORK to build four new accommodation blocks for personnel has officially begun at Digby in Lincolnshire.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation awarded a £65 million contract to Galliford Try to construct 276 single-occupancy, en suite bedrooms for junior ranks, spread across four blocks.

Operated by Strategic Command, Digby is the RAF's oldest airbase, established in 1918.

Station Commander Wg Cdr Neil Hallett said: "It is incredibly exciting to now see this project underway and watch the site deliver modern accommodation that will directly benefit the Service personnel based at RAF Digby."

The contract also includes provision of car parking, street lighting and landscaped outdoor communal areas.

# Almost 600 aviators take to seas for an eight-month deployment

### Continued from front page

The mission aims to show how allies can integrate to advance global security and marks a significant move towards full operational capability for the fifth-generation stealth fighter.

Lightning Air Wing Commander Gp Capt John Butcher said: "By deploying two F-35 Squadrons, we are enhancing our ability to support our allies in the region."

"This deployment underscores our commitment to collaboration with the Royal Navy, emphasising our shared objective of operating cohesively as a joint force."

The Carrier Strike Group's participation in multinational exercise Talisman Sabre, hosted by Australia with the involvement of 19 nations, will highlight the UK's dedication to security in the Indo-Pacific in a time of global uncertainty.

CO 809 Naval Air Sqn Cdr Nick Smith added: "As we operate alongside our F-35 partners, it is vital that we demonstrate our

strength and readiness."

This deployment marks the most ambitious undertaking by the UK since HMS Queen Elizabeth's global voyage in 2021.

HMS Prince of Wales is scheduled to sail from Portsmouth on April 22 leading a formation of warships, supply ships and aircraft off the coast of Cornwall, before departing for the Mediterranean.

The Indo-Pacific is a critical region for UK trade, with imports and exports in the region worth billions of pounds, and the deployment will provide a chance for trade events during port visits.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "This immensely complex operation demonstrates the UK's world-leading capability to deploy a major military force around the world."

Around 592 RAF personnel will be involved in the eight-month voyage with 12 other nations, including Norway, providing a warship for the entire duration and Canada and Spain



SEAS THE DAY: F-35 (top) will be joined on HMS Prince of Wales by Chinook (inset left)

MAIN PHOTOS: AS1 AMBER MAYALL

supporting the operation.

After its complement of up to 24 RAF Lightning fighter jets is embarked on board HMS Prince of Wales the group will be placed

initially under Nato command as it joins Exercise Neptune Strike.

Minister for the Armed Forces Luke Pollard said: "This isn't just about hard power; it's about

building influence and opening new trade opportunities both for defence and other sectors of our economy which will deliver British jobs and growth."





# Exciting news!

## Applications open 1st April 2025



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**RAF Cranwell's** New Tabletop Gaming Haven  
NAAFI Fund Scores Big for **Gibraltar Hockey Goalies**

     
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# Reds do Italian job



## Simon Mander

**AEROBATICS ACES from two countries teamed up for a spectacular display of unity during a Royal visit to Rome.**

The Red Arrows and the Frecce Tricolori, their Italian counterpart, came together for a flypast over some of the world's most famous landmarks as the King and Queen looked on.

And later, in the shadow of the Colosseum, the military band of the Welsh Guards joined Italy's Sassari Brigade Band to perform hits songs by Abba and Tina Turner.

Charles and Camilla were formally welcomed to Italy by President Sergio Mattarella and his daughter, Laura, who serves as first lady.

At the Quirinale Palace in Rome, which has been home to 30 popes as well as Italian

presidents and kings, there was a ceremonial welcome for the royal guests.

The four-day royal visit was designed to celebrate the strong relationship between Italy and the United Kingdom, with the Foreign Secretary David Lammy joining the King and Queen on parts of this visit.

President Mattarella watched the flypast with Charles and Camilla on the eve of their 20th wedding anniversary, with the first lady.



**SERVICE:** St Aidan's, Lossiemouth

## Nimrod dead remembered

**MILITARY PERSONNEL** joined bereaved families at a ceremony commemorating the crash of a Nimrod at the Toronto Airshow.

All seven crew members were killed when their aircraft ditched into Lake Ontario on September 2, 1995.

The event, held at St Aidan's Church in Lossiemouth, saw the RAF Chaplain-in-Chief rededicate a memorial which features imagery symbolic of the Canadian International Air Show.

In August 1995, the CXX Sqn crew left what was then RAF Kinloss, where they were based, and flew to Canada, where the aircraft crashed.

Following an inquiry, it was decided that a single crew, made up of instructors, would be specially selected for displays.

The Nimrod was retired in 2010, with the last official flight on May 26, flying from Kinloss to Kent International Airport at Manston.

CXX Sqn currently operate the P-8A Poseidon out of Lossiemouth.

# Tonka to Typhoon Allies have plenty in Reserve

**AIRSHOW GOERS will be able to see the skills of the last-ever RAF pilot to fly the Tornado GR4 as he prepares for his debut as this year's Typhoon display pilot.**

Former 31 Sqn 'Goldstars' veteran Sqn Ldr Nathan Shawyer (inset) completed exercises and operations in the final few years of the Tonka's service.

In 2018, he won a Joint Commanders Commendation for leading a pair of the bombers over Mosul, Iraq, to support friendly forces on the ground.

Now he has been named Typhoon display pilot for 2025 after converting on 29 Sqn in 2019.

Following frontline action with 3(F) Sqn in the Falklands,



Estonia, Romania and the Middle East, Nathan became a flying instructor in 2022, teaching the next generation of pilots how to fly and fight in Typhoon.

His role allowed him to form part of the flypast for the King's Birthday Flypast down The Mall, London in 2023.

Away from the RAF, Nathan supports Arsenal FC and is married to Elkie, whom he met during Tucano training at Linton-on-Ouse.

This year the Typhoon Display Team is celebrating its 20th anniversary, after 2020 saw that year's season cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

**RESERVES LEADERS from the RAF and USAF met to identify new opportunities for collaboration in a rapidly evolving global security environment.**

AVM Ranald Munro and Lt Gen John Healy were at the Pentagon and Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Georgia, as part of the Air Force Reserves Allies and Partners Program.

"We talked about strategy and what's the goal over the next five, 10, 15 years – growing our Reserves and making them more capable, more relevant, and more useable," AVM Munro said.

"What we established today was a real program to build relationships squadron to squadron."

The UK delegation boarded a C-17 Globemaster III for an aeromedical evacuation demonstration, incorporating lifesaving procedures on



**CLOSE LINKS:** Aviators from RAF and USAF

**PHOTO:** ROGER PARSONS

simulated patients.

At Dobbins airbase the team received briefings addressing shared challenges in recruiting and retaining reserve personnel.

"The ideas we learned here

will inform the next iteration of Air Reserve operations. We want to build on this foundation moving forward because we are stronger together as allies," said AVM Munro.



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# Delivery takes Hope to Nepal

## Crusading veteran Neil lifting charity mission to new heights in Himalayas

**Simon Mander**

**INTREPID FUNDRAISERS** are celebrating a successful delivery to Nepal in the name of a former RAF officer's daughter who died aged 19.

Twelve volunteers travelled to the Himalayas to distribute football shirts and cash from Lottie's Way, the foundation established to continue the legacy of Charlotte Hope, whose life was cut short in 2022.

Her dad and expedition leader Wg Cdr (Ret'd) Neil Hope said: "I am extremely proud of our fabulous links to Lottie's Way, which allow us to celebrate Charlotte's short life.

"I am hugely thankful to those volunteers who travelled to Nepal with us, at their own expense, to help promote and continue our work.

"Special thanks to my fellow trustee and great friend of my daughter,

22-year-old Sophie Goodwin, and Lottie's Way Patron Air Vice-Marshal Tamara Jennings for joining us, with her husband Jack."

The 17-day trip included a trek in the lower Annapurna Range visiting schools en route, a reception at the British Army Gurkha Training Unit, white water rafting and a safari.

In the Himalayas, the team completed a 38km trek over four days at heights of up to 3,316m and delivered football kit donated by England, Aston Villa, QPR and Wolverhampton Wanderers, and school uniform to three schools.

Sophie said: "Nepal was my third trip, but my first as an official trustee of Lottie's Way. I am so proud of what Lottie's Way has become, the work that we do to honour Charlotte's memory and to raise awareness of what an incredible person she was."

The Taking Football to



Africa and Beyond Appeal operates from RAF Shawbury and collects donations of sports kit for redistribution.

Lottie's Way, its sister charity, gave £2,500 to the Gurkha Welfare Trust and £500 to a Secondary School in Kathmandu to be used for essential education items.

The shirts appeal began in 2006 and continues to grow, delivering kit to 69 different countries to date, with full totals now at 411,852 items, including 115,972 shirts.



**CAMPAIGNER:** RAF Veteran Wg Cdr Neil Hope with members of the local Nepalese community



**BBMF BOSSES** are paying tribute to World War II fighter pilot Paddy Hemingway by adding his name to their vintage WWII Hurricane.

The last living pilot to have fought in the Battle of Britain in 1940, Paddy passed away last month at the age of 104.

The iconic fighter will grace the skies this summer at airshows across the UK and Europe alongside the BBMF's Spitfire, Lancaster and Dakota warbirds.

Awarded the DFC during the conflict, Dublin-born Paddy flew for the RAF during the Battle of Dunkirk, Battle of Britain, Invasion of Italy and Invasion of Normandy.

## Bulletin



**SALUTE:** 101 Sqn pilot Flt Lt Rich Needham at the memorial service

## Lanc tribute

101 SQN personnel joined serving US aviators to honour the multi-national crew of a Lancaster bomber who died in a crash at RAF Welford, returning from a raid on the German city of Nuremberg in 1944.

Maj Marques Reyes of the 420th Munitions Sqn led the memorial wreath laying ceremony, also attended by civic leaders, veterans and relatives of the crews.





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Benevolent Fund**



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## Charity fall-guy

**DAREDEVIL** AIR Force veteran John Dyer took the plunge for charity – from 13,000ft.

The former RAF technician proved he's a chute-ing star by taking on the tandem jump to mark his 90th birthday, netting more than £1,000 for the Royal Air Force Association.

He said: "I've wanted to do this since I was a boy but never had the opportunity, despite serving in the RAF.

"What better way to celebrate than to finally jump out of a plane.

"It's for a great cause and hugely deserving of my fundraising efforts."

● Go to: [justgiving.com/page/john-dyer-1](https://justgiving.com/page/john-dyer-1)



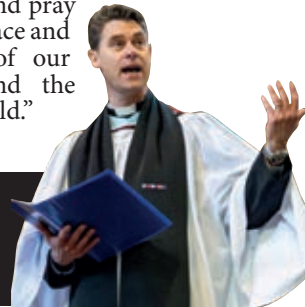
## Cathedral dedication

INTELLIGENCE-GATHERERS laid up their retiring Squadron Banner in Lincoln Cathedral.

Personnel from 51 Sqn were presented with new colours by the Duke of Edinburgh at a ceremony at RAF Waddington.

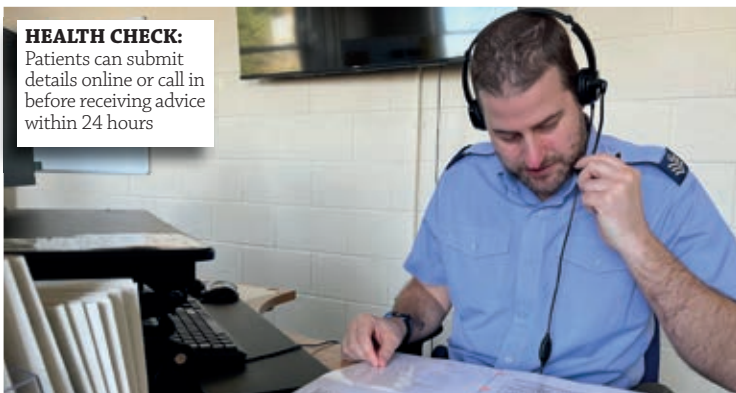
The dedication service was conducted by the Dean of Lincoln, The Very Rev Dr Simon Jones. He said: "By placing this standard in the Air Force Chapel, we honour the commitment and sacrifice of former members of the Sqn and pray for the peace and security of our nation and the wider world."

