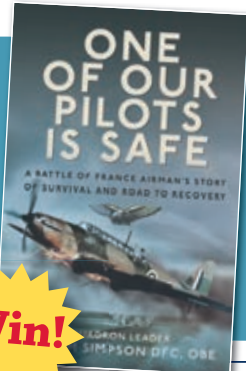


The Forces' favourite paper

Story of survival against all odds

● See page 17



Win!

Mystery of the death of Dams raid chief

● See page 19



Win!

ROYAL AIR FORCE

Friday, December 27, 2024
Edition No.1599 £1.20

RAF NEWS



Defining people and moments of the RAF year

See pages 13-15



Sports Year
Take a look back at the 2024 action



● See pages 25-27

Skeleton
Flt Lt Burger is pushing on

● See p23



Fitness
It's working out for Cpl

● See p23




Typhoons in Pole position



TYPHOONS ARE set to guard Polish skies in 2025 to face down the threat from Russia as Nato ramps up air defences in the Eastern European country with more than 1,000 anti-air missiles and 100 launchers, Defence chiefs have confirmed.
● See p9 for full story

BiteSize

“To take up the baton is a true honour,”




New Band of the Royal Air Force College chief Fg Off Tim Hynd
See p9

“Operating theatres are dynamic places, like I’m used to,”



NHS wants more Forces vets
See p7

“It was the perfect night, I boxed so well,”



Cpl Brad Axe bounces back to winning ways in Bethnal Green
See p28

Laser drone buster



ROYAL AIR FORCE
RAF News

RAF News
Room 68
Lancaster Building
HQ Air Command
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP14 4UE

Editor: Simon Williams
Email: editor@rafnews.co.uk

Features Editor: Tracey Allen
Email: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk

News Editor: Simon Mander

Sport: sports@rafnews.co.uk

All advertising:
Edwin Rodrigues
Tel: 07482 571535
Email: edwin.rodrigues@rafnews.co.uk

Subscriptions and distribution:
RAF News Subscriptions
c/o Intermedia,
Unit 6 The Enterprise Centre,
Kelvin Lane, Crawley
RH10 9PE
Tel: 01293 312191
Email: rafnewssubs@subscriptionhelpline.co.uk

Staff Reporter

A HIGH-ENERGY laser weapon fitted to an armoured vehicle has destroyed flying drones in the latest UK tests of direct energy weapons.

The powerful laser fired a beam of infra-red light from a Wolfhound troop carrier, disabling hovering drones, during the trials at the MoD’s Radnor Range in Wales.

It follows the first successful firing of the DragonFire system earlier this year and development of laser defences for aircraft, including the intelligence-gathering Shadow R2 and A400M transporter, to shoot down and disable threats.

Defence Minister Maria Eagle said: “This ground-breaking technology demonstrates Britain’s commitment to staying at the forefront of military innovation.

“This laser weapon system represents a significant step forward in our development of possible future defence capabilities and showcases British engineering excellence.”



LIGHT SPEED: The high-energy weapon fitted to an armoured vehicle in latest MoD test. Inset, the shattered drone after being struck by infra-red beam

This Week In History



1919 Churchill war role

WINSTON CHURCHILL is appointed as Secretary of State for War and the Royal Air Force in Prime Minister Lloyd George’s government.

1941 Malta attacked

AIRFIELDS AT Luqa and Halfar and the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious come under attack in the first major blitz on Malta.



1972 AWACS debut

8 SQN becomes the first RAF airborne early warning unit operating the Shackleton from Lossiemouth.

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



SUPPORT: Mr Healey with Ukraine deputy Defence Minister Serhiy Boyev

Aid pledge to Ukraine

BRITAIN IS to send £225m in military aid to Ukraine to bolster its defences ahead of the start of the New Year.

During a visit to Kyiv, Defence Secretary John Healey promised the money to develop the country's air defences and Navy.

He said: "Nearly three years after Putin launched his illegal full-scale invasion, the depths of his miscalculation are clearer than ever, as the brave people of Ukraine continue to defy all expectations with their unbreakable spirit.

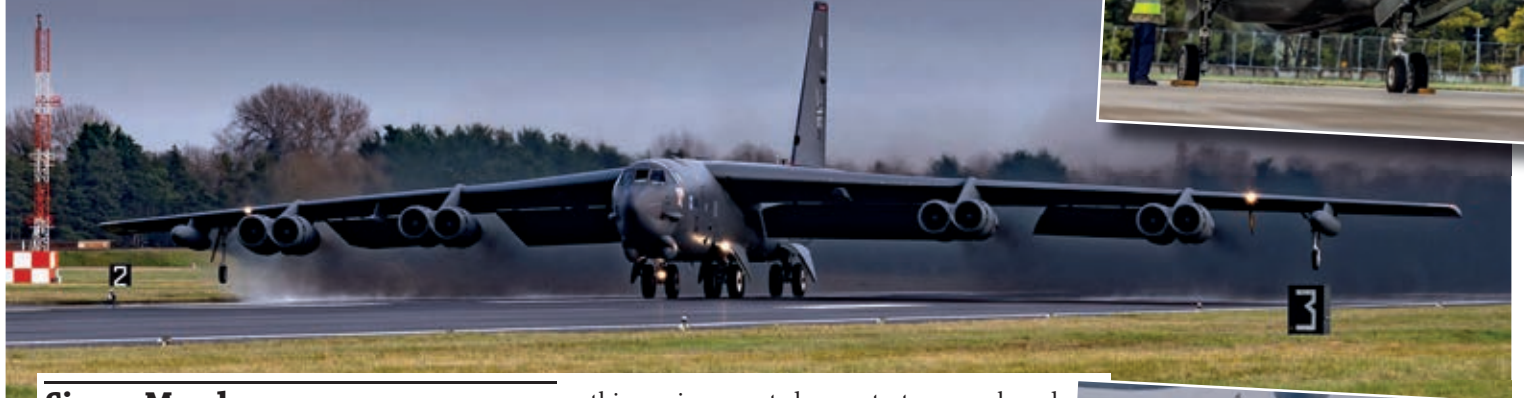
"But they cannot go it alone – which is why the UK will step up our international leadership on Ukraine throughout 2025."

The aid includes £68m for air defence equipment including radars and counter-drone systems as the Kremlin continues targeting infrastructure as winter bites.

Mr Healey added: "Our support for Ukraine is ironclad, and during my meetings in Kyiv I made clear the UK's support will continue for as long as it takes, regardless of the situation we will always stand shoulder to shoulder to ensure Putin cannot win."

Arctic raiders

F-35 joins mighty B-52 for High North security drill



Simon Mander

AMERICAN BOMBERS dropped live weapons on simulated enemy targets on the north coast of Norway supported by UK F-35s.

Stealth jets from Britain, Norway and America used data-sharing links during the operation, with a British RC-135 Rivet Joint in support, allowing USAF B-52 Stratofortresses to carry out the mission.

USAF Europe and Africa Commander, Gen James Hecker, said: "The Arctic is a critical region for our collective security and global stability.

"Training with our Norwegian and UK allies in

this environment demonstrates our shared commitment to defending Nato's northern flank and adapting to emerging threats."

The RAF and Royal Norwegian Air Force also form part of the Joint Expeditionary Force – a pool of ready, adaptable forces that can rapidly respond together.

Commander of the Joint Air Operations Center in Norway, Brig Gen Tron Strand, said: "Together we are a credible deterrent and, if required, we are ready to defend the Arctic region."

The Waddington-based Rivet Joint contributed to the intelligence picture by soaking up electronic signals from communications systems and a Voyager from Brize Norton conducted air-to-air refuelling.



NORTHERN STARS: USAF Stratofortress takes off; inset above, 207 Sqn F-35 joins mission



Vets test magic mushrooms to cure gambling addiction

VETERANS SUFFERING from gambling addiction are being sought to take part in a retreat in the Netherlands.

The Heroic Hearts Project is launching a new study investigating the effectiveness of psilocybin – the active ingredient in magic mushrooms – in treating gambling addiction.

It is claimed that addiction to

gambling is disproportionately high among former military personnel.

The Heroic Hearts Project – which helps veterans obtain safe and legal access to psychedelic treatments – is working on the study with researchers from the University of Gibraltar. It will involve 10 veterans travelling to the Netherlands to take part in the retreat.



AIR COMBAT chief Air Cdre Martin Cunningham (centre) flew into Qatar's Al Udeid Air Base to meet Air Force personnel deployed with 83 EAG and 901 EAW on Operation Shader.

He said: "I am overwhelmed by the morale and commitment of our people on Operation

Shader and the impact they have on security in the Middle East."

As the UK's frontline forces prepared to celebrate Christmas, entertainers from BFBS arrived at the base to perform for personnel on duty over the festive break.

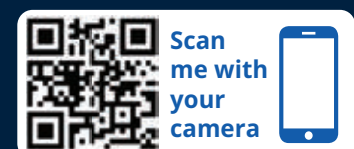
Take part in
our survey
for a chance
to win up to
£250!

Calling all current and former RAF personnel and partners

We want to hear from you!

We're looking for serving RAF personnel, veterans, and their partners to take part in our survey. Your unique experiences and invaluable insights are vital in helping us understand the support needs of the RAF Family and will contribute to our 'Meeting the Needs' research project.

Interested in playing a part to help support the
RAF Family? Visit: rafbf.org/meeting-the-needs



Wadd a way to go

Duo bow out after 76 yrs



Simon Mander

TWO WARRANT Officers with 74 years RAF service between them bowed out at Waddington.

Aircraft Engineer Mick Coupland and Motor Transport pool boss Shane Rousell said goodbye to the Lincolnshire station for the last time, to the applause of workmates.

WO Coupland enlisted in 1988 and after basic training worked on Tornado GR1s at Cottesmore and serviced Nimrods at Kinloss before being posted to Germany to evaluate the Pegasus engines of RAF and RN Harriers at Laarbruch.

As a 111(F) Sqn supervisor he deployed all over the world including Op Telic in Iraq before being promoted to Sgt and conducting key roles such as QRA commander in the UK and on Nato operations



WO COUPLAND

After a Falklands tour, he was posted to 5(AC) Sqn at Waddington, deploying on Operations Kipion and Shader.

In 2019 he was posted to Poway, San Diego and helped bring the UK's Protector through test and into service.

Married to Dianne, he was an emergency ambulance responder from 2001 to 2012.

WO Shane Rousell has served in some of the world's most challenging environments from humanitarian missions to high-pressure operations, from managing Mountain Rescue Teams to coordinating motor transport in Iraq, Bosnia and Afghanistan,

A WO since 2022, he has overseen MT's duties at Waddington since his arrival on the station.



WO ROUSELL

Canadian crews join Poseidon adventure

UK POSEIDON instructors have begun training Canadian crews ahead of delivery of their own Boeing sub-hunter aircraft.

Aircrew from 42 (Torpedo Bomber) Sqn have taken four personnel on their first flights with the P-8A to integrate them into the UK force.

The missions across Britain are only one of the collaborations with overseas forces, which will see German, Norwegian and American Service members operate from the Moray base.

RCAF's Captain Darren Kirk said: "The partnership with the RAF is an important part of the RCAF transition plan to convert from our current maritime patrol platform, the CP-140M Aurora, to the P-8A Poseidon.

"The RAF support is key to our rapid and safe transition from one aircraft to another.

"It was great to experience the first flight after months of training. The instruction received at 42 Torpedo Bomber Sqn has been excellent."

RAF Lossiemouth is currently



CANADA HIGH: RCAF Poseidon crews fly the flag at Lossiemouth, where they are training with 42 (Torpedo Bomber) Sqn

home to three Poseidon squadrons and will be enhanced by German crews flying from there to protect Europe's maritime security.

Routine training with Norwegian Poseidon crews has been completed with students expected to complete the 42 (TB)

Sqn conversion course in 2025.

Earlier this year the base also announced the opening of a US Navy hangar.

Next year the Sqn will begin training E-7 Wedgetail flying crews after its engineers began their training to prepare for the aircraft's arrival.



HOUSING PLEDGE: RAF Brize Norton is set for new homes under government deal

Forces housing revamp

Simon Mander

HUNDREDS of new homes are set to be given the green light at an RAF station after a deal has struck to bring Service housing back into public ownership.

The Government hopes the move will save around £230 million a year in rent to private landlords, freeing up cash for new-build projects, like the 265 new houses and apartments proposed at Brize Norton.

The deal ends an arrangement which has seen the taxpayer spend billions on rent while still paying rising maintenance costs.

Under the agreement, UK Defence will buy back 36,347 houses, sold in 1996, now valued at £10.1 billion, for £6 billion.

It will see the saving of more than £600,000 of taxpayers' money each day, now earmarked to fix 'deep-set problems' in military housing and build new homes under a strategy to be published next year.

It says the original 1996 agreement cost taxpayers an estimated £8 billion and saw 55,000 houses sold for an average of £27,000 each.

Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, said: "We understand the importance of housing

"This deal is a crucial step in being able to deliver meaningful change and an opportunity to move forward with substantial redevelopment and refurbishment."



**WHATEVER YOU'RE FACING.
WHEREVER YOU ARE.
WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK.**

Confidential advice and support for the **whole** RAF family.

