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● See R'n'R pages 4-5

Win!

Inside story of the RAF Hercules

● See page 17

Win!

ROYAL AIR FORCE

Friday, May 30, 2025
Edition No.1609

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RAF News

Busting the Bomber Command myth – how raids secured victory

See pages 14-15

Armed Forces pay bonanza

Duathlon
IS double

● See page 23

Cricket
Women get in the swing

● See page p25

Football
Boulmer lift the RAF Cup

● See page p28

THE RED Arrows pose for a selfie in the scorching Greek sunshine after being granted official approval to perform across the UK and Europe.

The RAF team received their licence to thrill from AVM Mark Jackson after months of training, culminating with pre-season work up at Tanagra airbase in Greece.

The aerobatic aces will be performing at more than 60 events this summer.

Simon Mander

MILITARY PERSONNEL are to get an inflation-busting pay rise.

The increase of 4.5 per cent (3.75 per cent for senior officers), is part of the government's efforts to fix recruitment and retention.

It follows last year's award, which was the largest percentage headline increase in 22 years.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "Our people are what make the UK Armed Forces' reputation one of the best around the world.

"Today's above-inflation pay award recognises their dedication."

The pay rise follows last year's headline award of 6 per cent (5 per cent for senior officers).

It means Armed Forces members have received a total pay settlement of 10.5 per cent (8.75 per cent for senior officers) since July 2024.

Starting salaries for Other Ranks completing initial training will increase to around £26,334, benefiting around 7,800 junior personnel.

Starting pay for junior officers will rise to around £34,676, while medical specialists will benefit from an increased 'Golden Hello' to attract consultants and registrars.

Around 5,000 aircraft engineers are eligible to receive £30,000 when they sign up for an additional three years of service.

BiteSize

"This is my way of giving back and also marking VE Day"

RAF Police corporal Gill Craig is walking a 500-mile beat for charity

See page 13

"My ultimate movie would be *Saving Private Ryan*... but starring Arnold Schwarzenegger"

WWII spoof movie director 'Steed' Davidson

See R'n'R page 3

"I am proud and lucky to skipper this team"

Boulmer FC's Sgt Max Fox

See page 28

UK signs Diego deal

BRITAIN IS to retain full operational control of the Diego Garcia military base following a landmark agreement with Mauritius, the MOD says.

The UK-US run base in the Indian Ocean which plays a key role defending the UK and its Allies will be subject to a 24-mile buffer zone and Britain will continue to manage the electromagnetic spectrum communications satellite to counter hostile interference.

Announcing the agreement this week, Defence Secretary John Healey said: "Today's treaty secures full operational control, strengthens our UK-US defence partnership and keeps British people safe at home for the next 99 years and beyond.

"Without this base, our ability to deter terrorists, defend our interests and protect our troops around the world would be at risk. This agreement will safeguard our national and economic security for generations to come."

STRATEGIC CONTROL: Defence Secretary John Healey says agreement with Mauritius will safeguard national security PHOTOS: MOD

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RAF News

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This Week In History

1942

Bomber raids

WINSTON CHURCHILL approves plans for Operation Millennium – the 1,000-bomber raid on the German city of Cologne. More than 2,000 tons of bombs are dropped during the 90-minute attack.

1953

Coronation duty

RAF PERSONNEL join a 10,000-strong military procession from Westminster to Buckingham Palace to mark the Coronation of HM Queen Elizabeth II.

1999

Serb withdrawal

THE SUCCESS of Allied air operations in the Balkans forces the Serbian leadership to withdraw troops from Kosovo.

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

Formidable

Simon Mander

BRITISH TYPHOONS are to feature in Europe's largest live fire naval training in the UK and Norway.

The participation of RAF jets – normally used for air policing, high-intensity conflict and quick reaction alerts in UK airspace – are Britain's main contribution to Exercise Formidable Shield, along with Norwegian F-35 Lightnings.

The Exercise is focused on defending against air and missile threats and involves the close integration of naval, air and land forces.

In total, about 2,500 troops from the UK and Allies are participating – most of them aboard naval vessels.

"Formidable Shield is Europe's largest at-sea live-fire exercise in 2025," Norwegian spokesman Sgt Jonny Karlsen said.

"The war in Ukraine shows the significance of integrated air and missile defence to protect the airspace."

The week after Formidable Shield, US Army paratroopers will jump over Northern Norway during Exercise Swift Response, part of Defender 2025. In a real conflict this would not be possible without protection against air threats.

Formidable Shield is organised biennially, led by the US Sixth Fleet and Nato's premier maritime battle-staff, and includes live-fire against subsonic, supersonic and ballistic targets.

"There is simply no substitute for the training and learning that occurs when we operate in these intensely realistic scenarios," said US Sixth Fleet Task Force Commander Capt Michael Dwan.

"Exercises like Formidable Shield are critical for refining our collective integrated air and missile defence capabilities."

The training hosted by the UK and Norway takes place at the Hebrides Range, Scotland and Andoya Range, Norway.

It brings together 11 participating Allied Nations, 17 ships and 16 aircraft, encompassing 7,000 deployed personnel.

Paras ready for Swift Response

BRITISH PARATROOPERS deployed on Exercise Swift Response wait to board an RAF Atlas for low-level parachute jumps in Sweden.

Over the course of the training hundreds of troops will bale out as Nato Allies led by the United States, and involving the UK, Italy, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden, conduct airborne operations across the High North and Baltic region.

The manoeuvres involve five near-simultaneous insertions, a field hospital exercise and live fires in Norway, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden and Finland.

REMEMBRANCE: Sidney McFarlane lays a wreath at Bomber Command Centre

Commonwealth tribute

AIR FORCE veterans laid a wreath at the International Bomber Command Centre to remember colleagues killed during World War II.

Jamaicans Ralph Ottey (101), Gilbert Clarke (98) and Sidney McFarlane (90), who featured prominently in national VE Day commemorations, joined a series of events in Lincoln.

Former 617 (Dambusters) Sqn volunteer driver Ralph, who served at Coningsby and Woodhall Spa, and former RAF radio and radar technician Gilbert, who sat next to Anne, Princess Royal during the celebrations in the capital, laid a wreath.

Sidney was part of the Windrush generation invited to the UK to help rebuild post-war Britain.

He joined the Royal Air Force in 1958, progressing from aircraftman to squadron leader and was awarded three Commanders-in-Chief commendations for outstanding service.

The veterans also attended a Ceramic Poppy Ceremony at Lincoln Cathedral and a VE80 Rugby Festival involving more than 150 young people from across the UK and France.

IBCC CEO Nicky van der Drift said it was an honour to be involved in the project and welcome the veterans to the Bomber Command memorial.

She added: "The support and involvement of the World War II and Windrush veterans has been pivotal to the VE Day project's impact.

"Armed Forces personnel from the Commonwealth played an important role in Britain's war effort and, in particular, Bomber Command, which is why I was so pleased to welcome them to the IBCC."

Harrison's aiming for the top

Richard Watt

AROUND 25 Air Cadets from Wiltshire were given the chance to inspect weapon systems during a visit to RAF Brize Norton.

The youngsters, who also had a tour around an Atlas A400M aircraft, were hosted by Gunners from II Sqn.

The cadets, aged between 10 and 17, were from 1011 Sqn in Amesbury and 2293 Sqn in Marlborough.

Cdt Harrison Poole, 15, from 1011 Sqn, *who is pictured handling a Glock 17 9mm pistol*, said: "I'm definitely joining the RAF, as I want to fly Chinooks."

And Cdt Amelia Waines, aged 13, from 2293 Sqn, was also thinking seriously about the RAF as a career. She is currently taking glider pilot lessons with an instructor.

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Harrier vet Geoff hits 100

Simon Mander

VETERAN FS Geoffrey Bolton who earned the British Empire Medal for his work on the Harrier Jump Jet marked his century this month.

The electronic fitter for navigational instruments, who spent WWII keeping aircraft fit for aerial missions over Europe, is modest about his commendation.

He said: "I wasn't special, I was just doing my job and was lucky enough to get a medal which was presented to me by the British Ambassador in Bonn."

Born in Rainham in Kent in 1925, Geoff enlisted at 15 as an apprentice in 1941 and met the love of his life, former RAF Cpl Joyce Tayler, when he was posted to Sylt, which connects Germany with Denmark.

He said: "She was so pretty and vivacious and eventually I plucked up the courage to ask her to a musical evening held on the base. She said yes and from then on, we saw each other as often as we could."

Posted back to the UK their courtship was put to the test but on leave together Geoff proposed and they were married on December 13, 1947 and celebrated 72 years of marriage before Joyce died in 2020.

The couple had three children. Ann, born on Malta, John, and Jill who spent much of their childhood on air bases in Cyprus and Germany as well as Wittering and Scampton.

CELEBRATION: Birthday boy Geoff with daughter Jill. *Inset*, receiving the BEM in Germany in 1972

Celebrating his 100th birthday with his daughter and carer Jill Bolton, his eldest daughter Ann McRoyall and son John Bolton, Geoff says his exercise regime has contributed to his long life.

He said: "I used to be a keen cyclist, travelling many miles each week. Although I no longer cycle outside, I use my indoor exercise bike to cycle 10 miles each day. I have recently clocked up 6,000 miles since I first bought it two years ago."

Atlantic sub hunt

SUB-HUNTING POSEIDON aircraft are patrolling the Atlantic as part of Nato's Exercise Dynamic Mongoose.

The Lossiemouth-based P8s are training as part of ongoing collaboration with allies Norway and Iceland.

Anti-submarine warfare drills will be conducted to support collective defence and crisis response operations in the High North region.

NATO showcases Med Ex firepower

Staff Reporter

UK AND Italian F-35s joined forces to spearhead large scale maritime war drills across the Mediterranean as the Carrier Strike Group powers towards the South Pacific on Operation Highmast, Britain's biggest Navy deployment in decades.

Led by HMS Prince of Wales Carrier and the Italian flagship ITS Cavour, a force of 21 warships, three submarines, 19 helicopters and more than 40 combat jets carried out combat sorties across the Ionian Sea off the southern Italian coast.

The latest exercise saw UK personnel work alongside Italian crews, launching simulated strikes against targets.

617 Sqn's Lt Cdr Joe Mason worked closely with ITS Cavour's Deputy Air Wing Commander, Captain Gian Battista Molteni, in the Italian carrier's flying control centre.

"I am thrilled to work alongside my Italian colleagues and see how they control, launch and recover F-35s from the tower," he said.

"We are stronger together, and combined training makes us more effective and more lethal for the future."

It is the first time the UK's F-35 Lightning has operated alongside the Italian Navy's AV-8B Harrier, launched from the deck of the Italian carrier.

SEA TEST: Italian Navy F-35 and Harrier prepare to launch from the deck of ITS Cavour. *Below*, 617 Sqn's Lt Cdr Mason with Capt Gian Battista Molteni

809 Naval Air Sqn's Commanding Officer, Cdr Nick Smith, added: "Ex Med Strike affords the opportunities to prove force integration both within the air and maritime domains, learn from one another's approaches to carrier aviation and demonstrate Carrier Strike capability within Nato."

A dozen countries are taking part in the carrier strike group deployment, which will last eight months cover more than 30,000 miles and include more large-scale exercises with allies in the Mediterranean, Middle East, Southeast Asia, Japan and Australia.

More than 4,500 British military personnel are involved, including almost 600 RAF, 900 soldiers, and 2,500 Royal Navy sailors and Royal Marines.

RAF MARHAM, the home of the UK's F-35 Force, gave local paramotor enthusiasts the chance to operate from the Norfolk station's runway.

Members of the Bulldog Club were invited to test their skills by flying down the runway and over the station during a coordinated safe period.

Local para pilot Lee Jackson said: "Being able to fly paramotors at the base was an honour – truly a privilege few of us civvies are lucky enough to experience."

