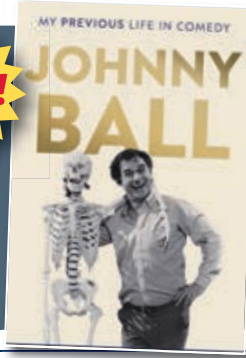
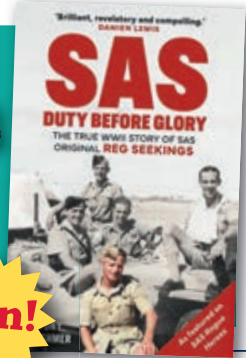


The Forces' favourite paper

TV star Johnny Ball's new autobiog.
● See R'n'R pages 4-5



One of the first heroes of SAS
● See page 17



ROYAL AIR FORCE
Friday, May 2, 2025
Edition No. 1607
Only 99p

RAF News



VE Day
80th anniversary

See pages 14-15



Alpine
Return of the ladies



● See page 25

Rugby Union
Inters win for women



● See page p27

Hockey
Under-25s fly the flag



● See page p28

Ocean's 24

Biggest ever force of UK F-35s as Carrier Strike Group heads for the Indo-Pacific



Simon Mander
THE RAF Dambusters 617 Sqn has joined forces with the Royal Navy's 809 'Immortals' Sqn on board the UK's Prince of Wales Carrier for Operation Highmast, marking the biggest ever deployment of the F-35 Lightning.
The Carrier Strike Group's eight-month mission across the Indo-Pacific could see up to 24 fifth-generation stealth fighters operating from the deck of the flagship carrier in what defence chiefs have called a milestone for the F-35 programme.
● See p9 for full story



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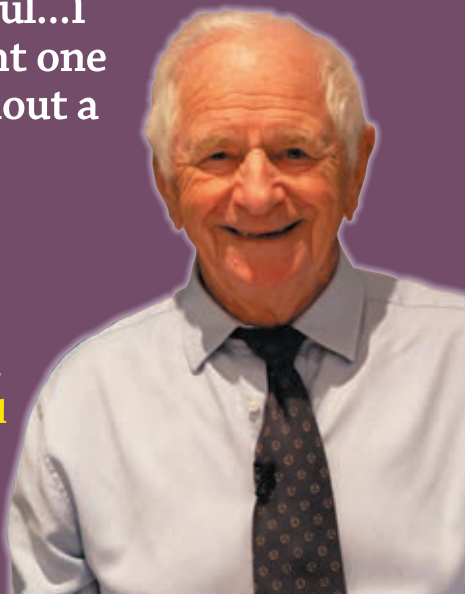
“We hope to inspire other stations to have some light-hearted fun,”

Lossie logistics chief Wg Cdr Sharon Eveleigh-Hall on getting school kids to name airbase's snow ploughs
See page 5



“The RAF, for me, was wonderful...I only went one day without a drink!”

Veteran entertainer Johnny Ball releases his autobiog.
See R'n'R pages 4-5



“I'm simply focused on helping boxing,”

RAF and Olympic boxing official Gp Capt Ray Morley on his UKAF award
See page 28



Britain marks VE Day



ROYAL AIR FORCE
RAF News

RAF News

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MODERN FIGHTERS on operations worldwide will join veteran aircraft and aerobatics aces as the RAF marks VE Day 80.

An aerial display of 23 aircraft celebrates the wartime generation with Coningsby's Battle of Britain Memorial flight and will include today's frontline jets and helicopters on standby globally.

Voyager transport aircraft which ship arms and troops to Ukraine, P8 Poseidon surveillance aircraft that patrol the coast for hostile submarines, Typhoons now defending Nato's skies from Poland and F-35 fighters, some of which are en route to the Indo-Pacific, will take part.

The Bank Holiday Monday commemoration starts with a Churchill speech and finishes with a Red Arrows flypast.

The event, marking 80 years since the end of WWII in Europe, on May 5 features a 1,300-strong military procession watched by the public along The Mall.

It starts in Parliament Square



when Big Ben strikes midday and an actor recites extracts from Winston Churchill's VE Day speech.

A young person will then pass the Commonwealth War Graves Torch for Peace to 100-year-old Normandy veteran Alan Kennett.

He said: "I remember Battle

of Britain pilot Johnnie Johnson bursting in and shouting 'the war is over'. A big party soon followed, filled with lots of drinking and celebrating the news. The 80th anniversary of VE Day brings back so many memories."

The Household Cavalry

Mounted Regiment and The King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery will lead the procession down Whitehall and past the Cenotaph dressed in Union Flags, through Admiralty Arch and up The Mall to Buckingham Palace.

They will be followed by a Tri-Service procession group with RAF personnel and cadets.

The Prime Minister and WWII veterans will watch the procession from a specially-built dais.

Armed Forces of Commonwealth nations have been invited to join the procession, led by The Band of the Irish Guards.

Members of the public can find street parties and events near them on the government's VE Day 80 website at: ve-vjday80.gov.uk

The Prime Minister announced last week pubs will be able to stay open an additional two hours on May 8 to celebrate.

This Week In History



1945 Final raid

THE RAF launches its last bombing raid of WWII as a force of 126 Mosquitos attack Kiel. Two Halifax aircraft supporting the raid are lost – the last Bomber Command casualties of the war.

1953

Duke gets Wings

THE DUKE of Edinburgh Prince Philip receives his Wings from Chief of the Air Staff, ACM Sir William Dickson.



1990

Women join jet set

FLT LTS Sally Cox and Julie Gibson become the UK's first women fast jet pilots when they take to the skies in the Jet Provost at Linton-on-Ouse.

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

Rookie Benn's RAF dynasty

Staff Reporter

AIR FORCE rookie Benn Morris stepped out on the Cranwell parade square – as the **FOURTH** generation of his family to serve with the RAF.

As he commissioned in to the Service earlier this year he became part of a Service dynasty stretching back 87 years to his great-grandfather and namesake Benn, who signed up in 1927 as one of the famous Trenchard Brats.

Born into abject poverty dockside in Maryport in Cumbria, he went on to take a commission in 1941 and was seconded to the Arab Legion after the war, eventually becoming Officer Commanding the engineering section at Shawbury.

Grandfather David took his commission at the height of the Cold War in 1960 and went on to pilot the mighty delta wing Vulcan – then the UK's frontline nuclear bomber.

Benn's father, David Jnr, followed the family calling, signing up in 1988 as a Catering Officer and retiring in 2005 when Benn was seven years old.

Speaking after his graduation, Benn Jnr said: "It was a great day for the family. Dad was very emotional but very proud. He said he could see himself in me when I was standing on the parade square going through what he did all those years ago."

"He was over the moon. It was a great day for the family. When I was talking to the Reviewing Officer and I told him that I



FAMILY AFFAIR: Top, Benn celebrates with brother Rory, mum Caroline and dad David at Cranwell

was about to become a fourth generation RAF officer, I realised what I had achieved."

Despite his family's Forces pedigree, the 27-year-old recruit didn't consider a military career until he left university – and his first effort to join was unsuccessful.

He said: "I've always been proud of my family's military service but when I left university

I was still unsure what to do.

"I wanted to do something different but I spoke to Dad about his experiences, the friendships he had made and the people he had met and that helped me make up my mind."

After his initial application was rejected Benn worked in sports retail and as a facilities manager for a sports charity near

the family home in Elgin.

He reapplied a few years later, was accepted and has just finished his Phase One training. He added: "Training was a shock to the system. It was challenging but enjoyable. Every day I was getting one per cent better."

"We are put under constant pressure and I had to learn some coping strategies but each day

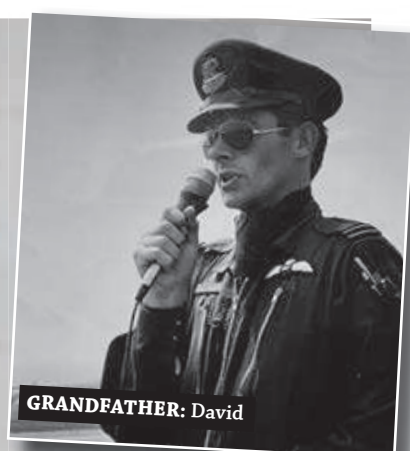
was different."

Benn now has his sights set on joining the Tactical Police Security Sqn after he finishes his Phase 2 training at Southwick Park.

Away from the classroom Service life has also allowed him to pursue his life-long passion for rugby and he hopes to make it on to the RAF Rugby Seniors XV team.



GREAT-GRANDFATHER: Benn



GRANDFATHER: David



FATHER: David Jnr

Dorn again

Staff Reporter

THE WING of the last known Dornier Do 17 is set to go on display 72 years after it was shot down over the Kent coast by the RAF.

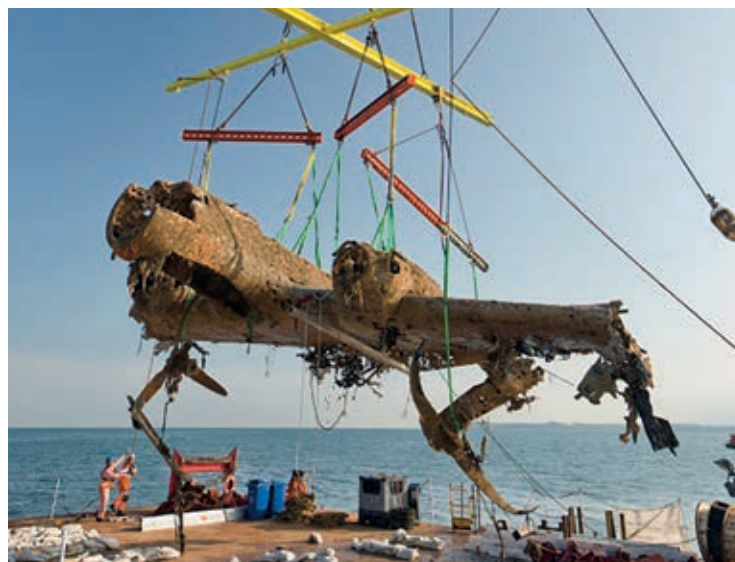
The Luftwaffe bomber, dubbed the 'flying pencil', was discovered off Goodwin Sands in 2013 and has undergone years of painstaking restoration work by a specialist conservation team.

Now it's ready to make its public debut at the RAF Museum

Midlands' Battle of Britain hangar later this year.

Tom Hopkins, the museum's curator for aircraft and exhibits, said: "When this aircraft was engaged in combat with a Boulton Paul Defiant of 264 Sqn it would have been absolutely riddled with .303 rounds."

"We can see evidence of where the Dornier was hit and how the metal has peeled back as if the round was passing through it at speed and actually deforming the metal."



Bulletin

BBMF returns

THE BATTLE of Britain Memorial Flight returns to the skies this month, performing the first of more than 30 displays at the Midlands Air Show.

The team was grounded in May 2024 following the death of Sqn Ldr Mark Long when his Spitfire crashed in a field near RAF Coningsby.



Exciting news!

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A Garden Oasis for **HMS Collingwood**
RAF Cranwell's New Tabletop Gaming Haven
NAAFI Fund Scores Big for **Gibraltar Hockey Goalies**

   
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Lossie kids are name for a laugh

SCHOOLCHILDREN IN the Lossiemouth area have swept aside the competition to name their local RAF station's fleet of snow ploughs.

Station chiefs invited pupils aged between five and 13 to christen four vehicles used to clear the way for the frontline Typhoons, Poseidon and Wedgetail aircraft on global operations.

Now the aptly named 'Plower O' Scotland' and 'Hercu-freeze' are ready to hit the runways after a naming ceremony.

The move continues a tradition of inviting the local Lossiemouth community to come up with names for the vehicles.

The newly-named fleet replaces the outgoing machines including 'Gritty Gritty Bang Bang' and 'Sleetwood Mac'.

During the winter months people can track the snow ploughs, which are listed under their given names on the official Traffic Scotland gritter app.