Call us **0800 058 4690** or
Chat with us **ssafa.org.uk/raf**



ssafa | the
Armed Forces
charity

**ROYAL
AIR FORCE**

SCAN HERE
TO LEARN MORE



ssafa.org.uk/raf

Registered as a charity in England and Wales Number 210760 in Scotland Number SC038056 and in Republic of Ireland Number 20202001. Established 1885. S906.0724

QUEEN ETHELBURGA'S COLLEGIATE

Welcoming day students from
3 months to 19 years
and boarders
from Year 3



Next Open Morning: 9 March 2024

email admissions@qe.org to book a tour or call 01423 333333

Defence counts the cost of 'Moral Stain'



FIGHT FOR JUSTICE: (from left) Military LGBT campaigners Ken Wright, Craig Jones and Caroline Paige led calls for the review

LGBT vets to net £70k payout following review

Simon Mander

LGBT VETERANS will get up to £70,000 each to acknowledge the historic wrongs they experienced under the Armed Forces ban on homosexuality.

Defence chiefs raised the compensation fund to £75million following talks with LGBT veterans prosecuted or discharged from service under the hardline policy.

Those dismissed because of their sexual orientation will receive £50,000 and payments of up to £20,000 will be available for personnel negatively affected by the gay ban from 1967 to 2000, when it was finally axed.

Victims can also apply to have their rank restored and discharge reason amended on official records, the MoD confirmed.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "The historic

treatment of LGBT veterans was a moral stain on our nation.

"We have listened to veterans and will continue to deliver against the recommendations set out in the Etherton review."

Lord Etherton's review proposed a Financial Recognition Scheme, and the government hopes its remaining seven recommendations are delivered in 2025.

The payments will be exempt from income tax and means-tested benefits, a spokesman said.

To help as many eligible people to apply as possible, the MoD has set aside £90,000 for charities to support applications.

Four non-financial restorative measures, including rank restoration, will be extended to those who served before 1967 and certificates of service will be reissued with former officers having their details published in *The Gazette*.

NHS eyes Forces skills to help deliver patient care

Tracey Allen

ARMED FORCES veterans are being urged to support the NHS by taking up careers as Allied Health Professionals (AHPs).

More than 100 veterans have signed up to events where experts from Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust and other organisations are encouraging former military personnel to step into crucial AHP roles.

"Guy's and St Thomas' is working in collaboration with NHS England and a number of universities to recruit serving and retired Armed Forces personnel, and their families, into 14 allied health professions, to increase the number of AHPs by around 70,000 by 2036," said a spokesperson for the Trust.

Alex Oliver joined Guy's and St Thomas' as an operating department practitioner in 2019 having served 12 years in the Royal Navy.

He said: "I'd always had an

interest in science and we trained as level 3 first aiders in the Navy. I did a year of nursing at King's College Hospital. But I went to the operating theatres for a patient follow through and thought, 'wow'. This is a completely different atmosphere. It's more dynamic and more suited to environments I'd been to in the past."

He transferred courses and completed a three-year operating department practise degree. Alex was able to put his military background to good use when the pandemic struck.

He added: "The pace changed and suddenly we were responding to an emergency. But in terms of organisation and putting new policies and procedures in place, that was stuff I'd done before. I got involved in trying to implement the cleaning routines without cross contamination, which was similar to the Navy and their chemical and biological warfare routines.

"The communication is very

similar in the operating theatre and a place like a warship and a military establishment."

Fiona Sandford, a consultant physiotherapist and clinical lead of Armed Forces programme at Guy's and St Thomas', said: "As an Armed Forces spouse I know the resilience, adaptability and dedication of the Armed Forces community.

"These are just the transferable skills we are looking for in the NHS and I would encourage anyone from the Armed Forces community, Armed Forces leavers, veterans, partners and spouses and families to join us. Your experience and knowledge will be invaluable."

● **Email:** armedforces@gstt.nhs.uk to register to attend the events.

HEALTH FRONTLINE:
Alex Oliver joined operating theatre team after 12-year military career



baesystems.com/typhoon

Proud to support the first flight of ECRS Mk 2 radar



BAE SYSTEMS

NATO calls in Typhoon

Simon Mander

UK FAST JETS will take part in a Nato Air Policing mission in Poland next year after a two-year British operation to defend the country's airspace ends.

The UK's Sky Sabre deployment, first planned as a six-month tour in 2022 but extended four times, has helped deter Russian aggression in the region, in close co-ordination with Polish and other Allied forces.

Sky Sabre is a ground-based defence system which can control 24 missiles simultaneously whilst in flight, guiding them to separate targets.

British and Polish troops recently marked the end of the mission at a ceremony in Rzeszów.

Armed Forces Minister Luke Pollard said: "I'd like to thank our Armed Forces for their professionalism and hard work during this extended deployment, I'd also like to welcome them home for some well-deserved rest with their loved ones."

He said RAF Typhoons would be sent to do the job next year and the NAREW programme – a collaboration between UK firm MBDA and Polish defence company PGZ – that will see Poland receive more than 1,000 anti-air missiles and more than



100 launchers will continue.

These will boost Poland's ability to defend itself against cruise missiles and fighter jets at ranges

of more than 40 kilometres.

And the UK-led Diamond initiative, which Poland is part of, will improve Nato's air and

missile defence by ensuring that the different air defence systems across the Alliance operate better across Europe.

In Brief



FG OFF TIM HYND: Cranwell return

New job's music to Fg Off's ears

FG OFF Tim Hynd has been appointed as the new Director of Music for the Band of the Royal Air Force College after his recent graduation from the RAF College.

He joined the RAF in 2007 as a musician and served at both Cranwell and Northolt and counts marching onto Moscow's Red Square in 2010, sounding the Royal Salute for Queen Elizabeth II during the 2018 Trooping the Colour and leading the Central Band of the RAF and King's Colour Squadron during Changing the Guard in 2024 among his career highlights.

He said: "Commissioning as a Director of Music with RAF Music has always been a career ambition of mine and I'm delighted to have been awarded this opportunity. To return to RAF Cranwell where it all started for me as an RAF musician and take up the baton for the Band of the RAF College is a true honour. Marching off my graduation to *Auld Lang Syne*, through all my friends and future colleagues, is a memory I will never forget."



REAPPOINTED: Air Marshal Stringer

Stringer keeps museum post

AIR MARSHAL Edward Stringer has been reappointed as the RAF trustee of the Imperial War Museum for a four-year term.

The former fast jet pilot and deputy RAF chief will be in the post until October 2028.

Striker II set for New Year tests

Simon Mander

FIGHTER PILOTS will flight test cutting-edge Striker II helmets for the first time in the New Year.

The trials, scheduled for the end of January, follow a £133 million contract to BAE Systems to develop the system, which projects mission data on to the pilot's visor.

Under the deal, £40 million will come from UK Defence to enable RAF personnel to use the equipment to fire weapons and avoid mid-air collisions day and night, whatever other partner nations decide.

Eurofighter chief executive Giancarlo Mezzanatto said: "Further developing Striker II

will ensure that Typhoon pilots continue to fly a world-leading aircraft, wearing a world-leading, all-digital helmet."

BAE Systems is already developing Striker II under the contract announced in September, and the UK wants the manufacturer to deliver the system to the RAF later this decade.

The high-tech display, which moves with the pilot's head, is also expected to attract interest from other nations.

Nato Eurofighter management agency general manager Simon Ellard said: "As the operational environment continues to evolve, it is essential that we grow Eurofighter's capabilities to meet current and future threats."



UPGRADE: Striker II system projects mission data on to visor and follows pilot's head movements

News



FORMER SERVING?

DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN STILL PLAY THE SPORTS LOTTERY?

Only open to serving and former serving, the exclusive nature of our RAF charity lottery gives players a great chance of winning a cash prize. So why not show your support for as little as £1 a week and you could be a £10,000 jackpot winner!

Join today or increase your tickets at:

www.rafcf.org.uk



HOW MUCH IS IT?
£1 PER TICKET
HOLD BETWEEN 1-6

LEAVING THE RAF?
UPDATE CIVIL DETAILS
0370 050 5893

WIN BIG CASH PRIZES!
£10,000 TOP PRIZE
20 WINNERS EVERY WEEK!

RAFCentralFund BeGambleAware.org

The RAF Sports Lottery operates as a society lottery within the Royal Air Force Central Fund and is licensed and regulated by the Gambling Commission (www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk). The Royal Air Force Central Fund is a company registered in England and Wales 8555984. Charity registered in England and Wales 1152560. Charity registered in Scotland SC044299.

Registered office: Hurricane Building | HQ Air Command | RAF High Wycombe | Bucks | HP14 4UE
Principal office: RAF Central Fund Danesfield | New Lock Lane | Henley Road | Medmenham | SL7 2EY

Italian job tests NATO



SERVICE DRIVE: RAF Typhoon crew chat to Italian engineer during NATO's Tactical Leadership Programme in Spain

Staff Reporter

FAST JET engineers could be called in to Service fighters from across the Nato alliance to improve frontline capability.

As part of the Alliance's Tactical Leadership Programme, technicians from eight member states will be trained to carry out servicing on Eurofighters and F-35 stealth fighters operated by Nato countries.

UK air chiefs say the move will boost combat agility as part of Nato's Agile Combat Employment strategy, which trains crews to operate from remote locations with minimal ground support.

The RAF's chief engineer AVM Shaun Harris said: "The ability to interoperate on the ground, cross-servicing aircraft between Nato partners, enhances the agility and speed of response of our Combat Air forces."

Eight Typhoons and an engineering team from Coningsby-based 29 Sqn flew out to Spain this month to spearhead the TLP programme and work alongside Italian Air



Force teams who operate the Eurofighter.

29 Sqn chief, Wg Cdr Andy Shaw, said: "The TLP offers the most immersive experience and opportunity for our crews to develop their leadership in a live flying scenario.

"Working so closely with other Nato nations makes the training so valuable and demonstrates the extent of our capabilities."

Sir Keir's Akrotiri tribute

PRIME MINISTER Sir Keir Starmer has paid tribute to military personnel on duty abroad over Christmas on a visit to RAF Akrotiri.

And he said humanitarian missions and anti-terror missions have been a challenge for the Armed Forces.

He added: "As we come towards Christmas, it is a period to remember that not everybody here will necessarily have their family with them.

"This year the challenges have been intense. We've asked you to step up, whether that's Operation Shader or the work that you do dropping stuff in Gaza.

"The service you give to your country makes us safe in a volatile time. At the moment in the world, that is the highest form of service."





By Appointment to
H.M The Queen
Medallists
Worcestershire Medal Service Ltd.
Bromsgrove



Worcestershire Medal Service Ltd

Specialists in the manufacture and supply of full and miniature size medals, medal mounting and framing.



124 High Street
Bromsgrove
Worcestershire
B61 8HJ

01527 835375

www.worcmedals.com

sales@worcmedals.com



ADDICA

Promotional and Corporate Gifting

01527 509380

www.addica.co.uk

sales@addica.co.uk





ARMED FORCES
COVENANT

EMPLOYER
RECOGNITION
SCHEME

GOLD AWARD

★ Trustpilot



Reviews 5,624

WiFi for the RAF

Private internet access to browse, stream and game
at your air base and 150 MOD sites

- ✓ Flexible subscriptions – pause up to twice a year
- ✓ Unlimited data
- ✓ Unfiltered content



Connect to **Wifinity PAYG**
or visit wifinity.co.uk/get-online

wifinity



**Review of
the Year
2024**

RAF News Review of the year 2024



January 01

1 AIR CHIEFS bid to slash training time for the RAF's new Protector crews using the latest simulator training kit. The move could see pilots and mission operators move to the Protector frontline in just 18 months.

2 THE UK'S first transgender officer, Caroline Paige, is awarded the MBE for campaigning for LGBT veterans following a government apology and compensation pledge for those prosecuted under the military gay ban, axed in 2000.

3 VETERAN JOHN 'Dusty' Miller, who took part in H-Bomb testing in the South Pacific, receives his Nuclear Test Medal.

4 AN AFRICAN-based charity set up by Wg Cdr Neil Hope in honour of his daughter, killed in a car crash, launches an education foundation funding university scholarships in Kenya.

February 02

1 TYPHOONS BLITZ Houthi sites in Yemen used to target shipping in the Red Sea in a nighttime raid by the UK and US which destroys eight terrorist bases.

2 A VOYAGER makes an emergency landing when a tyre explodes on take-off during war-games in Nevada. Exercise chiefs order Typhoons, F-16s and F-35s to land, clearing the way for the stricken tanker.

3 WWII VETERAN Jack Hemings completes record-breaking aerobatics in a Spitfire at the age of 102. The wartime Dakota pilot takes to the skies to raise funds for the charity he founded which flies in aid to some of the world's most remote regions.

4 DEFENCE SCIENTISTS carry out the first laser strike against an aerial target as the DragonFire laser blasts a drone during test firing on the weapons range in the Hebrides.

March 03

1 UK F-35s land on the deck of HMS Prince of Wales as the Dambusters spearhead Nato air operations on Exercise Steadfast Defender, the biggest war drill since the height of the Cold War.

2 UKRAINIAN PILOTS who graduate with the RAF are compared to The Few as they prepare for war flying F-16 fighters. CAS Sir Richard Knighton says: "We understand perhaps more than most how powerful the few can be against the many."

3 AIR FORCE mountain rescue teams stretcher an 18-year-old hiker to safety in a 16-hour rescue mission after efforts to winch him from a freezing stream by a Coast Guard helicopter fail.