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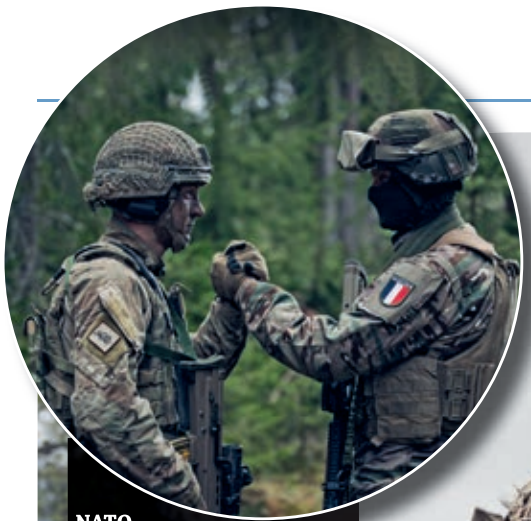

NATO PARTNERS: A member of the Duke of Lancaster Regt greets a French soldier during Nato war games in Estonia

Chinook lifts NATO Ex on Eastern front

Simon Mander

CHINOOKS SWOOPED across the battlefield carrying troops preparing to defend Nato's Eastern flank and deter Russian aggression.

The Odiham-based 18(B) Sqn aircraft took off from a forward operating base during Exercise Pinion Storm – their contribution to Exercise Hedgehog – the British role in the forward land forces within the alliance.

The battlefield workhorses deployed to Amari Air Base in Estonia to work alongside allies in a two-month deployment which also saw them prove the potential lethality of the Chinook as a drone delivery platform.

The training is also a mission rehearsal, giving units across Nato the chance to integrate and operate alongside Estonian units.

It is being run by the UK's 4th Light Brigade Combat Team – dubbed The Black Rats – and is the Estonian Defence Force's annual validation exercise.

Ascent nets £300m ISTAR training deal

Simon Mander

THE NEXT generation of RAF and Navy pilots are to benefit from a new £300m training deal.

Personnel flying uncrewed aerial systems like the Waddington-based Protector are to be trained under the UK's Military Flying Training System following the award to Ascent.

Air Force students will be taught at Cranwell in synthetic and simulated environments to meet the growing demands of modern ISTAR operations.

Head of Flying Training Air Cdre Rob Caine said: "The introduction of the training system will ensure we can safely deliver world-class personnel to the frontline to operate our latest aircraft, including Poseidon, Rivet Joint and Wedgetail."

Around 85 per cent of the tuition will be delivered on a new mission simulator while airborne lessons will use the upgraded fleet of four King Air Avengers.

The first trainees will be able to use the system in 2027.

Project chief AVM Ian Townsend said: "Today's air systems require aircrew who can exploit the electro-magnetic spectrum and assist in decision-making as we seek to outpace our adversaries in a complex battlespace."

LIFT OFF: Military and industry partners sign the latest FITCTS flying training deal at RNAS Culdrose

The RAF Directorate of Flying Training has worked closely with Defence Equipment & Support and industry to set the programme requirements.

They include Draken, Ascent Flight Training which has been training military aircrew since 2008, and US arms giant Lockheed Martin, based in Bethesda, Maryland.

Air Capability spokesman Richard Curzon said: "By investing in the people who will go on to operate our ISTAR platforms, we will ensure the UK maintains the best sovereign capability to meet emerging threats and challenges."

This support is expected to result in a four-fold increase in mission aircrew trainees to 140 per year for the RAF and RN.

PIONEERING: CAS, ACM Sir Richard Knighton, with the StormShroud team

UK boffins take a bow

DEFENCE SCIENTISTS played a crucial role in developing the RAF's new uncrewed aircraft system, it has been revealed.

StormShroud, recently unveiled at defence giant Leonardo UK's Luton site, is the first of a new family of Autonomous Collaborative Platforms designed to make combat aircraft more survivable and more lethal.

Development involved collaboration between the RAF's Rapid Capabilities Office, DSTL, Defence Equipment and Support and industry partners, the Ministry of Defence said.

Defence Science and Technology Laboratory Chief Executive Dr Paul Hollinshead added: "This achievement demonstrates how Dstl's world-class research directly contributes to operational advantage for our Armed Forces."

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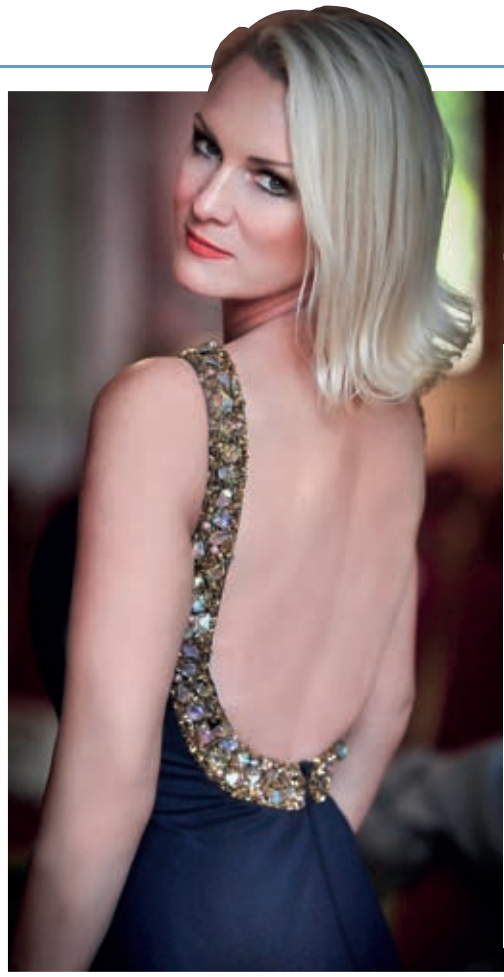
Bulletin

Putin faces UK Raven

DEFENCE HAS released images showing some of the weapons given by Britain to Ukraine to counter Russia's resurgent aerial threat.

The Raven Air Defence System is based on the Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile used by the RAF and the HMT 600 Supacat vehicle.

The system uses the AIM-132 rocket and adapts it for surface launch from the transporter.



Forces strike a chord with opera diva Krum

OPERA DIVA and Royal favourite Friederike Krum is backing Forces welfare campaigners by signing on as an ambassador for military charity SSAFA.

The internationally-renowned singer recently starred at the annual Wave Ball on board HMS Queen Elizabeth attended by HM King Charles and has strong associations with UK veterans.

She has performed for heads of state and European Union leaders in her native Germany and also released a classical chart-topping duet with platinum-selling tenor Russell Watson in aid of the Chelsea Pensioner Veterans, as well as supporting the German Armed Forces.

Speaking after announcing her support for the UK Forces charity, she said: "Joining the SSAFA family is a huge honour and joy.

"I look forward to volunteering, as it is important to me to get to know the people within the charity and those SSAFA supports.

"I have the utmost respect for anyone serving and putting their life on the line to protect our democracy and freedom.

"Being able to play a small part in making the lives of these brave men and women and that of their families a little easier – for example when transitioning back into civilian life or overcoming struggles – is close to my heart. That is what SSAFA stands for: family, and the promise to never battle alone."

SSAFA fundraising spokesman Jonathan Sandall added: "We are both thrilled and honoured that Friederike has become an ambassador for SSAFA, the UK's oldest military charity.

"Her enthusiasm and dedication to the Armed Forces, not only of Germany, her home country, but also of the United Kingdom, demonstrate her compassion and belief in the need to support those who protect us and the freedoms we hold so dear."

The eat is on

Lossie catering aces take cook-off crown

SERVING UP A WINNER: The Lossiemouth team is presented with the Best Supporting Station award

Simon Mander

A TASTE of the South Pacific came to Hampshire at the RAF Culinary Skills competition with a Scottish station coming out on top.

The contest at Worthy Down Camp saw Lossiemouth facing off against caterers from across the Service designing their own menus using goods from local businesses.

And dish of the day was won by newcomer A/Cpl Korologa for a Fijian-themed feast in the 'World Food' class using lobster from Buckie, which scooped gold.

There were silver medals for cakes from AS1 Chambers and AS1 Cagi, and AS2 Robertson competed for the first time in the open omelette, class receiving a certificate of merit.

AS1 Brown returned to the mixology class for the second time and took silver for his VE Day-themed menu of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. AS1 Hill won bronze for his spectacular flambé skills, which set the contest alight.

The Lossiemouth team took home the prize for Best Supporting Station for the second year in a row.

Coningsby took the Open Field title, while Leeming served up a winner in the senior cook and serve category.

In the individual heat AS1 Yates was named as Junior Chef of the Year and AS1 Makutu won the Junior Steward of the Year award.

EURO PACT: Defence Secretary Healey

Sting Ray agreement

Simon Mander

BRITAIN AND Germany have confirmed for the first time that they will work together to develop a new long-range strike capability with a range of more than 2,000km.

The news comes as German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius hosted Defence Secretary John Healey in the first Trinity House Defence Ministerial Council in Berlin.

The new system will be among the most advanced systems ever designed by the UK to safeguard the British public and reinforce Nato deterrence.

Discussions also focused on a joint procurement programme for P-8 Poseidon Sting Ray torpedoes, enhancing both countries' ability to counter underwater threats.

Mr Healey said: "Together with Germany, we're leading the way in supporting Ukraine, defending Nato's eastern flank, and jointly investing in next-generation capabilities."

News

Prize and shine

DARE-DEVIL 104-YEAR-OLD Air Force veteran Colin Bell has been honoured by military charity chiefs after netting more than £30,000 for good causes.

The former Bomber Command pilot, who was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, launched a daring fundraising stunt for the RAF Benevolent Fund, abseiling down the 17-storey Royal London Hospital building in 2024.

He was awarded the British Empire Medal in the New Year Honours for his charity work.

He was presented with the RAFBF's Heart of the Fund award, joining serving members of the RAF at the charity's annual awards night at the Sheraton Grand in London.

Now in their 13th year, the honours celebrate outstanding contributions, with Lossiemouth winning RAF Station of the Year, while Partnership of the Year went to the Service's Winter Sports Association.

SERVICE STARS: Lossiemouth team receive the Station of the Year title at RAFBF awards ceremony; *inset left*, guests celebrate at the Sheraton Grand hotel

WINNER: Colin Bell

Controller RAF Benevolent Fund AVM Chris Elliot said: "Everyone on the shortlist contributed to helping to raise funds and awareness of our support, enabling us to deliver our vital services."

AS1 Rowan Martin scooped Fundraiser of the Year and The King's Colour Squadron were judged to be the Formation of the Year.

Special recognition awards went to Gary Walker and Marcus Dodd.

AWARD: CAS Sir Richard Knighton, *left*, receives medal from Lt Gen Goretti

Sir Rich nets Italy honour

CHIEF OF the Air Staff ACM Sir Richard Knighton has received the Golden medal for Aeronautical Merit from the Italian Air Force.

The UK's top airman was presented with the award by his Italian counterpart Lt Gen Luca Goretti in recognition of his role promoting collaboration with European partners.

The award citation praised ACM Knighton's 'strategic vision' in building bilateral military relationships between Britain and Italy on operations and exercises.

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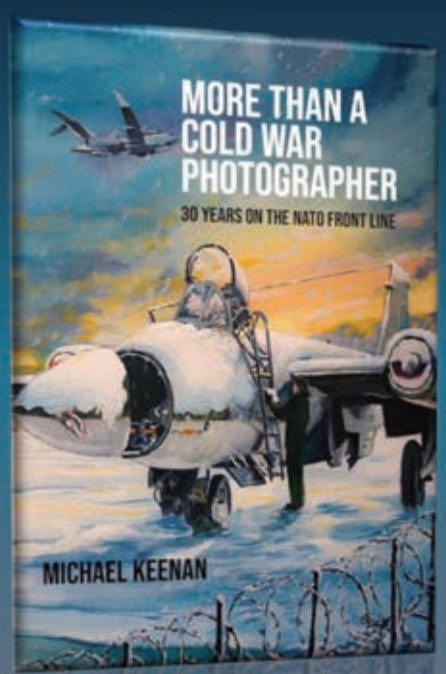

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Dak's back on display

BRIZE NORTON'S Dakota gate guardian is back on display after a three-month restoration programme.