Station Engineering and Logistics chief Wg Cdr Sharon Eveleigh-Hall



introduced the idea during a road-trip in the winter where she saw the numerous and humorous names emblazoned on the side of the gritters across the country.

She said: "We hope that Lossie's naming of the vehicles will inspire other stations to follow suit to introduce a bit of light-hearted fun, warmth and tradition to an important and cold part of station life during winter."



CLEAN SWEEP: Wg Cdr Eveleigh-Hall (left) joins youngsters at the naming ceremony. Above left and inset right, pupils check out military vehicles
PHOTOS: AS1 AERIS FINNEY

Haul of fame



Simon Mander

AN ATLAS aircraft made the largest air drop carried out by the RAF in the Falkland Islands from a single aircraft.

The A400M delivered 24 pallets, weighing approximately 900kg each, to Goose Green.

The 1312 Flight mission, supported by Brize-based 47 Air Dispatch, 30 Sqn and 70 Sqn personnel, jettisoned a container delivery system at 3,000 feet.

The operation, which is challenging to achieve in the UK, could be used in future humanitarian assistance and

disaster relief operations.

The sortie was woven into a 2 Royal Gurkha Rifles exercise.

British Forces South Atlantic Islands Deputy Commander Gp Capt Adele Stratton said: "We have received fantastic support from the whole local community, but especially the Goose Green community and Royal Falkland Island Police, without whom it would not have been possible.

"This air drop was the culmination of a lot of hard work by personnel in the UK and here in the Falkland Islands, and it sets the benchmark for opportunities in the future."

In Brief



QUAKE AID: ATC teams praised for work during humanitarian missions

Hunt is on for Akrotiri

AIR TRAFFICKERS in Cyprus have been honoured for their role supporting humanitarian relief efforts in areas of conflict and natural disaster.

The RAF unit has co-ordinated evacuation efforts in Sudan, the supply of earthquake relief to Türkiye and is serving UK and allied aircraft in Ukraine and Gaza.

Now Akrotiri's Air Traffic Control Sqn has been awarded the Hunt Trophy, which is given to those that have made an outstanding contribution to the service.

The unit's 20 controllers continue to support Operation Shader providing security over Syria, and monitor actions in Yemen, responding to unlawful interference and attacks on shipping.

Cypriot wildfires have also required the rapid deployment of fire-fighting aircraft.



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Typhoon triple counters Putin

Simon Mander

TYPHOONS WERE scrambled three times in three days from a Polish airbase to intercept aircraft leaving the Russian enclave Kaliningrad, close to Nato airspace.

The Malbork-based jets were launched twice in one day to identify Ilyushin Il-20M and later two SU-30SM2 aircraft, known as FLANKER-H two-seater fighters. The same week two Typhoons took off for a third time to identify an unknown Ilyushin Il-20M, also called a Coot-A, reconnaissance aircraft.

Aircrew from No. 11 (Army Co-operation) Sqn, part of 140 Expeditionary Air Wing, are currently conducting Quick Reaction Alert as part of the Alliance's enhanced Air Policing alongside its newest member, Sweden.

The interventions came as Donald Trump appeared to lose patience with Vladimir Putin and threatened to pull out of talks on a Ukraine peace deal.

It is the first time that the RAF has been called into action under its mission dubbed Operation Chessman. The aircraft, part of a six-strong fleet, were only posted to Poland three weeks ago.

They are usually stationed at Lossiemouth and have been accompanied by almost 200



INTERCEPTORS: Typhoons tracked Coot spy aircraft (pictured), Ilyushin Il-20M and two SU-30SM2 Flankers during three alerts in three days

British military personnel.

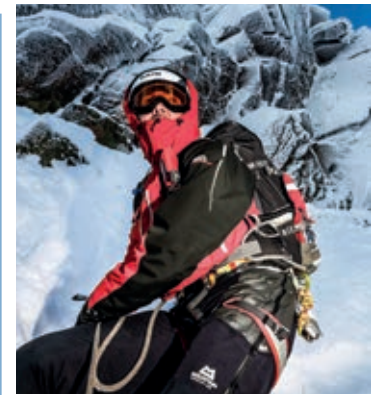
Russia has become increasingly aggressive in its probing of Nato countries' air defences since its invasion of

Ukraine three years ago.

Two jets from Lossiemouth were scrambled in November to intercept a Russian bomber over the North Sea

approaching UK airspace.

Then, in February, Norwegian air force F-35 jets intercepted two Kremlin bombers and their fighter escorts in the Arctic Circle.



Lossie peak performance

AIR FORCE mountain rescue teams responded to 16 calls, assisting 19 individuals last winter it can be revealed.

The Lossiemouth Mountain Rescue Team has 30 volunteers and will attend every callout, usually within an hour, around the clock.

Their services are particularly in demand during the winter months when inexperienced climbers and hikers aim to conquer the Bens and hills surrounding the North of Scotland.

The figures come as station rescue teams issued a warning to kayak and paddle boarders about the dangers of coastal waters off the northern coast.

One Lossiemouth volunteer said: "The perfect solution is to buy yourself a personal locator beacon, and if you don't have one ensure you have a means of communication."

"Black wetsuits are a nightmare to see in a heavy sea or in degrading light. If you get caught in a rip tide, swim parallel with the shore. Don't panic and don't try to fight the sea, float to live and you will find the panic eases."

Heroes' homes pledge

LIVING CONDITIONS for families in military housing will be transformed under a new Consumer Charter, as Defence Secretary John Healey promises to 'stop the rot' in military homes.

Measures will include higher move-in standards, more reliable repairs, renovation of the worst homes and a named housing officer for every family – all in place before the one-year anniversary of 36,000 military homes being brought back into public ownership.

The pledge comes alongside the announcement of an independent, expert team appointed to help deliver a rapid Defence Housing Strategy – with



work already underway.

The Charter will be part of a new Defence Housing Strategy, to be published later this year, which will set out further plans to improve the standard of Service family homes across the country.

Mr Healey said: "Our Armed Forces serve with extraordinary dedication and courage to keep us safe. For too long, military families have endured substandard housing without the basic consumer rights that any of us should expect."

New kit for combat injuries

Simon Mander

BATTLEFIELD MEDICS can now treat casualties with a new portable oxygen delivery system designed to improve survival rates.

Weighing just 5kg, the kit overcomes the limitations of traditional pressurised cylinders which are heavy, liable to explode and need refilling.

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory designed the equipment in collaboration with the Defence Medical Service.

It works by drawing air from the environment and removing the nitrogen, allowing breathable oxygen-rich gas to be delivered directly to the patient.

It also scrubs carbon dioxide out of exhaled breath so it can be inhaled again.

Dstl Military Advisor Major Andrew Maggs said: "By reducing logistical burden and improving safety, the system will provide



LIFE-SAVER: Medics test oxygen delivery system designed for battlefield casualties

critical care in situations where every second counts."

A total of 15 prototype systems will be deployed on operations, which it is hoped will lead to a mass-producible version tailored for military use.

Oxygen delivery is critical for patients suffering blood loss, head injuries and lung trauma frequently seen on the battlefield and can dramatically improve recovery.

The system currently costs around £15,000 per unit.



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F-35 spearheads UK sea power on Pacific mission



OPERATION HIGHMAST: The Carrier Group sets sail to Indo-Pacific with 617 Sqn and 809 Naval Air Sqn on board, marking largest ever UK F-35 deployment

Simon Mander

BRITAIN'S CARRIER Strike Group – with RAF Lightnings making it one of the most powerful on the planet – has set out on an eight-month mission across the Indo-Pacific.

Dubbed Operation Highmast, it is the second deployment of the force, which this time focuses on a critical region for UK trade, with imports and exports worth £286 billion.

Around 2,500 military personnel are on board, with that rising to more than 4,500 for some exercises.

In the first few days it will embark F-35B strike fighters and squadrons of attack, troop-carrying and anti-submarine helicopters.

Commander UK Lightning Force, Gp Capt John Butcher, said: "This is an important milestone – the deployment of two squadrons to different locations in the world on land or at sea.

"Operation Highmast will have a key focus on Nato as we operate in Europe and a real role in the Indo-Pacific."



On leaving UK waters, the force comprises Marham's F-35B Lightnings on HMS Prince of Wales from 617 Dambusters Sqn and 'The Immortals' from 809 Naval Air Sqn.

The Carrier Strike Group will immediately work for Nato testing French aerial defences before moving into the Mediterranean to work with an Italian-led carrier force, then sail east of Suez via the Red Sea.

Thousands of people lined Portsmouth's waterfront to bid farewell to loved ones they will not see for more than 220 days.

This mission represents a crucial turning point for the F-35 program, affirming the UK's power to project air superiority anywhere in the world, with full operational capability for both the jets and the Carrier Strike Group expected within the year.

Gp Capt Butcher said: "Operation Highmast marks a pivotal milestone for the Lightning program."

809 Naval Air Sqn was re-established in December 2023 and consists of personnel from both the Royal Navy and RAF.

During Operation Highmast, both squadrons will collaborate in the largest F-35 Lightning deployment the UK has seen to date.

Gp Capt Butcher added: "The F-35B Lightning is a formidable multi-role aircraft capable of executing air-to-surface strikes, electronic warfare and intelligence gathering – all at once."

To date, the UK has received 38 of the anticipated 48 fifth-generation fighter jets.

News



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Falcons trio fall in for charity bid



HEAT IS ON: From left, organisers FS Irvine, AS1 Harper and Sgt Coleman-Moffat

Pete Singlehurst

FALCONS SUPPORT volunteers serving in the Gulf are hitting the fundraising trail as the Air Force parachute team prepares to launch their summer display season.

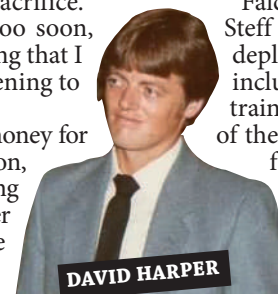
Brize-based FS Steff Irvine, AS1 Jade Harper and Sgt Hayley Coleman-Moffat will be braving scorching 40°C heat, leading a 5km fun run to mark the start of the air show season and raise funds for charity groups.

For AS1 Harper the event is also chance to honour her father, RAF firefighter David served for nine years and who died in 2005.

"Dad travelled the world, stationed in places I can only imagine, yet he never got the chance to share those stories with me. Instead, I've come to know them through the memories of family - stories of courage, dedication, and sacrifice.

"He was taken from us too soon, and I wish more than anything that I could have sat with him, listening to his experiences firsthand.

"That's why I am raising money for The British Heart Foundation, to help fund their life-saving research and prevent other families from experiencing the same experience we have."



DAVID HARPER



CHUTE TO THRILL: Falcons Parachute Display Team are set to launch their airshow season

Falcons volunteer commentator Steff added: "Having undergone pre-deployment preparations together including heat acclimatisation training we decided to mark the start of the Falcons season by organising a fun run.

"We wanted to get everyone involved and show their support to the RAF Falcons team back in the UK."

Wave goodbye to drones

UK DEFENCE has carried out the first counter-drone strikes using high frequency radio waves to disrupt and disable enemy operating systems.

The new frontline direct energy weapon designed and built by a consortium headed by Thales can target drone swarms at a distance of 1km, instantly neutralising multiple targets, a spokesman said.

The trial was completed at a weapons range in West Wales and is the largest UK counter-drone swarm exercise

to date.

Defence Minister Maria Eagle said: "This significant experiment exemplifies the strength of British innovation - driven by our home-grown industry, technology firms and scientific talent.

"We continue to strengthen our defence sector, adding more cutting-edge capabilities to keep the UK secure at home and strong abroad, while making defence an engine for growth across our towns and cities."



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AGES 3-18

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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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ATLAS CREWS based in the Falklands joined a UK environmental mission to monitor the breakaway superberg 'A23a' threatening wildlife and ecosystems off the South Georgia coast and the remote Sandwich Islands in the South Atlantic.