4 THE UK signs a £2 billion deal for 14 extended-range Chinooks with a top speed of 200mph and air-to-air refuelling capability.

April 04

1 THE LAST British wartime member of 617 'Dambusters' Sqn, Wg Cdr John Bell, dies a week before his 101st birthday. Considered too tall to be a pilot, at 6ft 4in, he was trained as an observer and bomb-aimer.

2 A FOUR-strong team of RAF Gunners cross the finish line of an epic 3,200-mile race across the Atlantic. The Atlantic Rocks reach Jolly Harbour, Antigua after 61 days 19 hours 13 minutes at sea.

3 ATLAS CREWS drop 10 tonnes of aid into Gaza to ease the plight of civilians trapped in the war-torn territory as the UK backs a UN call for a ceasefire.

4 FLT LT Dave 'Turbo' Turnbull puts the finishing touches to his show-stopping routine with a low-level, 500ft pass in the distinctive Blackjack Typhoon.

May 05

1 KING CHARLES takes on honorary roles with the RAF as he marks the first anniversary of his reign, becoming patron of the RAF Museum and the Royal Air Force Association.

2 D-DAY VETS Bernard Morgan and George Chandler join forces in Downing Street as Allied nations prepare to mark the 80th anniversary of the landings. Bernard, 100, landed on Gold Beach with the 83 Group Mobile Signals Unit.

3 CASTAKES to the skies over Croatia with the Red Arrows as the team put the finishing touches to their landmark 60th display season during training on Exercise Springhawk.

4 18 SQN CHINOOK crews launch a seven-hour war-fighting drill with elite Army units to test joint forces combat readiness alongside 16 Air Assault Brigade and the Parachute Regt.

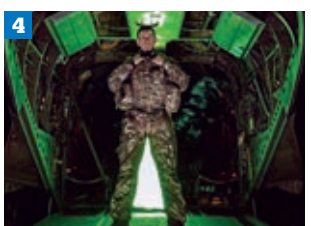
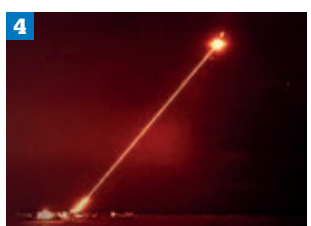
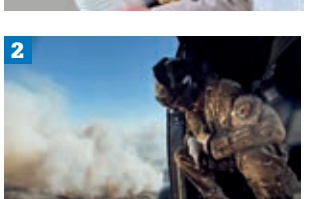
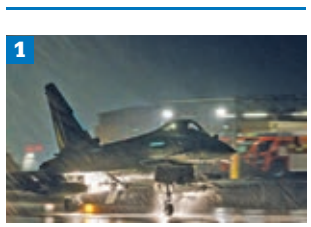
June 06

1 KING CHARLES delivers an emotional address in Ver-Sur-Mer as the last survivors of the Normandy Landings gather to mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

2 RAF PUMAS launch a nine-hour fire-fighting mission from Akrotiri in 45°C heat as forest fires threaten to engulf residential areas in Cyprus.

3 TRIBUTES FROM across the Services and aviation community are paid to Sqn Ldr Mark Long who died when his BBMF Spitfire crashed near Coningsby. The Prince and Princess of Wales were among the first to express their sorrow.

4 THE PRINCESS of Wales makes her first public appearance since undergoing surgery as she joins senior royals to watch a display of more than 30 RAF aircraft over Buckingham Palace to mark the King's official birthday.





July
07

August
08

September
09

October
10

November
11

December
12

1 **SPORTSCAR LEGEND** Caterham teams up with RAF motorsport aces to produce a £100k special edition of their classic Seven hot-rod using panels and components from a Puma helicopter.

2 **LEEMING'S JOINT UK-Qatari training squadron** salute their local roots by producing their own badge – based on the famous Yorkshire Tea brand.

3 **TYPHOON PILOT** Sqn Ldr Ben Polwin storms to victory in the legendary Schneider Trophy event on his first attempt in a racing plane he built in his garage, ending the RAF's 31-year Schneider drought.

4 **HRH PRINCE** William climbs into the hot seat to take part in a firefighting drill as he returns to RAF Valley, where he spent three years as a Search and Rescue helicopter pilot.

1 **WWII VET** Dick Skepper says he's 'humbled' after being inundated with more than 1,000 cards from well-wishers across the world following an appeal to mark his 100th birthday.

2 **VALLEY PILOTS** test augmented reality kit allowing them to engage with 'enemy' fighters during live training. The ATARS system generates virtual adversaries through digital visors.

3 **AIR FORCE fundraisers** hit the track at St Mawgan alongside 1,500 runners for the annual Children's Hospice Rainbow Run, netting a record-breaking £105,000 for the Cornish charity.

4 **27 SQN Chinooks** join Army Air Corps Apaches, Commando Force Merlins and 847 Naval Air Sqn Wildcats at Leeming for Exercise Hades Warrior. More than 200 Tri-Service pilots deploy operating under a single command.

1 **THE RED Arrows** display in the skies of Greenwood, Toronto, Ottawa and Ontario in Canada to mark their 60th display season as the Royal Canadian Air Force celebrates its centenary.

2 **THE UK'S** first earth-mapping satellite capable of tracking troops and equipment on the battlefield from orbit 500km above the planet blasts off from California on board SpaceX's Falcon.

3 **AIR FORCE rookies** Flt Lts Matt Smith and Jordan Capehorn make history as the first in service to graduate from Leeming's joint UK and Qatari fast jet training squadron.

4 **617 SQN and US 48th Fighter Wing F-35s** launch raids on simulated enemy targets across the south of England as air chiefs continue to ramp up Agile Combat Employment tactics.

1 **AIR FORCE** aircraft and transport helicopters stand by to help thousands of people caught up in the Middle East conflict as the Government urges British nationals in Lebanon to leave.

2 **THE RAF'S** boxing Padre, Rev James Mealy, steps ringside in the searing Gulf heat as UK fighters square up to their US counterparts for a showdown dubbed the 'Rumble in the Deid'.

3 **FORCES POOCHES** are in the luxury dog house after a £23 million upgrade to their accommodation at Marham, boasting underfloor heating, outdoor exercising areas, veterinary clinic and isolation suites.

4 **THE RAF'S** latest surveillance aircraft took to the UK's skies for the first time for flight checks. A Wedgetail E7 AEW Mk1 makes its maiden sortie from Birmingham Airport.

1 **A SPECIALIST** RAF team move into Catterick Garrison to set up a facility to resettle Afghan nationals who supported British Forces and were forced to flee following the withdrawal of ISAF forces.

2 **AIR FORCE** medics receive the Firmin Sword of Peace for flying into the disaster zone when earthquakes ripped through Turkey and Syria, killing an estimated 45,000 people last year.

3 **FRONTLINE PILOTS** get more fire power following the first guided firing trial of the SPEAR mini cruise missile from a Typhoon. The weapon will be fitted to the RAF's F-35 stealth fighters.

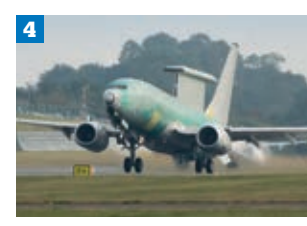
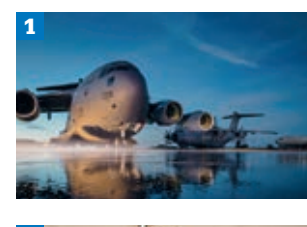
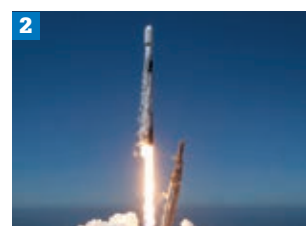
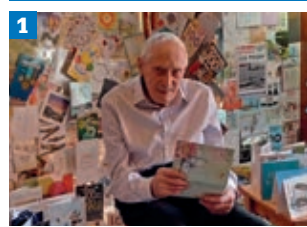
4 **BRIZE TRANSPORT** crews mark 10 years of operations with the Atlas A400M, including Caribbean hurricane relief missions, the military's COVID response and evacuations from Afghanistan and Sudan.

1 **BENSON PUMA** crews complete their final festive flight ferrying Father Christmas around 43 schools in Oxfordshire. The helicopter, due to be replaced next year, completes the traditional Santa drop at Oxford Children's Hospital.

2 **12 SQN Typhoons** intercept the Qatari Amir's aircraft as it enters UK airspace to deliver a welcome radio message in Arabic as His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani arrives on a state visit.

3 **MEDALS AWARDED** to XI(B) Sqn's Flt Lt James 'Cookie' Long, the last Great Escaper to be executed by the Gestapo, have been returned to their RAF Lossiemouth home after a crowd-funding appeal by the squadron.

4 **TRIBUTES ARE** paid to engineer AS1 David Enbom, 21, who is found dead at Lossiemouth. Known as Davey, he was on his first posting after initial training.



ROYAL AIR FORCE RED ARROWS™



Our ultimate tribute to the Red Arrows, in their 60th Year.

Friendly Skies has been supplying unique artwork to the aviation sector for nearly a quarter of a century.

To celebrate the Red Arrows' 60th and the Hawk's 50th anniversary, we are offering a limited edition silver hallmarked version of our wired artwork.

Each model has a 150mm wingspan, polished pure silver control surfaces, hallmark to the port rudder and the limited edition number etched backwards on the starboard rudder.

Each one is framed with deep dark flock surrounding it, to make the shape of the model and plaques stand out. In addition, each frame contains a highly reflective mirror set at 45°, conferring a second view, 90° to the main model. It is in the reflected image, on the tail, that you see the model's limited number.

The inner frame is trimmed with RAF Red and Blue, mounted on white core card to provide the white colour of the RAF. The area around the frame can be adorned with anything on a plaque that you require; in addition we have secured the use of MOD insignia to complete the frame officially.

Cost delivered anywhere in the UK is £2995.00 and a 50% deposit is required to place the order.

There are premiums of numbers 1 to 10, so secure your number now!

www.friendlyskies.co.uk/redarrows

Tel : 01252 675678

models@friendlyskies.co.uk



NB: ALL RAF INSIGNIA SUBJECT TO CROWN COPYRIGHT

PERSONAL PLAQUES TOGETHER WITH ANY, OR ALL, OF THE ABOVE RAF INSIGNIA MAY BE BUILT INTO YOUR FRAME





THIS IS YOUR LIFE: Sqn Ldr William Simpson receives the famous big red book from TV personality Eammon Andrews in 1961



CELEBRATION: Sqn Ldr Simpson (second from left) celebrates 90th birthday with daughter Anne and son-in-law Stewart (right) and niece Margaret

BOMBER COMMAND
pilot Sqn Ldr William Simpson's wartime experience is a moving story of survival against the odds.

Shot down in his 12 Sqn Fairey Battle on the first day of the Blitzkrieg in May 1940, he was pulled from his burning aircraft by his two crew members. Severely wounded, suffering extensive burns, he wasn't expected to live and spent the next year-and-a-half in seven different French hospitals.

He went on to be treated by the pioneering plastic surgeon Sir Archibald McIndoe and became a member of the famous Guinea Pig Club. Simpson died in November 2005, aged 91.

Simpson's autobiography, *One of Our Pilots is Safe, A Battle of France Airman's Story of Survival and Road to Recovery* (Air World, Pen & Sword Books, pen-and-sword.co.uk, £25), tells of amazing bravery and terrible suffering but also of great fortitude during the darkest of days. He endured dreadful burns and disfigurement before becoming one of McIndoe's most famous Guinea Pigs at the Royal Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead.

This edition incorporates Simpson's two wartime books, *One of our Pilots is Safe* (1942) and *The Way of Recovery* (1944). There is a short epilogue summarising his post-war career and a useful appendices section. To satisfy the censor and not jeopardise the safety of those still in France, Simpson was guarded about individuals and particular locations. Additional notes identify friends or places.

Simpson's squadron was part of the Advanced Air Striking Force which arrived in France from September 1939. He accepted criticisms of their obsolete Fairey Battles which he considered, 'ill-armed and lightly armoured', with no self-sealing petrol tanks, a factor he would later lament. He also underlined the bravery

Story of survival against all odds



YOUNG AIRMAN: Simpson in 1938

fire but he had severe burns on his hands and face. Initially, he was taken by locals to a convent and then by a French ambulance to a casualty clearance station in France.

His injuries were extensive. Both his eyelids were burnt off, his nose was almost completely destroyed and his remaining fingers were charred talons. He was treated by French Army doctors but considered unlikely to live. However, survive he did, held in seven French hospitals in the Occupied and Unoccupied zones over the following 18 months.

The months in impoverished French hospitals are recounted in grim detail. The bandaged Simpson was for lengthy periods bedridden and weak. He recounted the flies, maggots and the agony of his hardened gauze dressings being torn off, leading his porous wounds to bleed again. The treatment applied to his hands cost him more fingers and rendered them almost useless. Nevertheless, he was largely positive about the care he received in France. They kept him alive, built him up as best they could and he was able to walk again. His appreciation for French friends and visitors is evident, alongside his conviction that France would rise again.

Via Spain and Portugal, Simpson eventually returned to Britain in November 1941. Much of 1942 was spent undergoing painful and pioneering plastic



WE HAVE copies of this compelling read to win. For your chance to own one, tell us:

What was the aircraft Simpson was flying when he was shot down in May 1940?