The WWII aircraft, which played a key role during D-Day and the Berlin airlift, has stood watch over the 47 Air Dispatch depot since being moved from Lyneham in 2013.

Capt Joshua Lakey said: "The restoration reflects our ongoing commitment to honouring the legacy of the personnel who came before us.

"The freshly-painted guardian is not only a visual, powerful landmark but also a tribute to the generations who have served with distinction."

RESTORATION: WWII Dakota gate guardian at Brize

STEPPING UP: Gillian will walk 500 miles around station for RAFBF

Gill hits charity beat

Simon Mander

POLICE CORPORAL Gillian Craig is to patrol 500 miles around Honington to raise money for the RAF Benevolent Fund.

Her beat will take her 16 miles per day, or approximately 34,000 steps, around the Suffolk station where she is based.

She said: "This challenge is my way of 'giving back' in conjunction with the VE and VJ Day 80 celebrations. I wanted to challenge myself both physically and mentally."

And Cpl Craig does not expect to be alone for long on her route.

She said: "I have had several canine friends along for the ride thus far, as well as guest appearances from friends who have encouraged me.

"I am working full-time whilst completing the challenge, which is adding to the pressures of completion, but every time I hear my email notification 'ping' in my headphones whilst walking, it spurs me on even more."

Cpl Craig has raised more than £700 for the Fund so far.

Go to Justgiving to support Cpl Craig's fundraising campaign.

Frontline combat duo keep Reds' flag flying

Andrew Morton

TWO NEW Red Arrows pilots are set to take to the skies as the team prepares for the summer display season.

Flt Lts Rob Thomas and Andrew McEwen join the Arrows with years of experience operating on the frontline with the Typhoon and F-35 Lightning.

They will bring their combat pedigrees to formation flying skills as two of the Red Arrows' nine display pilots for next season.

Training is already underway at the team's home base of RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire.

Flt Lt Thomas, who is originally from Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, will fly in the Red 2 position.

He said: "The team inspired me to join the RAF and I would love to be part of inspiring the next generation."

He flew the Typhoon on operations and exercises around the globe, including providing Quick Reaction Alert to safeguard the skies in the UK and the Falkland Islands.

He added: "My experience will help to some degree but the precision, teamwork and trust required to fly in large, dynamic formations close to the ground is a totally new skill, almost like learning to fly again."

Up to three new pilots join the Red Arrows each year, succeeding those who leave following completion of their tours at the end of a display season.

New team members are selected following interviews, tests and other assessments.

To be eligible to apply, candidates must have 1,500 fast-jet flying hours, be assessed as 'above average' in their flying roles and have completed at least one frontline tour of duty.

Flt Lt McEwen is the first former F-35B Lightning II pilot to join the Red Arrows – the RAF's fifth-generation multi-role aircraft.

The former 617 Sqn Dambuster pilot added: "The F-35B has the wonder of modern technology, auto pilot and superior situational awareness.

"The Hawk T1 has none of that and is a true pilot's machine that involves raw flying."

Born in Wexham, Berkshire, Flt Lt McEwen, said his passion for aviation came at an early age, fuelled by a sight of the Red Arrows.

He said: "I first saw the Red Arrows flying on the wing of a Concorde above my house when I was about five years old. I remember it vividly.

"The pinnacle of professionalism and perfection in the air really appealed to me, as well as the sheer fun it looked."

He said: "It was the happiest moment in my career when I learned I'd got the job.

"I phoned my father immediately, whose words were 'no way!'. I think he was more shocked than I was."

In training a building block approach is used and pilots fly up to three times a day, with small formations of aircraft at first before more are added – increasing the complexity – all the way up to the team's trademark Diamond Nine.

REDS DEBUT: Flt Lt Thomas *(left)* and Flt Lt McEwen join Arrows for summer season

Dome run for pilgrims

RAF FAMILIES joined Armed Forces Bishop Paul Mason during the annual UK Defence pilgrimage to the Holy shrine at Lourdes.

This year's religious event included a fancy dress theme to add some fun to the procession through the southern French town.

"The joy on the children's faces said it all," said one of the carers, AS1 Nathan Atkin.

"To be part of something that gave them not just a holiday, but a chance to laugh, explore, and simply be themselves, was a privilege."

Feature Bomber Command

RAF LANCASTER: The most famous aircraft of Bomber Command

ONE part of Britain's role in World War II remains highly controversial, that of RAF Bomber Command.

Since 1945 analysts and historians have been critical of the bombing campaign against Germany, claiming the attacks failed to reduce its war industries but instead killed thousands of innocent civilians.

In 1963, the author David Irving wrote a book, *The Destruction of Dresden*, which became an international bestseller when it grossly exaggerated the number of civilian casualties and laid the blame firmly on the RAF. As a result, Dresden became the 'Guernica' of WWII, the city hit by German bombers during the Spanish Civil War eight years earlier.

ACM Sir Arthur Harris

Critics condemn Bomber Command's chief, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, for unleashing a "brutal and immoral" campaign. Since 1945 around 380 books have been published on Bomber Command, including excellent studies of individual operations, squadrons, and outstanding air crew, but no in-depth study had examined the full effects on Germany – until now.

This month I completed a new book, *The Greatest Force*, which, for the first time, examines in depth the impact of RAF bombing – and the evidence that it was stunningly successful is both deep and incontrovertible.

Research into German archives showed the RAF wreaked much greater initial damage than hitherto thought. Individual raid reports as early as 1940 reveal the Germans were aghast at the damage, even though the RAF dropped only 14,000 tonnes in that year. In 1944 the RAF would drop that tonnage in just three days. These 'puny' raids, the Germans reported, halted five per cent of their oil supplies, with far worse to come.

These early raids also provoked Hitler into making one of the worst decisions of the war – the launch of the V-weapons programme in December 1942. Using the same resources, Germany could have built some 40,000 new Luftwaffe aircraft.

First and foremost, Harris was indeed correct in attacking city centres – because these were the location of the thousands of vital small workshops and factories making spare parts and components for aircraft, tanks and U-boats.

The destruction of Germany's inner-city weapons factories led directly to its sub-components crisis, or Zulieferungskrise, which paralysed production. After the war many of the German commanders interrogated said the shortage of spare parts was the lead factor in its military defeat.

Secondly, if Harris had attacked only a handful of big assembly plants in precision raids the Germans would have needed small numbers of anti-aircraft guns and fighter aircraft to defend them. But by attacking cities and other targets across the whole of Germany the RAF forced the Nazis into building a gigantic, nationwide defence infrastructure.

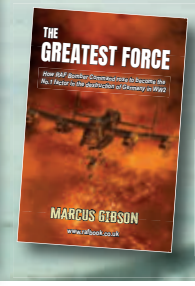
In March 1943, in the First Battle of the Ruhr, Harris mounted 16 heavy raids against the largest industrial cities. He destroyed no less than 43 per cent of its metal-working industries – an extraordinary achievement. Proper organisation across Germany soon ceased to exit.

Anti-aircraft guns

Equally unrecognised or quantified, the raids triggered a unique, additional stream of indirect effects which soon rotted Germany's ability to fight. By 1944 two million men had been diverted to man the thousands of anti-aircraft guns and clear the rubble across the Reich – equal to 130 army divisions.

Secondly, in a desperate bid to save their cities 80 per cent of the Wehrmacht's deadly, rapid-firing 88mm anti-tank guns, and up to 85 per cent of Luftwaffe fighters, were hurriedly withdrawn from the Eastern front.

CONTROVERSIAL: Bomber Command chief Sir Arthur Harris



NEW BOOK: The Greatest Force

Such diversions made D-Day possible. On Omaha Beach, where the Americans suffered heavy casualties, there were only two 88mm guns. What if there had been 20?

Thirdly, vast volumes of heavy ammunition that could have blunted Soviet offensives in the East were instead wastefully expended at Allied aircraft. The metal and aluminium used in manufacturing anti-aircraft ammunition alone could have created 30,000 fighter aircraft.

One fact critics have overlooked is that only 52 per cent of Bomber Command sorties were directed at urban areas. The rest were devoted to aiding Allied navies and armies.

Sea Mines

At night and at low level near to enemy coasts, bombers dropped thousands of sea mines at great risk. These crippled U-boat training operations and may have sunk the 80 submarines whose fate is unknown.

In the Mediterranean, Italy and in Normandy Bomber Command wrecked many frontline units of the German army, the Wehrmacht. There is little doubt the RAF raids on Italy in mid-1943 forced the nation out of the war.

The mere threat of British bombing prompted one of the largest construction programmes in history: a vast series of underground factories, bunkers, flak towers and U-boat pens were built. To make the Atlantic Wall bomb-proof around 1.2m tons of steel was used in its construction

ustified?

by Marcus Gibson

Bomber Command's attacks on Nazi Germany have been condemned by some as brutal and immoral but a new book by journalist *Marcus Gibson* argues they were stunningly successful and helped win the war

DEVASTATION: Bomb-ravaged Dresden and the Lloyds Works in Bremen, 1945

– equal to the metal required to make 20,000 Tiger tanks or 1,200 U-boats.

Much of the scorn directed at Bomber Command comes from the conclusions of the post-war US Bombing Survey which said the campaign had been a failure. Those claims were based most of all on information supplied by Albert Speer, Germany's armaments minister.

Yet, on close examination, the survey is frankly ludicrous. As Noble Frankland, co-author of the Official History of the campaign, pointed out – the results relied on thousands of questionnaires being sent to factories – to plants which had long been destroyed. Its inspectors were also forbidden to enter the one third of Germany now run by the Soviets.

'Miracle'

Speer's own claims to have created a manufacturing 'miracle' during the height of the bombing, long believed uncritically by historians, are an absurdity. The thousands of aircraft he told Hitler had been built never appeared at Luftwaffe airfields. The few that did were barely flyable.

RAF bombing was indeed the principal reason for Germany's early military defeat in the West, and no Allied military commander inflicted more direct damage on Germany than Air Marshal Harris.

The Canadian historian David L. Bashow summed it up: "By 1945, Allied bombing had destroyed virtually all of Germany's coke, ferroalloy and synthetic rubber industries, 95 per cent of its fuel, hard coal and rubber capacity, 90 per cent of its steel capacity, 75 per cent of its truck producing capacity, and 70 per cent of its tyre production."

Although the USAAF's attacks on oil installations in late 1944 were long held to be the foremost crippling blow, there is strong evidence that instead it was the RAF's so-called Second Battle of the Ruhr, which strangled coal supplies and brought Germany to a halt.

Refugees

One chapter is devoted to the raid on Dresden in February 1945. Much of what you've read is simply untrue. First, there were very few refugees in the city: the Russians were only 60 miles away and, as a result, no one got off the trains passing through en route to the south of Germany.

Consequently, the death toll was around 10,000 – far fewer than the 65,000 killed in Hamburg or the 250,000 in Warsaw. Interestingly, it is probable the raid saved more lives than it took. Why? Some 12,000 slave workers fled the city after the raids and, in the chaos, survived the war.

Next, Dresden's Zeiss Ikon factories were the last to be manufacturing vital gunsights and rangefinders for tanks and artillery. Far from being a 'war crime', the raid was justified.

There is now no doubt the bombing campaigns by the RAF over five long years – and the USAAF for the last 15 months of the war – were, for all their setbacks, a triumph.

Controversially, I also state that few German civilians were truly 'innocent'. The only true innocents in the Third Reich were children and the 200,000 dissidents – trade unionists, political opponents, churchmen and others – locked up in prisons since 1933.

Across Germany there were more than 42,500 labour camps, most within city centres, and the pitiful condition of those workers was visible to all. Few received any help.

Murdered

Far from being innocent, German cities were hateful places. In the final days of the war groups of Hamburg citizens roamed the streets and murdered the last remaining Jews they could find. Forty cities ran guillotines in their prisons.

