

**BASTION MOT: KEEPING THE WHEELS TURNING IN HELMAND**

# Defence**F**ocus

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## IN CHARGE

We meet Philip Hammond as he becomes the new Defence Secretary

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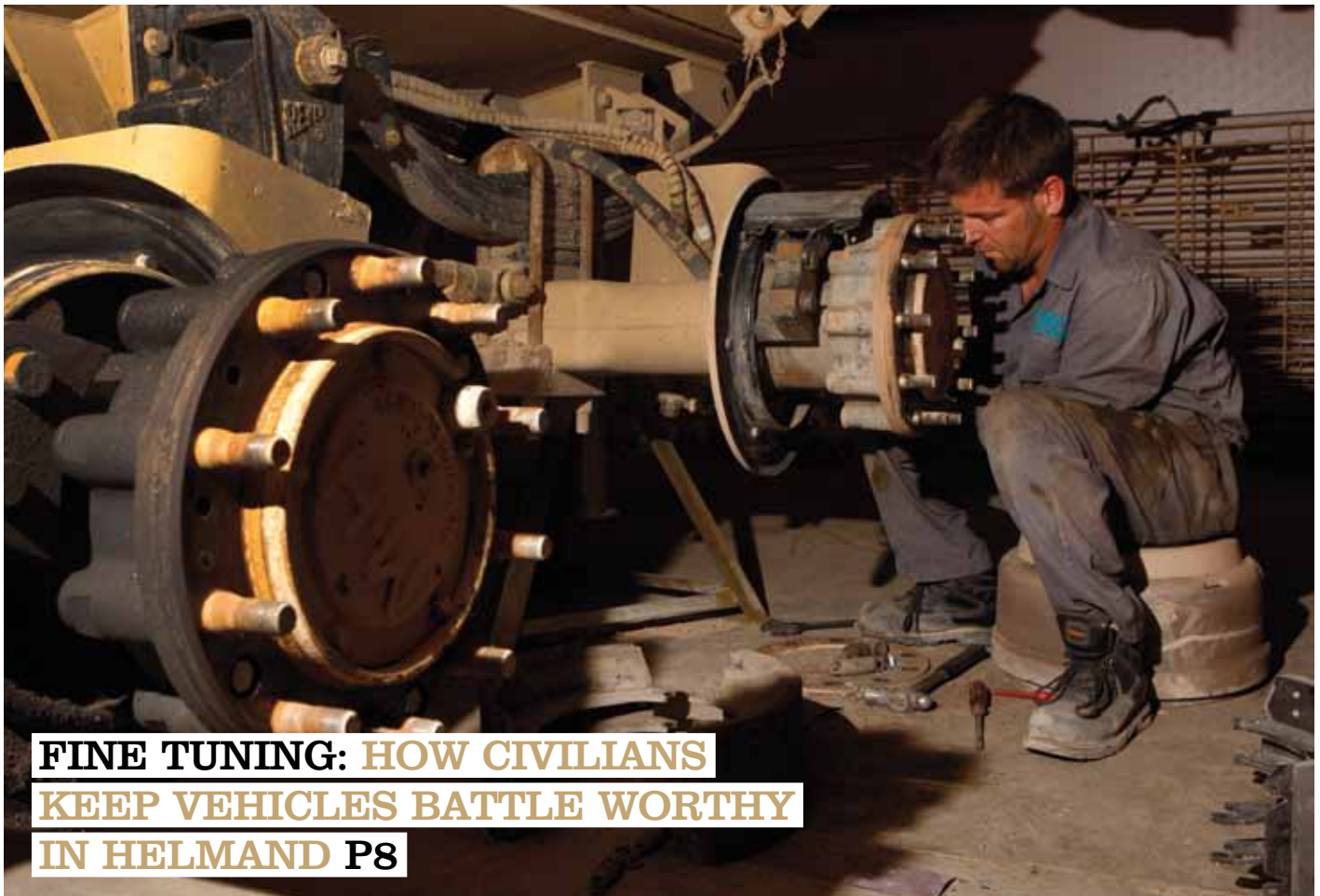
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# EDITOR'S NOTE

## DefenceFocus

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Level 1 Zone C  
MOD, Main Building  
Whitehall  
London SW1A 2HB  
General enquiries: 020 721 8 1320