Email your answer, marked **William Simpson 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 January 10, 2025.



surgery operations at East Grinstead, performed by New Zealander McIndoe.

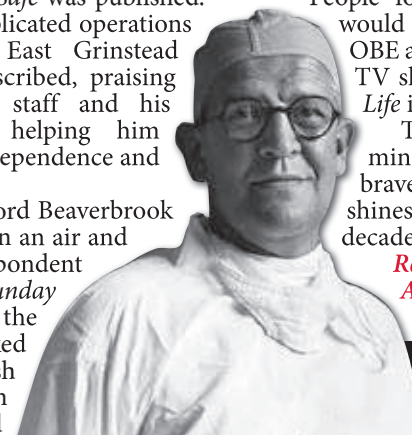
In periods of convalescence in a 'south Devon town' (Torquay), Simpson discovered the dictaphone and recorded his first book. In November 1942, he returned to work at the Air Ministry and *One of Our Pilots is Safe* was published. Further complicated operations followed at East Grinstead which he described, praising the medical staff and his friends for helping him regain his independence and dignity.

In 1944, Lord Beaverbrook made Simpson an air and war correspondent for the *Sunday Express*. After the war he worked for British European Airways and

in the wider aviation sector in press and public relations roles. A further account, *I Burned my Fingers* (1955), mentioned the personal turmoil he had endured. However, his commitment to disabled causes was unstinting, notably as a member of the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Disabled People for 30 years. He would be appointed an OBE and feature in the TV show *This is Your Life* in 1961.

The determination of this brave Guinea Pig still shines through eight decades later.

Review by Alastair Noble



PIONEER: Plastic surgeon Sir Archibald McIndoe



2 DAY EVENT
26-27 MARCH 2025

FARNBOROUGH
 INTERNATIONAL

**EXHIBITION &
 CONFERENCE
 CENTRE**

3000+
Attendees

220+
**Exhibition
 Stands**

120+
Sessions

CONFIRMED KEYNOTE SPEAKERS INCLUDE



Maria Eagle MP
 Minister of State,
 Minister for Defence
 Procurement &
 Industry



Andy Start
 Chief Executive, DE&S



Andrew Forzani
 Director General
 Commercial,
 Ministry of Defence



Avril Jolliffe
 Director General
 Industry, Trade and
 Economic Security
 Ministry of Defence



Julie Brettell
 Supply Chain Director,
 Ministry of Defence



**Lt. General Sir Rob
 Magowan KCB CBE**
 Deputy Chief of Defence
 Staff (Military Capability),
 Ministry of Defence

DP RTE 2025 WILL FOCUS ON THE MAIN EVENT THEMES BELOW



**REGISTER TODAY FOR YOUR COMPLIMENTARY
 MOD/PUBLIC SECTOR TICKET**

www.dprte.co.uk

THANK YOU TO OUR EVENT PARTNERS



EVENT DELIVERED BY



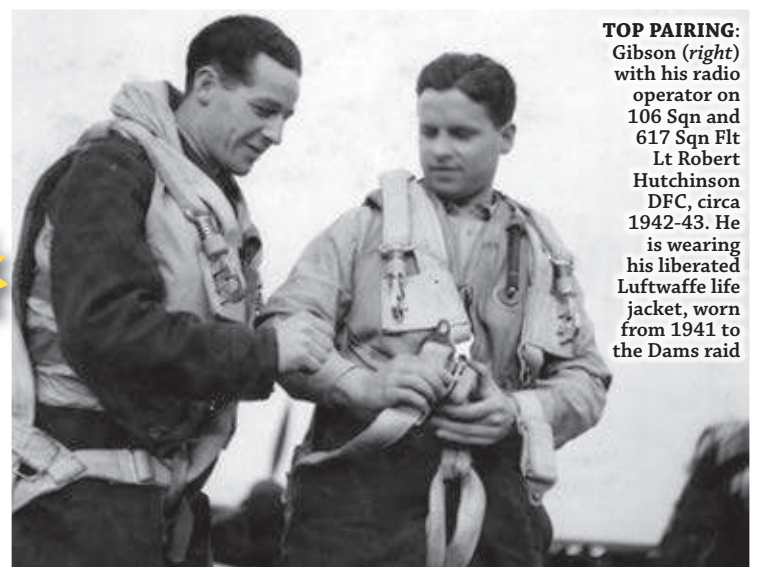
CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF INNOVATION

Death of Gibson is still a mystery

Senior ex-detective's investigation into how and why the Dams raid legend died fails to provide answers



VC: Guy Gibson

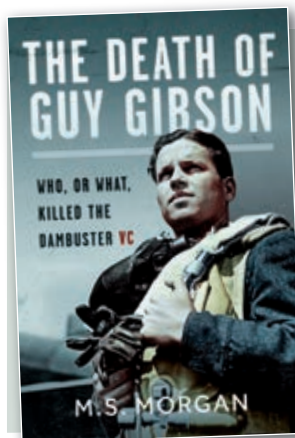


TOP PAIRING: Gibson (right) with his radio operator on 106 Sqn and 617 Sqn Flt Lt Robert Hutchinson DFC, circa 1942-43. He is wearing his liberated Luftwaffe life jacket, worn from 1941 to the Dams raid

WG CDR Guy Gibson was one of the most highly-decorated British Servicemen when he was killed in 1944.

Like the disappearance of Glenn Miller or Rudolf Hess's flight to Britain, Gibson's death is among World War II's most intriguing mysteries.

At 22:30 on September 19, 1944, a de Havilland Mosquito crashed in the village of Steenberg in the Netherlands. The crew, Wg Cdr Guy Gibson VC DSO* DFC* and Sqn Ldr James Warwick DFC were both killed, and their remains were recovered and buried locally. After the war, the local inhabitants lobbied successfully for the graves to



YOU COULD win a copy of *The Death of Guy Gibson*. To be in with a chance of winning one, answer this question correctly:

How old was Guy Gibson when he was killed in WWII?

Email your answer, marked **Guy Gibson 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 January 10, 2025.



remain in their local cemetery rather than being moved to the nearest Commonwealth War Graves Commission site, and the crash site (which was excavated

in the 1980s) has since been marked with a small memorial.

Guy Gibson was one of the most distinguished RAF pilots of the Second World War. He served as both a bomber and a night fighter pilot, and, of course, won fame (and a Victoria Cross) as the leader of the Dams Raid on May 16-17, 1943. Taking a force of Avro Lancasters at extremely low level across Occupied Europe and Germany, Gibson showed exceptional bravery and leadership in bringing the operation to a largely successful conclusion.

Taken off operations after the raid, Gibson spent 16 months on propaganda and staff work before successfully working his way back onto active service in September 1944. He was killed on his first official operation, aged just 26 – the circumstances of his death

and the cause of his crash have stayed a mystery for 80 years.

Author Michael Morgan is, according to his blurb, a recently-retired police 'senior investigating officer' who promises to bring his professional experience to solve the case. Unfortunately, he falls short in this. The first 75 per cent of his book *The Death of Guy Gibson: Who, or What, Killed the Dambuster VC?* (Air World, Pen & Sword Books, pen-and-sword. co.uk, £25) is a relatively standard biography of Gibson, although Morgan's lack of experience with aviation topics does show. There are many small but persistent errors in terminology or technical information that aviation enthusiasts may find irksome as the book goes on. To this reader at least, Morgan's personal opinion of Gibson (who was not a pleasant person to many

who knew him) also colours his narrative; for example, while Gibson had his faults, accusing him of being a stalker seems a bit too much.

Only in the final quarter of the book do we reach Gibson's death and its circumstances. Morgan does an efficient job of leading the reader through the various options: enemy action, technical problems, 'friendly fire', and sabotage. He rightly dismisses the latter two, while also looking at some of the background reasons – why Gibson had returned to operations in a role he was not trained for or experienced in. Unfortunately, his conclusion is that there is simply not enough evidence to tell what happened, and that the cause of Gibson's and Warwick's deaths remain a mystery.

Review by Stuart Hadaway



STEENBERGEN CEMETERY: The graves of Gibson and his navigator James Warwick

Gift a subscription of RAF News this Christmas

Go to www.rafnews.co.uk

24 Editions
£ 26.99 only

SUBSCRIBE



Tim Morris

Jaguar E-Pace 2024 (from £43,220 otr)

Motoring



BY THE time you read this review, everything I've written will be slightly out of date and that's a bit weird. The reason I've been caught off guard is that Jaguar has decided, in a blast of inspiration, to withdraw from sale its entire range of vehicles! The reason for this is that Jag is going electric and changing direction, with a full rebrand.

The first glimpse of the future was unveiled recently, the Type OO, and faced mixed reviews from the motoring press. It is undoubtedly a work of art, providing the impression that Jaguar is carefully crafting its future masterpieces with exuberance and passion. Whether the world will be ready for the modern art that emerges remains to be seen, but Jag has rarely got it wrong in the past. Let's just hope that the designers don't go completely mad and cut off an ear to get us there.

What I'm driving here, though, is one of Jag's most popular family models. The E-Pace may have been dropped for future orders but the existing stock is still worth a punt. It's a good-looking, small crossover that neatly rivals cars such as the Audi Q3, the BMW X1 and Mercedes GLA.

Exterior

Based on JLR's latest Evoque platform, the E-Pace looks agile and squat for a crossover. Our D200 test car came in Santorini Black, with 21in gloss black wheels. These are both pricey options, but the car did look good. It also features the iconic leaping cat, a logo that is soon to become extinct under Jag's rebrand.

Interior

The E-Pace looks pretty posh on the inside. The cabin is well laid out, wrapped around the driver nicely, with everything to hand. The soft-touch fabric on the dash and the neat stitching draw your eye and, at first glance, it looks expensive. Look closer though and you soon spot a few questionable plastics and cheaper buttons that let it down. This may not bother many, but when you factor in the price and the quality available in its nearest competitors, it's worth a mention. You sit higher up than you do in many family SUVs, giving a commanding view of the road ahead. You can however drop the seat down to take advantage of the E-Pace's car-like qualities. Even the entry-level model gets 12-



E-PACE: Dying breed

The end of an era for Jaguar



Pros

- Handles well
- Great driving position
- Plenty of clever kit

Cons

- A bit of road noise
- Rivals more economical
- So-so reliability record

Verdict

A great-looking small SUV

Jaguar E-Pace

crossover, with plenty of standard equipment onboard. If you're looking for better residual values from a JLR product, the Evoque may be a safer bet, but the E-Pace has plenty of charisma. The last of the old guard and a piece of history.

way electrically adjustable seats, with four-way lumbar support as standard. There's plenty of steering wheel adjustment too.

Sitting behind the wheel, the instrument binnacle houses a 12.3in digital instrument display

that replaces conventional analogue dials. This can be configured to display everything from fuel economy stats, to sat-nav directions.

Every E-Pace comes with an 11.4in touchscreen infotainment

system with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay smartphone mirroring. The software, called Pivi Pro, comes with internet connection and automatic software updates. It's one of the better touchscreen systems in this class. There are physical controls for the air-con and heated seats too.

On The Road

It's a Jaaaagggg...I've always been impressed with the way Jaguars handle and the E-Pace is no exception. Of course, this one is a crossover, so it's taller and heavier than an executive saloon but body roll is well controlled through the bends and it grips well.

The chassis is neatly balanced and the steering is pleasantly

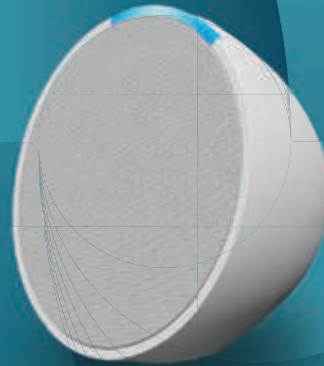
weighted. This tensions up as speed increases, too, giving it precision through the bends. Overall, it's pretty precise.

Powered by a 2.0, four-cylinder, 200bhp diesel engine, our (D200) test car was responsive enough to keep you entertained. The stats were 0-62mph in 7.9 seconds and a top end of 131mph. Fuel economy, on a combined cycle, was 42mpg.

The driving position, chunky steering wheel and slick alloy paddle-shifts make it feel more sporty to drive than it is, so it's an enjoyable Big-Cat experience. Of course, like all Jags, the E-Pace's transmission is much happier shuffling through the gears itself, but you can pretend to be race-shifting if it brings a smile.

bfbs | Radio

ON YOUR SMART SPEAKER



Scan to learn more and enter to win a Smart Speaker

bfbs.com/smartspeaker

*Closing date 31.12.24

Balfour Beatty HOMES

SUMMER, *made by us*

Welcome to an unbeatable summer.

Reserve your quality, brand new home now at Newton Meadows in the village of Colsterworth, surrounded by countryside close to Grantham and Stamford, and enjoy a magical summer. Especially with Home Mover; where we could help sell your current home and pay your estate agent fees.

Visitors are welcome to explore our show homes in Colsterworth, open Thursday to Monday 10am to 5pm. **Book a visit today.**



balfourbeattyhomes.com

Ask about
HOME MOVER*

We'll help sell your
existing property,
no estate agents
fees to pay.