After the war much of this horror was forgotten, but the role the RAF played in ending the worst regime in Europe since the Mongols should never be forgotten. Tragically, air crew losses throughout the war were grievous: 44 per cent of the 125,000 did not survive. So great were the fatalities one airman, Tom Jefferson DSO AFC of 18 Sqn, went from Sergeant to Squadron Leader in only 10 weeks. Expert RAF ground crews worked in the open air through three of the worst winters of the 20th century.

Having understood the scale of Bomber Command's astonishing achievements I suspect no one serving in the RAF today will ever hold their forebears in greater esteem than they will now.

● **Marcus Gibson, author of *The Greatest Force*, which is out now. You can read the book in print or in e-book, via rafbook.co.uk.**

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Band of the Royal Air Force College

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VIETNAM WAR SERVICE: US Army/Public Domain

1967: Hercules entered RAF service and was soon in action supporting Britain's withdrawal from Aden PHOTO: GODFREY MANGION

END OF AN ERA: Hercules retires from RAF service in 2023 after 56 years

FILLING UP: Hercules takes fuel from a Victor tanker, collection of Sqn Ldr Harry Burgoygne (Ret'd)

Fat's all folks...

Former Hercules captain's tribute to RAF legend

FOR MORE than five decades the iconic Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules was an RAF legend. Entering RAF service in 1967, it was only withdrawn in 2023. Many lamented the decision to retire a still extremely capable aircraft. There were angry letters to *The Times*.

Scott Bateman knows all about the Hercules. This is clear in the paperback edition of his *Hercules: The Inside Story of an RAF Legend* (Penguin Michael Joseph, £10.99, penguin.co.uk), first published in 2024. The American-built aircraft was central to Bateman's RAF career and he filled three crew positions – air loadmaster, co-pilot and captain.

47 Squadron

The book intersperses the story of the Hercules with that of 47 Sqn and the author's 18-year RAF career, starting in 1990. 47 Sqn was allocated its first Hercules in 1969, flying the aircraft until the squadron's laying up and the Hercules' retirement in 2023.

Bateman remains a great supporter of the Hercules. The book is an affectionate account of the so-called 'Fat Albert', a beloved lump of aluminium. Designed for the Korean War, the first C-130 Hercules rolled off the production line in 1954.

From the outset it was a game-changing military aircraft able to take off and land almost anywhere. Eventually more than 2,500 were produced.

The flexibility and adaptability of the Hercules in operations for air forces across the globe is an important part of the story. Its versatility as an aerial tanker, gunship, observation platform, air-sea rescue facilitator and bomber are underlined. It was a true workhorse for the RAF in so many different capacities. The story Bateman tells extends into aspects beyond the aircraft in RAF service.

For instance, he describes the Hercules' varied roles with the USAF during the Vietnam War and its key contribution of four Hercules in the Israeli operation to free the hostages from Entebbe (Uganda) in 1976.

The author never downplays the dangers. He highlights the risks and recalls with sadness occasions when RAF Hercules were lost on operations or in accidents.

Bateman's cockpit-eye approach extends to the most daring and dangerous RAF Hercules operations of recent decades. It first proved its worth in RAF service in November 1967 when helping transport British forces out of Aden.

The Hercules served a vital rescue role, evacuating British nationals from conflict zones. In 1971, this involved getting Britons out of Dhaka during the Pakistan civil war and in 1979, from Iran after the Shah's overthrow.

Other tasks came thick and fast, including life-saving humanitarian operations in Nepal (1973) and Ethiopia (1985) and supporting the British peacekeeping operation in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in 1979-80.

In the context of the relief effort for the Ethiopian famine, Bateman observes, 'Team Lyneham was, at that time, the go-to one-stop shop for government when any global disaster emerged.' The mantra of 'First In, Last Out', was epitomised to the end with the evacuation of civilians from Sudan in 2023.

The saddest task may have been the evacuation of wounded US Marine Corps by RAF Hercules from Lebanon in 1983 after the devastating terrorist bombing of the Marines and French peacekeepers' barracks in Beirut.

A year earlier, RAF Hercules had played a key part in the Falklands War, supplying and assisting the Task Force. Bateman conveys the bravery of the aircrews and the deadly challenges faced on these long flights, together with the ingenuity involved in air-to-air refuelling from Victor tankers, 1,000 feet above the freezing Atlantic. Similarly memorable is the image of the Hercules flying through the dense smoke into Kuwait City airport in 1991 after Saddam had set the oil wells ablaze.

Sarajevo

Alongside the laughs, a culture of professionalism is evident throughout. For instance, in the early and mid-1990s, despite the dangers associated with flying into Sarajevo, No. 47 Squadron flew over 2,000 missions into the city without losing any Hercules or aircrew.

This is a most readable account. The near 400 pages race by and the photographs are well chosen. It is an enjoyable book.

Review by Alastair Noble

Win Hercules book

YOU COULD win a copy of *Hercules: The Inside Story of an RAF Legend* by Scott Bateman in paperback.

For your chance to own one, tell us: ***When was 47 Sqn allocated its first Hercules?***

Email your answer, marked Hercules 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 June 13.

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Photographer Stephen needs model for unique Battle of Britain project

WWII pilot seeking his WAAF girl

SPITTING IMAGE: Scott makes a convincing WWII Spitfire pilot at IWM Duxford

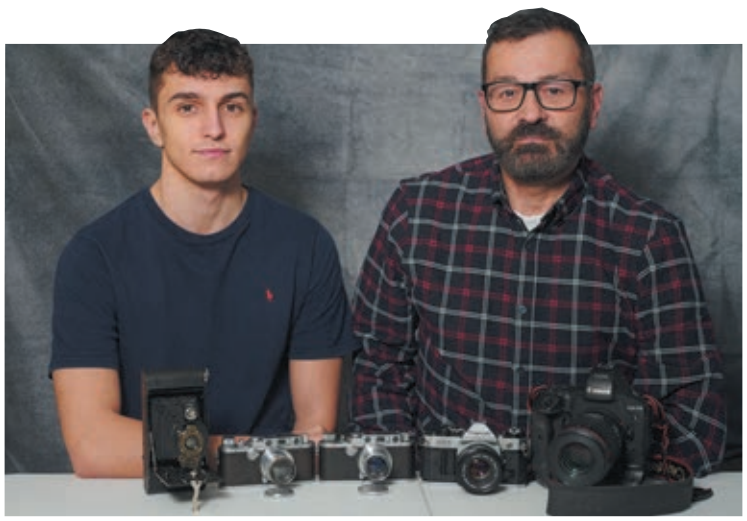
FOR STEPHEN HUNTLEY aviation history isn't just an interest, it's a passion – and it runs in the family.

The freelance cameraman, who has worked for BBC News both locally and nationally and on programmes such as *Watchdog*, is also an enthusiastic and accomplished photographer. And he's been busy on a fascinating project photographing uniforms and associated kit he has collected, dating from 1914 to the present day, with his son Scott modelling alongside historic aircraft.

Not only has Stephen been able to source and collect genuine uniforms, badges and flying kit, he has also shot some of the images using classic cameras and even expired film dating from World War II.

He explained: "I used a camera from 1916 for Royal Flying Corps shots and for the Battle of Britain period a 1938 Leica Illa and lens using 1940s expired film made during WWII, which I home-processed using raw chemicals as the original developer is no longer made."

He added: "I've recently bought over 30 rolls of wartime film that were found in a cellar in Boston in the US. I am testing the film and, hopefully, as it was stored in the cold and dark, I'll be able to use it. It was made between 1939-43 and expired between 1943-45."



AVIATION BUFFS: Stephen Huntley with some of his vintage cameras and son Scott

He also bought a 1917 Kodak Brownie to take photos of Scott in RFC uniform to produce images that look as authentic to the times as possible.

Stephen added: "I think my project is unique, I don't think it's ever been done before, using original cameras and film of the time to document uniforms and kit over the decades.

"I use Scott to model as the pilot as he really looks the part. He's the right age for a wartime pilot, 23, and wears the uniforms very well."

Stephen's life-long interest in aircraft was inspired, he said, by his late father Dennis who did National Service in the RAF in the 1950s.

"Dad taking me to airshows sparked my interest in aviation," he explained. "Then I joined 6F (Romford) Squadron Air Training Corps and was their Corporate Communications Officer for many years.

"My father was a photographer and I started taking pictures when I was five years old. I had my first picture published in the *Daily Mirror* when I was 16. I wanted to be a pilot when I was growing up but my eyesight wasn't good enough."

Now Stephen has passed his interest in aviation on to his own son.

"Scott is a motor racing instructor on high performance cars and a qualified drone pilot. His real passion is aircraft," said his proud dad.

Stephen added: "I have spent a lot buying vintage cameras and lenses and authentic uniform and kit over the years – the cost of Battle of Britain kit has gone up tremendously.

"My collection started with a Battle of Britain pilot's uniform I bought on eBay from an aviation museum that had closed down in Honolulu. Then I bought a WWII B-type flying helmet and the collection has grown from there. I'm still adding to it.

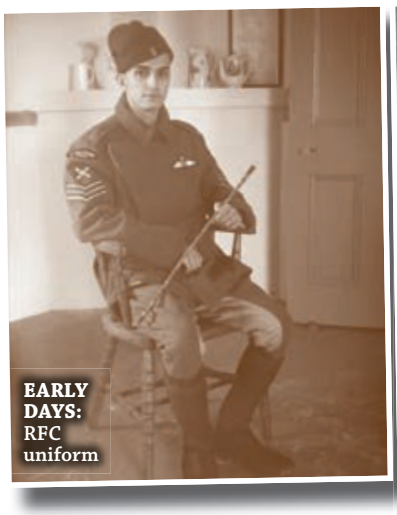
"My ambition is to have an exhibition of photos at the Imperial War Museum Duxford for the 85th anniversary of the Battle of Britain this September.

"It would be great to get a serving female RAF person – of any rank – to pose with Scott for further Battle of Britain period photographs with a MK1a Spitfire.

"She would ideally be a similar age to Scott and we could create a 'classic British wartime look' for the photographs as we would want them to be as historically accurate as possible. I also need a genuine WAAF uniform for the model to wear."

By Tracey Allen

● ***You can contact Stephen on: stephen.huntley@btinternet.com if you are interested in taking part in the photographic project or if you have a WAAF uniform he could use for it.***

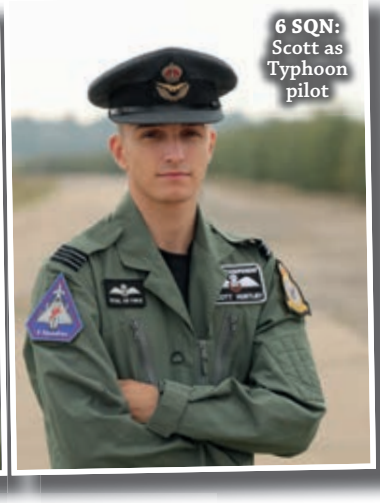


EARLY DAYS: RFC uniform

SPITFIRE PILOT: Scott at IWM Duxford

VINTAGE: Shot with 1930s camera and 1940s film

80s KIT: With Vulcan at Southend Airport



6 SQN: Scott as Typhoon pilot

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Peugeot 208 GT (from £26,795 otr)

Motoring

Peugeot's little beauty

WITH THE Fiesta having recently been bumped off by Ford, the 208 edges ever closer to the top of the small car pile, pressing its Stellantis Corsa cousin hard. Well, they're built on the same platform, after all. The 208 just has more visual va-va-voom.

Outside

The latest 208 GT looks smart. The claw-inspired LED running lights now dominate the car's front bumper, drawing the eye to the new grille, which has more colour-coded detail. New LED rear light clusters and stylish, curved contours – side and rear – complete the elegant upgrade. The 208 GT is now one of the most striking small cars on the market.

Inside

The 208's interior is one of the most carefully designed cabins that you'll find in any small car. It's right up there with the Germans in terms of soft-touch surfaces and high-end materials. The ambient lighting in the GT means that it even looks good in the dark.