1312 Flt carried out a routine Maritime Radar Reconnaissance sortie as part of Operation Cold Stare, working alongside the Royal Navy, South Georgia government and the Met Office.

PHOTOS: CPL BETH ROBERTS



MT ace nets Reserve title

Pete Singlehurst.

TRANSPORT SPECIALIST AS1 Jason Wathes has been named Cosford's Reservist of the Year after clocking up four tours in the Gulf supporting security operations across the region.

The MT ace chose to delay his promotion to Corporal to join aircrews in the Middle East for his latest deployment.

His citation praised his 'exceptional dedication, professionalism and commitment throughout the year, excelling across multiple operational and training commitments'.

The 605 Sqn Reservist

was presented with his award by Air Component Commander Gp Capt Kevin Terrett.

AWARD: AS1 Wathes, right, is presented with his certificate by Gp Capt Terrett



Bulletin



TRIBUTE: Stuart Green and Roger Churchill will lead a nine-strong team

Rides of March

AIRLINE PILOT Stuart Green is joining forces with the son of a Great Escaper and seven other riders to follow the 300km route taken by PoWs during the Long March as Nazis retreated from Poland in World War II.

Hundreds of allied airmen held at notorious Stalag Luft III prison camp in Poland were forced to march to Germany in sub-zero temperatures as the Soviet forces closed in during the final months of the conflict.

Stuart, whose father Alan was held at the camp and joined the exodus, will be supported by his son Ollie, daughter Izzie and wife Sally, and plans to arrive in Berlin on the 80th anniversary of VE Day.

Also taking part is Roger Churchill, whose father was also one of the 80,000 PoWs forced to march west across Poland and Czechoslovakia to Germany in extreme winter conditions.

Stuart said: "We plan to finish in Berlin at the Neue Wache Memorial to those lost in war and under oppression.

"The aim is to remember the sacrifice of these men and to raise money for military charities, as well as Coventry Cathedral and the Stalag Luft III museum in Poland."

Aircrash drill tests fire crew



INTO THE INFERNO: Coningsby fire crews tackle an aircraft blaze during the simulated emergency PHOTOS: SGT NICK EGAN

Ed Palmer

Coningsby

BLUE LIGHTS and orange flames lit up the night sky at Coningsby as the Lincolnshire station's Fire Section honed their skills.

Crews worked on a mock-up aircraft built to withstand the intense heat of training exercises as personnel practise extinguishing fires caused by electrical faults, fuel and weapons malfunction.

AS1 Ed Butcher said: "With any aspect of training you've got some adrenaline going, whether you're wearing breathing

apparatus or being the driver. You're going to be pushing yourself to a high level because every minute counts.

"When you are fighting the fire and you've got the equipment on, you are wearing the apparatus, you are working really hard, but the payoff is massive."

In addition to 10 weeks of basic recruit training, firefighters undergo another 14 weeks of specialist instruction and a further four months learning on the job during their first tour.

Military airport vehicles carry 4,550 litres of water and 650 litres of foam concentrate. In

an emergency, the tanks can be emptied in a matter of minutes.

Acting Coningsby Station Commander, Wg Cdr French, said: "An effective Fire Section is as much a part of a modern military airbase as aircraft and radar; it's impossible to run a front-line station without them. As a quick reaction alert station, we rely on our Fire Section 24 hours a day."

In addition to its airfield responsibilities, the Fire Section also covers the technical buildings and accommodation blocks.

Fire training and risk

assessments are also part of the section's day-to-day business; making sure that all RAF Coningsby personnel know what to do in case of a fire, and that buildings meet fire safety regulations.

Wg Cdr French added: "It's their job to understand the fire risks on the station and how they can be safely managed.

"They could go from holding a training session to tackling an aircraft fire in the next minute. Work of this kind is dangerous, and it takes a focused mindset to achieve, and we're extremely fortunate to have a crew like this."

OP MANNA: One of many Lancasters that dropped food to the starving population in the Netherlands



TYPHOON: Wreaked havoc amongst German transport



U-BOAT: Mosquito attacks

REMEMBER

Driven back deep within its own borders and helpless in the face of the relentless Bomber Command and USAAF onslaught, the crippled Nazi war machine finally capitulated after nearly six years of conflict

AFTER A German and unconditional 1945. The war in

Following the offensive in the A as the Battle the attempt to cripple Low Countries or Bodenplatte), it before the war en

The Luftwaffe losses that it was adequate air defen attacks by the and the USAAF Allied armies ad crossing of the R total destruction system, it was ruthlessness and behaviour that pr on April 30 allow to the inevitable was to be another surrender.

Throughout the the RAF continu effort. The Allie pound German ci rapid decline in Command, with been able to mo of attacks in dayl German oil indus loss of this cruci decline in the ene

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by Air Cdre (Ret'd) Graeme Pitchfork



U-2502 in the Kattegat



CELEBRATIONS: Groundcrew of 616 Sqn at Lubeck



BELGIUM: PoWs prepare to board Stirlings of 299 Sqn



CAPTURED: 547 Sqn Liberator escorts Nazi cruiser *Nurnberg*

BRING V E DAY

ALMOST six years of war, Germany finally capitulated and accepted the Allied terms of unconditional surrender on May 8. Europe was finally over.

The failure of Germany's bold Ardennes in late 1944, known as the Battle of the Bulge, and the Luftwaffe's defeat by the Allied air forces in the Battle of the Ruhr in January 1 1945 (Operation Market Garden) became a matter of time and ended in Europe.

Germany had suffered such heavy losses it was no longer able to provide any defence against the mass bombing of the RAF's Bomber Command and the US Eighth Air Force. With the Allies advancing into Germany, the Rhine River and the almost total destruction of Germany's transportation network, only Hitler's demonic and increasingly irrational behaviour prolonged the war. His suicide and the lack of a more rational approach to the defeat of Germany, but it took nine days before the final

In the early months of 1945, the RAF continued to operate at maximum effort against air forces continued to attack cities and oil targets. With the Luftwaffe strength, Bomber Command's massive resources, had mounted an increasing number of attacks. The destruction of the Luftwaffe was paramount, and the final product created a rapid decline in Germany's operational capability.

agle's Nest

In April, there were few targets left. Bomber Command mounted its last attack on April 25 when 482 aircraft destroyed coastal batteries at Wangeroege, where they guarded the key ports of Bremen and Emden. At the same time, 359 Mosquitos bombed Hitler's Eagle's Nest in Berchtesgaden in Bavaria. This signalled the end of the offensive.

With the end of the bombing campaign, the bomber force was able to turn its great resources to providing humanitarian aid. On April 26, Operation Exodus began, the collection of prisoners of war and their return to England. Together with aircraft of Transport Command, 469 repatriation flights were achieved on the first day, and this effort continued until May 7, by which time almost 75,000 prisoners had been flown home by the RAF.

Operation Manna

On April 29, some bombers were diverted to Operation Manna, dropping urgently needed food to the Dutch population. By the time the Germans surrendered, Lancasters had made 2,835 drops.

During the final days of the war, the Mosquitos of Bomber Command attacked the port of Kiel on May 2. Tragically, two Halifax bombers flying electronic support missions on the raid were lost resulting in the loss of 13 aircrew, the last Bomber Command casualties.



As the Allied armies advanced into Germany following the airborne operation (Operation Varsity) to cross the River Rhine, the squadrons of the Second Tactical Air Force provided close support and interdiction sorties. The main aim was to destroy infrastructure and the road and rail communications system. Remnants of the Luftwaffe were strafed on

the ground. As the ground advance gathered increasing momentum, the tactical squadrons were constantly on the move to more advanced airfields and by May 2, the first RAF squadrons had reached Lubeck on the Baltic coast. These included the RAF's first jet squadron, 616 Squadron, with its Meteor jets, which had been strafing ground targets.

By this time, German forces had been forced into a small area in Schleswig-Holstein and along the Baltic coast. Virtually anything that moved was attacked and it has been estimated that almost 4,500 vehicles were destroyed.

In the latter days of the war, the German Navy continued to pose a threat, particularly its fleet of modern U-boats. Coastal Command flew long-range patrols into the Baltic to ensure that U-boats did not escape into the Atlantic, and to attack surface vessels. In the war against the U-boats, the Strike Wings of Mosquito and Beaufighter squadrons, operating from bases in the north of Scotland, attacked shipping that might be trying to reinforce the large German force based in Norway.

U-boats

The final weeks of the war were hectic for the Strike Wings as they intercepted surface shipping off Norway and Denmark and used their rockets and cannons against surfaced U-boats. On April 9 1945, 34 Mosquitos from Banff attacked and sank two U-boats. On April 19, another was sunk and two badly damaged and on May 2 another was caught and sunk.

Liberators sank three U-boats in the Kattegat on May 5, the day ground forces in northern Germany surrendered to General Montgomery. The following day, another was scuttled after being attacked by a Liberator and a second was sunk. After the surrender, Admiral Doenitz, Hitler's appointed successor, ordered all U-boats to surrender. Some escaped to South America, but Coastal Command aircraft and Royal Navy surface ships escorted 23 U-boats to British ports.

Within days of the German surrender, the RAF flew headquarters staff and troops into Norway, where they took the German surrender and assumed control.

Throughout the final weeks in north-west Europe, fighting continued in Italy and the Balkans. The severe winter weather slowed Allied ground forces in Italy but once they had broken through the final German defensive position on the Gothic Line, the advance continued to the Austrian border. The Luftwaffe barely appeared in Italian skies during 1945, allowing the large medium bomber forces to attack the essential supply lines of northern Italy. Anti-shipping operations were flown and as the Allied armies began their advance, close support missions were flown. Finally, on May 2, German forces in Italy surrendered.

The war in the Balkans continued and the RAF and Commonwealth squadrons continued to support the partisans in Yugoslavia and in Greece with air drops and casualty evacuation. Close air support missions by Spitfires, Mustangs and Mosquitos were flown and by the end of the first week in May hostilities against German forces had ceased.

The war in the Far East was far from over and many families thought of loved ones still engaged against a bitter enemy. Understandably, the end of the war in Europe, when so many civilians had been lost to enemy action and with huge forces based in the United Kingdom, the sudden lifting of the threat and the suffering were wildly celebrated across western Europe, in the Commonwealth and in the United States. More than one million people gathered in the streets of the UK and thousands massed in Trafalgar Square and along The Mall to Buckingham Palace, where the King and Queen, with the two Princesses, acknowledged the crowd. The Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, also joined them on the palace balcony.

Mourned

In celebrating, many mourned the loss of loved ones. The RAF suffered more than 150,000 casualties, with over 55,000 young aircrew lost in Bomber Command alone. Today, they continue to be remembered on war memorials and in the beautifully maintained Commonwealth War Grave cemeteries spread across the world.

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Feature

The **REAL** Reg Seekings from SAS Rogue Heroes

REG SEEKINGS was a major character in the hit BBC series *SAS Rogue Heroes*. He was one of the original members of L Detachment SAS Brigade, founded in July 1941 in North Africa by David Stirling.

Tony Rushmer lives just a mile from where Reg grew up in the Fens and was inspired to write his biography when he discovered the extraordinary story of this founding member of the SAS – an ordinary man who rose from the bottom of the ranks to squadron Sergeant-Major, becoming one of the British Army's most highly decorated non-commissioned officers of World War II. Reg died in 1999, aged 78.

In his new book *SAS Duty Before Glory, The True WWII Story of SAS Original Reg Seekings* (mombooks.com), Rushmer describes him as "one of the Special Air Service's most fascinating individuals", and "compelling" and "complex."

The author said: "For the last two years I have lived with thoughts of Reg Seekings. It's a place that's kept me on my toes. What started out as a pursuit of a few simple facts turned into a quest to present a rounded depiction of the man."

This is an extract from the book, to be published on May 8:

"The chance to pursue his own longstanding parachutist aspirations was a reason why Seekings was ready to throw his lot in with David Stirling's L Detachment, Special Air Service Brigade in North Africa, 1941. Previously deemed too heavy for parachute training, months in the desert on army rations meant that Reg's physique was no longer a hindrance.