**SERVICE:**  
Rev Simon Jones at Lincoln Cathedral



# Health overhaul slashes Forces GP waiting times

**HEALTH CHECK:**  
Patients can submit details online or call in before receiving advice within 24 hours



### Simon Mander

**WAITING TIMES** for military patients to see a doctor have been slashed by more than a quarter thanks to an innovative approach adopted by Defence medical centres across the UK.

Total Triage is designed to cut unnecessary face-to-face appointments and enable quicker access to medical care.

One of the first places to use it has seen a 90 per cent reduction in needless GP visits, with 70 per

cent of enquiries handled at first point of contact.

Project Lead FS Chris Workman said: "We are already seeing positive results in healthcare outcomes. Patients have found submitting their request easier and their clinical outcome quicker, with some four-week waiting lists being reduced to zero days."

Under the new arrangements patients can submit a request online or phone the medical centre, where the request is triaged and allocated to a clinician.

Users should receive a call back within 24 working hours and be given medical advice, an appointment, or a consultation with a specialist, cutting the

volume of morning calls surgeries experience daily.

The new system completed its national rollout at 105 medical centres in January.

Director Defence Healthcare, AVM Dave McLoughlin, said: "Total Triage has resulted in an overall reduction in waiting times for doctor and nurse appointments by nearly a third."

Total Triage is based on an innovative system, used by NHS GP practices during the Covid 19 pandemic.

The concept was then adapted by the Defence Medical Services to cut unnecessary travel by patients and get medical centres to work together to improve patient outcomes.



## Send Jim a ton of love

### Simon Mander

**AN APPEAL** has been launched inviting the public to send birthday cards to a wartime veteran to celebrate his 100th birthday.

Former flight engineer Jim Freer won the Légion D'Honneur, France's highest order of merit, and the World War II Bomber Command medal for his service.

He will be celebrating his big day this month at his care home with his wife Valerie, friends and staff.

Jim's local Royal

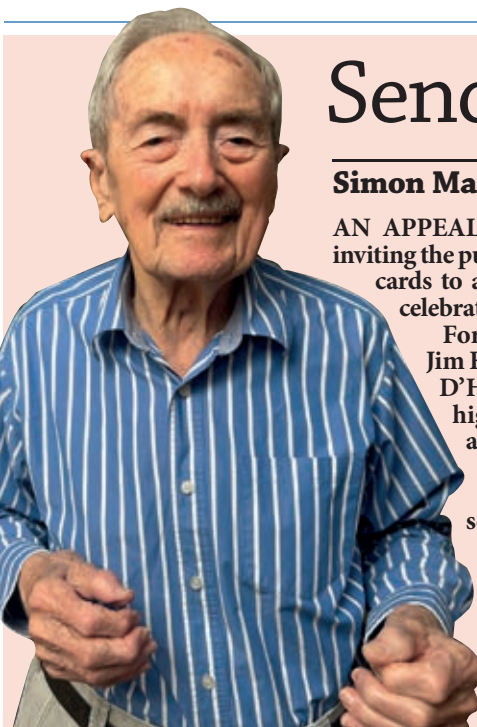
Air Force Association chairman Tony Dee said: "One can only marvel at the extraordinary courage shown by Jim, a mere teenager at the time, who endured 33 operational missions over Europe."

Joining in 1944, Jim was posted to 429 Sqn, known as 'The Bisons,' at Leeming as a Flying Officer.

He completed more than 30 operational sorties, including some in support of D-Day.

After being demobbed, Jim worked in engineering, most notably with Cobham in Poole, and retired as a production director.

● To help Jim celebrate his 100th birthday, send your card to: Newstone House Care Home, Stourcastle, Sturminster Newton, Dorset DT10 1FF.





News



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# Chief nails it on Rivet Joint



**BLACK SEA SURVEILLANCE:** CAS, ACM Sir Richard Knighton, joined 51 Sqn on a mission on NATO's eastern flank. *Left*, ACM Knighton is welcomed by Wg Cdr Keith Bissett

## Simon Mander

BRITAIN'S TOP airman got a bird's eye view of one of Europe's front lines during an intelligence-gathering mission.

Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Richard Knighton, joined 51 Sqn on a sortie from Waddington on an 11 Group operation to fly in Romania and the Black Sea.

Joining the crew for its pre-mission briefing at dawn he met some of the 150 ground crew, including operations staff, intelligence analysts and engineers, who ensure the UK Rivet Joint is ready to fly.

Taking off at 8am the aircraft was routed to an air-to-air refuelling area over the North Sea to be topped up by

a USAF KC-135 tanker from the 100th Air Refuelling Wing at RAF Mildenhall before continuing.

On task, the crew described how they collect and share data with Nato allies and other partners.

Sir Richard said: "The Rivet Joint is a remarkable capability, and it was fantastic to see first-hand how 51 Sqn execute their mission in the Black Sea."

The crew returned just before 6pm, almost 10 hours after their departure.

OC 51 Sqn, Wg Cdr Keith Bissett, said: "51 Sqn delivers almost exclusively on operations from its home base at Waddington, or overseas as required."

# Tributes to Brize tanker ace Gordon

## Staff Reporter

BRIZE NORTON crews have paid tribute to Sqn Ldr Gordon Parry, who has died after a short illness.

Sqn Ldr Parry joined up in 1980, flying Nimrod Maritime Patrol missions before switching to 10 Sqn at Brize Norton, operating the VC10.

During his time at the Oxfordshire station he carried out air-to-air refuelling, transport missions and aeromedical evacuations.

He was awarded the MBE in 2010 for his work on the Future Strategic Tanker project and tireless fundraising as a Trustee for the Cherished Memories charity, which supports families with severely disabled and terminally ill children.

A Brize Norton spokesman said: "Gordon will be sorely missed by the whole force at RAF Brize Norton. Our thoughts are with Gordon's wife Jenny and his family at this sad time."







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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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**LANDMARK:** Sqn Ldr Wise, left, receives his QFI certificate from Gp Capt Flynn

## Ernie's off to a flyer

SQN LDR Paul 'Ernie' Wise has been presented with the coveted A1 Qualified Flying Instructor (QFI) certificate.

The award, presented by Gp Capt Dave Flynn, is the pinnacle of aircrew instructor qualifications, and makes him the first to make the grade on the BBMF's vintage Lancaster and Dakota aircraft for 50 years.

He has also transferred his qualification to the Phenom, the latest multi-engine pilot training aircraft flown at RAF Cranwell.



## Tot Gun test

FUTURE TOP GUNS can find out what it was like to prepare for a Battle of Britain mission in a new interactive challenge.

The Pilot Training Show at the RAF Museum Midlands will transport audiences back in time as they take on aircrew roles and test their skills with the help of a drill instructor.

# Reds alert

## Arrows prepare for blockbuster season



**RED-Y FOR ACTION:** Sqn Ldr Graeme Muscat exits his Hawk after landing in Croatia for pre-season training  
PHOTOS: CPL PHIL DYE

### Simon Mander

**THE RED Arrows are perfecting their show-stopping aerobatic routine ahead of a packed calendar of summer events.**

The team's famous Hawk aircraft are in Croatia, where the pilots are honing their latest display before headlining 60 shows across the UK and mainland Europe this summer.

Sqn Ldr Jon Bond, who heads up the Waddington-based nine-jet team as Red 1, said: "Training

for the Red Arrows' 61st season is well under way.

"Exercise Springhawk allows all parts of the team to come together – often in more settled, finer weather – to further develop the new show.

"The aim is to use these conditions to fly up to 15 sorties a week, at a range of various locations, to simulate the varied places and scenarios we will experience this season.

"This teamwork culminates when we are assessed in late May

in order to be granted Public Display Authority."

Pre-season preparations allow Reds pilots and the Blues ground crew to refine the new show, which changes every year.

Air show fans watching the Red Arrows this year can expect crowd-favourite moves alongside some new formations.

The camera-friendly 'Tornado', which sees two jets roll around the other seven as the formation bends in front of the crowd, remains in the display.

Sqn Ldr Bond added: "I hope those watching are inspired by this relentless pursuit of excellence and enjoy the Red Arrows' new display at airshows and events across 2025."

The Reds transited to Zadar in Croatia, with stunning imagery shared by the team of the Hawk jets flying over the Alps.

They will then move to Greece and a Hellenic Air Force base to conclude preparations ahead of their first public displays next month.

# Tunnock's cleared for cake-off

**AIR FORCE safety chiefs have lifted a 60-year-old ban on shopper's favourite Tunnock's Tea Cakes after the sweet treats passed pressure tests at the Aerospace Medicine facility in Henlow.**

The embargo was introduced during the Cold War following claims the popular chocolate and marshmallow snacks explode under rapid changes of altitude during operational sorties.

But the chocolate-covered biscuits with a marshmallow filling are back on the flight-crew menu after ace-ing the latest

decompression tests in the MOD altitude chamber.

Defence scientists simulated climbs at 4,000ft per minute before subjecting the cakes to rapid descent and decompression to see if they would explode.

Dr Oliver Bird, a medical officer instructor at the RAF Centre of Aerospace Medicine, cleared the famous Tunnock's product for boarding. He said: "I think the best advice is that the snacks are kept frozen and in their foil wrappings until pilots are ready to consume them."

Launched in 1956, the tea cakes are exported to more than 30 countries worldwide, including Saudi Arabia and Australia.

A giant dancing tea cake featured in the opening ceremony of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games and scientists launched one into space in 2017, attached to a weather balloon which reached an altitude of 121,414ft.



## UK bosses value vets

**HIRING SKILLED** Forces veterans could save British businesses thousands in training costs and help bosses solve their recruitment problems, claims a government survey.

According to the latest research by the Office for Veterans' Affairs, 86 per cent of firms say veterans possess the perfect leadership experience for management positions and have the technical training to fill urgent skills shortages.



# FLYING INTO H

## The young Canberra crews who put themselves at the heart of the storm as UK entered nuclear age

**A**GED JUST 21, Fg Off John Robinson volunteered for unspecified 'Special Duties' and the chance to fly missions in the South Pacific. "I loved flying my Canberra and the opportunity to get to Australia was just too good to miss," he said.

A member of one of 10 crews, he soon realised the risk he was taking on when the UK prepared to test its first H-Bomb as the world's third nuclear power amid the escalating arms race between the US and Russia.

He added: "Everyone who was selected had to be single, which sounded a bit ominous. It leaked out that we would be flying through nuclear clouds following the detonation of Britain's first nuclear devices.

"No one backed away. There was speculation over how radiation would affect the body, protection we could expect and what would happen to the aircraft, which would be heavily contaminated."

Development of nuclear weapons moved rapidly following the use of atom bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending World War II.

In 1952 the US tested the first thermo-nuclear H-bomb, raising the destructive power of fusion weapons to new levels.

By 1957 the UK was ready to test its own H-bomb, launching Operation Grapple, a series of four detonations in the Pacific Ocean.

The first British device was dropped on May 15 from a Valiant over Malden Island, 400 miles south of Christmas Island.

Just 20 minutes later, 76 Sqn 'sniffer' crews flew their Canberras fitted with sensors into the mushroom cloud to collect samples. The order was to enter at 52,000 ft – way above the Canberra's official operational ceiling of 49,000 ft.

The extreme altitude created what pilots dubbed 'Coffin Corner', the point at which maintaining flying function in rarified air becomes a battle with diminishing engine performance and lift.

Pilot Terry Hilliard said: "At the heights we were operating we risked stalling the aircraft in thin air as the Mach compressibility increased, shaking us about and ruining the lift we had. If this happened we could fall out of the sky.

"Entering the cloud, we went from bright tropical sunshine into a dark, dense, turbulent, writhing air mass which was a combination of compressibility turbulence, stalling shudders and indescribable tantrums of vertical lifts and drops in a nuclear mushroom.



**'SPECIAL DUTIES':** Nuclear testing on Canberras was ominously only for 'single men'

**OP GRAPPLE:** The four Valiant BK.1s and crews of 49 Squadron, which deployed to Christmas Island in the Pacific to conduct the first series of British thermonuclear bomb tests, gathered at Wittering on March 1, 1957 prior to their departure

"Visibility was ever-changing from small clear spaces to very dense clumps of cloud. Our aim was to fly through the darker patches as high as possible as they were more likely to contain the best residual samples we were seeking."