**EDITOR:** Danny Chapman  
Tel: 020 721 8 3949  
email: danny.chapman709@mod.uk

**ASSISTANT EDITOR:** Ian Carr  
Tel: 020 721 8 2825  
email: carr\_ian@btconnect.com

**ASSISTANT EDITOR:** Leigh Hamilton  
Tel: 020 721 8 5988  
email: leigh.hamilton933@mod.uk

**ASSISTANT EDITOR:** Lorraine McBride  
Tel: 020 721 8 2341  
email: lorraine\_mcbride@btconnect.com

**ASSISTANT EDITOR:** Tristan Kelly  
Tel: 020 721 8 4252  
email: tristan.kelly569@mod.uk

**ART EDITOR:** Mark Eagle  
Tel: 020 721 8 3658  
email: designer\_defencefocus@btconnect.com

**DISTRIBUTION AND SUPPORT:** Shell Daruwala  
Tel: 020 721 8 1320  
email: shell.daruwala932@mod.uk

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## DANNY CHAPMAN

I feel like I often comment, "what a month" on this page. But for this edition I need a few more exclamation marks. Not only have we seen the fall of Gaddafi but a new Secretary of State for Defence has, suddenly, arrived.

I'm writing this on the day we go to print (*as per usual*), just hours before an expected announcement from Nato that operations in Libya are to end next week. Nato Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has already said: "We have accomplished our mandate to protect the civilian population of Libya." Quite a success story in which UK Forces were of course deeply involved (and many of whom will now presumably be coming home very soon).

My only (very personal) complaint about this rich diet of news is that it's come too close to our print deadlines for us to cover it in any detail in this issue. But if you look on the MOD website or intranet you will find reports on all the events as they unfolded over the last couple of weeks and a comprehensive account of UK Forces

involvement in the liberation of Libya, delivered by Chief of Joint Operations, Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach, at a press briefing on 27 October.

Much more convenient for our magazine production deadlines was the timing of the arrival of the new Secretary of State for Defence, Philip Hammond. So he's made me happy already (I'll gloss over the fact that changes at the top kept my out-of-hours online news staff away from the pub on a Friday night – all in the line of duty of course).

What's more, Mr Hammond agreed to give us an interview in his first week in office, thus giving us the chance to introduce him to you, as well as finding out what he thinks about taking on the defence brief and what his priorities are.

Mr Hammond was keen to emphasise that he sees his role as picking up the baton from his predecessor and continuing with the same priorities. So hopefully that means a bit of stability over the next few months. But then maybe we'd get bored if that happens!

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# IN MEMORIAM

DEATHS ON OPERATIONS - 26 SEPTEMBER TO 26 OCTOBER 2011



## Rifleman Vijay Rai

Rifleman Vijay Rai, from A (Amboor) Company, 2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, was killed in Afghanistan on Saturday 15 October 2011.

Rifleman Vijay Rai was killed by a gunshot wound when the checkpoint that he and his team were protecting alongside the Afghan Uniform Police in the Nahr-e Saraj district of Helmand province came under insurgent small arms fire.

Aged 21, from the Bhojpur District, Deaurali, in the East of Nepal, Rifleman Vijay Rai enlisted into the British Army on 21 December 2008, joining 2nd Battalion

The Royal Gurkha Rifles in Brunei after completing basic training in Catterick in September 2009.

Rifleman Vijay Rai soon established himself as a leading light within 2 Platoon, A (Amboor) Company and it quickly became apparent that this was a young man who epitomised the very finest qualities of a Gurkha Rifleman. Nowhere was this more apparent than on the sports field where his endearing personality came to the fore. He was always at the heart of any social gathering or function, strumming his guitar or treating everyone to his latest rendition of a Nepali folksong.

The youngest of five, he leaves behind his family who are very proud of him.

## HUMBLLED BY THE SACRIFICE

### BRIGADIER ED DAVIS, COMMANDER OF 3 COMMANDO BRIGADE, PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE TROOPS OF HERRICK 14

At a London press briefing, following his Brigade's return from a six month deployment to Afghanistan, Brigadier Ed Davis paid tribute to the Service personnel who have served as part of HERRICK 14 (April -October) saying: "It has been humbling to see the sacrifice and the professionalism of our people. Their humanity and their desire to reach out to the people of Helmand and their insatiable desire to make a difference has been inspiring."