Jock Lewes' early parachute training required men to leap from trucks as they rolled across the sands; a practice not found in any manual, nor one that comes with any recommendation. Indeed, for the recently assembled L Detachment, it was fraught with peril and a constant source of injury. Lewes led from the front – or rather the back. The Welsh Guards officer stood at the rear of the truck and jumped before executing a precision backward roll on landing. This was initially at 15 miles per hour; later it was replicated at speeds of 20 and 25mph. On each occasion, Lewes would jump and complete his back roll. Others were less inclined to follow his example. Reg was among those who had somehow managed to stay on their feet after departing from the truck, much to their instructor's irritation.

'Drive at 30 miles an hour,' Lewes told the driver. 'I'll guarantee they'll do backward rolls.' As the truck began to go through the gears, Seekings stood at the tailboard, face opposite to the direction of travel. 'The driver was in his glory. It wasn't 30 miles per hour – he was putting his foot down and laughing like hell.' Hurling himself over the side, he succeeded only in taking a couple of giant strides before plummeting headfirst into the sand. 'I ploughed the bloody desert

up with my face. I was in a hell of a state – the last time I tried to be clever.'

On a cold mid-October morning, Seekings shivered before his maiden parachute jump. But it was not only the dawn chill that caused a quiver as he sat on the floor of the Bristol Bombay, a troop transport aircraft designed for use in the Middle East and India. A problem with the Bombay's static line and the respective hooks had resulted in the deaths of two comrades, neither man's chute opening. The exercise was immediately abandoned with an initial rumour flying round that Seekings was one of the two to die. Riley had swapped chutes with Seekings, having been handed one carrying the number 13. It was not until the two men saw each other later on that Riley realized his superstitions had not resulted in a friend's death. Stirling and Lewes ensured there was no time to brood. The fault was addressed and resolved and everyone was asked to jump the next morning.

And as he waited for the dispatcher to send him and his fellow 'stick' (aircraft load) members on their way, Seekings was all too aware of the tense faces around him. He knew the wire and the anchor points had been reinforced but was far from alone in paying close attention to his final checks, shackling himself on to a big U-bolt. Double-checks and treble-checks were carried out. 'We made damned sure it was secure.' Despite the concerns, every man in L Detachment kept the faith and leapt into the skies. 'We didn't have one failure,' said Seekings. 'This thing we were very proud of in L Detachment. We never had a refusal in jumping.' The unified response to adversity underlined the strength and togetherness within

a group that had only been together for a couple of months."

Reg's good fortune continued throughout the war. In the Italian port town of Termoli where the unit suffered sickening losses as a result of a shell strike on a truck, he escaped with a damaged fingernail. Later in France, he took a bullet to the back of the head, returning to the thick of the action within weeks, the bullet still lodged at the base of his skull. His luck remained intact through the SAS's operations at the tip of the spear as the Allies surged into the Rhineland in 1945. Indeed, in May of that year he admitted to being a 'bit amazed' that he had somehow survived his own event-packed war."



Dare to win

WE HAVE copies of *SAS Duty Before Glory* up for grabs. To be in with a chance of winning one, answer this question correctly:

In which year did David Stirling found the SAS?

Email your answer, marked: Reg Seekings biography 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 16.



ALWAYS READY: Reg Seekings in a parachute, preparing to jump into occupied France for Op Houndsworth, 1944 (Courtesy of the Cooper family)

BRAVE: Reg Seekings DCM, MM, possessed a fierce ambition, unyielding inner strength and immense courage (Courtesy of the Seekings family)



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Owen's II Sqn fall guy

HIGH-FLYING GUNNERS celebrated their 103-year-old history with a series of parachute drops near Bicester.

Among them was recruit AS1 Owen Foster, *inset and above left*, who took part in his first squadron jump after basic training.

The 22-year-old, from Newcastle, said: "I've just completed three day jumps and one night descent, the day ones went well, the training is very solid and the coaching was top notch. But at night I don't know what went wrong, my exit was okay, but my landing terrible. I creamed in extremely hard."

"When doing a night with container, you don't see the ground that well, you listen to the kit hit the deck, then you have a split second to brace for the landing. But doing my first squadron jump is the proudest moment of my career."

A total of 12 members of Brize Norton-based II Sqn completed currency jumps from a Skyvan on to Weston-on-the-Green drop zone as part of Exercise Tartan Spirit.

OC Sqn Ldr Gary Butler said: "The majority of our lads have not done training for the A400, we will be doing the conversion to Atlas on the next Tartan Spirit."

"AS1 Foster only completed his basic parachute course this week and he is now doing his first squadron jump, which is brilliant."

II Sqn personnel also took part in a 10-mile tab around Brize to mark the 103rd anniversary (*below*).

PHOTOS: RICHARD WATT



Gunners pick up the tab at Brize for 103rd anniversary





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Tim Morris

Aston Martin Vantage V8, 2025 (from around £165,000 otr)

Motoring



Baby of the range is epitome of cool

LET ME be honest here, I've always had a soft-spot for Aston Martin. I've owned a few over the years and I've always found them to be a gentleman's car. It doesn't matter where in the world you are, from the Cote d'Azur, to the Hollywood Hills, turning up in an Aston speaks volumes about you.

I remember rolling into Monte Carlo with a DB9 a few years back and we stopped the seafront. It's the kind of car that people respect and you'll be let out into traffic far more often in an Aston than you would driving something like a Porsche or a Mercedes.

Astons are the definition of quintessential British charm, the life and soul of the party. Unlike the more obsessed racing machines on the market, they exude confidence, sophistication and roguish charm. The Vantage is the baby of the line-up, pure entertainment and a car that leaves you with an immense smile on your face.

It's wide, with more girth than a Porsche 911 GT3 RS, but the proportions are perfectly balanced. The sleek bonnet, curvaceous rear end and low stance make it a thing of beauty, while its well-balanced chassis makes it a wonderfully agile racing machine. At around £165,000, it isn't cheap, by any means, but one expects exclusivity to come at a cost.

Inside

The Vantage is a two-seat GT car, with lots of space for two tall adults. It has a marvellous driving position, with generous electric adjustment for both the driver's seat and steering wheel. The low seating position provides excellent connection with the road. You can feel every course correction and throttle input in real time. Aston has pulled a blinder here.

The interior design is a work of art that's as individual as you are. Everything is completely bespoke and no two cars are the same. The choice of hand-stitched fabrics

and custom dash inserts are all yours. If you're planning on using the car's handling to the max, we'd recommend opting for the carbon-fibre performance seats. These provide an epic amount of side support during cornering.

The dashboard is influenced by the Aston Martin DB12, with a variety of user-friendly physical controls on the centre console for those commonly-used functions. The digital driver's display looks sharp and switches seamlessly between the cool racing clocks. You can also view the sat-nav map, or customise what information you want to see on certain sections of the display.

Mercedes fans will recognise familiar components, such as the headlight switches and stalks on the steering column. Earlier versions of the Vantage also used to incorporate a Mercedes infotainment system, but this is long-gone. The Vantage now flaunts a bespoke unit with a 10.3 inch screen that is sharp and fast.

It has 346 litres of boot space, with a large hatchback offering good access. It's probably not enough for a couple of full-size suitcases, but it's practical enough for day-to-day use.

On The Road

The Vantage uses a twin-turbo, 4.0-litre, V8 petrol engine that pushes power output to a stonking 656bhp. That's cut the 0-62mph time to 3.5 seconds and gives it a top end of 202mph. Let me put that in simple terms... it feels very fast.

The 4.0-litre, twin-turbocharged V8 is supplied by AMG, but Aston has tuned it to its own specification. The turbochargers are bigger than on the previous Vantage and more responsive, while throttle response above 3,500rpm is much improved. There's no lag here, just the addictive roar of the V8 and world-turning torque of 590lb ft.

The eight-speed automatic gearbox snaps from one gear

to the next with stunning efficiency too. The whole package is perfectly balanced to complement the nimble chassis.

The Vantage has traction in spades and fine body control, so you can throw it into corners with confidence. Track mode is akin to setting the car up for making a jump to hyperspace, because it sharpens everything up to such a degree that it's savage. Great for baby-skin smooth tarmac but, on

the undulating, course, roads of Great Britain, the slightly softer settings are far better tuned.

In every environment, it is an absolute joy to drive and almost impossible to fault. On tighter turns you will find some understeer, of course, but the Vantage always feels precise, with a predictability that allows you to nudge the back end out in style. It's a great entertainer, with character and elegance.

Aston Martin Vantage

Pros

- Fast and charismatic
- Stupendous engine
- Great handling
- Bespoke interior

Cons

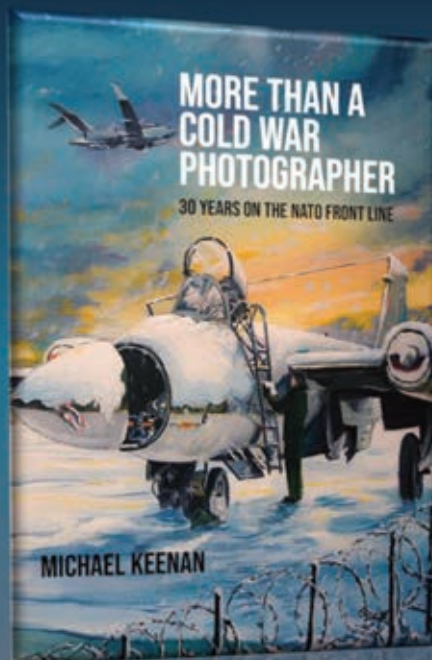
- Obvious road noise
- Premium price

Verdict

The Vantage is Aston Martin's best sports car to date. It delivers an electrifying drive in a classy way. The thundering power, sharp nose and nimble chassis give it an edge over most rivals.

Ad-Vantage Aston Martin

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RUGBY UNION

Bulls win Navy Cup

A first for RAF Marham's joint service rugby side

Daniel Abrahams

IT WAS an historic win and a Service first as RAF Marham's joint Service rugby union team Marham Bulls/Lightning Force won the Navy Cup.

The dominant 45-13 victory over HMS Queen Elizabeth (QNLZ) at Burnaby Road, Portsmouth was the culmination of several years of near misses for the team, made up of RAF/RN/Army and US Marines personnel.

With the Bulls' starting line boasting three RAF stars in Sqn Ldr Steve Clarkson, Cpl Sam Freeman and second half try-scorer Cpl Adam Potter, they weathered an early Naval storm.

Despite QNLZ's dominance, it was the Bulls who landed the first major blow with flanker AET Mike Fulwell bursting through the Naval defensive line with a powerful run, setting up AET Toby Dutton to crash over for the opening try, with POAET Ryan Cliff kicking the extras, putting Marham ahead 7-3.

A quick QNLZ penalty brought them within one point, but it was clear the Bulls were on the charge. Fulwell carved open the QNLZ defence, allowing Potter to dart over for the Bulls' second try.

The momentum was wholly with Marham, and it wasn't long before Cliff chased down his own kick, gathering and finishing with aplomb before converting for 19-6 at the break.

Marham wasted no time adding to their score as Dutton released hooker AET Ben Weatherill, who crashed over in the corner for another well-worked try.

The Bulls were relentless in attack, with Dutton himself soon crossing the whitewash, finishing off a slick move to further extend the lead.

QNLZ clawed back a score for 31-13, but two more Marham penalties kept the scoreboard ticking over.

With the game all but sealed, Marham's vice-captain POAET James Stockdale surged over the line for another try. As the final minutes ticked away, Fulwell stormed



WRIGHT STUFF: CPO Stewart Wright (left) with Bulls manager LAET Lewis Brooker and the Navy Cup

through the exhausted Naval defenders to dot down to seal it.

Reinstated in 2018, the Bulls are now a mainstay of the station's sporting prowess.