Interior space is gargantuan, by Parisian standards. That means that a couple of six footers can sit comfortably in the front and two more can squeeze into the back without too much fuss. There's more room than you'll get in a Clio, but less than you'll enjoy in a Polo. GT trim even comes with leather upholstery, heated seats and a massage function.

Peugeot's iCockpit, the digital instrument cluster, is always a bit 'Marmite', in the sense that you'll either love it or hate it. You view the clocks by looking over the tiny steering wheel, rather than through it, and this will mean that your choice of driving position will play a part. If you love to sit high and close to the wheel then you're in luck but, if you like to sit on the floor, you'll find that the steering wheel sits squarely between you and the gauges.

The GT gets a 10-inch touchscreen infotainment system, that comes with sat-nav, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. It works seamlessly while connected to your phone but the screen could be higher resolution and the menu system is a bit clunky to operate. There are more physical buttons than before though, which does make it a lot more user-friendly to operate on the move.

On The Road

Peugeots are traditionally soft, cushy affairs that are designed to waft along uneven French roads with ease, so they don't tend to lend themselves well to rapid turns. The old GTi was the exception to that rule, a surprising master of the hot-hatch class.

Unfortunately, the new GT doesn't share that sharpness and you'll experience more body lean than you might like.

Our car was the 136 e-SDC6 Hybrid, a feisty little wagon that hits 62mph in 8.1 seconds. It's not quite a warm-hatch, but enough to keep your interest around town and a sweet little powertrain that matches the 208's style well.

Add to that the 55mpg it returns around town, and an asking price of less than £27k, and it's a bit of a bargain. There's a noticeable bit of engine noise as you accelerate away but that quickly fades into the background and road noise is well hushed.

Peugeot 208 GT

Pros
- Cheap to run
- Comfortable for a small car
- High-quality interior
- Punchy petrol engine

Cons
- Not much fun to drive
- Fiddly infotainment system
- Steering wheel design limits driving position

Verdict

The new 208, especially in GT trim, is a pretty little car. It's also surprisingly well made, and a lot of technical finesse has gone into creating a car that has real character.

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BADMINTON

Magnum opus for Cpl Katie Witting

UK Armed Forces success in Belgium for RAF champ

Staff Reporter

SIX-TIME INTER-SERVICES badminton champion and multi-time RAF Championship winner Cpl Katie Witting helped secure an impressive Magnum Tournament third place.

She was one of nine RAF players in three UKAF teams at the Klein Boom Badminton Club-hosted event in Putte, Belgium, securing six wins – four mixed and two doubles – from her 10 matches.

The UKAF contingency consisted of two women and two men per team, with three reserves. All three teams were entered into the top division of four, consisting of 10 teams.

Witting, who played in UKAF team one, said: "There were teams from the UK, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. All matches were either level doubles or mixed doubles, with more of the matches being mixed doubles. We played matches with every person within the team.

"The tournament was scored based on the number of sets won, and all matches were best of 3 sets to 21. The standard of play was very high, with the majority of games going the full distance to three sets."

MIXING IT UP: UKAF pairing Cpl Katie Witting and Pte Bishal Khadka PICTURES: photoshelter.com

The other RAF players were: AS1 Jacob Marklew, Sqn Ldr Charles Badu-Boateng, Flt Lt Bernice Doré, Flt Lt Briony Moir, Cpl Maxwell Clarke, WO Simon Gaines, Cpl Rob Moore and AS1(T) Lewis Farrell.

UKAF team two finished eighth, with UKAF three 10th.

RUNNER-UP: AS1 Drew Clark

DUATHLON

Cleansweep for men in Inters

BACK-TO-BACK Inter-Services wins was the reward for the RAF's duathlon men's team at Thruxton Race Circuit in Andover.

There was a record field for the annual event, which sees competitors complete a 3.8km run and a 22.8km bike ride.

The men's team took all three podium spots, with first-placed Cpl Adam Baker reclaiming the Open Senior Male title he last won in 2023.

And the RAF Women's team took a brilliant second place, with FS Angela Bell second in the Female Open Senior event, behind SSGT Nerys Jones.

RAF Triathlon Association chairman Sqn Ldr Rob Scothern said: "It's always a blessing to not race a duathlon in the howling wind or driving rain, though the scorching temperatures for this year weren't much easier.

"Across the board, the RAF athletes put in some fantastic individual performances but walking away as the overall event champions was the icing on the cake.

"We now have a target on our backs for the Inter-Service Standard Distance Triathlon Championships in a couple of months."

The Male Masters team win also went to the RAF, and the RAF Female Masters were second.

THIRD PLACE: AS1 Ryan Jones

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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CRICKET

WINNING PARTNERSHIP: Plt Off Ellie Stanley (*left*) and Cpl Emilee Steel against Oakham

Ellie and Emilee Steel the show as women gear up for the IST20

Daniel Abrahams

THERE HAS been a truly international feel to the start of the season for the Service's women cricketers.

Led by WO Kerri Hancox, the team have trained with the Cypriot women's team during a training week in the country and then hosted the National Asian Cricket Council in Uxbridge.

The camp is preparation for the Inter-Services T20 championship in Arundel, West Sussex, next month.

Hancox said: "In mid-April we held our annual trials/taster sessions. The aim of the event is to identify talent and grow numbers in the sport and it proved significant in building a pool of players, with approximately 40 women attending."

CAMP: Cpl Carl Kelly coaching women in Cyprus

Following the taster sessions the squad took several players across to Cyprus to undertake pre-season training. During four days of drills and skills coaching, they teamed up with the Cypriot Women's team for a joint training session.

Kicking off their season proper, the team then won an away T20 fixture against Oakham School after 12 overs.

Fielding first, the aviators bowled the home team out in the final over for 97 runs.

Despite losing an early wicket, the new partnership of Plt Off Ellie Stanley and Cpl Emilee Steel secured the win, with Steel getting 52 runs and taking victory in the 12th over.

The team then hosted the National Asian Cricket Council at the Service's home ground – Vine Lane, Uxbridge.

The aviators fielded less experienced batters to allow them to gain exposure against the fast and accurate bowling of the visitors.

Hancox said: "Despite losing the fixture, exposing our less experienced batters is vital for their Inter-Service preparation, and the performances from these games has left us feeling confident ahead of the IS."

The RAF continued to explore this method in their next friendly against Hitchin CC.

Led by first-time team Captain Cpl Chloe Staite, the aviators gave new bowlers an opportunity, with all three – Flt Lt Isobel Woods, Cpl Jess Doyle and Cpl Gina Whitchurch – claiming wickets in the defeat.

The next home matches are June 8, against 40 Overs Club and June 9, versus the Fire Service.

The IST20 tournament at Arundel Castle is on June 12.

Never-say-die performance turns tide for Service's men

THE SERVICE'S men's cricketers continued their unbeaten start to the season with a morale-boosting T20 win over Aston Rowant Cricket Club.

The evening clash saw the aviators win the toss and elect to bat on a good batting wicket with a short boundary to one side.

Despite losing the early wicket of Cpl Tom Shorthouse, a partnership of 68 in seven overs between Flt Lt Sam Moorby (scoring 42 off 32 balls) and Flt Lt Luke Hansford (scoring 45 from 28 balls), laid the platform for a solid batting display.

Cpl Oli Rogoff weighed in with 29 from 17 balls and Cpl Jack Fuller trashed 20 not out from nine balls, to take the aviators to a highly respectable score of 184-8 off their 20 overs.

An early wicket left the hosts at 7/1 after the first over, but a steady build of runs saw Aston reach 100 in the next 8 overs and look on course for a comfortable victory, with the South African overseas pro Hayden Rossouw scoring 62 from 28 balls.

The match turned however with the introduction of Cpl Jack Fuller, who took the vital wicket of Rossouw and claimed overall figures of 3-20 from his four overs.

Once opening batter Durness Mackay-Champion was removed for 58 from 40 balls, the RAF took wickets at regular intervals to claim an unlikely five-run victory.

Sport

RUGBY UNION

Close but no cigar

Gardner: There was 50 points out there for us

Royal Air Force	31
Army	38

CAPTAIN: Cpl Mark Williams PHOTOS: SBS

Daniel Abrahams

IT WAS a humdinger of a closing IS championship clash, but head coach Sgt Tom Gardner has tagged the game a 'missed opportunity' after the aviators lost 38-31.

The clash at Kingsholm Stadium in Gloucester saw both sides hoping to bounce back from narrow defeats at the hands of the Royal Navy.

It also saw the aviators score 30 points for only the fourth time since the tournament began in 1920.

A solid first half, where RAF captain Cpl Mark Williams opened the scoring with a penalty, had RAF hooker Cpl James Roberts touching down for the aviators' first try later in the half, to see them go in 24-10 down at the break.

Gardner said: "We created opportunity after opportunity and just did not get the final pass away. We had a pair of two versus ones in the first half, which we did not complete."

He added: "I'm super proud of the lads, but there was 50 points out there for us, we came to win this, and we go away without the championship win."

Having seen another Army try after the break, scores from AS1(T) Keiron Prescott and Flt Lt Jacob Seddon kept the aviators in touch, with Williams kicking the extras.

Resurgent, the Air Force looked to push home their advantage, and a superb Cpl Zack Taylor try kept them within touching distance at 38-31, but they could not find another score despite a battling charge.

Gardner said: "We started the stronger and ended the stronger, and we come away from the tournament without any injuries.

"I felt we looked the fittest – so we have shown we are competitive. We need to show we can step up another gear or two, which I am confident we can. This group of blokes can be a force to be reckoned with."

● **Follow RAF Rugby Union on Instagram @ rafrugbyunion.**

Women fall short, too

RAF Women	12
Army Women	47

IT'S A WRAP: Fg Off Lucy Nye is tackled PHOTO: SBS

THE SERVICES women's rugby union stars have promised to 'come back stronger next year' after their 47-12 defeat against the Army to close out this year's IS tournament.

Speaking to *RAF News* following the clash at Kingsholm Stadium, home of Gloucester RFC, assistant coach Sqn Ldr Ian Cokayne said: "The result doesn't reflect the quality or character of this group.

"The Army were clinical and dominated the collisions, and we didn't take our chances or make enough tackles in key moments, which was disappointing. That said, I'm proud of the effort from our girls — especially AR Daisey Aspinall on her first cap, and Sgt Annie Forbes, who was outstanding before her injury.

"It was also an emotional day as we said goodbye to Sqn Ldr Lou Langton in her final game – a true servant to RAF rugby."

He added: "This was Sgt Sian Williams' first Inter-Services as head coach, and the first time all three teams were led by women, which in itself is a real step forward for the women's game.

"The RAFRUW programme is much better than this scoreline suggests, and we'll come back stronger next year."

The aviators bounced back from an early Army score with a fantastic offload by Fg Off Lucy Nye to Aspinall, to get a try down for the RAF.

The unconverted effort was followed by further Army scores, before the light blues responded towards the end of the half as Nye broke away from a maul in the Army 22 to dot down over the line for 26-12 at the half-time whistle.

The visitors responded to the RAF's late try and sparked a dominant second half to end the game – and retain the IS crown – without seeing the aviators add to their total.

MOTORSPORT

Pair chasing off gremlins

ON COURSE: RAF pairing, *front*

A HUGELY-POSITIVE testing weekend saw the Service's sidecar team gain a hat-trick of podium finishes at Snetterton to set up their season.

Sgt Mark Middleton and Cpl Rob Atkinson blew off the cobwebs with two BEMSEE motorcycle racing club races.

Two high-speed second places were followed by a third as the aviators sought to remedy the mechanical issues that plagued them throughout last season.

All three events were Club Level, with the RAF pairing riding out two procession races to secure comfortable seconds, while in the final race of the weekend they had a coming together in a field of 26 riders, which saw them forced back to ninth, before they battled their way back to an impressive third place finish.

Middleton said: "We take away nothing but confidence with the bike and both the rider and passenger's abilities after the winter off.