Newton Meadows, Bourne Road,
Colsterworth, Grantham NG33 5JF

3, 4 & 5 bedroom homes
from £349,950

Call: 07763 212627

e: newtonmeadows@balfourbeattyhomes.com



Scan to find
out more

SKELETON



START AS YOU MEAN TO GO ON: Flt Lt Nicole Burger is fast becoming an expert at explosive ice track push-offs

Ice queen pushes on

Daniel Abrahams

THERE WERE further international skeleton milestones for Flt Lt Nicole Burger as she blazes a trail across Europe with top-20 finishes and top-five-fastest push times.

After impressing hugely in her first heats in the opening rounds of this year's World Cup in Pyeongchang, South Korea, she produced a superb 15th-place finish in the first round of Europe Cup action in Winterberg.

Having taken to the German track, Burger recorded a combined time of 1.56.81, just 2.97 seconds off first-placed German Viktoria Donicke. The aviator (pictured right) also recorded the fifth and seventh fastest starts.

Next up was the famous Lillehammer track in Norway, where Burger finished 12th, with a fourth-fastest start. Her combined time of 1.47.87 left her just 1.50 seconds behind



first-placed Austrian slider Julia Erlacher.

The Flt Lt now heads to Bludenz, Austria and Sigulda, Switzerland for the final Europe and World Cup rounds of the year.

Speaking to *RAF News* as she arrived in Austria for the next round of sliding, Burger said: "I'm super excited that I have completed my first World Cup race, not just a debut for me but also my country [South Africa]."

"The community surrounding the sport is amazing and they made me feel so welcome.

"So far this season I am happy with my performances; setting both start and track PBs on all the tracks I've been to, which is an incredible feeling."

● Follow RAF skeleton on Instagram @raf_skeleton_team and Nicole @nicoleburger.skeleton.

HYROX



Arthritis-hit athlete Ben is fighting back

FORMER SERVICE football star Cpl Ben Fitzmartin is racing against time to reach the world championships of a new high-intensity sport.

After a diagnosis of severe osteoarthritis in his hip in 2020 and two operations, the U23 footballer decided to take up a different challenge.

That sport was fitness-based HYROX, that sees competitors run 8km in total, interspersed with different gym workout stations after each 1,000m – including the farmer's carry, pictured above.

The aviator is targeting the finals of the competition in Chicago next June before he goes under the knife once more.

Fitzmartin, 34, said: "Following my diagnosis I decided not to waste time. I wanted to push myself as hard as I could."

So far he has competed in Turin, finishing ninth in his age group out of 890 competitors, before another ninth in Amsterdam out of 1,539 athletes, and a 10th in Birmingham in a field of 1,917. Next up is a pro-division race in Manchester in January.

The aviator – now in the top one per cent of HYROX athletes globally – added: "If one person sees this and thinks, 'if this guy can do it, so can I,' that would be awesome."

"There is always a way round things, people need to know they are never out of the fight."

"I took up HYROX and now I have a purpose. I had no idea I would be good at this sport, and I am now focused on Chicago."

● Follow Sgt Fitzmartin on Instagram @benfitzmartin.

GRIDIRON

Duo's American dream

IT WAS Viva Las Vegas for RAF Mustangs stars Cpl Curtis Calhoun and Sgt Ben Harris as they played in a Gridiron invitational game for the Sealand Seahawks.

Facing All-Star side MLFR Nationals at Ed Clark High School, Nevada, the duo were on the wrong end of a 32-0 scoreline, but hope their selection will highlight the growing status of American football in the UK Armed Services.

Sealand is an invitational team selected from players across Europe.

Sgt Harris said: "The experience was incredible. Having been a part of this sport for almost 20 years, I know full well that very few



U.S. GAME: Harris (left) and Calhoun

British American football players get the opportunity to play aboard, let alone in the US against American opposition."

● Follow RAF American football on Instagram @rafamericanfootball.

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



RAF News

The Forces Favourite Read

Hit your target market with **RAF News** - the official newspaper of the Royal Air Force since 1961.

Reaching an audience of more than 50,000 readers every fortnight, **RAF News** is the Forces' favourite newspaper delivering exclusive news, features and sports action from across UK Defence.

To discuss your advertising in **RAF News** please call or email:
T: +44 (0)7482 571535
E: edwin.rodriques@rafnews.co.uk

RAF News

The official voice of the Royal Air Force

RAF Sport Review of the year 2024

Also pages 26-27



ICE QUEEN:
Flt Lt
Nicole
Burger



January 01

February 02

March 03

April 04

1 THE NEW sporting year brought fresh hope for U23s football coach Sgt Danny Bartley as his charges gathered at RAF Henlow for their pre-Inter-Services camp.

Bartley would get revenge on the Army in the 2024 event, winning 2-0, but lost 1-0 to the championship-winning Royal Navy.

2 THE SERVICE'S skaters were getting into park and ride mode as the association announced plans for a series of unofficial jam sessions.

The events ran under the banner of 'Skating more in 24', starting at Ramp World Cardiff, before running nationwide until June, with the team competing in the Inter-Services in December.

3 "THE GAME was exactly what we wanted, a good physical challenge against a very good opponent," is how RAFRU head coach FS Justin Coleman described his side's 50-26 loss to Chinnor RFC as they prepared for the coming IS championship in March.

4 THE OTHER rugby code, League, had its time to shine on TV as the BBC screened the Challenge Cup first round clash versus the Royal Navy. The aviators suffered first-night nerves on their screen test, losing 22-28 at RAF Cranwell.

5 THE SERVICE skeleton fraternity had a new ice queen as debutant Flt Lt Nicole Burger produced a 10th-place finish in Winterberg, Germany and a 21st in Bludenz, Austria for her home nation South Africa in the European Cup.

1 IT WAS one for all and all for one as Service angling put aside historic rivalries to host a joint Service camp at Cresswell Bay, Northumberland to boast the UKAF team's chances of shining at the upcoming Match Federation Challenge in March.

The move left RAF team captain Sgt Steve Rathbone confident of success, as he said: "All three Services will be fighting as one."

2 THE SERVICE'S female rugby union stars had an arresting opening to the year losing 81-10 to the British Police as part of their IS warm-up.

3 TWO TOP-10 St Moritz finishes in recent rounds of European and World bobsleigh brought the winter Olympic dream of Cpl John Stanbridge a step closer in February.

Team Stanbridge finished eighth in their fifth two-man World Cup race, and ninth in the four-man, at the famous Swiss course.

4 THE SENIOR footballers went goal crazy notching up a fourth win in seven, beating Oxford City 2-1 in the perfect start to 2024's IS preparations.

Head coach WO Andy Kuchta was purring after four wins, one loss and two draws, netting 24 goals.

5 AN ALMOST clean sweep saw the RAF dominate the muddy Army-hosted UKAF Inter-Services Cyclocross Championships at Mallory Park for the second year running. The Air Force team won the overall tournament by 12 points.

Cpl Ian Lee took the men's race, while Cpl Sarah Toms took the runner-up spot in the women's event.

1 NEW HEIGHTS were hit as the RAF Gliding and Soaring Association members returned from South America after Expedition Andean Condor 24.

The 10-day annual flying event saw the aviators scaling heights of 20,000ft and travelling more than 400kms.

2 THE SERVICE'S powerlifters shook off the cobwebs with their Intermediate Camp and Winter Lift-Off at RAF Cosford.

The association would go on to win a fourth Inter-Services in a row in September.

3 OUR ALPINE sports stars melted the snow slopes of Meribel, France, after a white-hot hat-trick of IS team wins. The landmark first Telemark women's team win was backed up by Cpl Barnaby Rudge's first men's team title as captain after six years battling to take the top spot, while the men's snowboarders blasted their way to gold led by captain Chf Tech Martin Boon.

4 THE WINTER sports medal bonanza continued with a high-speed trophy blitz in St Moritz as the RAF's ice sports stars celebrated another bumper Inter-Services.

They took home three team wins: men's skeleton, men's luge and combined men's/women's overall.

1 SERVICE ROAD cycling got off to a great start with two top 10 finishes in the first two criterium races, of the year through AS1(T) Laura Sheppard and AS1 Zoe Catherall.

2 IT WAS more a downpour than an April shower, as the Service's rugby union women got their IS warm-up back on track with a 38-0 thrashing of Shelford RUFC.

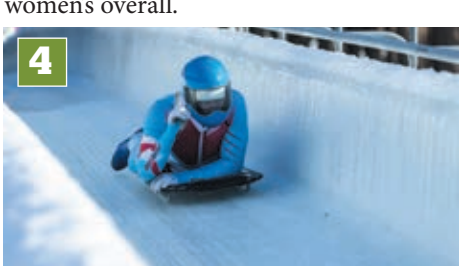
In difficult conditions at the Cambridgeshire ground the dominant aviators rounded out the last warm-up clash in style, leaving assistant coach Sqd Ldr Ian Cokayne delighted.

3 THE SERVICE'S bouldering climbers stole the show in the steel city with a clean sweep of Inter-Service podium finishes at the Climbing Works event, Sheffield.

4 AS1 JAY KITCHEN and Off Cdt Amber Brittlebank cooked up a Novice Cup fencing storm taking all three men's titles and two out of three in the women's at the three-day event at Cosford.

5 IT WAS treble joy for the Service's hockey stars as they dominated the men's, women's and women's masters at the outdoor championships in Aldershot.

The men's team made it seven wins in a row as they thumped the Army hosts 4-1, having beaten the Royal Navy 5-4.



RAF Sport Review of the year 2024



3

May

05

1 SERVICE RUGBY union star Fg Off Amy Cokayne had a bittersweet return to Six Nations rugby, touching down a try and being sent off as the Red Roses thrashed Scotland 46-0. England went on to win the championship ahead of France.

2 THERE WAS a record-breaking Powerlifting Championships at Cosford. AS1 Lisa Shaw took first place in the women's while AS1 Alexander Ayres won the men's event.

3 SERVICE BOXER turned professional, Cpl Brad Axe produced a debut victory with a unanimous points win over Latvian fighter Edgar Kemskey at the Brentwood Centre, Essex.

4 IN ATHLETICS pentathlete FS Laurence Ramm won silver at the 14th European Masters Indoor Athletics Championships in Poland.

Competing in the 50-54 age category, he finished just behind ex-Olympian Swedish athlete Mattias Sunneborn.

5 SERVICE EQUESTRIAN stars stormed to an opening IS Loriners win in dressage at Sparsholt College, Winchester.

The aviators would go on to win the show jumping and combined training legs of the Loriners competition in October to take the IS championship.



1



1

June

06

1 FG OFF Afton Perry bowed out at the top after performing for Team GB at the ISU World Synchronised Championships in Zagreb.

The holding officer was skating with Team Icicles Seniors, who she had represented for 15 years.

The RAF High Performance athlete has skated for GB at four Junior World Champs, with Zagreb being her second Senior Worlds event.

2 THERE WAS double joy for RAF ice hockey as both the men's and women's teams triumphed in the Inter-Services at Sheffield Ice Arena.

3 UKAF'S WOMEN footballers knocked in three unanswered goals to win the President's Cup against the Dutch Armed Forces, to the delight of team manager FS Karl Milgate.

RAF men also got one over the Netherlands, beating the Dutch Air Force 4-0 at Sporting Khalsa FC.

4 RAF REGIMENT FC keeper AS1 Jamie Bartlett etched his name in Astra League history with a dramatic 94th-minute headed equaliser and match-winning penalty save.

The Regt's super stopper got his hands to a TG5 spotkick for a 7-6 win on penalties to cap an epic comeback for his side, who retained the trophy at Oxford City FC's ground.

RAF Regt captain Cpl Hayden Pain said: "To win the Astra League cup two years in a row is a remarkable achievement."



4



1

July

07

1 THERE WAS an Olympic one-two for the Air Force as RAF, England and GB hockey star AS1 Liam Sanford and Gp Capt Ray Morley both won selection for the Paris summer Olympic Games.

Sanford (*above*) is no stranger to summer Olympics, having helped GB to fifth at the Tokyo Games in 2020.

Morley (*below*) was selected as boxing International Technical Officer.

2 A DEBUT silver medal at the European Masters championship was the reward for weightlifter Cpl Michael Cutler in Norway.

He stormed the snatch and clean but a failed lift in the jerk saw him miss out on gold.

Cutler went on to represent the RAF at the British Championships and Great Britain at the World Championships.

3 SERVICE CRICKET finally got underway at Wormsley Cricket Ground, against Sir Paul Getty's XI.

Speaking after the drawn match at the idyllic Stokenchurch, Buckinghamshire venue, RAF and UKAF men's captain Flt Lt Adam Fisher said: "Summer feels like it has officially started."

UKAF opened the batting, going on to score 289-6 after 54 overs.

Fielding, UKAF took four wickets but could not stop the match ending in a draw.



1



2

August

08

1 A BATTLING display from the Service's road racing team produced fourth and seventh-place finishes at the Navy-hosted Brentor Circuit, Dartmoor.

2 WOMEN'S RUGBY Union received a double shot in the arm this month as Flt Lts Lucy Nye (*above*) and Carys Williams-Morris signed club contracts with Exeter and Gloucester respectively.

The signings saw Devon-born Nye, RAF women's captain, return to her roots at Premiership side Exeter Chiefs, from Leicester Tigers, while Williams-Morris, who has represented both England and Wales internationally, moved from Loughborough Lightning to current Premiership champions Gloucester-Hartpury.

3 THE SERVICE'S rugby league stars hit a magnificent seven tries as they sunk GB Teachers 36-10 at RAF Cranwell. The game saw six different try scorers.