Bulls' director of rugby CPO Stewart Wright said: "We are the perfect template for all three Services playing as one. The beauty of being at Marham is it gives us the opportunity to play in Navy and RAF cups.

"We also have lots of local clubs wanting games, as Norfolk is a fertile ground for rugby union."



FOREIGN TOUR: Marham team at Aki 10s in 2019

On finally winning the Navy Cup, Wright said: "It was a great sense of relief to get the cup. The years getting there have been tumultuous, so it has been something special after many bumps in the road."

The team, who play in various iterations of the sport including 10s, sevens and even beach rugby, was born out of the ashes of RAF Marham's former team following the drawdown of the Tornado Force.

Wright said: "In 2018, with the introduction of the F-35B Lightning Force and Royal Navy Personnel joining the station, the team began again under the direction of then OC 617, Wg Cdr John Butcher – now Gp Capt, Lightning Force Commander and club president.

"Now we have great support from Station Commander Gp Capt Leonie Boyd. Personnel have the time to work hard and play hard and to deliver their best. It's the perfect outlet and we come back better personnel because there is a great work-life balance.

"We have recently launched the Lightning Ladies team, who are entered into the Aki 10s this June, and we want to push this side of the game."

Next, the team is aiming to finally snaffle the RAF Cup, sitting top seeds going into the tournament's semi-final stages to face Brize Norton. Who would bet against them?

● **Follow Marham Bulls on Instagram @ plaza.de.toros**

GOLF



Honours even

THE RAF men's golf team started their season with a hard-fought draw against Gloucestershire second team at Lansdown Golf Club.

Led by captain Wg Cdr Jamie Nickless, the aviators bounced back from a chastening morning foursomes which went the way of the hosts 4-1. The sole point for the RAF came from Sgt Aaron Ashberry and AS1 Jake Kirkby.

The RAF came back strong in the afternoon singles, with wins for Ashberry, LCpl John Blanks, Kirkby, Sgt Aaron Docherty, Nickless and Fg Off Gareth Williams.

A half point came from the final match still playing on the course, with Flt Lt Stuart Hardy fighting back in the singles to half the match overall.

POLO

Sand polo a real test for riders

"A FANTASTIC and unique opportunity," said RAF polo chair Wg Cdr Vicky Woodhead speaking after a training tournament at St Andrews.

As part of the association's pre-season preparations, the squad took to the iconic West Sands Beach for the competition against Saints Polo – from the University of St Andrews.

Woodhead added: "This tournament was a fantastic training opportunity for both our Development and Senior squads.

"Playing on sand against the fantastic backdrop of St Andrews presented unique challenges that tested our riders' adaptability and horsemanship. This was ideal preparation ahead of a demanding and exciting upcoming 2025 season."

The weekend of action at the unique seaside setting began with a training session at Kinross Polo Club to

enable the players to meet their ponies before a series of team drills and hitting the beach for two competitive instructional games.

The opening clash saw the Development Team lose 5-4 in a thrilling match that went down to the wire.

Under the expert tutelage of Thom Bell from Kinross Polo Club who guided the game, the team of Sqn Ldr Emma Fallon, Flt Lt Winnie Draper, Flt Lt Rosie Middleton and AS1 Lucy Sinclair demonstrated strong form and determination, only to be pipped at the post in the final chukka.

The RAF Senior team showcased their experience and composure in the second clash, edging out Saints Polo with a 4-3 victory. The team – which included Woodhead, Sqn Ldr Ross Thompson, Sqn Ldr Georgie



CHALLENGE: Sand Polo
PHOTO: FLT LT BEER

Harwood and Sqn Ldr Ellie Hoogewerf – produced a confident performance in unique beach conditions with Kinross coach Chris Kiesel guiding the play and offering instruction to both sides.

● **To find out more about the sport and association visit RAF Polo on Instagram @rafpoloofficial.**

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



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NORDIC SKIING

COACHING:
Workshop

Ex Nordic Challenge

IN CONJUNCTION with the IS event, the RAF Nordic Association staged Exercise Nordic Challenge, which saw novice and experienced cross-country (XC) skiing in Norway.

Combining training and competition the two days of action saw personnel supplied with kit and training sessions from RAFNA, Snow Sport Scotland and Nordic Leader-qualified coaches.

Dep Chair RAF Nordic RANK Andrew Goodwin said: "The aim of the exercise was to get all personnel proficient and safe to ski cross-country in varied terrain and compete in the RAF Nordic Development Championships, the Classic 5km race, with the more

experienced skiers taking part in the international Ski Classics Reistadløpet Military 35km Ski Marathon."

The 5km men's race was won by OCdt Connor Atherton of Bristol UAS, with Sgt Jade Forster from RAF Waddington first in the women's event.

The Reistadløpet Military Ski Marathon also acted as the 2025 RAF Nordic XC Ski Championships.

AS1 Russ Williams (Waddington) took the Classic 35km race, with Sqn Ldr Amy Hill (Boulmer) taking the women's title.

● Email: Nordic.info@rafnsport.org.uk for more details about the sport and events in 2025.



Women back on the slopes

First time for ladies since Covid pandemic

Daniel Abrahams

FIELDING THE first female IS cross-country team since the Covid pandemic and smashing a 10-year record results wise was the RAF's reward from the Nordic Inter-Services at Ruhpolding, Germany.

Facing a strong field of more than 25, the men's A, B and C teams came third and female aviators took second, behind the Army.

Out of a field of 33 teams in the Men's 4x5km Classic Relay, the RAF Men's A team of Flt Lt Jason James, FS Steve Perry, Cpl William Hodgson and AS1 Russ Williams came home third, while the B team of Wg Cdr Kieren Jarratt, Sqn Ldr Dominic Macaleese, Sgt Rich Bond and Flt Lt Youmash Rai took fourth.

The Women's RAF A team of Sqn Ldr Amy Hill, Flt Lt Lauren Gault, Fg Off Hannah Richards and Flt Lt Antonia Laundry were fifth.

In the men's 10km classic individual race, Flt Lt Jason James was the top RAF finisher, while in the women's event Sqn Ldr Amy Hill came home first out of the aviators.

In the 10km FT individual, James repeated his feat as fastest RAF finisher, with Flt Lt Lauren Gault fastest in the women's 7.5km FT individual.

Dep Chair RAF Nordic RANK Andrew Goodwin said: "We had high hopes for all our teams as performances by individual athletes had improved considerably over the summer training programme and, as it turned out, their hard work reaped dividends.

"This was the RAF's best team results in over 10 years and warranted some extensive celebrations.

"It also highlighted that all the focus RAF Nordic had placed on XC proficiency, training and technique had paid dividends and provided a successful foundation from which to build further, especially if we can enter a second Women's team in 2026."

● Follow RAF Nordic on Instagram @RAFNordic.



WELCOME RETURN: RAF women's Nordic team



THIGH-ZAPPER: Action from the men's Inter-Services Nordic Cross Country

Sport

MARTIAL ARTS

Aviators have fighting spirit



WARRIORS: Cpl Marshall gets to grips with opponent, *above*, Taekwondo fighters in action, *above right*, Cpl Eleanor Walvin is presented with her trophy, *inset right*, and Muay Thai exponents celebrate the sport winning official status, *below right*



Daniel Abrahams

RAF DIGBY hosted this year's Martial Arts bonanza as the association staged its annual Service championship and showed off its newly-recognised sport, Muay Thai.

The day kicked off with Brazilian Jui Jitsu Gi, Taekwondo (TKD) Forms, TKD Weapons and Karate Kumite in the morning with a repeat in the afternoon of BJJ No Gi, Karate Kata, TKD Points and Continuous, ending the event with the Muay Thai.

The awards evening saw medals presented by new RAFMAA President Air Cdre David Crook, ACOS Workforce Requirement

and Recruiting, a black belt in Karate, black belt in Taekwondo and purple belt in BJJ.

Among those honoured were Flt Lt Jordan Jones, the Competitor of the Year and Cpl Gav Cox, winner of the Alex Elliot Fight Spirit Trophy. Flt Lt Jim Whitby was awarded his brown belt after 12 years with the association.

The Luke Perriman Fight Spirit Award went to Cpl Lewis Chugg, with The John Horran Trophy going to Cpl Eleanor Walvin and RAF Brize Norton-winning the RAFMAA BJJ Interstation League.

Taekwondo gold medallist Continuous Sparring and Points

Sparring, Cpl James Morgan, said: "Prep can sometimes be difficult being on exercise or tasking quite a lot, but in the free time I get to train, I drill techniques that will benefit me in tournaments.

"My matches went well with working on certain techniques to improve my fighting. It felt good to just be competing as it can be quite difficult getting mat time whilst serving."

Chf Tech Andrew Jackson, ProjO for RAF Championships, said: "The event was very successful with some excellent



competition at all levels and across all styles and Muay Thai got a chance to demonstrate a new sport to the military.

"Overall, it was a great representation of fighting spirit

in the RAF, and I can't wait to see the teams go on to compete at the Inter-Services Championships against the Army and Navy"

● Follow RAF Martial Arts on Instagram @raf.martial.arts.

GLIDING

Paragliders towing the line on flatlands of Rutland

THE SERVICE'S paragliders were put through their paces as the association staged its Tow Launch conversion training at MOD North Luffenham airfield.

Several RAF Paragliding pilots underwent the training joined by Army, ex-serving, and civilian paraglider pilots, learning what the association calls the 'necessary skills to safely tow-launch'.

Wg Cdr Matt Tandy, Treasurer and Deputy Chairman RAF Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association, said: "Most paraglider training and consolidation is conducted from hill sites; tow training is a skill that has to be undertaken as an additional qualification but opens up more opportunities to get airborne from the flatlands of eastern England."

The training opened with sessions on ground instruction followed by tandem experience flights, flown by Senior Tow Coach Gp Capt (Ret'd) Mick Roche.

The pilots were then tasked to fly 10 solo tow launched flights under controlled conditions, with tow speeds



gradually increased over the duration of the flights, followed later by simulated emergency scenarios.

A RAFHPA spokesperson said: "The event was organised alongside Rutland Airsports, a military/civilian club that operates from the airfield with kind permission of CO St George's Barracks, operating within the RAF Wittering Military Air Traffic Zone.

"Several flights over 200km, and many of over 100km, have been achieved in recent years, establishing Rutland Airsports as the premier UK location for tow-launched paragliding."

After successfully completing the flying exercises, all pilots sat a written examination, before being recommended by Gp Capt Roche to the sport's national governing body, the British Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association, for a tow launch endorsement to their BHPA rating.

● Follow RAF gliding and soaring on Instagram @rafgliding.

RUGBY UNION

Women dominate

NAVY	13
RAF	32

Daniel Abrahams

THERE WAS joy for the women's rugby union stars and pain for the men after the opening round of IS championship matches at Northampton Saints Cinch Stadium.

A lively Franklin Gardens ground saw the aviators chasing a hat-trick of IS opening round wins against hosts the Royal Navy, following the veteran RAF Vultures' 32-13 victory the day before.

The women's team were looking to kick the day's action off with a second win, which they managed despite valiant Navy defending in the opening half-hour.

Head coach Sgt Sian Williams said: "I am proud of the team's performance especially their defensive effort.

"We were a bit scrappy in our



TOP PLAYER: AS1 Daisy Fahey gets support from Cpl Orla Procter PHOTOS: SBS

attack and that's something we need to tidy up before we head into the Army fixture but over all a good performance with six new caps."

Driven from the opening

whistle by captain Flt Lt Lucy Nye, who must have covered every blade of grass during the clash, the aviators lost Sqn Ldr Emma Tadman after six

minutes to injury.

It took a further 12 minutes for the visitors to make a break through with a string of passes from Flt Lts Carys Morris and Sarah Graham-Jenkins, to find Fg Off Ella Johnson to score.

AS1 Daisy Fahey began her player of the match display by kicking the extras for 7-0.