Terry witnessed three tests from the cockpit. He added: "The flash of the explosion just cannot be described. With eyes screwed shut and covered tight, for a moment I could see

every bone in my left forearm as if it were a super X-ray.

"The image remained for several seconds and the flash is so bright that when you open your eyes, it's like walking into a darkened room where you can't see anything."

Even at the dawn of the nuclear age, the lethal effects of radiation were well known. All personnel were issued with 'dosimeters' to record in

'roentgens' the radiation they had been subjected to. The readings were noted on medical records and on reaching a specified point, crew members would be stood down.

Aircraft were sprayed with radioactive 'resistant' paint but short of lining the jets with flight-limiting lead there were few truly effective measures available.

Terry added: "It all felt a bit *Dad's Army*. Contingencies were a rather hurried, makeshift affair, no doubt caused by the foreshortened processes which became necessary as operation Grapple was hastened

to a speedy finish to test ban treaty being agreed at United Nations.

"On landing we had to touch the side of the aircraft when exiting because of the radiation. I have been told by a ground crew member the aircraft was so contaminated that decontamination was required every day, and the effluent from the decontamination run into the sand bar at Wittering. This I found astonishing."

For John Robinson (left), his large distinctive nose profile a problem for safety. "The aeromedics were concerned about the protection of the standard RAF crew. We had been using a special suit as they could not provide a proper seal over the mask."

"American masks were used to solve the problem but the nose profile was a satisfactory compromise. It was not made and the mask was withdrawn from service. I was given a quite different mask."

"The cabin pressure was maintained. We were also beefed up with filters and the aircraft was painted with a translucent paint to assist in decontamination after flying through the cloud."

The contribution of Britain's nuclear test programme made to the security of the world and Western allies was recognised in 2023. The Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963, which estimated 22,000 military personnel who took part in the tests survive today.





by Simon Williams

# ELL



“With eyes screwed shut and covered tight, I could still see every bone in my left forearm as if it were a super X-ray”

Pilot Terry Hilliard



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INTO THE UNKNOWN:  
Canberras flew deep  
into the nuclear cloud  
equipped with special  
radiation sensors, above

“It all felt a bit *Dad’s Army*... contingencies were a hurried, makeshift affair”





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Win!

Feature

# Daughter's tribute to Mossie Master Bomber DFC dad

## Tracey Allen

JEANNIE BENJAMIN scarcely knew her father. She was only 18 months old and her sister just three weeks old when World War II hero Wg Cdr Eric Benjamin, DFC & Bar, was killed. He was 25.

The courageous Mosquito pilot, who was selected and trained as a Master Bomber, was flying as a member of No 54 Base in No 5 Group on missions to Germany when, on one of the sorties, his aircraft failed to return.

Jeannie, with author Sean Feast, has written her father's moving and powerful story, using a collection of letters Eric wrote to his wife as the backbone for the book, *Main Force to Mosquito Master Bomber* (fightinghigh.com).

She said: "These letters are a testament to the love that our parents had for each other, set against a background of one of the fiercest wars in history, revealing a mixture of joy and longing, of the small everyday worries, and the desperate anxieties of wartime."

Eric left school aged 16 and worked as a clerk for an insurance company in the City of London. Two years later, in 1937, he met Betty, who was to become his wife and mother of his two daughters.

Jeannie said: "Despite being a Sea Scout, Eric's real passion was to fly. Not long after meeting Betty, Eric was attested into the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve."

In September 1938 he began flying instruction at White Waltham, near Maidenhead.

Jeannie added: "Eric's motivation for joining the RAFVR, as much as the thrill of flying, was to save a little extra money through his flying pay to enable him to get married. Promoted to sergeant, his training progressed well, and his peers deemed him to be of 'very good' character."

In September 1939, he was recalled from the reserve and mobilised. He married Betty three months later.

By the following March he was commissioned and promoted to Pilot Officer. He was given the RAF Service number of 77777, which he and Betty considered to



**LINK TO THE PAST:** Jeannie Benjamin in 2015 with former Royal Canadian Air Force mid-upper gunner Fraser Muir, who had heard her father's last words



## Win the book

YOU COULD win a copy of this excellent book – to be in with a chance, tell us:

**Where, in 1939, did Eric start flying instruction?**

Email your answer, marked: Eric Benjamin book, 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 April 18.

be very lucky, said Jeannie.

He survived being shot down on his first operation, when his air gunner was badly wounded, and Eric was among the last RAF aircrew to be evacuated from France in the summer of 1940. While serving as an instructor he was pulled clear of the mangled wreckage of a Vickers Wellington that crashed in flames, narrowly escaping with his life for a second time.

## Fairey Battles

During the Battle of France Eric flew Fairey Battles with No.150 Sqn. He and his crew were one of 10 selected for a dawn reconnaissance and headed for the area around the south of the Seine, where German Wehrmacht columns had been reported.

His aircraft was shot down and his gunner seriously hurt – Eric had no choice but to force land. He organised a French ambulance to take the wounded gunner to hospital.

The brave pilot managed

to make it back to England by various means, including walking, by motorbike, an ambulance and a goods train, and the book includes an excerpt from Betty's 1991 memoir about her husband's surprise return.

She wrote: "One of my most treasured memories is of the night of 17 June 1940 – the day France fell to the Germans. I awoke about 11.30pm to see my beloved husband of a few months, standing at my bedroom door – weary, dusty and with a sprained ankle, but full of joy at reaching home. He had arrived back at his aerodrome at Nantes after an early bombing raid that morning, to find the squadron had left hastily in the face of advancing Germans – my photograph the only thing left hanging on a tent pole. He jumped into a plane – a fighter, though he was a bomber pilot, and flew the Channel! He crossed London on the underground, mingling with home-going workers."

Eric went on to fly Main Force



**BOMBER CREW:** Eric, centre, with his Fairey Battle observer, left, and wireless operator



**PILOT TRAINING:** White Waltham, 1938



**THE DAY BEFORE HE WAS KILLED:** Treasured family photo of Eric with wife Betty, toddler Jeannie and 3-week-old Sally

Avro Lancasters with No.61 Sqn during the Battle of Britain and De Havilland Mosquitos as an elite Pathfinder Master Bomber.

After a successful raid on Berlin in November 1943, he was among a group of 61 Sqn and 50 Sqn aircrew interviewed about their recent experiences by a journalist from Pathé News. The newsreel was shown in cinemas.

## Military Cemetery

Eric's Mosquito was shot down over Germany on the night of February 19, 1945. Initially reported missing, his body was recovered after the war, in September 1947. He is buried in the British Military Cemetery at Charlottenburg in Berlin.

Betty remarried in 1968 aged 50 but sadly was killed in a car crash in 1991, aged 73, not long after she finished writing her memoir.

In 2015, Jeannie met former Royal Canadian Air Force mid-upper gunner Fraser Muir who had contacted her sister Sally to

tell her he had heard their father's last words as his aircraft was shot down. They were: "Oh Damn, I've been hit. I'm going down. Number two take over, number two take over..."

Like Eric, Fraser had been posted to No 5 Group Bomber Command. Jeannie explained: "They had both been on the same bombing mission, a raid on the synthetic oil plant at Böhlen, near Leipzig. Fraser had not known my father personally but when he heard those words uttered over the VHF radio that night he said he was amazed by the sound of my father's voice: he said there was no panic, no shouting and he seemed to be more concerned with his responsibility of passing on his command to Number Two than the fact he was on the way down."

She added: "Fraser went on to say 'It was the calm, collected, controlled nature of his voice that has made it one of the most vivid memories of my tour of 35 bombing operations.'"





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# Former Falcons chief made over 1000 jumps

Daredevil spent two years with elite SAS

**SQUADRON LEADER** Alec Jackson, who has died aged 83, was the leader of the RAF's Falcons Parachute Display Team, served with the SAS and carried out many trials during his service, that involved making over 1,000 parachute descents.

Following a career teaching PE and geography, he decided to join the RAF in 1967 and went through the Officer Cadet Training Unit at Henlow, being commissioned into the Physical Education Branch.

After a brief period at the RAF School of Physical Education, his first posting was to the RAF College at Cranwell, where sport was a major aspect of life and where he was able to pursue his passion for rugby. Johnson's main interest, however, was the opportunities for outdoor activities held during camps in the Scottish Cairngorms and the Welsh mountains.

Keen to fly, he was sent to the RAF Parachute Training Squadron at Abingdon. He qualified as a Parachute Jumping Instructor (PJI). Early in his career he was sent with a small team to Italy to prepare a dropping zone for an exercise. Tragedy struck and the RAF Hercules with 46 Italian parachutists crashed, and they and the crew of seven were killed.

A few months later, Jackson and most of his colleagues narrowly escaped death when their Andover aircraft crashed on take-off with the loss of five personnel.

He was selected to be the deputy of the Falcons Display Team for the 1972 season. Jumping from 12,000 feet and free falling with trailing smoke, the team became a regular feature of the air display season. Training and displays were sometimes conducted abroad.

The following year, Jackson was made the team leader and soon received an unusual task.



**TEST TEAM:** Alec Jackson, *main picture*, led a small specialist team, *above*, at Boscombe Down evaluating new military parachuting equipment and techniques

John Noakes, the presenter of the BBC programme *Blue Peter* had previously done a free fall jump from 12,000 feet with the Army and now wanted to go one better. Under Johnson's guidance, he was trained for a high-level jump and on May 2, 1973 the jump was completed from 22,000 feet and received extensive publicity, with a photograph taken during the exercise featuring on the cover of the 1973 *Blue Peter Annual*.

Throughout his two years with the Falcons, Jackson jumped at airshows across Europe and on

detachments to Cyprus and Jordan.

At the end of the 1973 season, he left for Hereford to spend two years with the SAS. His activities took him to Dhofar, Brunei and exercises in Kenya. By the end of his time, he said: "My time at Hereford was the most rewarding of my whole career."

In January 1976 he joined the staff of the Joint Services Air Transport Establishment (JATE) at Brize Norton. New techniques and new parachutes were being tested which included jumping from 24,000 feet with

steerable parachute canopies, use of oxygen systems and improving existing drills.

After a period at RAF Cosford, he returned to the parachute world in 1979 when he was posted to Boscombe Down. He was in charge of a small team to look after all kinds of parachuting, from ejection-seat canopies to military parachutes. Military free-fall parachuting was undergoing great changes at this time. Whilst static-line parachutes were still the 'umbrella' shape, free-fall parachutes were following the 'sport parachuting' world which was now using 'squares'. These were designed like an aircraft wing; six cells open at the front where air was rammed in but closed at the back and tapered like a wing. They also flew much faster, so needed more experience to handle, as they had to be 'flared' on landing just like an aircraft.

He was also tasked to carry on with the work he had been doing at JATE, jumping and canopy opening higher to increase the

glide factor. He also co-ordinated trials at night, from high level and with heavy personal equipment. His team was allocated their own Argosy aircraft, allowing much greater flexibility for tasking and conducting trials in more remote areas.

In January 1982 he returned to Brize Norton to be the chief instructor at the Parachute Training School. Detachments and visits overseas were a regular feature and a return to the Oman allowed him to make a few more jumps, sufficient to take him past 1,000. At the end of his time as the chief instructor, he saw his future as one sitting around a desk, so he chose to leave the Service in 1983.

For three years he managed and developed Telford Tennis and Leisure Centre, one of the top three such places at the time. He then spent 15 years managing social clubs and sports facilities for Brinton's Ltd in Kidderminster, a carpet manufacturer with several thousand employees and three factories.





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Tim Morris



5th-gen Prius has revved up the style

THIS IS the fifth generation Toyota Prius and it's light-years ahead of the previous generation. Toyota has thrown the kitchen sink at improving the model's image, and it's worked... Well. Just look at it... It's sleek enough to actually be proud of and, I can't believe I'm saying this, the Toyota Prius is a sporty-looking machine.