4 RAF TENNIS stars looked to ace their Polish counterparts as they prepared to take to the courts for the 41st AIRCOM Inter-Nation Sports Championships in Poznan. The prestigious six-discipline event saw the Service take part in tennis in September, volleyball in October, followed by cross-country, basketball, athletics and football.

5 RAF MARHAM triumphed at the Inter-Station T20 cricket, beating Brize Norton in style.

Losing just one wicket on the way to glory, Marham beat Brize at the home of RAF Cricket, Vine Lane, Uxbridge, reducing their opponents to 96-9.



1

● Also see p25

4



September

09

1 HAVING STARTED the month in the British 24-hour race, the Service's kart stars produced top-five finishes in the Armed Forces Championship in Kent.

2 THERE WAS Parisian paralympic joy and pain as the medal dreams of veterans ASI Luke Pollard and Cpl Stu Robinson (*below*) were made and lost just minutes apart.

Pollard, guide to para-triathlete world champion Dave Ellis, roared with delight as the pair crossed the Pont Alexandre III finish line in first, while Robinson's GB wheelchair rugby team lost the bronze medal game against Australia in the nearby Champs-de-Mars Arena.

3 UKAF's RUGBY union stars narrowly lost the Rugbytown Sevens tournament in Colorado, 10-12 to Gorilla Rugby. The military men had trounced the host US Navy's All Navy Rugby 50-0 at Infinity Park in Glendale, USA in the semi-final.

4 CPL DAN MCNAMARA (*above*) hoped his newly-won Elite Athlete Status as a coach would help his Wolves Women's football side in the 2024/25 season.

His team narrowly missed out on a Women's FA Cup quarter-final berth.

5 THREE RAF drone flyers formed part of the UKAF team competing at the Military International Drone Racing Tournament (MIDRT) 24.

Sgt Simon Fassler, Cpl Brendan Bolger (current RAF champion) and Cpl Marc Booth were set to take to the air at the Honourable Artillery Company in London against a field of top pilots.

2



4



October

10

1 HM THE King presented Odiham tug of War captain Cpl Phil Morley-Jones with the winner's shield at the Braemar Games as the aviators stormed to IS glory. Odiham also beat the Army for the first time in three decades.

2 SERVICE BOULDERERS weren't hanging around in the hunt for medals at The Climbing Hanger for the RAF championships.

The Reading event saw Cpl Brandon Phipps win the open men's event, while in the U25s ASI(T) Rhys Hall took top spot and ASI Sam Spencer claimed the women's title.

3 RAF ESPORT stars came a battling second to the US Army in the Code Bowl 2024 event.

All three UK Services were present at the international Call of Duty showdown at the National Building Museum in Washington DC.

4 IT WAS going to take more than fog, rain and wind to stop orienteer duo Sqn Ldr Philip Johnston-Davis and Flt Lt Charlie Elliss from winning their respective RAF orienteer championship titles.

The duo triumphed on the technical Malham Moor course in the Yorkshire Dales.

5 TACTICAL CATCHING secured the Inter-Service carp angling championships for the RAF for a second year running at Brasenose 2 Linear Complex, Oxford.



5

1



November

11

1 WEIGHTLIFTER CPL Michael Cutler and table tennis ace ASI Darcie Proud (*above*) took top honours at the RAF Sports Awards as they were crowned sportsman and sportswoman of the year at Halton House.

2 MOUNTAIN BIKE and downhill riders followed up an Inter-Service double win with podium finishes in the British Enduro series in Innerleithen.

The spectacular year end also saw MTB stalwart Sgt Andy Lochhead seal third in Vets and third overall in the BNES in Scotland.

3 ARCHERY HOTSHOTS Sgt Ellie Spinks and Chf Tech David Inglis secured a bronze podium finish at the national county championships for the first time ever. The pair were shooting in the barebow mixed teams category at the Lilleshall National Sports & Conferencing Centre event.

4 SERVICE RUGBY union stars Flt Lts Amy Cokayne and Sarah Bonar played in the second WXV tournament.

Cokayne's Red Roses made it back-to-back wins in WXV1 while Bonar's Scotland tasted late WXV2 defeat to Australia.

5 RAF AMERICAN football stars' IS hopes of back-to-back championship wins were dashed as the Army ran out winners.

Having beaten the Navy 27-6 then lost to the Army 18-6, the RAF Mustangs faced a nervous wait for the outcome of this year's championship, with the Jackals winning the final game and the title.



2

3



December

12

1 SERVICE FOOTBALL'S Over-55 team paid its respects to former RAF and England star David Salkeld with a clash against England Veterans Over-60s. The Service side lost the match, at Kirby Muxloe Football Club, 1-0.

2 BLUEWINGS MADE it a hat-trick of wins at the RAF Ice Hockey Championships, beating Vulcans 7-4 in Cardiff after a week of action. The competition at the Ice Arena featured 14 games, a separate trades contest and coaching camps.

3 THERE WAS a gold medal in the deadlift and bronze overall for Sqn Ldr Vicky Radcliffe as she represented England at the Commonwealth Powerlifting Championships in South Africa. The same event also saw ASI Megan Davenport (*above*) secure a double win at U52kg in the Bench-only and Full Power Commonwealth Championships.

4 SERVICE FOOTBALLER Cpl Rachael Howes completed a 24-hour gym challenge to raise money for Blood Cancer UK. Howes was joined by teammates for the event at RAF Shawbury in her bid to raise £3,000 after she was diagnosed with the rare incurable blood cancer lymphoplasmacytic lymphoma in August.

5 A HAT-TRICK victory for the RAF at the Holly Birkett six-hour endurance race at Silverstone maintained its reign as the most successful Service in motorsport.

The Motorsport Association fielded three debutants but still had enough experience to win out in the 73-year-old race.



2

5

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



Take look back at sporting RAF year

Pages 25-27

BOXING



SIX OF THE BEST: Cpl Brad Axe (left) impressed in his first pro bout over half a dozen rounds, in London's York Hall

Axeman back on track after York Hall bout

Daniel Abrahams

THERE WERE capital gains for a consummate six rounds as Cpl Brad Axe won his third professional bout, this time at the home of English Boxing, York Hall in Bethnal Green.

In his first six-round fight after moving up from three rounds, Axe fought out a points win against Swindon's Jensen Irving in the middleweight division.

The RAF firefighter instructor told *RAF News*: "To win at York Hall was a dream, it was a perfect night. I boxed so well and really managed to put on a show for my supporters.

"It was a good step up to six rounds. I showed that I'm back and I mean business."

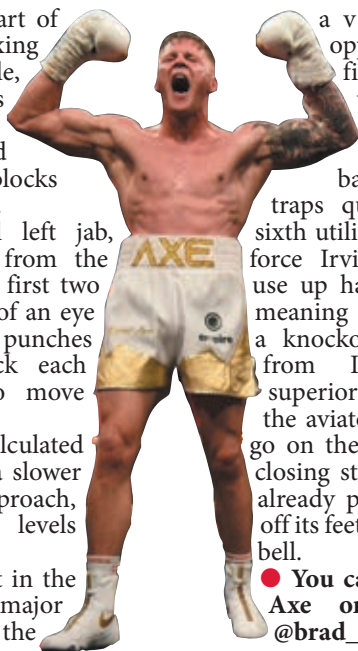
Having narrowly lost in his second bout, in America to Texan

Julian Delgado as part of the Transatlantic Boxing Clash in Brownsville, Texas, the aviator was keen to get things back on track and was quick out of the blocks against his opponent.

Using a surgical left jab, Axe scored points from the first bell, taking the first two rounds in the blink of an eye with combination punches pushing Irving back each time he looked to move forward.

Axe was more calculated in the fourth, with a slower measured approach, maintaining energy levels where he could.

A good head shot in the fifth was the first major blow struck by the



aviator's opponent, as the fight opened up, but did no real damage.

Axe was back out of the traps quickly in the sixth utilising his jab to force Irving back and use up half the round, meaning nothing but a knockout would do from Irving. With superior ring craft, the aviator was able to go on the attack in the closing stages to lift an already partisan crowd off its feet until the final bell.

● You can follow Cpl Axe on Instagram @brad_axe.

MOTORSPORT



ANGLESEY: Remembrance

Eco-fuel win and tortoise and hare triumph for Hall

Daniel Abrahams

SERVICE MOTORSPORT recorded bumper-to-bumper winning finishes to the year after taking top spots in the Race of Remembrance and Coningham Cup.

Anglesey was the port of call for the 12-hour endurance event which runs through the opening Saturday night, pausing on the Sunday morning for a pitlane service of remembrance.

Entering three teams, the Mazda MX-5 Pioneers Alternative Fuels and BMW 116 Graduates Racing Car teams both showcased the service's drivers and engineering capabilities, but it was Audi TT Running on Sustainable Fuel that took top spot.

Running entirely on HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil) diesel alternative fuel, the car completed an impressive 760 miles over the course of the race.

Audi driver, Cpl Alex Smith said: "I jumped at the opportunity to race in the biofuel Audi TT. After about two hours we began to feel confident about having the consistency, pace and strategy

to win the race. It was a fantastic result."

Donington Park Raceway was the next venue for the Con Cup and with the Royal Navy pulling out due to technical issues, a tortoise-and-hare battle saw the RAF come out on top.

Driver Sgt Phil Hall took the wheel for the aviators in a 35-year-old 60bhp Skoda Favorit, while the Army fielded a 300bhp turbo-charged four-wheel drive Alfa Romeo running Subaru components.

A plucky RAF crew squared up and after six intense stages, covering 50 miles, there was perhaps the greatest upset in military rallying.

With Hall sticking to the Alfa throughout, a clutch issue beset the Army team after stage four.

Losing time and places the Army needed to gain on Hall, while the aviator simply had to hold fast for the final eight miles of the race to win, which he did.

Former World Rally competitor Hall said: "I can't believe it. There are no words. It's probably one of my greatest achievements in rallying. It shows, you never give up."



MY FAVORIT WIN: Sgt Hall in the 35-year-old Skoda



R'n'R

Announcements:

p6-7

Puzzles: p8



Win!



Win complete collection of hit TV series ● p5

Jason Isaacs is Cary Grant in Archie

● See pages 4-5



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

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



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

**COMBAT
STRESS**
FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

CINEMA

Film Review

A Real Pain (U)

In cinemas January 10

Revisiting horrors of the WWII death camps

TWO JEWISH cousins embark on a trip to Warsaw to honour their late grandmother, joining an intimate group of travellers on a tour around historic sites including a concentration camp.

Played by Jesse Eisenberg and Kieran Culkin, they explore a tense familial chemistry, young men who had been joined at the hip as kids and since drifted apart. Strait-laced David (Eisenberg) has settled down

and started a family, where Benji (Culkin) seems to have lost his way, evidently struggling with the loss of their grandmother.

Immediately the difference in their personalities is apparent. David is the regimented plan maker, where Benji is the disruptive wild force. The tour that David has booked, run by an English guide (a deceptively brilliant Will Sharpe), will give the cousins an agenda for the next few days, visiting monuments and towns whilst hearing about

the Jewish experience of World War II but also talking to each other. This small but diverse group are all on a very personal journey, but will find some collective catharsis.

We will learn that Benji is battling mental health issues, has stopped medicating, and had recently tried to commit suicide. His forthright nature may rub some people up the wrong way, but he seems to connect in a way that David is unable to.

The masterful appeal of A



JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY: Benji (Kieran Culkin) and David (Jesse Eisenberg)
PHOTO: SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

Real Pain is in the relatability to both characters, personifying a duality that perhaps each of us possesses: the sensible, self-conscious introvert and the coolly uninhibited extrovert.

Writing and directing, as well as starring, Jesse Eisenberg manages to create an experience rich in emotion, but hitched to the energetic onslaught of Culkin. Carrying over some of

his brash charm from HBO show *Succession*, the character of Benji can change so abruptly that he can create or relieve tension in an instant.

A thoughtfully intimate film that taps into big themes of the human condition, suffering and pain, whilst managing to make you smile.

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

Music

Eternal

Scala, London, April 30, 2025



No end in sight for Eternal

BBRITISH R&B band Eternal have announced their first UK headline show in more than a decade – at Scala in London on April 30, 2025.

Having taken the pop world by storm in the 1990s, Eternal reformed earlier this year, with founding members and sisters Easter and Vernie Bennett being joined by new bandmate Christel Lakhdar.

The trio appeared at a number of UK festivals throughout the summer, and the show at Scala – which will see them backed by a full live band – will be Eternal's first UK headline show in over a decade.

Vernie said: "The fans have given us such an amazingly warm welcome back to the stage this year that we are overjoyed to perform our very first London show in more than 10 years. I'm looking forward to performing on stage with my sister Easter and the beautiful Christel. The show will be filled with memories,

laughter and a few songs we haven't sung in a while. It will be very nostalgic."

Easter added: "It has been an amazing experience returning in 2024 for the Big Reunion but this time around will be epic. I'm so excited to be hitting the stage, reliving my youth, and singing live to you all with our band. Here we come 2025!"

Originally formed in 1992, Eternal rose to fame throughout the 90s with hits such as *Stay* and *Just A Step From Heaven*. Their 1997 gospel-inspired song *I Wanna Be the Only One* topped the UK Singles Chart, and won them both the 1997 MOBO Award and Capital FM Award for Best Single.

They achieved international success, selling around 10 million records worldwide and receiving seven BRIT Award nominations.