AS1(T) Evie Longworth touched down an unconverted try for 12-0 a score the RAF could take into the half-time break.

The hosts' defiant defence was ended in sharp fashion after the break as the aviators blasted their way to 26-0 as Sqn Ldr Elise Fletcher and AS1 Kim Grundy touched down, with Fahey kicking one of the extras.

Fahey then ran in the first of her brace of tries with the conversions resulting in the RAF's last scores of the game. A late Navy charge saw them run in 10 points but the result was safe for Sgt Williams and her team at 36-10.

BMX

Summer season is under way

SERVICE BMX headed to Manchester to kickstart the 2025 Summer BMX Racing Season at the home of British Cycling, the National Cycling Centre.

Rounds one and two of the Lloyds Bank National Series featured Sgt Matt Haywood and Off Cdt Pete Watson.

Day one saw Haywood in the Grand Vet Cruiser and, following a shaky start, he settled down and posted sixth in the first race, which he followed up with fourth in Moto 2 and a 3rd in Moto 3.

In a semi-final where any one of the top 16 were in contention to transfer over to the A final, Haywood – requiring a fourth-place finish – could only manage seventh, so was in the B final.

A start gate malfunction sent three riders over their handlebars, with the RAF man overcoming nerves to move up a couple of positions by the time he crossed the line in third, which meant 11th overall in class.

The following day a slightly better start with a fifth in moto 1, was followed with a third in moto two and three for Haywood.

In the semi, he again missed out on the A final, but a fifth saw him go into the B final.

There, he got off to a flying start, leading down the first straight right round to the final berm, where an error in his choice of track placement allowed another rider to slip down the inside, forcing him high, this also allowed another rider through, with Haywood eventually crossing the line in third – 11th for the day.

Off Cdt Watson kicked off his 2025 National Series on a pair of new ICE Element F-22 frames, and he wasted no time taking advantage of his new kit.

In the 17-29 Cruiser class he posted fourth in moto one, followed up with third in moto two and winning moto three, which got him through to the semi-final. Despite all his efforts he could only manage a fifth, which set him up for a B final, managing a fifth in that too and 13th overall for the day.

In a very challenging 19-29 Men's Open class, Watson managed sixth in moto one, fourth in moto two and seventh in moto three, which meant he didn't meet the cut to progress into the semi-finals.

The next day he started well with a third in moto one, but his chain came off down the second straight which meant he dropped back to seventh, and a fourth in moto three meant again he didn't make the semi-finals.

The team head to Scotland next month for rounds 3 and 4.

● Follow RAF BMX on Instagram @RAFCABMX.

Men aim to step it up a gear against the Army



OPENER: CplsMark Williams and Ryan Pugh

"THE LADS are frustrated, I'm frustrated," said RAF Head Coach WO Tom Gardner speaking after his side's 27-17 opening IS defeat against the Royal Navy.

The game, which saw Flt Lt Dave Manning become the most capped RAF forward ever with his 25th cap, started badly for the visitors.

Gardner, whose starting line-up featured five debutants, said: "We had a plan of what we wanted to execute, but we had four errors in the opening 20 minutes and were 13-0 down. The lads then went off plan for a bit and it became an arm wrestle, which played into the Navy's hands."

Cpl Sam Boxhall got the aviators

NAVY	27
RAF	17

on the scoreboard for 13-5 at the break, but conceded an early Navy try after the restart. The RAF scored through Cpl James Roberts and AS1(T) Kieron Prescott to make it 21-17, but could not push things home and the Navy sealed the win.

Gardner added: "The Navy played a bit more championship rugby and we showed our lack of maturity in a new system.

"I wanted the win and I will be going into the Army game for the win, we are not here to be participants, we are here to win."

SAILING

First ever win for the A team

RAF DINGHY Racing is celebrating its first ever win in the Inter-Service Team Racing Championships.

And before the landmark triumph, AS1 Ethan Miles and Flt Lt Calum Wilson were victorious in the Asymmetric Champs at Thorney Island, West Sussex.

At the IS event at Bowmoor Sailing Club in Gloucester, RAF A won, led by Wg Cdr Ed Dodwell. The team also included Sqn Ldr Tristan Cook, Flt Lt Simon Greenhalgh (who also coached the event), Fg Off Josh Davies, Sgt Alex Nikoloudakis and Cpl Ben Reed.

Events Manager Reed said: "We are part of a real resurgence in RAF Dinghy sailing, with an influx of new, highly-skilled sailors mixed with experienced heads creating a strong squad to continue chasing success at Inter-Service and civilian events."

The racing format is 3v3, with three boats

of each team facing another three boats, with victory gained by the combined finishing positions.

Through the round robins each team had 15 races, followed by RAF A v Army in a best of three event.

The action in gusty conditions with winds reaching up to 20 knots saw RAF A team begin strongly, finishing the first round robins undefeated, with five victories.

They continued to press, taking the lead overnight with nine wins, one ahead of the Army in second place. RAF B managed two victories against the Navy B team.

Day two saw RAF A continue their run of strong performances, despite a loss to the Army resulting in a rematch in the final. RAF B managed to fight for two more victories, finishing fourth overall.

In the final between the Army and RAF



ON CREST OF A WAVE: RAF Dinghy team PHOTO: N VICK (UKTRA)

A, the Army won the first race convincingly, before RAF A mounted a comeback, taking the final two races to win 2-1.

RAF A team member Sgt Alex Nikoloudakis said: "We are so happy that after such a long time we were able to beat the Army and the Navy. Finally, we are the team racing champions."

● Follow RAF Dinghy on Instagram @rafsailing.

5 RAF Sport

pages of



Women set out their stall in Inters

See page 27



Dinghy victory for the A team

See page 27

HOCKEY

U25s show way as seniors falter



WONDER GOAL: U25s star AS1 Tom Scuffham and, inset below, women's team's AS1 Alex Naughaly
PHOTOS: CINNABAR STUDIOS

Daniel Abrahams

THE MEN'S Under 25s showed their class at HMS Temeraire in Portsmouth to record the RAF's only Inter-Services outdoor hockey victory in a shock championships.

The event saw the end of the men's team's eight years of dominance, going down fighting with a nail-biting 3-2 defeat against the Army before beating the Navy 4-2, while the women's team also came up short, closing out with a 2-1 win over the Royal Navy after losing 2-0 to the Army.

The U25s set up back-to-back IS wins with a commanding 5-1 victory over the Army before overcoming the Navy 2-0 to clinch the UKAF Hockey Association Inter-Services title.

In their opening clash the aviators dug deep, finally finding the net after a tense

first half through AS1 Thomas Scuffham's brilliant reverse strike. The Army responded to level things at 1-1, but the RAF capitalised on the Army's fatigue, adding four more goals, including Plt Off William Morgan's stunning top-corner effort, to seal a 5-1 win.

Scuffham was back on the score sheet in the winner-takes-all clash with the Navy. Some solid defence held RN at bay until in the final quarter a deflected short corner from AS1 Matt Ambrose sealed the 2-0 victory.

The women's team had a tough start with a battling 2-0 defeat at the hands of the Army before bouncing back in style with a fiery 2-1 win over the Navy. Dominating early possession,

they finally broke through after AS1 Beau Wood won a penalty corner, converted by Fg Off Jeorgia Carr. The Navy levelled after the break, but it only fuelled the aviators and, after a dominant display, Carr slammed home her second late in the game.

A brace of goals from Cpl Scott Perry could not prevent the last-minute heartache for the men's team, who, having clawed their way back to level the scores at two apiece, conceded from a swift Army counterattack with just 16 seconds left on the clock.

Perry also netted against the Navy, while Sgt Kyle Barnes hit a hat-trick as the former title holders went down fighting with a goal-fest win of 4-2.

● Follow RAF Hockey on Instagram @rafhockey.



BOXING

Morley lands UKAF award

SERVICE BOXING hit another high as Gp Capt Ray Morley MBE was named UKAF Official of the Year.

The latest honour comes off the back of his success in the 2024 RAF Sports Awards.

The UKAF accolade is for his outstanding contribution to international boxing after officiating at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Morley said: "I'm really delighted to win this award because of the high level of competition. I'm simply focused on helping boxing; though the year leading into the Paris Olympics was hard work, it was worth it in the end."

Morley celebrated 20 years operating at the highest level of the sport as an international referee and was selected by the International Boxing Association (IBA) to undertake the International Technical Official (ITO) course.

Using this qualification, he led an IBA Referee 1* upgrade course in Poland, and acts as a Referee and Judge evaluator at international tournaments.

His career in the sport reached a high when he was selected as one of only three England Officials to support the 2024 Paris Olympics.

He served as an ITO, where he was tasked with overseeing all activities in and around the ring, ensuring everything was conducted in accordance with Olympic Boxing regulations.

Morley remains the Vice-President of the RAF Boxing Association. A RAF Boxing spokesperson said: "Ray is a fantastic role model for all our members and still also finds time to be a great mentor to aspiring RAF Referees looking towards the national and international levels."

● Follow RAF Boxing on Instagram @raf_boxing.

TOP AWARD:
Gp Capt Morley



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Ladies back on slopes: p25

R'n'R



Win boxing drama
on DVD ● See page 5



Living history – Chalke Festival

● See
page 5



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

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**COMBAT
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FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH



Film review
The Uninvited (15)
 In cinemas May 9

You too can be the uninvited guest at a Hollywood soiree

AT A star-studded garden party in the Hollywood Hills, tensions mount, egos inflate and a lost elderly woman unexpectedly crashes the scene in Nadia Conners' comedy of errors *The Uninvited*.

Rose (Elizabeth Reaser) and Sammy (Walton Goggins) host, though she handles all the preparation while he schmoozes with movie stars, leaving her to put out fires behind the scenes. The party is almost beginning – the bartenders ready, the aura-photographer set up in his tent – when a confused old woman (Lois Smith) arrives at the gates, mistaking this mansion for her own. Concerned for her safety, she is invited inside, where she remarks on how much the house has changed.

Once an actress herself, she feels like a visitation from

Hollywood's past. Rose's young son and the party's inebriated guests mistake her for a ghost or a witch, but all she wants is to find her way home – or share stories with those she confuses for family.

These showbiz types don't so much converse as monologue – talking at each other while only hearing what they want. The party is brimming with insecure narcissists, vegans who eat burgers, and 'recovered' alcoholics who are still partial to a drink. Pedro Pascal makes a memorable impression as Rose's old flame, Lucien, exuding a comically seductive charm that banks on his cultural cachet.

At times, *The Uninvited* feels like an extended series of industry in-jokes, which may limit its broader appeal. There is a prominent female voice in the



SELF-OBSESSED:
Party guests and hosts

writing, that plays against the usual competitive stereotypes, lamenting age and motherhood, but still allowing for flaws and imperfection in a way that feels refreshingly honest.

Although conceived of as a play there is definitely some style to the way it is shot and edited, but it leans very heavily on dialogue, which, despite some sharp

performances, can feel like too much. A fun soiree that can feel insular, and make you feel like the uninvited.

3 roundels out of 5 ●●●○
 Review by Sam Cooney



Film review
April (15)
 In cinemas now

Top doc's secret abortions

A DOCTOR doubling as a secret abortionist is on a clandestine crusade to help restore agency to the young women of her community, in Dea Kulumbegashvili's deeply tense and provocative thriller, *April*.

Nina (Ia Sukhitashvili) is the best obstetrician-gynaecologist at the hospital, but when an investigation is launched after a baby dies in delivery, it casts a spotlight on her extra-curricular work.

Set in rural Georgia, the law and politics of the area will become clearer with each patient that Nina comes into contact with, both in the hospital and in the village for covert call-outs. Married at 16 years old, one girl's mother is concerned that she is not yet pregnant, where another mother is concerned that her young, deaf-mute daughter has missed her period, despite being under her care at home.

The pills that Nina secretly provides some of her patients with, and the illegal abortions she performs if too late, make her the talk of the village. If she is discovered by authorities, or anyone who feels empowered by the law, she stands to lose everything.