It now shares its underpinnings with the Corolla, so it has tidy handling, and can officially travel up to 44 miles on battery power alone. The fuel economy is ridiculously good and you read the official figures with disbelief. Starting with a full charge, in a lab, the WLTP cycle produces an estimate of... wait for it... 404-565mpg! Not a cat in hell's chance in the real world, but it is stupendously frugal.

It comes with a new price tag, and I hope you're sitting down for this, because the Prius now starts at £37,315, running to nearly £40k at the top end. It looks a bit steep, but everything has gone up recently and, when you drill down into the detail, you realise that the Prius still undercuts most of the competition.



# Ugly duckling Prius now beautiful swan

## Exterior

The fifth generation Prius has rakish lines and a sporty stance. Its new proportions make it far more visually appealing than its predecessor. Gone are the clumsy details of the old car, with the ill designed rear lights and bulbous boot. In with a swooping profile and a sleek nose... I need not say more, just look at it.

## Interior

The Toyota Prius has plenty of space in the front for six-footers to get comfy and it's easy for most drivers to find a comfortable seating position. Headroom is reduced, due to those sporty new lines, but I'd take credibility over an inch or two of headroom any day.

The interior is well laid out and everything is in a logical spot. The 12.3 inch infotainment touchscreen is easy to read, plus it has a column of icons close to the driver that makes it easy to hop between functions. Adjusting the climate control

## Pros

- Eye-catching looks
- Cheap to run
- Fairly engaging to drive
- Well-laid-out controls

## Cons

- Uncouth CVT gearbox
- Not as fast as it looks
- Tight for rear passengers

## Verdict

The latest Prius is the best incarnation of the car that its maker has produced

## Toyota Prius

to date. The old car was ugly but Toyota has entirely redeemed its reputation with this effort. It handles pretty well, is quieter than most rivals and delivers a more comfortable ride. The CVT gearbox is still uncouth, but the hybrid system is tremendously efficient, offering genuinely useful electric-only range.

system is simple, thanks to a row of physical buttons below the central air vents.

My only word of warning is that some drivers may find that the steering wheel obscures the bottom of the 7.0 inch digital driver's display. I sit as low as you can go, with the wheel right down, so it didn't affect me, but my colleague

grumbled a bit. That sounds like a 'him' problem to me...

The new sporty shape means that visibility could also be better, for a family wagon. It's easy to see over the low dashboard in the Prius, but the front pillars are noticeable. Rear visibility is also limited somewhat by chunky rear pillars. Fortunately, front and rear

parking sensors, along with a rear-view camera, come as standard.

## On The Road

Firing up the latest Prius, you expect performance to match the sporty new looks but, of course, that's not what the Prius is about. It's about saving the planet, getting you to where you're going safely and saving you money on fuel in the process.

That said, it will take you from 0-62mph in 6.8 seconds, thanks to a clever plug-in hybrid system (the only option available). This consists of a 2.0-litre 4cyl inline petrol engine, enhanced by a permanent magnet, synchronous motor, to deliver a combined output of 220bhp.

Now, I'm not saying that this is a car that's going to leave you grinning from ear to ear on a winding mountain road, but it is, certainly, the best Prius I've ever driven. It has precision and composure, something that was

sorely lacking in its predecessor.

Body-roll is well controlled and the nose goes keenly where you point it. The steering is light and, although it lacks feedback, it does redirect the Prius with satisfying precision when you lock it through tight bends. The chassis is tidy.

On a run, it's a comfortable family wagon that soaks up imperfections in the road and deals with undulating surfaces well.

CVT gearboxes (Constantly Variable Transmission) have always been a sticking point with me, because they sound like a badly slipping clutch whenever you try to put your hoof down. The latest e-CVT is no exception and makes an otherwise well-packaged motor car sound uncouth whenever you try to drive with enthusiasm. It was my biggest gripe in the 90s, in the 00s and in the 10s. With the car's new sporty looks, it's more noticeable than ever... My biggest gripe today.



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## eMOTORSPORT

# Vroom at the top

## RAF virtual drivers are in the driving seat in Championship

**Daniel Abrahams**

THE SERVICE'S virtual rally stars are adding extra vroom to this year's Armed Forces Virtual Race Challenge with the aviators top of the team charts.

In its fifth year of competition, the AFVRC sees another strong entry list of 26 drivers throughout the season, with 13 RAF, five Army, four Royal Navy and four Veteran competitors taking to the virtual track.

With the team championship firmly in RAF hands, the drivers' championship has been a close fight so far with all four teams represented in the top five positions.

Leading the aviators' charge, Cpl Ryan Martin (2023 Champion), has been in good form, taking several race wins, but inconsistency has meant he sits third behind Sgt Peter Plastow (RLC) and Adam Barron (ex-RAF Sgt), with PO Thomas Stevens the leading RN driver in fifth.

RAF drivers Flt Lt Chris Pawley, Sqn Ldr Darren Berris



**TRAINING:** Development day  
PHOTO: RAFMSA

and Sgt Chris Boland have all recorded wins, with Barron the only non-RAF driver to take a win in the first six race meetings.

The event sees drivers 'race' the length and breadth of the UK via Thruxton, Silverstone, Oulton Park, Snetterton, Knockhill, Donington Park and Brands Hatch, with three flyaway rounds to Lime Rock Park in America, Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium and Circuito de Navarra, Spain.

The cars are GT4 class and include Aston Martin, BMW, McLaren, Mercedes and Porsche.

Cpl Jay King said: "AFVRC provides a great opportunity for



**OVERSEAS:**  
Racing at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium  
PHOTO: JACK TRUNWITT

local, national and international competition. There are even more benefits to sim-racing: primarily around the ability to link it so closely to the physical racing world.

"RAF eMotorsports' secondary output is the provision of racing simulators to assist in new driver development for RAF

Motor Racing, Karting and Rally.

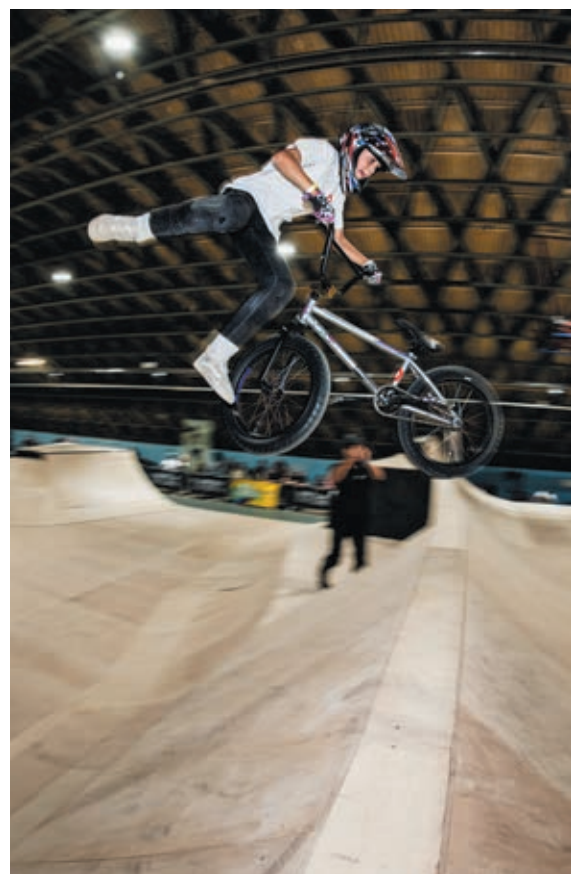
"The RAF Motor Sports Association has been using simulators for this purpose for four years now, and it gives drivers a strong foundation to transition onto the live circuit."

Outside of the AFVRC Championship, the team competed in the Sebring 12

Hours race – featuring more than 14,000 drivers – in which Sgts Boland and Plastow secured a class win in LMP2 in split 13 of the primary 1200GMT time slot, an 18<sup>th</sup> place GT3 team finish and an LMP2 team fourth place.

● Visit: [rafmsa.co.uk](http://rafmsa.co.uk) for more information on RAF eMotorsports.

## BMX



**HANG-AR TOUGH:** Young BMX rider

PHOTO: ADAMLV

## Station Shaw is gold standard

HAVING STARTED life as a secret Olympic weapon, RAF Shawbury's freestyle BMX track is now a hub for Service cycle action and family events.

The recent BMX Jam, held in conjunction with the station's community day, saw more than 80 Air Force family children participate in coaching sessions with five British Cycling coaches and several athletes including Declan Brooks, Olympic Bronze medallist in BMX Freestyle Park.

The day also saw Brooks holding a Q&A session at the course, which is widely used by the RAF BMX Freestyle Team in their recruitment, development and preparation for Inter-Services.

Sgt Matt Haywood, RAF BMX OIC, said: "BMX is a great family sport and accessible to a broad range of abilities. The Jam format for the freestyle event allows people to see and compete at a level commensurate with their ability."

"Having the open family aspect was a lovely way of introducing the younger riders to the sport, which highlights the wonderful inclusivity that it allows."

British Cycling built the BMX Freestyle track in Shawbury's Sports Hangar to prepare Team GB for the 2024 Paris Olympics. Those preparations resulted in Kieran Reilly going on to win a silver medal in BMX Freestyle Park.

British Cycling BMX Freestyle Park Programme Coach Greg Illingworth said: "This park gives us the opportunity to train and practise on big ramps. The layout is similar to major freestyle parks worldwide."

"The team is preparing for upcoming events in the year. The first major event being the World Cup in May, in Montpellier France."

"Having this freestyle park facility here at RAF Shawbury enables the team to train and practise in private."

British Cycling plan to continue to use the world-class facility every month to run their annual programme of events, from beginners' community taster and coaching sessions to national elite athlete competitions.

A station spokesman added: "The track has proven critical to cementing the link between RAF Shawbury, and the RAF as a whole, with national



**COMMUNITY DAY:** Fun for RAF children  
PHOTO: IAN FORSHAW

elite sport. As a Phase 2 Training Unit, the ethos and philosophy of RAF Shawbury is very much in synch with elite team athletes as they prepare to pursue their goals."

● Follow RAF BMX on Instagram @RAFCABMXRacing.

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





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RUGBY UNION

# Blazing trail to IS

RAF Women	41
Fire Service Women	16

Daniel Abrahams

THE RAF women's rugby team showcased their skill with a thumping 41-16 win over Fire Service women as the tempo for IS glory speeds up.

The match saw a steady stream of tries from across the RAF team, supported confidently by the boot of AS1 Daisy Fahey – who kicked four conversions.

Head coach Sgt Sian Williams expressed her pride in the team's performance, saying: "The girls showed incredible determination and skill today. Our preparation at RAF Northolt and the sessions with Amy [Cokayne] and Sarah [Bonar] really paid off. The Fire Service provided the exact level of competition we needed to sharpen our strategies for the Inter-Service matches."

The game began with a strong start from the aviators,



IN HOT FORM: RAF dominated Fire Service

PHOTO: RHYS MURRAY

with AS1 Kim Grundy scoring the first try straight from the kick-off, followed by AS1(T) Evie Longworth, bringing the score to 10-0. Fahey successfully converted, extending the lead

to 12-0, before the Fire Service responded with a penalty and two tries, to lead 13-2.

AS1 Freya Gracie's try and Fahey's conversion restored the RAF's lead, 19-13 at half-time.

In the second half, Williams shuffled the pack with a series of substitutions which made a significant impact, injecting fresh energy into the game.

Sqn Ldr Emma Tadman, Sgt Annie Forbes, and Flt Lt Carys Williams-Morris each scored tries, with Fahey converting two of them, sealing the victory at 41-16.

Williams said: "Every player contributed to this victory, and it's a testament to the depth and strength of our squad."

IS FIXTURES

- RAF v Royal Navy, April 19, Cinch Stadium, Franklin's Gardens, Northampton
- RAF v Army, May 17, Kingsholm Stadium, Gloucester



PAD WORK: Training session

A WEEK-long training camp at RAF Northolt had an international feel about it as the women's rugby team prepared for the Inter-Service championship at the end of the month.

The squad welcomed Flt Lt Amy Cokayne and Fg Off Sarah Bonar, fresh from Six Nations duties, and the pair held intensive sessions, focusing on set-piece and forward play.

The week was also bolstered by a joint training session with Old Albanians women, providing a competitive edge.