"The mechanical issues faced last season have been addressed and we have a clear direction to head in. The podium finishes are a real confidence boost for the whole team, so we are looking forward to the first round of the British sidecar championships at Donington Park."

● **Follow the team on Instagram @raf_motorsports.**

BMX

Service banks on Haywood and Watson

SERVICE BMX stars cashed in at Rounds 3 & 4 of the British Cycling Lloyds Bank BMX National Series with a first and seventh place finals finish.

Sgt Matt Haywood and Off Cdt Pete Watson entered the rounds looking for more valuable points towards UCI World Championship Qualification for 2026.

Cumbernauld, Scotland was the venue as Watson took seventh in the 18-29 Men's Cruiser A-final in round three, while Haywood shone in Gosport 50+ Grand Vet Cruisers.

Watson – double biking in the 19-29 Men's Open and 18-29 Mens Cruiser, and riding the ICE-Element F-22 Frames from team sponsor DC Cycles – made the A final and seventh before taking 14th in the B Final on his 20". The following day he made the B Final, finishing 13th on the Cruiser and 15th on the 20".

SEVENTH: Off Cdt Pete Watson (*right*) PHOTO: ABI TAYLOR

Struggling with a knee problem, Haywood still managed 13th on Saturday but was forced to withdraw after moto two on Sunday due to his injury.

Having rested up during the week, he hit the ground running in Gosport for Round 4 of the South Regional Series in the 50+ Grand Vet Cruisers.

Winning two of his motos, the aviator unclipped from his pedal in moto 3, before recovering to finish third.

In the A final Haywood needed a good start to be in with a chance and shot into the first corner, from where he took the lead and held it to the line for the win.

SKATEBOARDING

PHOTOS: Vis Com Ops at RAF Halton

We're jamming

THINGS WERE jam hot at the latest Service skateboard meet at the XC indoor skatepark in Hemel Hempstead.

The skills and tricks sessions saw skaters battle out a round robin tricks competition, as well as debutants being coached in 'dropping in' for the first time (a skater 'drops in' from the top of a half or quarter pipe to begin a run).

● Follow RAF Skateboard on Instagram @rafskateboarding.

EQUITATION

Martin reins supreme at I.S. Loriners

Dressage and show jump wins for WO

Daniel Abrahams

THERE WAS a winning start for the RAF at the Inter-Service Loriners competition's opening round.

Three days of competition at the Air Force-hosted event at Sparsholt College, Hampshire, saw riders tackle dressage, show jumping and arena eventing.

The RAF team consisted of Wg Cdr Caitlin Wroe, WO Keeley Martin, Flt Lt Mandy Meikle and FS Mel Day – who were victorious in the dressage leg victory of 2024.

Opening with the dressage discipline, Martin led the charge with a commanding individual win on her horse Rachan Wind Dancer, followed by Meikle in third, as the aviators beat the Army into second and Royal Navy third.

Martin then showed her versatility, winning the 1.10m show jumping and placing fourth in a hotly-contested London International Horse Show qualifier.

The highest-placed RAF rider in the qualifier, Wg Cdr Sarah Boon and Tango du Cache Pot Z, posted a perfect double clear round, only losing by a fraction of a second in the jump-off.

The pair also took second place in the 1.10m and won the 1.05m with a speedy jump-off.

Boon said: "I'm so proud of Tango, it's all starting to come together this year and our hard work is paying off. He is feeling great and loving his jumping, so we are excited for the season to come."

AS2 Rowan Duke made a winning return to competition following injury, riding King's Silver to victory in the pick your own Medium dressage, choosing the technical Medium 6 test to showcase the 24-year-old thoroughbred's lateral work.

New pairing of Flt Lt Nicole Gent and her young horse Ballyvadd Cornet scored the highest of any RAF combination in the dressage with 72.83 to head the 26-strong Preliminary 2 class.

Sgt Nicole Stephenson and mare Ghaicorrie posted a win in the Novice dressage and only knocked the final rail in the London Qualifier to finish just outside the placings.

Flt Lt Ellie Brewer then dominated the higher arena eventing classes with a first and second in the 90cm and 1m classes on her mare Epasja.

HIGH SCORER: Flt Lt Nicole Gent
PHOTOS: WO GEORGE PARISH (RET'D)

WINNING START: RAF Equitation Association Loriners team

5 pages of **RAF Sport**

Double the joy in duathlon Inters

See page 23

Rugby teams lose out to Army

See page 26

FOOTBALL

Boulmer make it Cup hat-trick

Brave Lossie go down fighting

Daniel Abrahams

RAF Boulmer	4
RAF Lossiemouth	3

A CLASSIC RAF FA Cup final saw Boulmer take home the silverware for the third time after a thrilling 4-3 win over Lossiemouth at Oxford City FC's MGroup Stadium.

Boulmer raced into a 3-0 lead thanks to goals from Sgt Kevin Lindsay, Cpl Sean Jennings and Cpl Phil Bright, but Lossie hit back with two goals in four minutes to set the tempo for the battle royal final that will live long in the memory.

Boulmer FC captain Sgt Max Fox said: "I'm both proud and lucky to skipper this team. What we have achieved over recent years is special but unsurprising given the quality and dedication everyone involved has for little old Boulmer. There's genuine love across the whole squad and I couldn't ask for a better group of lads."

Boulmer made the initial breakthrough, as Lindsay's header was adjudged to have crossed the line before the defensive clearance. What followed was a lengthy delay before Boulmer could celebrate.

They made it 2-0 with a well-worked goal as a composed Jennings, who was awarded Man of the Match following the final whistle, netted, then following the break Bright added a third, but Lossie wouldn't go down without a fight.

A handball against Cpl Ben McConnell gave them a way back in from the spot, and James Johnston converted with ease before Cullen tapped in from close range to make it 3-2.

Boulmer rallied again, and Cpl James May made it four after Lossie failed to clear.

The game had another twist as Lossie slotted home a second penalty, with Boulmer going down to 10-men as Lindsay saw red in the final minutes.

Despite the pressure, it was Boulmer who were the victors for the third time in the competition's history.

PROUD: Boulmer skipper Sgt Max Fox is presented with the RAF Cup

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Cricketers show their Steel

See page 25

R'n'R

Win explosive action-comedy on Blu-ray ● **See page 3**

Comedy's golden age – The Last Laugh

● See page 4

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

BREW + BAKE!

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

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

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

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Charity Registration No 206002 (SC038828 in Scotland).

DVDs
Dick Dynamite: 1944
Out now on DVD, Blu-ray and digital

Win!

Punk star 'Steed' sticks it to the Nazi scientists

DICK DYNAMITE: 1944 **is a gory, tongue-in-cheek homage to World War II adventure films, cheesy 1980's action and scuzzy grindhouse cinema. Helmed by Scottish guitarist, Robbie 'Steed' Davidson, best known from legendary punk band, The Exploited, he has crafted a loving tribute to the films he grew up with. In his film, we meet a tough, one-liner-spouting action hero taking on Nazi scientists, zombies and ninjas during the final days of the war.**

As for the project's origin, Davidson told *RAF News*: "While on tour with The Exploited, I was on a flight and peering over people's shoulders, seeing the films they were watching. I came up with the idea for what I thought would be the ultimate movie, *Saving Private Ryan*… if it starred Arnold Schwarzenegger! As a kid, I loved WWII adventures and Arnie films, so it sounded like the best film in the world to me." He added: "I wrote the movie several years ago but never thought I'd have the time, budget or skillset to make it happen. But after my last short film, I made a crowdfunding video and we were off."

Made for a modest and very impressive £10k, Davidson was resourceful in bringing production value to his film, even gaining access to military hardware. He explained: "I got press passes to the C-47s arriving in Scotland, before they headed to Normandy for the 75th anniversary of D-Day. I thought, how can I secure filming onboard a plane? My friend and I arrived in her DeLorean and upon arrival, the pilots came out and asked if they could sit in the car and have their pictures taken. We said, sure, so long as we can film in your plane tomorrow.

"We also had access to a Spitfire replica. We filmed on location at a local airport in Scotland which happened to house a Piper Cub that was used in D-Day. Plus, we acquired lots of costumes, uniforms and props which were very useful."

As a busy touring musician, Davidson even used music connections to enlist cameos from members of heavy rock and punk bands like Queens of the Stone Age, Suicidal Tendencies, Sleaford Mods, Rancid and many others.

What does he hope audiences take away from experiencing it? He said: "The film has been seen all over the world and played a lot of sold-out cinemas and film festivals. It seems to be a fun movie to watch with friends. So, I'd be very happy with that, just save some beer and pizza for me!"

EXPLOSIVE STUFF: Actor 'Snars' lets rip as Dick Dynamite. *Inset*, film's driving force Exploited guitarist Robbie 'Steed' Davidson

Win film on Blu-ray

DICK DYNAMITE: 1944 **(15) is out now on Blu-ray, DVD & Digital and we have copies to win on Blu-ray. For your chance to win one, tell us:**

What is the name of the director of *Dick Dynamite: 1944*?

Email your answer, marked Dick Dynamite competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: Tracey Allen, RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by June 13.

Film
Motel Destino (18)
Out now

Trapped in sleazy motel purgatory

STRAINED RELATIONS: Heraldo, Dayana and Elias

IN KARIM AÏNOUZ'S Brazilian neo-noir, a young gangster hits a dead end, holed up in a dingy sex motel.

Twenty-year-old Heraldo (Iago Xavier) is put on a job with his brother Jorge, but after meeting a woman the night before, he's seduced, scammed, and left stranded at the Motel Destino. The mark slips away, and Jorge ends up dead. Burning the last of his bridges, Heraldo has nowhere left to go but back to the motel, hoping they'll take pity, or offer him a job.

Run by married couple Elias (Fábio Assunção) and Dayana (Nataly Rocha), the motel becomes Heraldo's only shot at survival. But earning his keep means staying in their good graces while dodging the enemies he's made outside.

With its red-lit walls, UV glow, and constant disinfectant spray, the motel is a perfect purgatory. You can practically smell the place. The moans of the guests leak through the walls, providing a backing track for the drama between Heraldo and his new bosses – sometimes adding levity, sometimes dread. As one character puts it: they moan so hard it sounds like they're being chopped up.

It's a sordid slice of hell that can feel like a Bosch painting, especially with all of the animals around, sometimes slithering their way in, including a huge symbolically potent snake, discovered in the hot tub.

The film starts with promise but quickly loses steam. By the time it latches onto Heraldo's affair with Dayana and their half-baked plan to escape, it's too rushed to hit hard. Still, sleazy Elias is a welcome menace, with the physicality of the central trio becoming a language of its own.

A feverish noir soaked in sweat, bleach, and bad decisions – even if it can't quite hold its own.

Three out of five roundels

Review by Sam Cooney

Theatre
The Last Laugh
UK tour

THE THREE AMIGOS: 'Morecombe', 'Cooper' and 'Monkhouse' in the play

Comedy legends still having the last laugh

THREE OF Britain's most loved comedians are reunited in a new play touring the UK this summer.

Following sell-out runs at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and London's West End, *The Last Laugh* goes to various venues in June, July and August including Richmond Theatre, Surrey, Milton Keynes Theatre, Glasgow's Theatre Royal, The Alexandra in Birmingham and Manchester Opera House. The tour culminates at The Grand Theatre, Blackpool on August 31.

Written and directed by Paul Hendy, *The Last Laugh* reimagines the lives of three of Britain's all-time greatest comedy heroes – Tommy Cooper, Eric Morecambe and Bob Monkhouse. It stars Bob Golding as Morecambe, Damian Williams as Cooper and Simon Cartwright as Monkhouse, all reprising their roles in the Edinburgh and West End runs.

Producer Jamie Wilson said: "The young team here at Jamie Wilson Productions were bowled over by the relevance of Cooper, Morecambe and Monkhouse's timeless comedy and, after seeing the play myself in Edinburgh, I just knew it had to have a further life so many more people could experience it."