April confronts the dangerous intersection of healthcare and morality in a society where the female body is strictly regulated – both by law and by custom. The film is packed with extremely unnerving scenes that present a very real threat to Nina, each laced with an air of unpredictability. The camerawork helps to keep you suspended in high



NINA:
Double life

tension, in what it chooses to show graphically and head-on, or keep just out of frame. In fact, the camera very seldom stays still – making you feel uneasy and always on edge. Sometimes the perspective will shift and so it feels like you are directly being questioned, seduced or interrogated.

April is a remarkable film: shocking and uncomfortable, politically urgent and deeply personal. It doesn't just expose injustice, it immerses you in the fear of being found out, in a world where compassion is criminalised.

Four roundels out of five ●●●●○
 Review by Sam Cooney

Backshall goes wild on supersized arena tour

A THRILLING new live entertainment adventure is coming to UK arenas this October. *Deadly Live!* is described as an 'action-packed, edge of your seat experience' that's based on the popular BBC franchise *Deadly*, hosted by BAFTA award-winning wildlife presenter and adventurer Steve Backshall.

Visiting 10 major UK venues during the October half-term, *Deadly Live!* kicks off at the Utilita Arena Newcastle on October 24 and finishes at Connexin Live, Hull on November 2. The tour includes dates in Nottingham, Swansea, London, Bournemouth, Manchester and Birmingham.

Backshall said: "I'm thrilled to be bringing *Deadly Live!* to arenas across the UK later this year for the very first time. We've got some amazing stunts and incredible experiments planned for this new supersized show for all the family, as we explore animals from 600 million years ago right through to the modern day."

Steve is well-known for presenting TV shows including *Deadly 60*, *Supergiants* and *Lost Land of the Tiger*. He has



WILD MAN: Presenter Steve Backshall

also appeared on *Strictly Come Dancing* and is an author of wildlife books and children's fiction.

Deadly 60, now in its fifth season, was first broadcast in 2008. It follows Steve and his crew on journeys to remote regions to discover the 60 deadliest animals on the planet. All episodes are available on BBC iPlayer.

● Go to: stevebackshall.com for full tour information.



Theatre
Wodehouse in Wonderland
Edinburgh Fringe, July 30-August 24

Plum role honours TWO great writers



ONE-MAN PLAY: Robert Daws as writer P.G. Wodehouse PHOTOS: PAMELA RAITH

ROBERT DAWS (*Jeeves and Wooster*, *Poldark*), will bring to life the humour and heart of one of Britain's greatest comic writers when he stars in William Humble's play *Wodehouse in Wonderland*.

It's staged at Assembly George Square Studios at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe from July 30 until August 24 (excluding August 11 and 18) and coincides with the commemorations marking 50 years since P.G. Wodehouse's death.

The one-man play takes place in the 1950s in the New York State home of the celebrated author, whose most famous creations are young man-about-town Bertie Wooster and his faithful valet Jeeves.

Plum, as Wodehouse is known to family and friends, is working on the latest Wooster story but is interrupted by a young would-be biographer, his adored wife, daughter Snorkles and his two Pekingese dogs.

He shares stories about how Jeeves entered his life, how he became addicted to American soap operas and why he wrote books that were 'like musical comedies without music'. He sings songs composed by Broadway legends such as

Jerome Kern, George Gershwin, Cole Porter and Ivor Novello with lyrics written by himself, and entertains the audience with characters including Wooster, Jeeves, Lord Emsworth, Gussie Fink-Nottle and the squashily romantic Madeline Bassett...but there's also a darker story ahead for Wodehouse beneath the fun.

Daws said: "Seven years ago, I called my friend of several decades, the BAFTA-winning screenwriter and playwright William Humble, and asked him if he fancied working on a theatre project about the life of Pelham Grenville Wodehouse. To my pleasure and happy surprise, Bill instantly replied, 'That would be spiffing'."

"Bill presented the first draft of *Wodehouse In Wonderland* within weeks. Workshops, readings, and first performances at Literary Festivals at Oxford, Blenheim Palace and Gibraltar followed, and Bill was in his element. His love of Wodehouse and the theatre spurred him forward, helping, as he often told me, to fight against the ill health he was increasingly battling to keep at bay. Sadly, Bill lost this battle at the end of 2024.

"Bill had expressed the wish that his play might be performed at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe on the 50th anniversary of Plum's death. It is bittersweet that *Wodehouse In Wonderland* will make it to Scotland this year but without its author. Neither Bill nor his literary hero Plum was much given to sentimentality. Still, I hope they would both forgive me the indulgence of imagining the two of them looking down on our Festival run and enjoying a spiffing time together."

● Go to: assemblyfestival.com/whats-on/1034-wodehouse-in-wonderland for ticket details.



New book
Johnny Ball: My Previous Life in Comedy
(bookgild.co.uk)

National Service Johnny had a B

BEST KNOWN for his 20-year BBC career, where he made his name writing and presenting entertaining educational shows including *Think of a Number*, Johnny Ball credits his time in the RAF as playing a major part in his success.

The national treasure spent what he calls "three blissful years" as a National Serviceman, joining aged 18 and initially training as a radio operator.

In his recently-released autobiography, *Johnny Ball: My Previous Life in Comedy* (bookgild.co.uk), the former stand-up comedian describes his happy time in the Service, playing the drums, square bashing and working at the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Aberporth, which he said was 'paradise'.

The household name, father of TV and radio star Zoe Ball, revealed that he "loved every minute" of his basic training, which he called an "exhilarating and totally memorable experience."

When young Johnny came home on leave before moving on to trade training, he revealed that his mother didn't recognise him.

He said: "That weekend, my mum was coming home on the bus, and she saw a lad in RAF uniform walking along the road, looking incredibly smart. As the bus passed, she turned and her jaw dropped open. It was me and she hadn't recognised me from behind because I appeared a good four inches taller than just a few weeks ago. I had clearly changed in many ways, and all for the better."

The Buckinghamshire-based household name, now 86, said: "I'm so pleased I wrote this book - I realised I have a very good memory, and so many stories to tell."

And he's already written the second volume, with the title *Stories That Must Be Told!* It starts in 1982, where the first book finishes, and, he said,



WEDDING DAY: With second wife Dianne and daughter Zoe

should be out in about a year.

He added: "The RAF for me was wonderful, it was my university, in that I came out six inches taller in mind, in attitude and confidence and I didn't have one dull day in three years."

He revealed: "I only went one day in that three years of National Service without a drink! It was usually beer. The reason was that we were in radar on an exercise that was all underground for 16 hours. Then it was announced it would be extended for another 12 hours. It was a big European exercise so we realised we weren't going to get a drink within 24 hours. That had never happened in two and a half years in the RAF!"

It seems Johnny was always destined to be a performer, it was in the blood.

His father Danny, who worked in aircraft production during World War II, was, Johnny said, "a born comedian, but the cards never fell in his favour his entire life. However, that didn't stop him saying something funny every time he opened his mouth."

After National Service Johnny achieved his first dream on the road to a career as an entertainer and became a Butlin's Redcoat.

He was then a stand-up comedian for 17 years which saw him working all around the UK and abroad, entertaining British military personnel. Among those he worked with was the legendary actor and comedian Harry Secombe.

Johnny said: "Harry was so popular with the Forces. I did 16 tours all together for the Forces and had a wonderful time - Singapore three times, it was lovely."

"I got on ever so well with

Harry. I in Malta Forces u great fr material Johnny Playscho on to ha television including Think of Again. His e maths an led to hi treasure. He s much he man I an today, if if you're career, w Forces? "The in the F still tod saddled universi best edu growing

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YOUNG COMIC: Johnny says the cigarette was part of his act

Edited by Tracey Allen

Win!

ce?
Ball



YOUNG AIRMAN: Johnny's only photograph from RAF days



SHOWBIZ START: Ball in early job as a Butlin's Redcoat



TV STAR: Johnny on *Think of a Number*



ENTERTAINING THE TROOPS: Johnny, right, helps to kit out Harry Seacombe, centre, in Singapore



DVDs

Day of the Fight (15)

On Blu-ray, DVD & digital now (Icon Film Dist.)

Irish Mike's fight for redemption

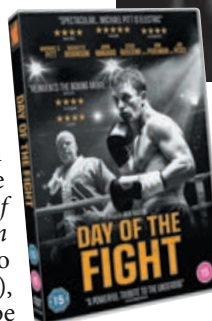
ON THE day of his first fight since leaving prison, former middleweight champion and weathered boxer 'Irish Mike' Flannigan prepares for his highly-anticipated return to the ring, a long-shot undercard at the legendary Madison Square Garden.

But before he can face off against a new champion, he first needs to face the demons from his past, embarking on a redemptive emotional journey of second chances, self-sacrifice and forgiveness.

The film stars Michael C. Pitt (*Seven Psychopaths*, *The Dreamers*) in a fearless lead performance, with support from Nicolette Robinson (*Woman of the Hour*, *One Night in Miami*), John Maguro (*Past Lives*, *The Big Short*), Emmy and Golden Globe winner Steve Buscemi (*Boardwalk Empire*, *Fargo*), Golden Globe winner Ron Perlman (*Hand of God*, *Hellboy*) and Oscar winner Joe Pesci (*The*



RING RETURN: Michael C. Pitt as ex-con Irish Mike Flannigan



Irishman, *Raging Bull*).

Day of the Fight marks a bold filmmaking debut from acclaimed actor turned writer-director Jack Huston (*Boardwalk Empire*, *House of Gucci*) and you could win a copy on DVD.

For your chance to own one, tell us:

Who plays 'Irish Mike' Flannigan in *Day of the Fight*?

Email your answer, marked: Day of the Fight DVD 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 16.

Please include your full postal address with your entry.

Festival Chalkes up big names

TOP HISTORIANS and household names are among the full line-up just announced for the 2025 Chalke History Festival.

Speakers taking part in the event, which runs from June 23-29 in the beautiful setting of the Chalke Valley in Wiltshire, include renowned historian and broadcaster Tracy Borman, critic and author William Dalrymple and *Grand Designs* presenter Kevin McCloud (*inset below*).

The annual festival is welcoming back author, TV presenter and *Monty Python* star Michael Palin, described as 'one of the nation's most adored TV travellers' who will be talking about his latest book *There And Back: Diaries 1999-2009*.

Borman will be appearing at the festival's opening night, joining a panel discussion about the extraordinary legacy left by Dame Hilary Mantel, author of the *Wolf Hall* trilogy, that offered a radically different portrayal of Thomas Cromwell.

Peter Kosminsky, the acclaimed director of the BBC's two *Wolf Hall* series, will be talking about his long career in television and film later in the week.



SIGNED UP: Historian and broadcaster Tracy Borman and author William Dalrymple



A festival spokesperson said: "There will be plenty of events to highlight the 80th anniversary of VE Day and the end of World War II in Europe, including a talk by James Holland and Al Murray who will bring their trademark insight and wit to the gripping story of how the Second World War truly ended, uncovering the drama, diplomacy, and untold human stories behind the eight surrenders that reshaped the world."

International bestselling author Antony Beevor will also be returning to Chalke to discuss one of the most momentous moments of 20th

century history: the death of Hitler, the fall of Berlin in 1945 and the collapse of the Third Reich.

"And the focus of this year's Second World War Morning will be the war in the Far East and the Pacific – experts such as Richard Dannatt, Rob Lyman, Frank Close, Phil Craig and Saul David will come together with James Holland to examine the war in Southeast Asia, the bloody campaign of Okinawa, the significance of dropping the atomic bomb twice on Japan, and the Korean War of the 1950s."

The Chalke History Festival takes place at Church Bottom, Broad Chalke, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP5 5DP.