Coach Sqn Ldr Ian Cokayne said: "The inclusion of AR Daisy Aspinall [England U20 Winger], despite her commitments to Hartpury Uni in the BUC semi-final, showed her commitment to the RAF team."

ANGLING



TOP PAIR: FS Whittaker and Sgt Emery

## First blood to Whittaker and Emery

THE FIRST RAF Carp Angling Association pairs event of the year kicked off at Barston Lake, Solihull and saw FS Matthew Whittaker and Sgt Martin Emery triumph.

The duo beat FS Jim Thomas and Sgt Dave Jones into second by more than 10lb in catches at the 21-acre pit, renowned for its abundant fish population, after two days of action.

The match, scored on the 10 biggest fish caught by each pair, kicked off in chilly conditions and within 10 minutes Sgt Ben Caizley and Chf Tech Matthew Curtis landed the first carp – a 7lb 04oz common.

As the day progressed, temperatures rose and as evening fell Whittaker and Emery had taken a commanding 60lb lead, having managed to land more than 10 fish. WOs Jason Verney and Richard Cooke followed in second with four fish for 39lb 02oz, closely trailed by Thomas and Jones with

four fish for 38lb 07oz.

The next morning Whittaker and Emery had increased their total to 130lb 02oz, while Thomas and Jones moved into second place with 124lb 07oz. FS Lee Wharltan and Sgt Lloyd Moore climbed to third place with a total of 110lb 10oz.

The top three had all now caught 10 fish or more and were concentrating on selecting bigger specimens.

As the second day's action progressed, FS Simon Robinson landed a 22lb 09oz common, and shortly after, Caizley caught the biggest fish, a 22lb 12oz common.

The final standings were sealed, with Wharltan and Moore rounding off the top three, 9lb behind Thomas and Jones.

● Follow RAF carp fishing on Instagram @ raf\_carp.

## Five alive for men after narrow loss



TRY FEST: Aviators

THE SERVICE'S male rugby union stars served up a try-fest in their final Inter-Services warm-up clash in a narrow 33-35 defeat to Luctonians at Mortimer Park, Leominster.

Five different try scorers crossed the line for the aviators against the National League Two West side with AS1 Kieron Prescott, Flt Lt Jacob Seddon, Fg Off Jack O'Regan, AS1 George Cook and Sgt Joe Parkin boosting their chances of selection for the

Luctonians	35
RAF Men	33

upcoming IS championship.

The RAF will face the Navy at Northampton Saints' Cinch Stadium at Franklin's Gardens on April 19, before taking on the Army at Gloucester's Kingsholm Stadium on May 17.

Visit: [eticketing.cp.uk/northamptonssaints/events](http://eticketing.cp.uk/northamptonssaints/events) for tickets to the opening clash.



## Sport

### BOXING



**BAG WORK:**  
Tough session



**FOCUS:**  
Sparring



**BOUT:** It's  
fight time

# Festival packs a punch

### JUDO



**JUDOKAS:** Sgt Andy Melbourne, Cpl Andy Stewart, Sqn Ldr Steve Milne and RAF Judo head coach Cpl Liam Hart celebrate their success at the British Veterans Open

## Handy Andy's golden

**GOLD, SILVER** and bronze, the RAF's judo stars took all three for a cleansweep of medals at the first British Veterans Open event in London.

RAF Judo's Sgt Andy Melbourne was the stand-out performer among the military entries, winning gold in the 100kg M2 category.

UKAF Judo Chairman Sqn Ldr Steve Milne won silver in the under 100kg M2 category and teammate Cpl Andy Stewart tied for bronze in the 100kg M1 category.

There was also medal success for the British Army and the Royal Navy.

The British Veterans Open, which was overseen by the British Judo Association, consisted of competitors from all over the world, including those still active on the international circuit.

Japan's double Olympic champion Shohei Ono and Team GB's 2016 Olympic bronze medallist Sally Conway were in attendance, presenting medals and prizes to the winners.

## Rookies sign up and coaches and officials make the grade

### Daniel Abrahams

RAF BOXING celebrated five days of white-hot action as its inaugural Festival of Boxing came to a close with the UKAF Elite Boxing Championships at RAF Honington (see back page).

RAF Boxing spokesman Sgt Benjamin Baily said: "For a first attempt, it is safe to say the Festival of Boxing was a great success. Hopefully, the association's passion for the sport is now spread across all RAF stations and as participation in the sport grows at all levels, the next festival will produce double the numbers."

"The aim of the festival was to grow the association across the boxer, coach and official cadres whilst concurrently working to increase RAF Regiment participation in the sport."

"An outstanding turnout of more than 50 personnel resulted in seven new coaches and nine new officials completing their initial qualification courses and lots of people trying boxing for the first time – learning new skills and, hopefully, starting on a journey towards supporting their respective station clubs or even having their first competitive bouts."



**COACHING:** Learning new skills at Honington PHOTOS: AS1 HARRIS WILLIAMS

The festival opened with sessions on boxing basics and talks from the station's PTIs, while the Officials Grade C Judge/Timekeeper course and the England Boxing Level One Coach course were well under way.

The second day saw advanced talks and sessions in the Jimmy James Hangar with Sgt Simon Green at the helm.

Day three saw intense training sessions from bag and pad work to swimming and Level One

coaching course theory tests for officials, before shadowing qualified judges at the evening boxing event.

Taking advantage of the ring set up for the UKAF event, the festival held a series of bouts featuring boxers from Marham, Wittering and Coningsby versus 1RSME Regt Royal Engineers and Attleborough Boxing Club.

The RAF picked up four wins from seven bouts, with each RAF station taking a victory.



## FOOTBALL

# Five titles in a row

## It's a fairy tale ending for Perkins as she signs off

**Daniel Abrahams**

**"THE GAME had everything,"** according to SRT(W) Manager FS Michelle Perkins speaking to *RAF News* after the team's 4-3 win over the Army.

She said: "I was confident the team would bring the match home, despite the Army getting some late goals. I didn't feel rattled, in fact, that is part of the whole rollercoaster of the Inter-Services."

Having beaten the Royal Navy 1-0 in Portsmouth thanks to AS1 Lucy Farrow's strike, the SRT(W) knew that to retain the IS and win 5 in a row, they had to defeat the Army after the soldiers had beaten the Navy 2-0 the week before.

The game at Lincoln City's LNER Stadium could not have started better for the aviators as Sgt Cat Beaver netted a penalty early on. That goal was followed by a keeping error by Army number one Nicole Gair which saw Flt Lt Jorgia



RAF	4
ARMY	3

Carr find Farrow, who netted for 2-0, all inside the opening half hour.

Carr (inset below, right) then punished another Gair error after a failed clearance deflected off the aviator into the net for 3-0 just after the restart.

"There were a lot of fairy tale stories to this last game, but we wanted to get the job done and we did that."

"It was a great goal from Beaves [Sgt Beaver] and her being captain for the five in a row made her goals something special, but for me the fairy tales come second to getting over the line," Perkins added.

"We wanted to make it uncomfortable for them and we did that superbly, taking



**WE'VE DONE IT AGAIN:** Women celebrate another well-earned Inter-Services title

PHOTOS: AS1 WILLIAM MOULTON

away their momentum. We also worked on pressing the keeper and it worked out twice, with two mistakes leading to goals."

Beaver's curling classic finished the aviators' scoring, and with the game at 4-1 going into the final 10 minutes they looked home and hosed.

The Army had other ideas, netting twice as the game ran into the eighth minute of injury

time, before a final Army shot was fired wide and the IS was won.

After 20 years in Service Football, Perkins will hand over to FS Karl Craven in the coming weeks as she leaves the Service later in the year.

On the future she said: "I would love the women's team to match the men's IS record of seven in a row and I believe they can do it."

"We have a group here who know how to win the Inter-Services. We have leaders and winners to get us over the line and I think they need to keep taking advantage of that, which is why I did not feel panicked against the Army, I knew they would get the job done. I trust them."

● Follow women's football on Instagram @rafladiesfootball.

## ARCHERY

# Wadd strike gold

**Daniel Abrahams**

**AVIATORS WERE on target** at the recent Indoor Archery Championships at RAF Cranwell, with Waddington kicking off their season in style by winning the Inter-Station Cup.

The annual event saw battle royals, with AS1 Chris Wright winning the men's recurve from Chf Tech David Inglis, while AS1 Kimberley Johnson took the women's title over Cpl Lauren Potter (pictured below).



## Station Cup victory in the season opener

Inglis did get a win as he took the men's barebow over Sgt John Shields, as Sgt Ellie Spinks took the women's title. The men's longbow went to AS1 David Pilsworth, with Sgt Tim Shuker second.

In the Inter-Station Cup Cranwell were runners-up and Brize Norton third.

Championship debutant Cpl Allan Wighton said: "Having taken part in beginner's archery events last year, I joined RAF Coningsby Archery Club, RAF Archery Association and of course Archery GB and have not looked back."

"The championships was a busy event to say the least. After shooting more than 120

arrows, my arms felt like jelly the following day."

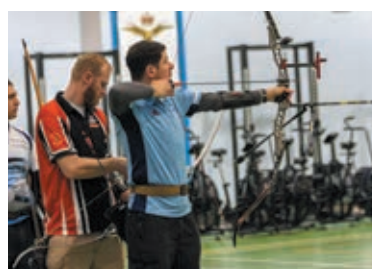
Wighton finished in 13th place with a respectable score of 334 from a possible 600, hitting three golds and only missing twice. Over two sessions he scored 158 and 176.

He added: "There is something meditative about this sport. I found that once up at the archery line, thinking about technique, form and setting up for the shot, all the noise of daily work and life had disappeared. I had fun and have now experienced a competitive fixture, so I will be setting new goals as I grow within the sport."

● Follow RAF Archery on Instagram @rafarchery.



**BAREBOW CHAMP:**



**DEBUTANT:** Cpl Allan Wighton



**RECURVE:** AS1 Kimberley Johnson

## Upcoming events

- RAF Team selection (Outdoor), RAF Cranwell, June 6-8
- RAF v Royal Toxophilite Society (Oldest English Archery Club), July 12.
- Aug 26-31, RAF Outdoor Champs, RAF Cranwell.
- Sept 14, Battle of Britain Memorial Shoot, Burnham Company of Archers.
- Sept 26-28, UK National County Champs, Lilleshall Nat Sports Centre.
- Oct 10-12, RAF Team selection (Indoor), RAF Cranwell
- Dec 6, Inter-Services Indoor, venue TBC.



# 5 RAF Sport

pages of



**Rugby women blaze trail to Inter-Services**

See page 25



**Wadd strike gold in Station Cup**

See page 27

## BOXING



**71KG CHAMP:** Cpl Arran Devine



**80KG CHAMP:** Sgt Cam Lewis



**TWO-TIME UKAF TITLE HOLDER:** Cpl Arran Devine beat LCpl Marc Thompson on a unanimous points decision  
**PHOTOS:** CPL CONNOR PAYNE (RAF)

# Armed Forces Elite

## Daniel Abrahams

IT WAS the RAF's turn to host the annual UKAF Elite Boxing Championships, and Honington saw the aviators come up one point short of team glory.

Held alongside the RAF's first Festival of Boxing, the night of ring action saw the aviators score a total of four points due to withdrawals, to the Army's five, with the Royal Navy taking just a single point.

Coming off the back of fixtures against Yorkshire and East Midlands regions and a training camp at The Lion's Den – Team GB's training set-up in Sheffield – the aviators were looking to challenge for the UKAF title, but



## Aviators are a triple threat at Honington

were hit by withdrawals from the other Services, with just four of the team getting to box for the coveted belt on the night.

The evening's first bout saw AR Jaydon Johnson (pictured left) show off his skills against Fus Matty Calderwood to take the 57kg UKAF Elite title.

An extremely close bout then saw Army Pte Dylan Swales defeat the RAF's AS1(T) Blaine Lambert in the 67kg UKAF Champ.

Next up was RAF team captain

and Boxing Scotland full-time elite athlete Cpl Arran Devine. He used his experience to outbox LCpl Marc Thompson of the Army and cruise to a unanimous points victory in the 71kg UKAF belt.