Their success even saw them travel to the Vatican in 1995 to perform their song *I Am Blessed* for Pope John Paul II.



Theatre

Strictly Come Dancing Live

Arena tour, 2025

Dust off the glitter ball for Strictly Live

SARAH HADLAND and Shane Ward are among the celebrities taking part in the 30-date *Strictly Come Dancing Live* UK arena tour 2025, that runs from January 17 to February 9.

The line-up also includes soap star Jamie Borthwick; broadcaster, presenter and opera singer Wynne Evans; singer, TV presenter and author JB Gill; model and TV personality Tasha Ghouri; and Gladiator and Olympian Montell Douglas.

They will be joined by the *Strictly* judges Shirley Ballas, Anton Du Beke, Craig Revel Horwood and, for the first time ever on the tour, Motsi Mabuse. And, from *It Takes Two*, Janette Manrara will return to host the tour.

Jamie said: "*Strictly* is magic and I had a ball on the TV show – so I'm delighted to be hitting the road next year and getting the opportunity to perform in arenas all over the UK."

BSL

The tour opens at Birmingham's Utilita Arena then the celebs, along with the glitz, the glamour and the sequins, will travel to some of the UK's biggest entertainment venues: Utilita Arena Sheffield, Utilita Arena Newcastle, OVO Hydro Glasgow, M&S Bank Arena Liverpool, First Direct Arena Leeds, AO Arena Manchester, Motorpoint Arena Nottingham and finally The O2 in London.

Each performance will host a British Sign Language interpreter, who will be displayed on two large screens on either side of the stage.

Tasha added: "I can't believe I'm going to be performing in arenas – it's a real



STAR LINE-UP: (l-r) Shayne Ward, Tasha Ghouri, JB Gill, Montell Douglas, Wynne Evans, Sarah Hadland and Jamie Borthwick
PHOTO: RAY BURMISTON

pinch me moment and an amazing way to continue this journey, I've loved it so much. I'm so happy that all the shows on the tour are going to be BSL signed."

● **Go to:** [StrictlyComeDancingLive.com](https://www.strictlycomedancinglive.com) for more information and to book tickets.

TV

New Year viewing
ITV & ITVX

Hard-hitting drama & Hollywood glamour

Rural drug running and life of Cary Grant

MARTIN CLUNES stars in the gritty drama *Out There*, about county lines drug-dealing, on ITV and ITVX in January.

Written by acclaimed screenwriter Ed Whitmore (*Manhunt*), in the six-part series Clunes plays Welsh farmer Nathan, with Louis Ashbourne Serkis as his 15-year-old son Johnny.

An ITV spokesperson said: "The drama depicts the stealthy and surreptitious invasion of the land our farmer cherishes with devastating consequences as his livelihood, homestead and family life are threatened by local county lines drugs dealers who are essentially urban gangs using the British countryside as a field of operations and moving drugs and money between their inner-city hubs and provincial areas."

And *Happy Valley* actor



James Norton leads the cast of psychological thriller *Playing Nice*, adapted by *Malpractice* writer Grace Ofori-Attah from the bestselling novel by JP Delaney.

Set against a sweeping Cornish landscape, two couples discover that their toddlers were switched at birth in a hospital mix-up and face a horrifying dilemma: do they keep the sons they have raised and loved or reclaim their biological child?

ITVX will launch the murder-mystery *North Shore*, starring Joanne Froggatt (left), about a British and an Australian detective, forced to work together to solve the complex murder

of a UK politician's daughter in Sydney, on December 29, and on ITV there's another chance to see Jason Isaacs, Laura Aikman, Harriet Walter and Kara Tointon in *Archie: The Man Who Became Cary Grant*, a four-part drama by award-winning screenwriter Jeff Pope about the life of Hollywood's leading man.

Born in Bristol in 1904, to parents Elsie and Elias, *Archie* narrates the story of a young

Archibald Alexander Leach's troubled childhood and how extreme poverty, his father's adultery and the loss of his older brother, John, tore the family apart and sent his loving mother into a downward spiral of grief and depression.

Pope's scripts reveal how deceit, cruelty and one overpowering lie shaped Archie's life. At 14 he auditioned for the Bob Pender Troupe, a band of



OUT THERE: Rural drugs drama stars Martin Clunes (left) and Louis Ashbourne Serkis



AGE-GAP COUPLE: Cary Grant (Jason Isaacs) and D

acrobats, stilt walkers, clowns and comedians after seeing them perform at the Bristol Hippodrome. Lean and athletic, he learned stilt walking, and when the troupe went on tour to the US, teenage Archie was intoxicated by the land of opportunity. Believing he was not wanted by his family in the UK, he decided to stay in the US to try to make his way in showbusiness.

A chance meeting with the comedian George Burns helped him find his first footing on the acting ladder and a contract with a movie studio who felt he needed to change his name, and Cary Grant was born. The drama intercuts with scenes from 1961 when at the height of his fame, living in Benedict Canyon, Los Angeles, the legendary actor was breaking all box office records, but desperately unhappy in his

Exhibitions

Splash!

The Design Museum, London, March 28 to August 17, 2025



ICONIC: Pamela Anderson in *Baywatch* swimsuit ZUMA Press, Inc./Alamy Stock Photo

Pammy's swimsuit still makes a Splash

PAMELA ANDERSON'S sensational red bathing suit from *Baywatch*, the first Olympic solo swimming gold medal won by a British woman, and a selection of eye-catching men's Speedos from the 1980s are all-star items that will go on display in the Design Museum's spring exhibition on swimming.

Splash! A Century of Swimming and Style – opening at the Design Museum in London in March – will examine our enduring love of water over the past 100 years: from Britain's lido boom during the early 20th century, to the viral

Mermaidcore trend of the 2020s.

Other remarkable objects in the exhibition include the banned 'technical doping' LZR Racer swimsuit, one of the earliest surviving examples of a bikini, and a detailed architectural model of the Zaha Hadid-designed London 2012 Aquatics Centre.

A spokesperson for the Museum said: "Over 200 objects from around 50 lenders across Europe will feature in *Splash!* collectively exploring swimming's evolution in its social, cultural, technological and

environmental contexts.

"Across three in-depth sections that reflect the three locations in which we swim – the pool, the lido and nature – the exhibition will dive into design's role in shaping our relationship with swimming, both in the water and beside it. Visitors will discover the full spectrum of the design of swimming – from sports performance and fashion, to architecture.

"The exhibition's story will begin in the 1920s, when swimwear began to be marketed for swimming rather than the Victorians'

preference for bathing, and w beach holidays exploded popularity. It will explore right to the present day, and swimming's role in modern life such as ho influences and subverts our i of body autonomy and agency well as its link to environme issues."

Splash! will be guest-cur by the dress and design histo and broadcaster Amber Buto (inset left), known for her his segments on BBC One's *The C British Sewing Bee*.

● Go to: designmuseum.org more information.



Edited by Tracey Allen

Win!



DVDs

Taken: The Complete Collection (15)

Out now on Blu-ray and DVD (Fabulous Films Ltd/Spirit Entertainment)

Action movie fans will be *Taken* by this

CLIVE STANDEN (*Vikings*) stars in this series, an action-packed prequel to the international blockbuster franchise *Taken*, as Bryan Mills, a younger, hungrier version of the iconic character played by Liam Neeson in the *Taken* films. Fans can now enjoy all 26 episodes from both series of the hit television show on DVD and Blu-Ray.

Based on the *Taken* films by Luc Besson (*Léon*) and Robert Mark Kamen (*The Karate Kid*)

the TV series was developed by Besson and English screenwriter, producer and ex-soldier Alexander Cary, who previously worked on *Homeland*.

The series also stars Jennifer Beals (*The L Word*, *Flashdance*) as Christina Hart – the leader of a small group of specially-trained government operatives.

A former Green Beret, Mills becomes swept up in a quest for

vengeance after he fails to protect one of those closest to him.



Recruited to join a group of CIA operatives, he begins to hone his deadly skillset as he dives headfirst into dangerous missions that test his courage, and push him to the edge.

We have a copy of *The Complete Collection* on DVD (rrp £74.99 or Blu-ray £99.99) up for grabs. To be in

with a chance of winning this great prize, answer this question correctly:

Who starred as Bryan Mills in the *Taken* films?

Email your answer, marked Taken 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 January 10, 2025. Please mark on your entry if you prefer to win the prize on Blu-ray or DVD.

Win!



Competition

The Banff Mountain Film Festival

UK and Ireland tour, 2025

Win tickets for wild evening out at Banff Mountain Film Festival

THE BANFF Mountain Film Festival World Tour is bringing the latest action and adventure movies to venues around the UK and Ireland in 2025.

The festival features two new collections of short films packed with extreme expeditions, intrepid characters and stunning cinematography.

“Buckle up for a night of nail-biting adventure – from the comfort of a cinema seat,” said tour director Nell Teasdale. “Join the world’s top outdoor filmmakers and adventurers as they climb, ski, paddle, run and ride through the wildest corners of the planet. Plus, we guarantee you’ll leave inspired to have an adventure of your own too.”

As well as gripping films, each event features a free prize draw for outdoorsy goodies from the tour’s partners.

Banff tour films are chosen from around 500 international entries into the Banff Mountain Film and Book Festival, held every November in the Canadian Rocky Mountains. Now in its 16th year, the UK and Ireland tour will visit 50 locations in spring and autumn 2025.

Film highlights include *A Team Sport*, which focuses on ultra-runner Courtney Dauwalter – one of the greatest athletes in the history of the sport.

Courtney has challenged herself to tackle three iconic 100-mile races back-to-back in one summer, including the legendary Tour du Mont Blanc in the Alps. The film explores how she sees herself as the latest rung in a long ladder of women redefining the boundaries of trail running and inspiring a new generation of athletes.

Another highlight is *Of A Lifetime* – following three extreme skiers and snowboarders as they sail across the notorious Drake Passage to ride the unimaginably steep, icy lines of Antarctica.



ULTRA TOUGH: Endurance athlete Courtney Dauwalter is the subject of *A Team Sport*

For more information and to book tickets, see banff-uk.com.

You could win a pair of tickets to the festival, to a venue of your choice. For your chance to win, answer this question correctly:

What is the name of the athlete featured in *A Team Sport*?

Email your answer, marked Banff Film Festival 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 January 10, 2025. Please make sure you mark on your entry which venue you prefer to attend – see the website for venue details.



EXTREME: *Of A Lifetime* follows snowboarders in Antarctica



Dyan Cannon (*Laura Aikman*) in story of screen legend

private life. With two failed marriages behind him, he began to woo actress Dyan Cannon. Thirty-three years his junior, Dyan didn’t initially fall for his charms, turning down his attempts to meet.

Isaacs said: “Cary Grant didn’t just want to be the biggest star in the world, he needed to be and applied all his street-learned guile to make it happen.”

Walters plays Elsie, Grant’s mother, who was described by her son as ‘a small, fierce woman.’ Tointon plays the younger Elsie.

Walters said: “What I liked about her [Elsie] was she showed moments of sensitivity and great awareness along with humour, so with what little she had she was a fighter and I admire that.”

PLAYING NICE: James Norton (*left*) stars in psychological thriller about baby swap mix-up



GB SWIMMER: Lucy Morton won gold at 1924 Paris Olympics
PHOTO: SHOWTOWN BLACKPOOL



Your Announcements

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

Death

ARMSTRONG Joy. The family are sad to announce the death of Joy Armstrong (née Bedenham), aged 99. Beloved wife of the late Wg Cdr Colin Armstrong. Married shortly after the Second World War, they raised a family and retired in 1977. They were devoted to their Service life and made many friends. Per Ardua ad Astra.



Joy and Colin Armstrong on their wedding day in 1948

MERCER Clifford, born 1935, died at Melksham, on December 4. He had a long association with the RAF through his job as an MoD Meteorologist. He joined the Met Office 1951 at RAF Tangmere, postings included Lyneham, Brize Norton, High Wycombe, HQ 2nd TAF (Germany), Bruggen, Borneo, Gan, Gibraltar and Falkland Islands. He retired 1995 and lived in Wiltshire.



Clifford Mercer

Reunions

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

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

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

103RD Entry RAF Halton Apprentices Reunion October 17, 2025 at the The Park House Hotel in Shifnal, TF11 9BA, 7pm. Contact Mick Woodhouse on: 07811 401040, email: 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

TO all members and supporters of the RAF Association, Beccles and Southwold Area RMG; wherever you might be, we wish you all a Happy New Year with your families and friends. The New Year will bring challenges for us all, so please remember your less agile colleagues who would appreciate a voice on the telephone now and again. President Brian and the RAFA

Committee, RAF Association, Beccles and Southwold Area RMG.

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

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

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

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

RAF Catering Warrant Officers' and Seniors' Association: all serving or retired TG19 WO or FS and all former Catering Branch Officers are invited to join the RAF CWO&SA. We meet twice yearly For more information please email: janedjones@btinternet.com.

RAF Physical Training Instructors Association - email RAFPTIA Honorary Secretary Denise Street-Brown on: ptisec@outlook.com for membership enquiries.

ROCKIN': The band's members are all military personnel. Inset, below, enthusiastic Top Cover gig-goers



Fans flock to hear Marham band live

A STATION BAND from RAF Marham have hit all the right notes performing to thousands across the country.