Go to: chalkefestival.com for more details.

met him first backstage at a small theatre the used to use. We became friends and I wrote for him."

ny joined BBC's *ool* in 1967 and went ave a highly successful n career with shows g *Award Winners*, *a Number* and *Think*

xpertise in explaining and science with humour m becoming a national

aid: "The RAF very lped me to become the n. I say to young people you've got no direction, not sure what to do as a why not join the Armed

camaraderie you have orces is the best, and, lay – without being with a lot of debt for ty fees – you get the cation a young person up can have."

Tracey Allen

his book

COULD win a copy Johnny's engaging graphy. For your o own one, simply tell

n did Johnny Ball join ol?

l your answer, ked Johnny Ball 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 16.





Your Announcements

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

In Memoriam

CLEARY Steve Junior Technician. 29 April 2000. Forever missed beyond words by Mum, Dad and Neil.

Seeking

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

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 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? Contact: David Slough. 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 for membership details and news of the next annual reunion along with other upcoming events for 2025.

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

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

THE Association of RAF Women Officers (ARAFWO) is a lively, friendly, world-wide networking group. Please visit our website:

arafwo.co.uk and discover the benefits of membership, plus see what activities and events we offer all over the world.

SUAS – have you been a member of Southampton University Air Squadron as a student or staff member? If so, please join our Facebook page, 'Southampton UAS Association' or email: 6FTS-SUASAdmin@mod.gov.uk to join our association community so that we can welcome you back

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

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

RAF Physical Training Instructors Association holds an Annual Dinner and AGM over a weekend plus locally organised events. Please contact RAFPTIA Honorary Secretary Denise Street-Brown on: ptisec@outlook.com for membership enquiries. To become a member of the Association you will have had to have successfully passed the RAF Physical Training Instructors Basic Training Course.

RAF Wainfleet

LOOKING for photos/memorabilia/stories from RAF Wainfleet. The current owner of the tower would love you to get in touch. Please contact: willroughton@hotmail.com.

Channel challenge

CHARITY FUNDRAISER Helen Jenkins will take the plunge in July when she starts a solo swim of the English Channel.

Helen, 53, will be swimming from Dover to France from July 19-23 to raise money for five charities including the RAF Benevolent Fund.

She said: "The challenge will involve approximately 15 and a half hours of non-stop swimming but could be longer depending on conditions and fatigue – or equally less for the same reasons!"

"My grandfather, William Forth, was killed in World War II as a volunteer flight engineer, which left his wife with three young children to raise, one of whom was my dad.

"The RAF helped my dad research information into his father, and Dad was always a committed supporter of the RAF Benevolent Fund and the RAF"

She added: "I lost Dad three years ago and he would have been so proud of what I'm doing so I



TRIBUTE: Helen Jenkins is to swim the Channel in July in memory of her grandfather, flight engineer William Forth (inset), who was killed in WWII

wanted to give back to the Fund to help anyone that may lose a family member in the same way my Dad did back on May 5, 1943."

Helen has raised £3,100 so far for her chosen charities, which also include Dementia UK, Young Minds, Pleasant Valley Camp and Charlie's Promise.

● You can donate to Helen's fundraiser on Go Fund Me.

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's service is 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 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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Squadron gets new Guardian



A NEW Squadron Guardian is finally in place, marking the location of 2623 Sqn Royal Auxiliary Air Force's HQ at RAF Honington.

"The long-term project, led by Cpl Stevie Birch, resulted in the acquisition of an obsolete Rapier Fire Unit to act as a historic memorial for the only Royal Auxiliary Air Force Squadron to conduct an operational Ground Based Air Defence deployment with the Rapier missile system," said 2623 Sqn RAuxAF's OC, Sqn Ldr Tim Taylor.



JOB DONE: Proud members of 2623 Sqn with their new Sqn Guardian. Left, Cpl Stevie Birch (in red) and members of the project team load a missile onto the launcher

He added: "Cpl Birch oversaw the decommissioning of the system and its renovation before finally getting permission to site the system, and constructing, along with other squadron members, its permanent resting place."

The event was marked by a dedication service for the Guardian, attended by Honington's station commander, Wg Cdr Max Hayward, Station Warrant Officer, WO Paul McGuire and members of the squadron.



GAME ON: Players at the annual event

Cranwell hosts chess champs

MORE THAN 83 entrants were at RAF Cranwell recently when the Lincolnshire station hosted the Armed Forces Chess Association Championships.

Founded over 60 years ago, the Association has more than 150 members from across the military and the MOD.

The annual championships were held at Cranwell last month to decide the Single Service, MOD, Veteran and Armed Forces Champions.

The prize winners were: UK

Armed Forces Chess Champion, Cpl Tenin; RAF Champion, Off Cdt Kenyon; Royal Navy Champion, Marine William Cole; Army Champion, Cpl Tenin; MOD Champion, Mr Wells; Veteran Champion, Mr Tucker and Brokenshire Blitz Champion, Off Cdt Kenyon.

The results are also used to select the team for the Nato championships that the UK has proudly competed in since its inception 35 years ago – to be held in Poland in August.

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Crossword

No. 384

Solve the crossword, then rearrange the 9 letters in yellow squares to find an RAF aircraft

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.

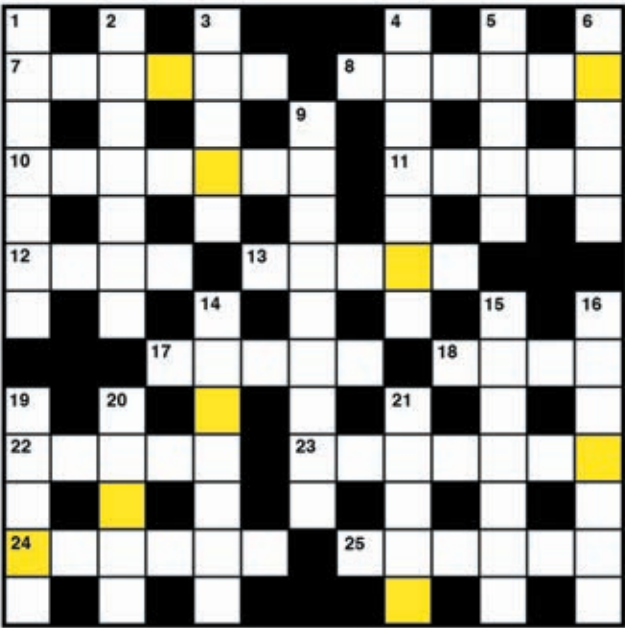
- Across
- 7. Without me, dire tome disturbs man looking for copy (6)
 - 8. See 18 Across
 - 10. Plant found on Venus? (7)
 - 11. Just Orville or Wilbur lose their head (5)
 - 12. First man needs a mother (4)
 - 13. Gas for Jason's ship heading north (5)
 - 17. Food served to Dad's Army (5)
 - 18. And 8 Across. Music to accompany RAF's first atomic bomb (4,6)
 - 22. Decapitated kid on steamship heading for oblivion (5)
 - 23. Is confidential about pen opus (5,2)
 - 24. Volunteers attack first person on island (6)
 - 25. The greatest directions for foreigners (6)

- Down
- 1. RAF exercise involving communist emblem (3,4)
 - 2. Where to find green jumper in pond (4,3)
 - 3. And 4 Down. Another RAF exercise for snake fighter (5,7)
 - 4. See 3 Down
 - 5. Toboggan has northern thrust (5)
 - 6. Cheeky hothead in Scottish city (5)
 - 9. And 14 Down. WWII campaign destroys a treaty provision (9,7)
 - 14. See 9 Down
 - 15. Fought 100 bound together (7)
 - 16. The heartless politician is French hurricane (7)
 - 19. First houses attacked in the island country (5)
 - 20. UK military satellite a little beauty cherished (5)
 - 21. Lock-up duck instrument (5)

Name: _____

Address: _____

RAF aircraft: _____ Crossword No. 384



Solution to Crossword No. 383

Across – 6. Liberal 7. Tempo 9. Tower 10. Praline 12. Brass Monkey 14. Bamboo Eagle 18. Sopwith 19. Vague 21. Camel 22. Typhoon

Down – 1. Pilot 2. Meteor 3. War 4. Merlin 5. Spanner 8. Crimean 11. Escorts 13. Dakotas 15. Bowler 16. Loathe 17. Futon 20. Dye

RAF memorial – Wall of Honour

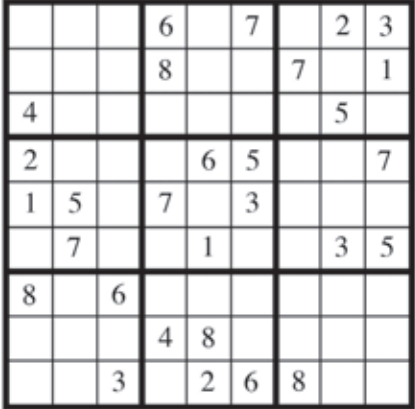


Su Doku

No. 394

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

Solutions should be sent in a sealed envelope marked 'Su Doku' with the number in the top left-hand corner to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP14 4UE, to arrive by May 16, 2025. The winner of Su Doku No. 392 is: H Thompson, Birmingham.



Solution to Su Doku No. 393

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



Music

Rod Stewart

Ultimate Hits, out June 27

Rod's summer is set to be a scorcher with new hits album and Glasto

SIR ROD STEWART has announced the release of his first-ever solo career-spanning hits collection. Due out on June 27, *Ultimate Hits* will be available just days before he takes to the Pyramid Stage at this year's Glastonbury Festival, where he will perform before an estimated crowd of 80,000 in the coveted Sunday afternoon 'Legends' slot.

Released as part of Rod's ongoing 80th birthday celebrations, *Ultimate Hits* starts with breakthrough songs *Handbags and Gladrags* and *Maggie May*. The collection also includes *The Killing of Georgie (Part I and II)*, *Young Turks*, *Da Ya Think I'm Sexy?*, *Hot Legs*, *Baby Jane*, *Sailing*, *Rhythm of My Heart* and *For the First Time*.

A two-CD deluxe edition brings the story bang up to date with *Ain't Misbehavin* and *Almost Like Being in Love*, highlights from 2024's *Swing Fever* album,



Rod's UK No. 1 collaboration with Jools Holland.

Maggie May kickstarted it all when it went to No. 1 on both sides of the Atlantic and since then Rod has topped the UK charts a further five times.

He said: "I love what I do, and I do what I love."

Go to: rodstewart.com for more information and details of Sir Rod's 2025 world tour.



Film Review

Restless (15)

In cinemas now

Noisy neighbour misery

A SEMI-DETACHED house on a council estate becomes a battleground when, night after night, a new neighbour refuses to turn the music down.

Nicky (Lyndsey Marshal) is a nurse, working long shifts at an understaffed practice. Having just lost her mother, who was living in the house next door, she is in need of rest and seeks solace in listening to classical music and watching snooker on the telly with her cat Reggie. This will become impossible once Deano (Aston McAuley) moves in: filling the place with people and playing drum and bass through the paper-thin walls till 4am each night.

This neighbourly tension is very particular and instantly recognisable for anyone who has experience of it. When your safe space is compromised, and you are unable to sleep, the effect is maddening.

Nicky is reasonable at first and allows him one night of housewarming celebration, even if it is midweek. But when it never seems to end, her polite request to turn the music down is ignored, by Deano and the police,



suggesting that she take it up with the ineffective council instead. Even the other neighbours don't want to get involved, either unaffected or just not wanting the trouble.

Marshal is brilliant as Nicky, believably exasperated so that when she eventually takes matters into her own hands, we can see that it was her only option. The tension is constantly mounting in *Restless*, but there are moments of humour that allow you to take a breath. Especially true for acquaintance Kev (Barry Ward) who takes an interest in

Nicky, but the feeling isn't exactly mutual, just a way of escaping the torment.

The film appears to paint itself into a corner, with tensions mounting so high that it needs to break the realism in order to reach a satisfying conclusion, but even this is done with a knowing sense of humour.

An impressive debut feature from director Jed Hart, *Restless* is a neat little psychological thriller with a familiar setting and great performances.

4 roundels out of 5

Review by Sam Cooney