The fourth RAF boxer of the night was Sgt Cam Lewis, looking to become a two-times UKAF Champion after winning the 75kg title in 2024. In a tough, well-contested bout, Lewis's tenacity and skill saw him edge out RM Connor Fanning in a split points decision to add the

80kg UKAF title to his collection.

Though the final tally of the evening was RAF three, Army two and Navy two, rules around points for walkovers and the sheer size of the Army team meant the final points recorded were: Army five, RAF four and Navy one.

RAF boxing spokesman Sgt Ben Baily said: "It was an amazing effort from the RAF team, giving top performances against the full-time athletes of the other Services."

"Sgt Cam Lewis, Cpl Emry Parry, Cpl Jen Sabine, AS1 Carys Mainwaring and AR Jaydon Johnson will now all go on to represent UKAF in the National Amateur Championships."

● Follow RAF Boxing on Instagram @raf\_boxing.

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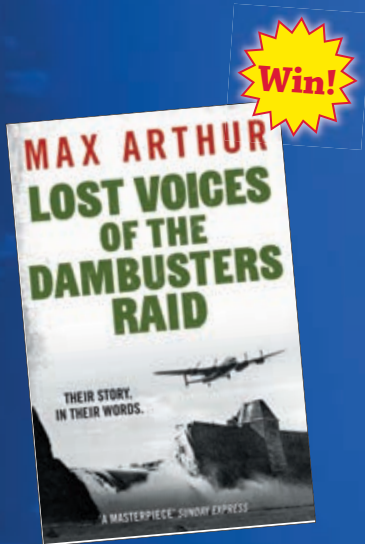


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**First Festival of Boxing: p26**



# R'n'R



Win Dambusters' story in their own words ● See page 5



Inside No.9 – top TV show hits the road

● See page 5





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

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



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

**COMBAT  
STRESS**  
FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH



**C**LOSE YOUR eyes and picture this... a quaint Italian village, nestled into the rolling hillside, above a picturesque bay. A warm breeze fans the shore. A small boat sits in the harbour. Gulls cry as they sail above. Below the village sits a hotel, straight from the 1920s, above, a castle stands guard.

This is a tranquil picture postcard that you'd happily travel 3,000 miles to see, yet, it's right here in the UK.

#### Location

Portmeirion sits on a private peninsula in North Wales, overlooking stunning coastal scenery. Classic Italian Riviera architecture and rolling Welsh hills become blended together, locked in a timeless loop. The colourful buildings stand out against the rolling green hills and the sparkling blue of the sea. It somehow feels like it shouldn't exist and, yet, here you are, in a mythical place, hidden by a shimmering haze from the world beyond. Nothing is quite what it seems here though.

Something feels off and your brain naturally struggles to resolve it. The boat in the dock, for example, is actually a building that's part of the harbour wall. The exteriors of the main village give the impression that they're half as old as time, yet the interiors are modern. That's because they were actually designed in the 1920s by the famous architect Sir Clough Williams-Ellis.

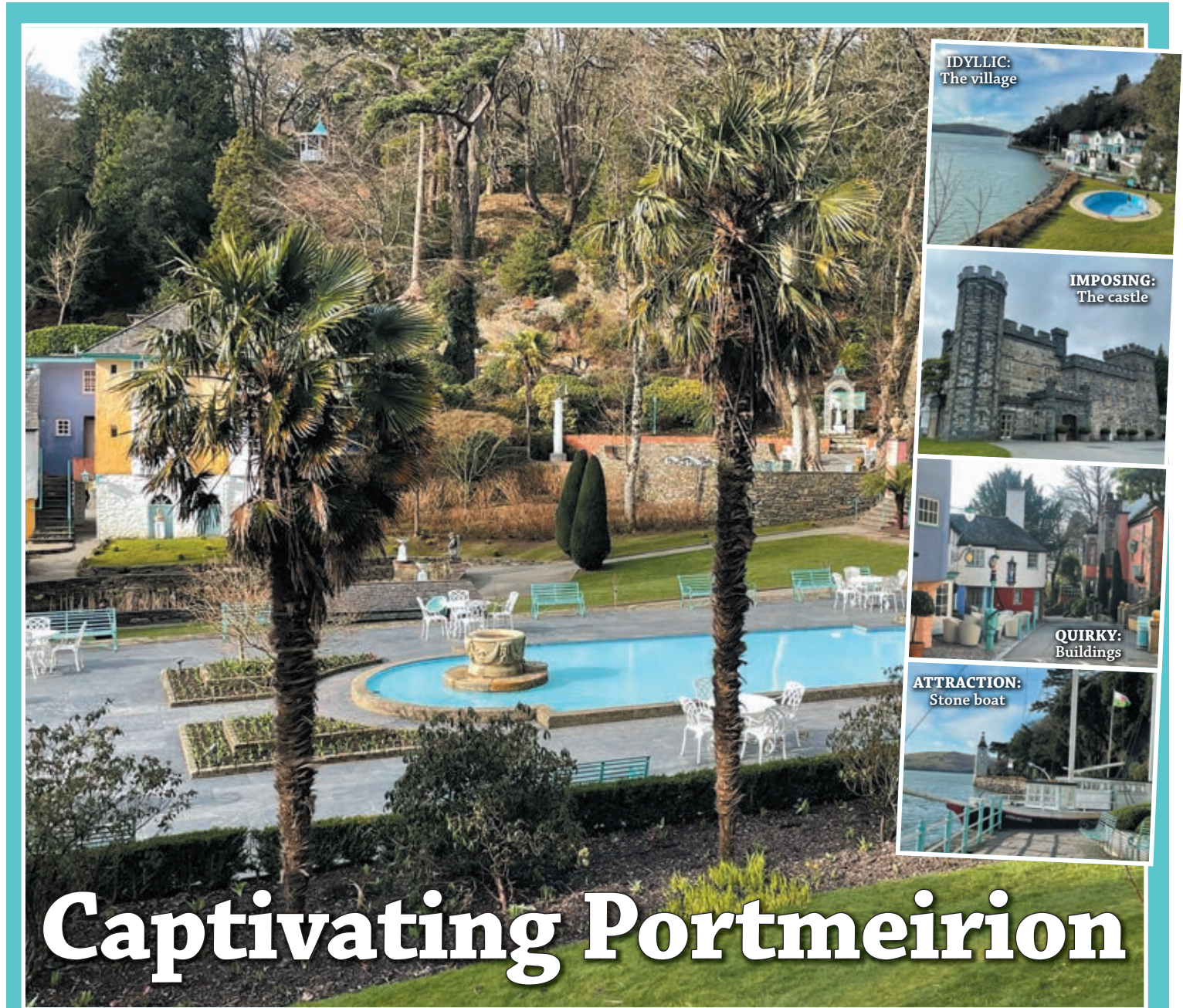
In many ways, Portmeirion Village is a living film set but, even that isn't strictly accurate because parts of it are authentic. Williams-Ellis transported endangered buildings and unwanted artefacts from all over the globe to create his vision. It really is unique.

Centred around a Mediterranean style piazza, the village incorporates a nest of loggias, grand porticoes and tiny terracotta-roofed houses. It was the set for the 1960s cult TV series *The Prisoner* and it's been no stranger to film work since. It remains one of the most popular tourist destinations in Wales.

#### Relax

Enjoy a sunset stroll out, past the faux lighthouse and up into the wooded hills. The views at sunset are magnificent and you can be one with nature.

Grab a drink from the hotel bar and take it out to watch the tide come in, sitting aboard the unusual Amis Reunis, or Friends Reunited, the stone boat. Once upon a time the Amis was a real vessel, an old trading ketch that was moored alongside the quay. Unfortunately, it became stranded on a shoal near the Ynys Giffan and sank. Clough decided to salvage what he could, and built the stone boat in homage to the original. It's a



# Captivating Portmeirion

surreal attraction that you'll love.

Portmeirion is also a botanist's paradise. Stretch your legs in the 10-hectare woodland of The Gwyllt, an Edwardian wild garden designed by Caton Haigh, who was a world authority on Himalayan flowering trees and exotic plants. Relaxing is easy in Portmeirion.

#### Adventure

Search your favourite streaming service for the *The Prisoner*, starring Patrick McGoochan, then step into the shoes of Number Six as you explore his mysterious village. The unusual architecture, the Mediterranean atmosphere, the high-tech interiors, tannoy, surveillance cameras and piped music created a bizarre, but captivating, combination for the show. The real village feels just as off-key today.

Unlike 'Number Six' guests can come and go as they please, however, so why not explore the stunning Welsh scenery by steam? Minffordd Station is just a mile's walk or drive from Portmeirion. With platforms for both the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways and the mainline Cambrian Coast

railway, it's a rail enthusiast's heaven. You can board a steam train bound for the heart of Eryri (Snowdonia) towards Blaenau Ffestiniog. Alternatively, take the short but scenic hop to Porthmadog, perhaps continuing north to Caernarfon via the Welsh Highland Railway.

Porthmadog itself is a bustling town with a harbour, supermarkets, galleries and plenty of independent shops and cafes. Attractions include the Porthmadog Maritime Museum and the nearby Glaslyn Wildlife centre. Well worth a wander.

#### Stay

Portmeirion is a private village, so all accommodation is supplied by the trust and is of the highest standards. Pick from a stay in Castell Deudraeth, at the top of the hill, the beautiful 1920s hotel on the harbour, or one of the rooms in the village itself.

We stayed in Salutation, a 4-star luxury room in the heart of the magic. We awoke to the quaint, unusual chimes of the grand clock tower and looked out onto a view of the classic piazza, with the Dwyryd Estuary beyond. A comfortable bed, self-catering facilities and a smart en

suite bathroom came as standard.

Salutation is just one option. Accommodation is dotted all around the village and options range from a standard room, sleeping two, up to a spacious family suite. The latter comes complete with two bedrooms/bathrooms, a kitchenette and a lounge. Some have private patios and terraces.

Wherever you stay in Portmeirion, you feel like you're in a magical place, especially after the gates close to the public.

#### Eat & Drink

The Hotel Portmeirion was opened by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis on April 2, 1926. In 2005 the Dining Room and Bar were redesigned by Sir Terence Conran in an art deco style. The dining room has breathtaking views over the Dwyryd Estuary.

Portmeirion's Executive Head Chef Mark Threadgill and his team, under the supervision of Head Chef Daniel Griffiths, use the finest local ingredients to create his unique style of modern-Welsh cuisine, combining traditional French techniques and Japanese flavours. It is a foodie's utopia and service is second to none. You can

understand why it's won awards. The Dining Room has two AA Rosettes.

#### Brasserie at Castell Deudraeth

Above the village, but within the Portmeirion estate, sits a striking mansion, with a stone façade, tall crenellations and Gothic flourishes. Originally the home of an early Victorian MP, the castle is now a cool hotel, with a stylish conservatory brasserie. The dining atmosphere is slightly less formal than the hotel, but it's still a classy affair, serving some outstanding dishes. Again, the service is spot-on and food presentation is outstanding.

Don't forget to take home a bottle of single malt Welsh whisky, or locally-produced confectionary as a souvenir.

#### Downsides

I can't find many faults here. It could be a little quiet for younger children and it's not a cheap break. A cottage, sleeping five, will set you back around £900 for three nights in May. If you're looking for exclusive, though, it ticks enough boxes to justify the outlay.

Tim Morris





**Film**  
**Juliet & Romeo**  
June release

# Rebel pops up in new musical twist on old Shakespearean classic



MOTHER OF ALL ROLES: Rebel Wilson as Juliet's mum, Lady Capulet

**N**EW FILM *Juliet & Romeo*, described as an innovative twist on the Shakespearean classic, and featuring a stellar cast, comes to cinemas nationwide in June.

It will be shown for a special one-night event on June 11 with the screening including an exclusive Q&A starring "a dynamic ensemble of the film's rising stars and industry veterans", said a spokesperson.

Its stars include Rebel Wilson (*Pitch Perfect/Jojo Rabbit*), Jason Isaacs (*The White Lotus/Harry Potter franchise/Mrs. Harris Goes To Paris*), Rupert Everett (*My Best Friend's Wedding/the Shrek franchise*), Rupert Graves (*Sherlock/Emma*), Tony Award-winner, Dan Fogler (*A Complete Unknown/Fantastic Beasts franchise/The Walking Dead*), and Sir Derek Jacobi (*Gladiator II/The King's Speech*).