'Top Cover' were formed in 2023 by seven personnel from the Norfolk base as part of the Marham Music Club. Their members feature an all-ranks mix of serving personnel from the RAF and Royal Navy, from professions as diverse as armourers, pilots, engineers, People Ops, Logistics and even a Station Commander.

Performing at various station events such as mess dinners, Christmas parties and the annual Marham Family Day, they have also built a strong reputation outside Marham, leading to the band supporting The South at yearly 'Festival Too' in Norfolk, headlining the closing party at the Royal International Air Tattoo for 1,500 volunteers and playing the annual 'Fawkes in the Walks' fireworks display to a crowd of more than 5,000.

In the past six months they have performed to over 10,000 people at around 15

separate events. Rehearsals and performances are fitted around day jobs, deployments and exercises - with the majority of the band members directly supporting F-35B Lightning operations.

The band's frontman is former RAF Marham Station Commander, Gp Capt Fred Wigglesworth.

He said: "When we muddled through our first rehearsal as a band, I couldn't have imagined us playing to a crowd of 5,000 in under two years."

"In the music club, rank doesn't matter and we support each other whatever happens".

Flt Lt Emily Jenner, who plays saxophone in the band, said: "Whether civilian, military, young or old, music brings everybody together and is a real morale boost."

She added: "The highlight for me has been playing at RIAT. It started off with people having a relaxed drink sat at a table, but by the end of the night everyone was up dancing and we must have played three encores - epic!"

● Top Cover can be found at @topcover_band on Instagram.



Bo scoops top award

A RAFAKIDZ Cranwell staff member has won a prestigious early years award.

Bo Forster was named Nursery Room Leader of the Year at the National NMT Nursery Awards in London recently.

Bo, pictured right, said: "I'm so happy and I feel very honoured to receive the award."



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.**

Important Notice

The publishers of *RAF News* cannot accept responsibility for the quality, safe delivery or operation of any products advertised or mentioned in this publication. Reasonable precautions are taken before advertisements are accepted but such acceptance does not imply any form of approval or recommendation. Advertisements (or other inserted material) are accepted subject to the approval of the publishers and their current terms and conditions. The publishers will accept an advertisement or other inserted material only on the condition that the advertiser warrants that such advertisement does not in any way contravene the provisions of the Trade Descriptions Act. All copy is subject to the approval of the publishers, who reserve the right to refuse, amend, withdraw or otherwise deal with advertisements submitted to them at their absolute discretion and without explanation. All advertisements must comply with the British Code of Advertising Practice. Mail order advertisers are required to state in advertisements their true surname or full company name, together with an address from which the business is managed.



Your Announcements

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

Charity helps Glen recover

A CONINGSBY-BASED airman has paid tribute to the RAF Benevolent Fund for helping him in his hour of need after an horrific bike accident left him in a coma.

Chf Tech Glen Evans (*pictured*) joined the RAF in November 2000 and is now an engineering operations controller. He previously served at RAF Brize Norton with 47 Sqn Hercules.

In April 2015, while stationed at RAF Marham, Glen was riding his motorbike three miles from base when he hit a bump in the road and lost control of the bike.

He said: "The motorbike hit me in the face, which knocked me out, and I fell headfirst into the road. I suffered a traumatic brain injury and was airlifted to Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge in a critical condition.

"I had broken my nose, was heavily bruised and very sore.

"The brain injury left me with memory loss; I had no recollection of the accident and even struggled with recalling people's names and events from my past."

He added: "It could have been career-ending for me. There was an element of uncertainty towards my future in the RAF. I knew that my recovery would determine my future?"



The Benevolent Fund stepped in and provided financial support to allow Glen's parents to fly from Scotland to be at his bedside, with accommodation, food and taxis paid for to ease the strain.

Glen added: "Having my family there to support me, and to support each other, was key to my recovery. It was reassuring to know the family were well looked after.

"I'd started to withdraw and would pretend I was asleep so I didn't have to speak to people and would try to miss meals. Knowing my family were there to visit each day gave me something to look forward to and motivated me to engage with people."

After two-and-a-half months of recovery in hospital and at home, Glen was able to return to work.

He said: "I have now made a full recovery, and ever since then, have been raising money for the Fund to give back. It is the very least that I could do.

"Before this happened to me I never fully knew the level of support the Fund could provide. Now I tell all my colleagues and friends about how they helped me and my family. I always say: 'Get involved with the Fund, it happened to me, and it could happen to you.'"

● Go to: rafbf.org for more information.

County's RAF story

NEWARK AIR Museum trustee Colin Savill's new book is now on sale at the attraction's shop.

It is about Nottinghamshire's part in the story of the RAF and its predecessor, the Royal Flying Corps. It lists all the RFC and RAF units that were based in more than 30 places in the county.

A spokesman for the Museum said: "For over a hundred years, from the days of the RFC of World

War I through the formation of the RAF, its 1930s pre-war expansion and WWII, the Cold War and into the 21st century, the county has played its part in the RAF's story. Not all places were airfields but they are integral to the story.

"The defence of the country especially, in WWI, the air offensive by Bomber Command and the USA's part in D-Day and Operation Market Garden in WWII were, in part, events that took place from RAF bases in Nottinghamshire. Training of both air and ground personnel began at places in the county during WWI and continued into the 1990s," he added.

"Many of these places have now disappeared to be replaced by housing, industry or returned to agriculture, some have left traces of their existence that can still be found but, sadly, many have not. One or two still have aircraft flying from them but only one remains as an RAF station."

Colin's book costs £12.
 ● Go to: newarkairmuseum.org for more information.



AUTHOR: Colin with his new title



RAF News

The Forces Favourite Read

Hit your target market with **RAF News** - the official newspaper of the Royal Air Force since 1961.

Reaching an audience of more than 50,000 readers every fortnight, **RAF News** is the Forces' favourite newspaper delivering exclusive news, features and sports action from across UK Defence.

To discuss your advertising in **RAF News** please call or email:
 T: +44 (0)7482 571535
 E: edwin.rodriques@rafnews.co.uk





R'n'R



Prize Crossword No. 376

Solve the crossword, then rearrange the nine letters in yellow squares to find an RAF term

Across

- 7. Mother concealed nothing coming back from station (6)
- 8. In French sea I wear no material (6)
- 10. Bar entertainment where songs are murdered (7)
- 11. Immature but well-intentioned? (5)
- 12. Shakespearean villain I joined in the past (4)
- 13. A profit once more (5)
- 17. **And 25 Across.** Dots locales around hot spot (5,3,4)
- 18. In Zanzibar I actually heard beautiful piece of opera (4)
- 22. **And 24 Across.** Base bronze or tin smelted here (5,6)
- 23. No good blower (3,4)
- 24. **See 22 Across**
- 25. **See 17 Across**

Down

- 1. Rooster to tip up part of plane (7)
- 2. High altitude meltdown? (3,4)
- 3. Nobleman trumps son, by the sound of it (5)
- 4. Flightless bird Batman likes to send packing (7)
- 5. **And 6 Down.** RAF plane to fix connection (5,5)
- 6. **See 5 Down**
- 9. We ligated against RAF aircraft (9)
- 14. Economic upturn consumes communist frustration (7)
- 15. Tramp ruins parties (7)
- 16. Chap from Delaware meets Los Angeles statesman (7)
- 19. OBE returned to Big Apple raven (5)
- 20. Help return railway log (5)
- 21. Fast-moving RAF planes? (5)

Name:

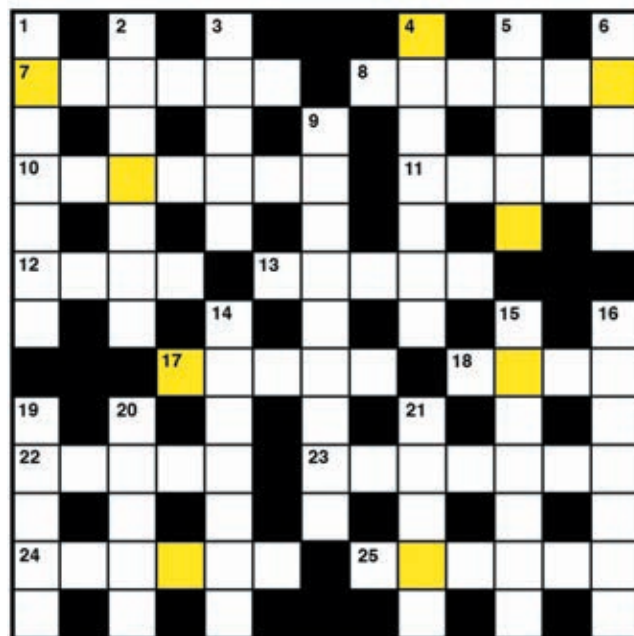
Address:

.....

.....

RAF term: Crossword No. 376

The winners of our Prize Crossword and Prize Su Doku puzzles will receive a recent top military title – please send your entries to the address printed in the adjacent Su Doku panel, to arrive by January 10, 2025. Prize Crossword No. 375 winner is: Christine Ford, Wisbech, Cambs.

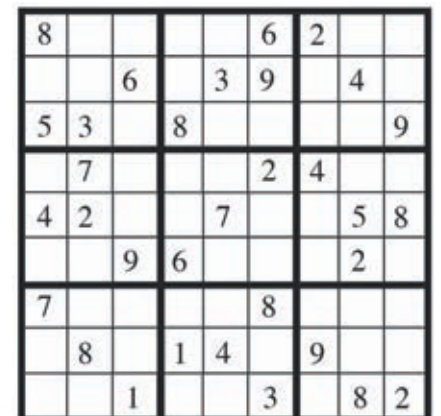


Solution to Crossword No. 375
Across – 6. Station 7. Topaz 9. Bilbo 10. Carnage 12. Wellingtons 14. Lissiemouth 18. Unearth 19. Unfit 21. Melon 22. Tallboy
Down – 1. Staid 2. Stable 3. Zoo 4. Hornet 5. Baggins 8. Rainbow 11. Alberta 13. Roundel 15. Shadow 16. Tangle 17. Pilot 20. RAF
RAF station – Cranwell



Prize Su Doku No. 386

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



Solutions should be sent in a sealed envelope marked 'Su Doku' with the number in the top left-hand corner to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP14 4UE, to arrive by January 10, 2025.

The winner of Su Doku No: 384 is: George Bean, Gloucester .

Solution to Su Doku No. 385

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



Panto reviews

The Further Adventures of Peter Pan & Aladdin

Waterside Theatre, Aylesbury (atgtickets.com) Swan Theatre, High Wycombe (trafalgartickets.com)

New takes on old faves, oh yes they are

IT'S PANTO time – and two of the best are in Bucks. Radio 2's Vernon Kay and Ru Paul's Drag Race star La Voix head the cast in a sparkling production of *Aladdin*, with a dazzling new digital set, at the Wycombe Swan. And Mark Moraghan (*Coronation Street, Holby City*) showcases his superb singing voice with Bradley Riches (*Heartstopper, Celebrity Big Brother*) as the perfect Peter in *The Further Adventures of Peter Pan* at Aylesbury's Waterside Theatre.

Moraghan positively relishes being the baddie, revelling in his role as the posh, evil Captain Hook. The story goes that, unbeknown to the other characters, Hook hasn't died after all and has been living on his own on a desert island, plotting his comeback and revenge on Peter.

Meanwhile, the boy who never grew up returns to the Darling family's London home where he meets young Emily Darling (Maeva Byrne), the great-great-granddaughter of Peter's original playmate Wendy, who is now 104.

Waterside panto stalwart Andy Collins (Three Counties Radio) is a side-splitting Smee, Leanne Garretty a sublime Tinker Bell (on rollerskates!) and Emma Jay Thomas is excellent as Ethel Mermaid/Mrs Darling.

Three-man acrobatic team The Nitwits perform the most breathtaking routines and the youngsters of Allstars Academy and Castielli School of Dance are adorable, especially in their fantastic sea-creature costumes (my favourite was the cute jellyfish).

It's a lovely family show and delivers everything you need from a panto, despite not having a dame.

Over at the Swan, where *Aladdin* is set in 'High Wycombia', the unbeatable La Voix excels as Lola Lankey – a new take on traditional washerwoman Widow



PHOTO: Barry Rivett

WATERSIDE THEATRE: Spectacular production of Peter Pan sequel



PHOTO: Matt Martin

SWAN THEATRE: La Voix and Vernon Kay star in Aladdin at High Wycombe

Twankey, keeping her sons Aladdin (Kyle Richardson) and Vernon (yes, you've guessed it) in some kind of order.

The cast, including powerfully-voiced Richardson, are brilliant and the set and costumes stunning. Lola first appears in a pink and yellow shimmering number with an orange feather headpiece describing herself as looking like 'a cross between a highlighter pen and Ed Sheeran'. I particularly loved her 'soap bubble' outfit, with yellow plastic ducks on her hat and shoulder.

There's strong support from Amiyah Goodall as Jasmine, Natalia Brown as Spirit of the Ring and Gerard Carey as the villainous Sven Gali.

This is only Kay's second outing in panto (he won best newcomer in the UK Pantomime Awards 2023) – he's a revelation, with a good singing voice and great comic timing. And he's unforgettable in the hilarious Abba tribute dressed up as Agnetha, complete with long blonde wig – someone naughtily commented that he looked like his wife (*Strictly's* Tess Daly).

If you're looking for some first-class seasonal entertainment, book your tickets now – both pantos run until January 5.

Five out of five roundels for both 
 Reviews by Tracey Allen