He added: "What is so brilliant about it is that the audiences who love and remember Eric, Tommy and Bob will be able to relive their comedy greatness and those that don't will be introduced to the genius of these national treasures."

Golding starred as Eric Morecambe in the West End hit *Morecambe* at the Duchess Theatre, for which he was nominated for an Olivier Award, with the show winning the Olivier Award for Best Entertainment.

Williams played Tommy Cooper in the tour of *Being Tommy Cooper*. His many other theatre credits include Edna Turnblad in the national tour of the musical *Hairspray,* as well as the national tour of *The Ladykillers* and the plays *Bouncers* and *Educating Rita*. For the past 17 years he has been the resident Dame in the pantomimes at the Sheffield Lyceum.

Cartwright has been an actor and impressionist since the 1980s, appearing at The Comedy Store many times. He has also appeared in the award-winning Channel 4 hit *Toast of London* and the films *Mother's Day* and *Closure*. He recently toured the UK in the stage play *Howerd's End,* in which he portrayed the legendary comedian Frankie Howerd.

Go to: thelastlaughplay.co.uk for full tour details.

UKULELE BABY: Bob Golding playing it for laughs as Eric Morecambe

Competition
Battle Proms
Summer dates

Battle Proms 2 celebrates VE

GLAMOUR: Battle Proms Belles

JOIN THE celebrations at the Battle Proms… pack a picnic and chill the fizz; this year's promises to be bigger and better than ever!

Alongside the breathtaking displays the Battle Proms is famous for – uplifting music, fireworks, Spitfire, cannons, cavalry, parachutes – 2025 will be a Vintage Spectacular to celebrate the VE Day 80th anniversary year in style.

If swing is your thing you can get your toes tapping with the gorgeous harmonies and 1940s glamour of the Battle Proms Belles and their live band, and join in with the fabulous moves from the Victory Swing dancers.

Around the arena you'll be invited to revive the nostalgia of a bygone era at the fascinating World War II living history displays led by the country's foremost wartime enthusiasts, with authentic vintage vehicles, memorabilia and expert re-enactors; what better way to mark this specia

Enjoy a programme of i and the musicals music you know *Jupiter* accompa from the legend *Overture* and Be

FLYING THE FLAG: Battle Proms festival-goers at one of last year's events and Worcestershire Cavalry Re-enactors

Edited by Tracey Allen

Win!

2025 Day

l anniversary year?
breathtaking orchestral
conic pieces from film, TV
s alongside uplifting classical
v and love, including Holst's
anied by an aerial display
ary Grace Spitfire; the *1812*
eethoven's '*Battle Symphony*'
complete with 200 live firing cannons; themes from *The Great Escape* and *633 Squadron*; much-loved operatic arias from superstar soprano Denise Leigh, and all closing with a jubilant flag-waving, sing-along finale with all the traditional proms favourites like *Jerusalem, Rule, Britannia!, Land of Hope and Glory* and more under a sky of dazzling fireworks.

● Head to battleproms.com for full programme details and tickets.

Win £110 ticket prize for summer spectacular

SIX LUCKY readers can win a pair of tickets to the concert of their choice:

● **Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire – Saturday, July 5,** in the beautiful, Capability Brown landscaped Palace gardens.

● **Burghley House, Lincolnshire – Saturday, July 12,** set on the lawns overlooking the stunning Elizabethan architecture of Burghley House.

● **Hatfield Park, Hertfordshire – Saturday, July 19,** the historic and leafy Queen Elizabeth Oak Field of Hatfield Park is the setting, just five minutes' walk from Hatfield station, which is just 20 minutes by train from King's Cross London.

● **Highclere Castle, Hampshire – Saturday, August 2,** Perfect for music lovers and *Downton Abbey* fans, Highclere Castle overlooks the iconic castle architecture made famous by the hit ITV show.

To be in with a chance of winning a pair of tickets to Battle Proms (rrp £110), answer this question correctly:

Which special anniversary will be celebrated at Battle Proms this year?

Email your answer to: info@battleproms.com, subject: RAF NEWS COMPETITION, to arrive by June 13, 2025. Please note entries must be sent by email so that your prize tickets can be sent out electronically. Please remember to state on your entry your first and second choice of venue from the four listed above.

Don't want to leave it to chance? Go to battleproms.com to book your tickets and make the most of the military and group discounts.

Travelling from further afield? Battle Proms hotel & picnic packages are now available, with lots of added extras to make your experience even more special. Just the ticket for a celebratory summer getaway! See battleproms.com/hotel-packages for more details.

DVDs

The Serpent Queen (15)

Out now on Blu-ray and DVD (Dazzler Media)

Win!

Queen of deception

STRONG WOMAN: Samantha Morton as the Queen of France

BAFTA-WINNER Samantha Morton (*The Last Panthers, The Walking Dead*), takes the lead in *The Serpent Queen,* which chronicles Catherine de Medici's journey from an orphaned Italian noblewoman to the powerful Queen of France.

Facing betrayal, political intrigue and religious turmoil, Catherine uses her wit, cunning and ruthlessness to secure her position and protect her family, weaving a dark feminist tale of survival in the 16th-Century French court.

The series is based on the book *Catherine de Medici: Renaissance Queen of France* by Leonie Frieda and is directed by Justin Haythe.

The impressive cast list also features Minnie Driver as Queen Elizabeth I and Charles Dance as Pope Clement.

The complete season 1 and 2 collection of *The Serpent Queen* is just out on Blu-ray and DVD and we have copies up for grabs on DVD.

To be in with a chance of winning this great prize, answer the following question correctly:

Who wrote the book on which *The Serpent Queen* is based?

Email your answer, marked The Serpent Queen 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 June 13.

Remember to include your full postal address with your entry. Please note that entries to any other email address except the one above will be discounted.

POPE CLEMENT: Charles Dance

QUEEN ELIZABETH I: Minnie Driver

Music

OMD

Junk Culture (remastered)

Another OMD hunk of Junk

FOLLOWING A headline date at London's O2 Arena last year, OMD have announced plans to celebrate the 40th anniversary of their acclaimed album *Junk Culture* with a special vinyl release, out on June 20.

Originally released on April 30, 1984 and the band's fifth album, *Junk Culture* is arriving on vinyl for the first time since the late 80s. It has been remastered from the original ½ inch reels and cut at half speed by Miles Showell at Abbey Road Studios.

The release follows 40th anniversary reissues including *Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark* (1980), *Organisation* (1980), *Architecture & Morality* (1981) and *Dazzle Ships* (1983).

Junk Culture reached Gold status in the UK and landed in the UK's Top 10 album chart on release. Produced by the band and Brian Tench (with additional contributions by Tony Visconti), the album was recorded at a variety of locations including AIR Studios in Montserrat, using the band's newly-acquired, state-of-the-art Fairlight CMI sampler keyboard and mixed at Wisseloord in Hilversum, Netherlands.

REMASTERED: OMD's *Junk Culture*

The record also returned OMD to the upper reaches of the singles charts, with *Locomotion* (top 5 in the UK and top 10 across Europe), *Talking Loud and Clear* (No. 11 in the UK, top 5 in Belgium, the Netherlands and Ireland), and the club hit *Tesla Girls* (No. 21 in the UK, No. 8 in the Netherlands). All three remain live favourites.

The version of *Tesla Girls* on the remastered release differs slightly from the one used on the original album.

"The final version we did for the original album was made out of the 12-inch extended version," explained band member Paul Humphreys. "For this reissue, we elected to use the Wisseloord edit version as it's the same arrangement that we play live, and I think it's the best one. The one on the original album goes around the piano riff twice in the intro but I think this Wisseloord edit was always the definitive version."

Currently on a US tour, OMD have sold 25 million singles and 15 million albums, establishing them as electronic synthesiser pioneers.

● **Go to: omd.uk.com for more details.**

R'n'R

Your Announcements

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

Death

WE are very sad to announce that Wendy Wright died on April 13, aged just 65, after enduring cancer for some time. Wendy enlisted as a Supplier Logistics in January 1977 and, after completing successful tours at home and abroad, left as a Flight Sergeant in October 2006 to join Augusta Westland as a Logistics Manager at RAF Benson.
From July 2017 Wendy had a successful and very happy second career in facilities management at Bartholomew School in Eynsham and subsequently Europa School UK in Culham.
Wendy will be greatly missed by her loving husband Mark and her family and her many friends and colleagues from home and abroad. RIP darling Wendy.

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.

12 ex 72nd Entry Aircraft Apprentices (RAF Locking) will meet on the weekend July 25-27 to celebrate the passing of 70 years since passing out. We think that it is a great effort to meet up after all that time. Part of our weekend celebration will be a visit to the International Bomber Command Centre in Lincoln. Please email: davegunby@btinternet.com for more information.

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.

THE RAF Masirah and RAF Salalah Veterans Association AGM and Reunion Gala Dinner is to be held on Saturday, October 4 at The Park Royal Hotel, Stretton, Warrington, Cheshire WA4 4NS. All Members are welcome to attend.
If you are interested in attending the Reunion, please contact Alan Teasdale on: joalteas@btinternet.com. If you would like to join the Association as a Member, please visit our website: www.omanrafveterans.org for further information.

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

THE Southend Group of the National Service (RAF) Association holds its next Social Lunch on June 25 at the Castle Hadleigh, Essex at 1pm. Guest speaker will be Wg Cdr (Ret'd) Neil Tomlin, Area Director of the RAF Benevolent Fund. All RAF veterans and guests are welcome. Contact Area Organiser Ron Spack: 01268 779697 for more information.

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

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 email the committee: plumbersrest@outlook.com.

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

IF you trained as an RAF Administrative Apprentice (or you 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.

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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Sign up for RAFA Rides

IN THE SADDLE: Taking part in last year's event

RAFA Rides, the Air Force charity's global cycling event, takes place next month at four venues across the country.

"Cyclists unable to attend one of the in-person events can sign up for RAFA Rides 'Your Way.' This option allows teams and individuals to create their own events from wherever they are in the world, choosing their own date, start time, location and distance," said a spokesperson for the charity.

RAFA Rides is now in its eighth year – over the past seven years, 5,000 riders have taken part from across the world.

Liam Clark-Brown, the RAF Association's Associate Director of Fundraising & Engagement, said: "Since its inception RAFA Rides has been a key moment in the charity cycling events calendar, uniting Air Force communities locally and internationally.

"It not only fosters a deep sense of connection between riders, but it also encourages participants to invest in their own physical and mental wellbeing."

Money raised through RAFA Rides will go towards the RAF Association's work providing help and support to thousands in the RAF community. In 2024, the event raised £150,000.

All the in-person events offer route options of 25, 50, 75 and 100 miles and take place on the following dates: Marham (June 7), Kendrew Barracks, formerly RAF Cottesmore (June 14), Brize Norton (June 21) and Leeming (June 28).

RAFA Rides 'Your Way' runs from June 1-30.

● Go to: rides.rafa.org.uk to find out more and sign up.

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.

Your Announcements

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

SWEET TREATS: There's plenty for all to enjoy at The Big Lift Off

Free family fun at Museum

THE RAF Museum Midlands is inviting families to experience The Big Lift Off, a free event that includes aerial displays and lively ground activities for all ages.

Taking place on May 31, the event also features a skydiving display and a Lancaster flypast from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (weather permitting), live music, barbecues and interactive family games.

The Big Lift Off marks the launch of the Museum's new fundraising appeal – The Crate Escape. The appeal aims to raise the final funds needed for new redevelopment plans that include a new collections hub at the Museum.

Once completed, the hub will house more than 50,000 historic objects, making them accessible to the public for the first time.

Work on the Museum's major transformation will begin later this year, with completion expected in 2027.

● Go to: rafmuseum.org/midlands for more details.

Dan dares for vets charity

AN AMBASSADOR for veterans charity Launchpad, Dan Smith is setting out this summer on one of his biggest fundraising adventure challenges to date – aiming to become the first person from the UK to paddle 500km solo along the Hess River in the Northern Yukon, Canada.