Clara Rugaard (*Love Gets A Room/Black Mirror*) plays Juliet and Jamie Ward (*The Last Supper/His Dark Materials/Tyrant*) is Romeo.

The spokesperson added: "*Juliet & Romeo* will be the first film in an exciting movie-musical trilogy based around the real-life 1301 story that inspired Shakespeare's greatest tale, with the world's most famous lovers finding themselves central figures in an epic journey of battles and betrayal, the iconic duo turning the tides on history as we know it."

Speaking about the challenges of bringing one of Shakespeare's most renowned tales to the big screen, writer/director Timothy Scott Bogart said: "*Romeo & Juliet* is one of the most romantic stories ever told. And the challenge for any storyteller is to find a different colour that they can add. To work from a different palette.

"To me, what Shakespeare did was to express the poetry of his time. So, in searching for the poetry of our time, we turn to music... Original Pop Music, as a way to truly dive into our character's journeys - which I believe makes our film different than any other version that's ever been done before. The greatest love story of all time, set to the greatest music of our time."

Rebel Wilson plays Juliet's mother, Lady Capulet.

She said: "It was a really interesting and creative opportunity to play Lady Capulet in this film. I was playing a famous mother after just becoming a mother myself. But overall I was attracted to this project because of the excellent music and the chance to play really against type as an actress.

"Filming on location in ancient castles in Italy was very special as well - not to mention the stellar cast: Rupert, Jason, Sir Derek and the young talented cast who I just love and know they have an amazing future ahead of them."



**Theatre**  
**The Croft**  
UK tour



# Croft original

**S**HE'S BEEN a familiar face on our screens for decades, starring in hits like *Bergerac* and *Doctor Who*. Now Liza Goddard is appearing in the ghostly stage thriller *The Croft*, by Ali Milles, alongside former *Coronation Street* star Gray O'Brien.

Her first love, she said, has always been the stage, so she's delighted to be returning to it for her latest role, in Original Theatre's acclaimed production.

"The concept of the play is really interesting," she explained. "It's set in the Highlands, and I play a former inhabitant of a croft, who reveals her story to the modern-day visitors. I love the idea of it being a ghost story."

The production, which starts an eight-week tour on May 9, also stars Caroline Harker (*A Touch of Frost*, pictured far right).

Goddard said the setting of the play feels close to home. "I've spent a lot of time in the Highlands. We have relatives who live in the Trossachs, and I absolutely adore it."

She is no stranger to life on the road, having appeared in countless travelling productions including the recent hit revival of Michael Frayn's farce *Noises Off*. "The nice thing about touring is that you get to see so many different cities. I

# Highlands homecoming

probably know this country better than anyone thanks to my work," she added.

Her first theatre credits were in regional rep. She even appeared as a baby on stage at the Aldershot Repertory Theatre, where her father David Goddard worked before becoming a BBC producer.

Her big break came after the family relocated to Australia, when she was cast to play Clancy Merrick in *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo*, which became a huge international hit.

After returning to the UK in the late 60s, "with the aim of earning enough money to get back to Australia", she soon got cast in *Take Three Girls*, the first drama series to be broadcast in colour.

More roles quickly followed, including in *The Brothers*, in which she appeared alongside Colin Baker, who became her first husband. Future co-stars would include Ben Kingsley and Richard Burton.

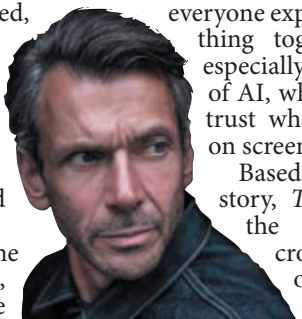
"I've worked with some amazing actors," she said, "and I've also had some

fantastic collaborators on stage. I've worked a lot with the playwright Alan Ayckbourn, and later this year will be returning to his theatre in Scarborough, my spiritual home, for his 96th play."

When she's away from the stage she enjoys relaxing at home in Norfolk. "I live in a village that has lots of activities to keep me busy such as keep fit classes and OAP lunches. I find village life very entertaining."

But despite enjoying her down time she says the lure of the footlights remains as strong as ever. "Acting is the only thing I know how to do, and it's quite addictive really. I don't think there's anything better than live performance, with everyone experiencing the same thing together. And that's especially true in this age of AI, when you can't really trust what you're watching on screen."

Based on a true Highland story, *The Croft* is set in the real-life former crofting community of Coillie Ghille in the Highlands.





Edited by Tracey Allen



LIZA GODDARD:  
Back treading  
the boards in  
Highlands thriller



## Books

### Lost Voices of the Dambusters Raid

by Max Arthur (augustbooks.co)

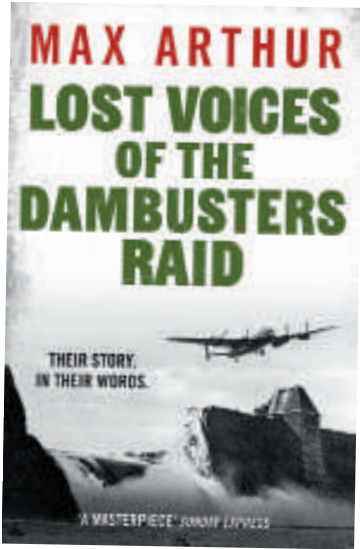
Win!

# The Dambusters Raid in the words of those actually there

**T**HE DAMBUSTERS raid was one of the most iconic missions of World War II. Three dams along Germany's Ruhr Valley, which powered the nation's industrial war effort, were the target. To overcome the torpedo nets and other defences, Barnes Wallis invented the 'bouncing' bomb to skim along the surface of the reservoirs before breaching the dam walls. 617 Squadron was chosen to deliver them.

On the night of May 16-17 1943, 19 specially modified Lancaster bombers left Britain. Weeks of training under absolute secrecy were put to the test. In *Lost Voices of the Dambusters Raid* (augustbooks.co) acclaimed oral historian Max Arthur has gathered together the voices of the Lancaster crews as well as the German civilians who endured the attack, compiling a unique picture of how the mission unfolded, and the devastation it caused.

The book, which features



contributions from Mission Commander Guy Gibson and from Barnes Wallis, has been described as the definitive oral history of the raid.

Max Arthur was an author who specialised in first-hand recollections of historical

events. He worked closely with the Imperial War Museum to bring together two books in the *Forgotten Voices* series: *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* and *Forgotten Voices of the Second World War*.

He was appointed OBE in the 2013 New Year Honours for services to military history. Before becoming a writer, he served with the Royal Air Force and for some years was an actor.

We have copies of this highly acclaimed title up for grabs – for your chance to own one, tell us:

**Who invented the 'bouncing' bomb?**

Email your answer, marked Dambusters Raid 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 May 2. Please mark your entry Dambusters Raid book and remember to include your full postal address.



## Theatre

### Inside No.9 Stage/Fright

UK tour

# Coming for Goddard

The play sees two women arrive for a holiday, where they encounter O'Brien's character, a local gamekeeper. This soon leads them all on a journey of discovery into the history of the settlement, and the fate of the house's former inhabitants.

The present interweaves with the past as ancient tales surface and the terrifying truth lurking in the Croft is revealed.

O'Brien (pictured below left) played murderer Tony Gordon in *Coronation Street* from 2007-10. "It was a great experience, and it changed my life, but it also stopped my life in a way. I find it difficult to even get considered for TV roles now, because I'm so associated with that character," he said.

He recently overcame treatment for cancer, an experience that he said has given him a new perspective on life.

Born in Glasgow, he knows the landscape around Coillie Ghille well, so *The Croft* feels close to home.

His role in it felt like serendipity. "One day I got a call from a friend

saying his neighbour, Liza Goddard, was doing a play called *The Croft* and wanted some help with the dialect," he revealed. "So I helped her out over WhatsApp and thought nothing more about it. Then a few months later I got a call from my agent saying they were sending me the script for the same play."

Once he started reading, he was hooked. "I thought I'd just dip into it, and found myself reading the entire thing in a single sitting, which is always a good sign. I thought it was really interesting, and very theatrical."

His stage career has blossomed, with regular collaborators including the legendary late producer Bill Kenwright. Last year Gray starred in the premiere of *Rebus: A Game Called Malice*, an experience he says gave him a taste of how much audiences love a mystery story. "*The Croft* will definitely get people talking at the interval," he said with a mischievous smile.

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

Interviews by Theo Bosanquet



# Inside No.9's swan-song

**F**OLLOWING A sold-out West End season, Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith are taking the critically acclaimed *Inside No.9 Stage/Fright* to theatres around the UK this autumn on a 12-week tour.

The duo will once again star in the stage version of their award-winning television comedy *Inside No.9*.

Nominated for a prestigious Olivier Award this year in the Best New Entertainment or Comedy Play category, *Stage/Fright* features comedic, spooky and dramatic moments as fans of the TV show have come to expect, with some familiar characters and stories mixing with brand new material. Further casting will be announced soon, said a spokesperson.

Pemberton and Shearsmith said: "We have been bowled over by the success of *Inside No.9 Stage/Fright* at the Wyndham's Theatre. Selling out every performance before the run started and being nominated for an Olivier Award was fantastic enough, but the nightly reaction from fans and newcomers alike has been exhilarating and really quite moving.

"So we are delighted to be able to bring the show to a wider audience around the country. The phrase 'swan-song' refers to a final performance, often associated with the ancient belief that swans sing beautifully just before their death. So come along to the swan-song tour of *Inside No.9* and see for yourselves how we bow out. There won't be a dry seat in the house."

Each performance will see a different celebrity 'hostage' perform with Steve and Reece. The West



LEAD ROLES: Pemberton and Shearsmith Photo: Mark Brenner

End run included cameos from Stephen Fry, Lenny Henry, Mel Giedroyc, Matt Lucas, Michael Sheen, Tamsin Greig, Adrian Dunbar, Bob Mortimer, David Walliams, Micky Flanagan, Meera Syal, Mackenzie Crook, Emilia Fox and Rob Brydon, as well as many others. Which famous faces will join them on stage for the regional dates?

Kicking off in Milton Keynes on September 9, *Inside No.9 Stage/Fright* visits 11 theatres across the UK including Sunderland, Canterbury, Birmingham, Manchester, Woking, Hull, Oxford, Stoke and Liverpool, before culminating in Edinburgh on November 29.

The ninth, and final, season of the critically acclaimed TV series was screened last year and is now available on BBC iPlayer.

● Go to: [insidenono9onstage.com](http://insidenono9onstage.com) for full tour details.





## Your Announcements

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

### Seeking

I am seeking SAC Mary Cessford in connection with our 60th anniversary, which is in July 2026. My wife Ann (née Maddrell) and I (Richard) met in 1965 at RAF Wittering, Mary was instrumental in bringing us together. All three of us were in the Supply Squadron (stores). Ann was discharged in January 1968 and myself in 1972. It is my intention to have a celebration function in July 2026 and we would dearly love Mary to be present. If anybody out there knows of Mary's whereabouts please would they contact me – email: dick.squire4@gmail.com or mobile: 07792 629059.



**Mary Cessford**

**CALLING** ex members of 230 OCU RAF Finningley who served there during the 1960s. I am seeking 230 OCU's Squadron Crest to make a wall shield. Email: rogerparker1944@icloud.com maybe for get-together sometime in the future.

### Reunions

**THE** Royal Air Force Administrative Apprentices of the 302nd Entry (Supply) gathered, with wives, on April 2 for a reunion dinner at The

Oxfordshire Golf Hotel and Spa to commemorate a remarkable milestone: the 60th anniversary of their attestation taking the Queen's Shilling in January 1965. This historic occasion was marked with heartfelt toasts to those who have passed on and to those unable to attend due to ill health. The event honoured the enduring spirit and camaraderie of those who have served.

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

**ALL** ex Clk Secs who were trained on the Apprentice Wing at RAF Credenhill in the 1960s and 1970s are cordially invited to contact the undersigned with a view to arranging a reunion in 2025. Please email: David.tibbett@ntlworld.com

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

**217** Craft Apprentices RAF Halton 55 years Reunion September 30 and October 1 at the Petwood Hotel, Woodhall Spa, LN10 6QG. BBMF & IBCC trips planned for during the day with a formal dinner on the evening of October 1. Contact Gerry Evans on: 01793-764236 or email: gerry.e.54@btinternet.com.

**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: mickjwoodhouse1946@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? Please contact David Slough via email: d.slough@outlook.com

### Associations

**591** SU Association. In its 72nd year of existence, 591 Signal Unit has established an Association (better late than never..!). Its aim is to foster esprit de corps and comradeship, to promote and maintain the ethos and heritage of this incredible Signals Unit.

**EX-MEMBERS** and currently serving ex members of 591 SU are invited to visit the Association's website at: [www.591suassociation.co.uk](http://www.591suassociation.co.uk) for membership details and news of the next annual reunion along with other upcoming events for 2025.

**WHAT** do you know about the 2 Halifax RAF Sqn 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](http://rafaarmourers.co.uk) or email: [plumbersrest@outlook.com](mailto:plumbersrest@outlook.com).

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

**RAF** Physical Training Instructors Association holds an Annual Dinner and AGM over a weekend, plus locally organised events. Please contact RAFPTIA Hon. Secretary Denise Street-Brown on: [ptisec@outlook.com](mailto:ptisec@outlook.com) for membership enquiries.

## Air Marshal steps up as new SSAFA CEO

AIR MARSHAL Steve Shell has been announced as the new CEO of Armed Forces charity SSAFA, after 37 years' service with the RAF.

He succeeds Sir Andrew Gregory, who stepped down as SSAFA Controller at the end of February after more than eight years in the role.

Steve (pictured below) was commissioned into the Royal Air Force in 1988, joining as a pilot, and has exclusively flown Chinook helicopters. His operational deployments include



the First Gulf War, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, the evacuation of Lebanon and earthquake relief in Pakistan. He was the Station Commander of RAF Odiham and Commanding Officer of the UK Chinook Force.

Steve worked in the Pentagon as Chief of Defence Staff Liaison Officer and directed Air Operations as Chief of Staff in Air Command. His most recent posting before joining SSAFA was as Director General of the Defence Safety Authority.

Sir Simon Bollom, SSAFA's National Chair, said: "Through his RAF service, Steve has worked closely with SSAFA in different roles and understands us well."

"I am delighted to welcome him as our new CEO; he comes with great passion and commitment to SSAFA, and I know that he will continue to drive SSAFA forward in support of our beneficiaries."

## Runnymede ceremony

**THE** ANNUAL ACT of Commemoration at Runnymede Memorial is on Sunday, May 18 at 11am.

Wreaths will be laid on behalf of the Commonwealth Air Forces and Ex-Service Organisations in honour of 29,263 members of the Commonwealth Air

Forces who lost their lives in the Second World War in 1939/45 while operating from the UK and North West Europe and who have no known grave.

This moving ceremony is open to all who wish to pay their respects to those named on the memorial.

## 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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Your Announcements

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NIGHT TO REMEMBER:  
The Band of the RAF College perform at Lincoln Cathedral in 2022

Special concert for VE Day 80th

TO CELEBRATE the 80th anniversary of VE Day, on Saturday, May 17, Lincoln Cathedral will host a special concert for the county. It will feature the choir of Lincoln Cathedral with the Band of the Royal Air Force College, based at RAF Cranwell in Lincolnshire. Sponsored by Newark-based charity the Royal Air Force Music Charitable Trust in partnership with Lincoln Cathedral, the concert will be compered by Lincolnshire broadcaster and presenter Melvyn Prior, raising funds to support the wider Armed Forces Community. Malcolm Goodman, founder of the RAF Music Charitable Trust, said: "Having established the charity 21 years ago to raise welfare funds for our military veterans, it is a real privilege to be working with the cathedral once again to support this truly historic celebration."

Go to: [lincolncathedral.com](http://lincolncathedral.com) for tickets and more information.

Helping the homeless

A FIVE-STRONG team from RAF Brize Norton have raised £1,200 for charity Homeless Oxfordshire after taking on the gruelling David Goggins 4x48 challenge over two days.

Amber Hughes, FS Connal Jones, Sgt Christopher Blayney, Cpl Chris Lyon and ASI John Bevan's marathon effort earlier this month was the culmination of six months of dedicated training.

Sgt Blayney said: "One of the hardest parts of this challenge was easily the midnight and 4am runs. After finishing each run, time was needed to stretch, eat and unwind before trying to sleep, meaning at times starting the next run on as little as an hour of sleep."

"But the morale between us all never wavered and we kept each other's spirits high."

"Although this was a



FAB FIVE: The runners celebrate completing the challenge

team event, different levels of fitness and fatigue meant running solo a lot of the time, which required a lot of mental resilience from everyone.

"However, we had plenty of support during the event with people even coming out to join us at midnight and 4am, which was such a great boost to morale."

He added: "At noon on the Friday, with some sore joints and a lot of blisters, we set off on our final and happiest run as we knew we could rest afterwards and finally get more than two hours sleep."

"I would like to thank everyone who donated and everyone who supported us before, during or after the challenge."



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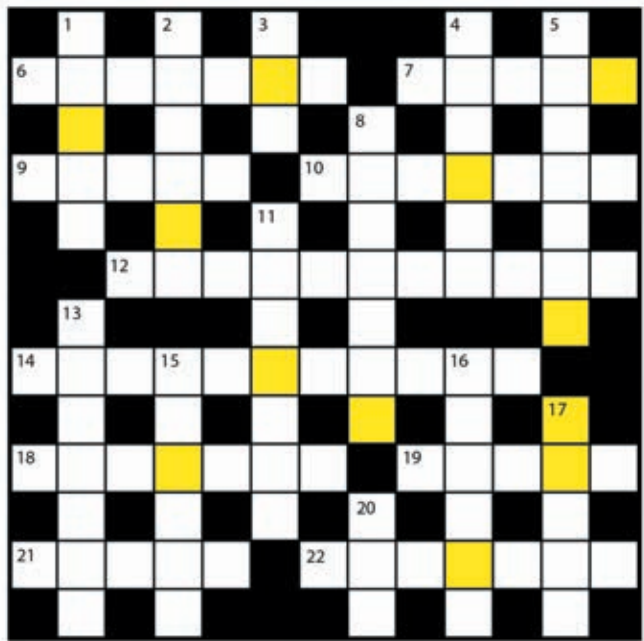
Crossword

No. 383

Solve the crossword, then rearrange the 12 letters in yellow squares to find an RAF memorial.

This edition's crossword and Su Doku puzzles are just for fun for you to do at home, no need to send your entries in.

- Across
- 6. Politician translates braille (7)
  - 7. Speed mustered back at Italian river (5)
  - 9. Dominate little Bristow, Eric (5)
  - 10. Father has right view on chocolate (7)
  - 12. Alloy mischief-maker in cold weather (5,6)
  - 14. Grass for bird's air exercise (6,5)
  - 18. And 21 Across. Did this plane give pilots the hump? (7,5)
  - 19. Fuzzy five contract malaria (5)
  - 21. See 18 Across
  - 22. Plane disturbing hot pony (7)
- Down
- 1. RAF worker: first photographed in Latvia or Tasmania (5)
  - 2. RAF missile encountered contaminated ore (6)
  - 3. See 8 Down
  - 4. Helicopter wizard? (6)
  - 5. Tool used on a bridge, presumably (7)
  - 8. And 3 Down. Airman crew destroyed during Victorian conflict (7,3)
  - 11. Guards sectors under attack (7)
  - 13. Famous planes in two US states (7)
  - 15. Jimmy Anderson's hat? (6)
  - 16. Failed alto the man will dislike (6)
  - 17. Where people lie in Japan (5)
  - 20. Sounds like Welshman's colour (3)



Prize Crossword No. 382 winner is: A Coxon, Surrey.

Name: .....  
Address: .....  
.....  
.....  
RAF memorial: .....Crossword No. 383

Solution to Crossword No. 382  
Across – 7. I Ching 8. Plaiice 10. Siberia 11. Dross 12. Lear 13. Snail 17. Bathe 18. Anne 22. Alert 23. Raising 24. Bomber 25. Office  
Down – 1. Missile 2. The Bear 3. Angry 4. Al Udeid 5. Pilot 6. Verse 9. Launchers 14. Fast Jet 15. Anti-air 16. Beagles 19. Bambi 20. Seamy 21. Biffo  
RAF aircraft – Voyager

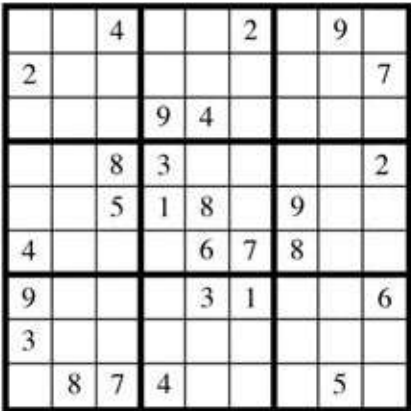


Su Doku

No. 393

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.

The winner of Su Doku No: 391 is: Mr R Bancroft, N Yorks.



Solution to Su Doku No. 392

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



Film

War Paint – Women at War (12A)

In cinemas now

War through women's eyes

THIS COMPELLING documentary is the final film in Margy Kinmonth's War Art Trilogy, following on from the multi-award-winning box office success of Eric Ravilious – Drawn To War and War Art With Eddie Redmayne.

War paint – Women At War shines a light on the trailblazing role of women war artists on the frontlines around the world, championing the female perspective on conflict through art and asking: when it's life or death, what do women see that men don't?

The artists featured include Zhanna Kadyrova, Linda Kitson, Shirin Neshat, Rachel Reckitt, Dame Laura Knight, Lee Miller, Nina Berman, Marcelle Hanselaar, Jananne Al-Ani, Assil Diab, Doris Zinkeisen, Fiona Banner aka The Vanity Press, Maggi Hambling, Cornelia Parker, Dame Rachel Whiteread and Maya Lin.

Kinmonth said: "As a female director I want to show war from the female point of view. Up till now I've seen war through



WAR PAINT: Corporal JDM Pearson GC WAAF by Dame Laura Knight. Credit Imperial War Museums

men's eyes. Now I'm asking whether conflict is different as experienced by women.

"Women war artists have the power not only to document, but inspire empathy and provoke action internationally. My film bears witness to their work and seeks to understand the true impact of conflict and its aftermath – destruction, sexual violence, displacement and genocide – through a female perspective and artists' eyes."



Film Review

Last Swim (15)

Out now

A London coming of age

A GROUP of London teens rendezvous at school to collect their A-level results with a full day planned together, but one of them has a secret that can only be kept hidden for so long.

Iranian-Brit Ziba (Deba Hekmat) is the plan-maker: the straight-A, goody-two-shoes who takes the label of Persian Hermione Granger as a compliment. She hasn't seen the others over the summer break due to spending time in hospital, dealing with a potentially fatal diagnosis. Ziba wants to keep this from her friends, though they have their suspicions, and her constant nosebleeds aren't helping.

Hopping from Portobello Road to Primrose Hill on a beautifully sunny day with her closest friends, the plans are all built around witnessing a once-in-40-year meteor shower in the evening. The last day of summer and end of adolescence is given a much stronger sense of loss, knowing that much more is at stake, heightened by her ambition and potential. The group, played by Solly McLeod, Lydia Fleming,



KEEPING A SECRET: Ziba (Deba Hekmat)

Jay Lycurgo and Denzel Baidoo, captures the spirit and charm of young friends in their banter.

The film's insistence on a rose-tinted view can become jarring, and you know it must be something of a fantasy when a Gen-Z gang seldom pulls out a phone. When the topics become loftier, it feels forced, with the loss of innocence hammered home as the group laughs in slow motion at various intervals.

The score is effective, but it's the soundtrack that truly lends a sense of time and place, featuring

songs from The Streets, Aphex Twin, and Iranian artists that help anchor the film in Ziba's experience. As Ziba battles her private struggle, tainting this idyllic journey across the city, Last Swim dives into darkness in a shocking way. But it is only once you've recovered that you might question whether this fate was warranted.

A moving coming-of-age story compressed into one dramatic day.

Review by Sam Cooney  
3 roundels out of 5