He starts the challenge on July 14 and will be flown into the Yukon – one of Canada's remotest regions – faced with relentless wilderness, fending for himself armed with only his canoe, bear spray, a shot gun to protect himself from apex predators and enough food and supplies to last him for two weeks, said a Launchpad spokesperson.

"The Hess is considered to be the most remote and challenging canoe-able whitewater river in Yukon and while Dan aims to become the first person from the UK to complete the challenge in just 14 days, he is also doing it to raise awareness and money for two UK veterans' charities, Launchpad and Team Forces," the spokesperson added.

INTREPID: Dan Smith with his trusty canoe

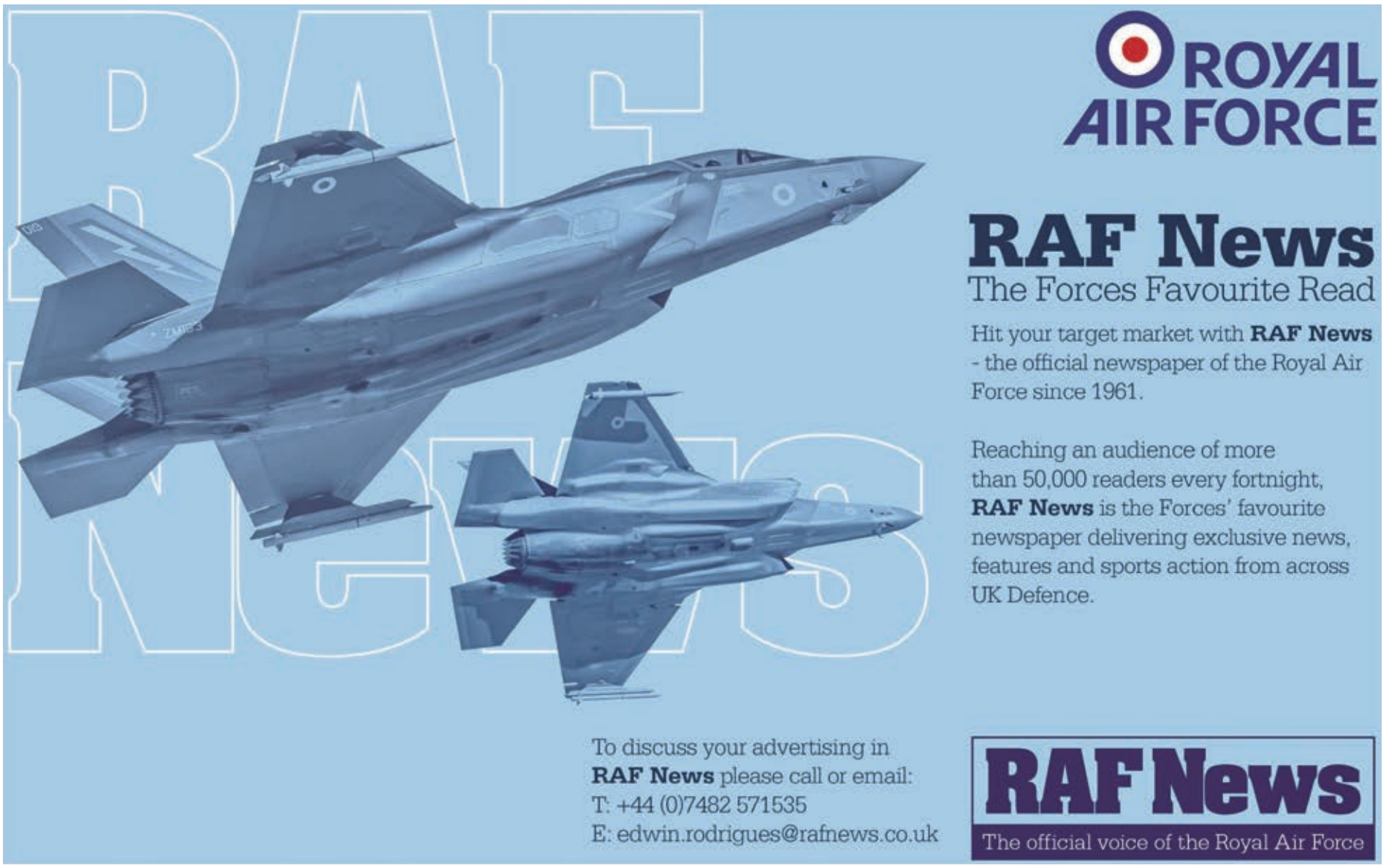
Army vet Dan, 45, from Northumberland, is no stranger to setting himself personal challenges. In 2018 and to mark the centenary of the end of World War I, he kayaked the length of Britain solo, covering 998 miles in just 53 days, raising £27,000.

He said: "I'm really looking forward to this latest challenge, it has always been a dream of mine. I can't wait to experience the feeling of being flown into the Yukon and be dropped off on Keele Lake. I'm super excited."

Founded in 2013 Launchpad provides accommodation and targeted support to UK Armed Forces veterans experiencing homelessness and unemployment.

Dan aims to raise £30,000 to be split between Launchpad and Team Forces.

● Go to: www.gofundme.com/f/1oip56azg0 to donate.

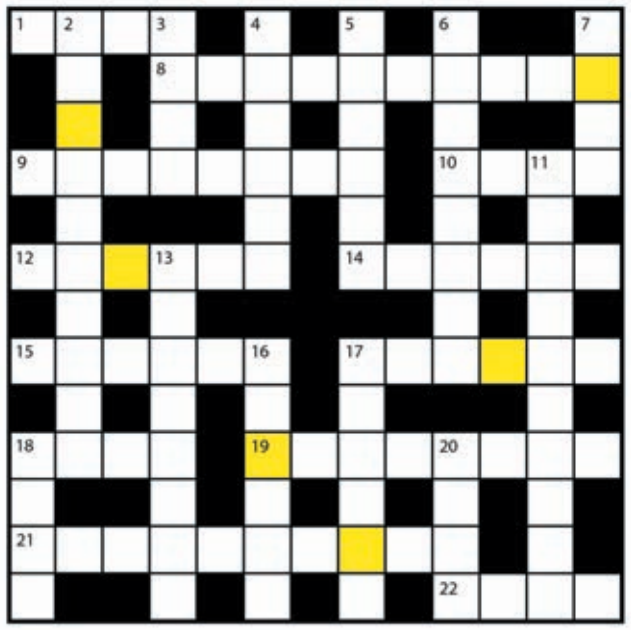


R'n'R

Crossword
No. 386

Solve the crossword, then rearrange the 6 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
1. Vegetable found in Christmas pudding **(4)**
8. Ship that's welcome at parties **(10)**
9. Disney character on RAF plane **(8)**
10. Make minuscule Penny cry **(4)**
12. Solid baby's bed sent up into the atmosphere **(6)**
14. RAF aircraft first named in moving remembrance of Dambuster **(6)**
15. Note weapon with quick look **(6)**
17. Break promise, upsetting 'Brighton Rock' author **(6)**
18. In Paris, I embrace article on Tarzan's girl **(4)**
19. Big Mama on way to UK's largest maritime combat drill **(8)**
21. RAF aircraft may ruin arches **(10)**
22. Leicester City on edge **(4)**

Down
2. Mighty damaging, a plant to be reckoned with **(10)**
3. Record Diana's 100 **(4)**
4. See 18 Down
5. Public relations is working from Wormwood Scrubs **(6)**
6. Bowman volunteers upset superhero **(8)**
7. Leak in wet blanket **(4)**
11. No need to continue when huge Adonis topples **(6,4)**
13. May baseball's Yogi fly RAF plane? **(8)**
16. Moral principles from English county, we hear **(6)**
17. He represents a minor monarch **(6)**
18. And 4 Down. By upsetting Holy Jean he becomes Defence Secretary **(4,6)**
20. Fail to catch Colleen **(4)**

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

.....

RAF aircraft: .....Crossword No. 386

Solution to Crossword No. 385
Across – **7.** Hangar **8.** Charge **10.** Vampire **11.** Tango **12.** Open **13.** Viola **17.** Badge **18.** John **22.** Ready **23.** Adamant **24.** Benson **25.** Admire
Down – **1.** Chevron **2.** Enemies **3.** Cabin **4.** Whittle **5.** Frank **6.** Melon **9.** Hemingway **14.** Babylon **15.** Romania **16.** Another **19.** Probe **20.** Haunt **21.** Paddy
RAF activity – Reconnaissance

Su Doku
No. 396

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.

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

Solution to Su Doku No. 395

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

Music
Anna Lapwood
New album and UK tour

Firedove from night owl

INCLUDED IN the Spring 2025 *Sunday Times* Young Power List celebrating the 30 most powerful people under 30 in the UK, acclaimed organist Anna Lapwood releases her new album *Firedove* on May 30 via Sony Classical.

Following a sold-out concert at London's Royal Albert Hall earlier this month, she will be appearing at the BBC Proms at the same venue on August 8.

Anna recorded *Firedove* through the night at Nidaros Cathedral, a spectacular Gothic masterpiece founded in the 11th century in Trondheim, Norway.

She said: "I wanted to create an album where the listener doesn't quite know where it's going to go next. There are lots of little Easter eggs in there that you wouldn't expect – even the first appearance of the choir – and a through-line of flight and spreading wings, because this does feel as though I've found what I want to say as an artist. I'm very proud of it."

Described as Anna's most personal record to date, *Firedove* demonstrates her open-minded approach to music, one where a Vierne scherzo can sit alongside a rendition of Robbie Williams *Angels* and Maurice Duruflé's *Prelude and Fugue* with Bob Dylan's *Make You Feel My Love*.

She is no stranger to blending classical music with pop having performed with Raye, Florence & The Machine and Aurora, even finding time to give Tom Cruise an impromptu organ lesson during a late-night rehearsal at the Albert Hall.

Anna will be playing live dates around the UK in December, including Salisbury Cathedral (December 6), Birmingham Town Hall (Dec 9), St Mary's Catholic Cathedral, Edinburgh (Dec 12) and Llandaff Cathedral, Cardiff (Dec 21).

● **Go to: annalapwood.co.uk for full tour details.**

Film Review
Midas Man (12)
On streaming platforms now (Signature Entertainment)

Epstein: the fifth Beatle

WITH SAM Mendes' all-star Beatles biopics slated for 2028, *Midas Man*, a much smaller film by comparison, turns its attention to the brains behind the band, the so-called fifth Beatle: Brian Epstein.

MIDAS MAN: Jacob Fortune-Lloyd as Brian Epstein

Jacob Fortune-Lloyd plays Epstein with reserved charm: well-dressed, soft-spoken, and polished, thanks to his RADA education (as his mother, played by Emily Watson, proudly reminds us). A well-to-do and ambitious young Jewish man, Brian transforms the family's furniture shop into one of Northern England's most successful record outlets. His father (Eddie Marsan) is dubious about Brian's ambition to manage a band – after seeing four unknown Scouse lads whip up a frenzy at The Cavern Club. But Brian sees something more.

Casting relatively unknown actors as The Beatles is a smart move. They resemble the Fab Four just enough (ignoring height) to sell the idea that they're still just talented young boys. They aren't yet icons, but Epstein will change that – dressing them in suits, securing a record deal, and replacing Pete Best with Ringo.

The Beatles' rapid rise dominates the film, but there are nods to Epstein's other signings such as Gerry and the Pacemakers and Cilla Black (Darci Shaw). Yet as his business thrives, his personal life falters. At a time when homosexuality was illegal, Epstein lived under the constant threat of blackmail, leading him toward self-medication.

As the story stretches from Liverpool gigs to American stardom and Brian's decline, the tone begins to wobble. Fortune-Lloyd carries the early part of the film well, charmingly talking to camera over stock footage, but as the story tilts into trials of torment, the shift feels forced and uneven.

Midas Man may lack the polish of a major studio project, but it uses its scrappiness to great effect, especially in its depiction of those thrilling early days.

3 roundels out of 5

Review by Sam Cooney