Brigadier Davis talked of the campaign in Helmand province as being very much on track thanks to the efforts made during 3 Commando Brigade's tour and the hard work and sacrifice of ISAF and Afghan troops on previous deployments.

"Increasingly the progress is Afghan-led. The Afghans have developed an appetite to seize back sovereignty from the insurgent," he said.

Putting local people first was one of the principles that guided the work done by the Brigade over their tour, said Brigadier Davis.

"We put the people first and the insurgents second. They'd become disenfranchised and we had to convince

them that the opportunity for a better life was through a different route to becoming an insurgent."

From the start of the tour 3 Commando Brigade's approach was to build on the previous Task Force Helmand concept of Shape, Clear, Hold and Build operations, to what was going to be needed for the future – the transition of authority to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the national government.

"And that's exactly how it played out," said Brigadier Davis. "The tipping point was 20 July when we handed over lead security authority for metropolitan Lashkar Gah to the ANSF. That really lit the touch paper for Afghan appetite and confidence to seize back their sovereignty.

"As the tour progressed, the measure of success switched from looking at how well the battle group reacted to being attacked, to looking at how successful they were in connecting with the people through shuras. We also shifted from partnering the ANSF with us in the lead to enabling and mentoring them with them in the lead."

At the start of HERRICK 14 the attitude of locals was, at best, ambivalent about the role of the Afghan Government, but at the end of the tour the Brigadier said that most

were now supportive. The suppression of the summer fighting season was a key factor in this change of mindset.

"We moved away from the psychosis of what you can and can't do during a summer fighting season; you can do a lot more than just fight... you can progress the campaign," said the Brigadier.

In comparison to previous years, across their area of operations the Brigade experienced a 45 per cent reduction in insurgent attacks against ISAF and ANSF forces, a reduction of 86 attacks a week.

"There were some spikes in activity, but that was as a direct result of us taking the fight to the opposition which completely unhinged them," said Brigadier Davis.

At the end of their tour, 3 Commando Brigade leave behind a protected community about a third of the size of Dorset, with 450,000 inhabitants, which is around 65 per cent of the area identified as the target for the transition of authority by 2014.

"Some areas will take longer than others, but it is all eminently doable on the trajectory we have set," he said.



**TIME OUT**

A soldier from 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, sits in his bed space in a checkpoint in Helmand and goes through a recent batch of mail from loved ones. The CP is only accessible by foot so it can take weeks for a mail run. This batch of mail was delivered by the photographer whose image here is part of the portfolio that has earned him the accolade of Army Professional Photographer of the Year

Picture: Sgt Rupert Frere RLC



**Steady: a member of the DSG staff carries out wiring repairs on a MAN SV recovery vehicle**



# ENGINEERING SUCCESS

**CIVILIAN MECHANICS IN CAMP BASTION ARE HELPING TO KEEP THE SHOW ON THE ROAD. TRISTAN KELLY REPORTS**



**S**oldiers in Afghanistan rely on their vehicles to carry out the mission as well as keeping them safe - if anything does break down it can be a potentially life-threatening situation. It is for that reason that the civilians in the Defence Support Group's (DSG's) ESS Regeneration Capability, based in Camp Bastion, take their job very seriously.

Once inside the huge, £12 million, purpose-built, air-conditioned and well-ordered state-of-the-art workshop, it is easy to forget that you are in Afghanistan at all, but the expense and sophistication has a dual purpose. Officially opened in January this year, the workshop allows for vehicles to now be maintained and repaired in theatre, closer to the guys that use them. And this saves the Treasury an estimated £15 million a year.

Steve Faulkner, who has progressed from an apprentice at DSG to Head of Production at the Bastion facility, speaks of its achievements with obvious pride.

"We do the work we would do in the UK and that saves money but it also keeps the vehicle closer to the unit," he says, explaining that to send a vehicle back to the UK for its two-year '932' (the military equivalent of an MOT) costs around £150,000 and can take up to five months.

Reducing the time the vehicles are out of theatre also means the size of the fleet can be reduced, making an estimated saving of £50 million. However, Faulkner stresses that they are not there to do the work of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

"Their role in life is to keep the unit-level repairs going, and to service platforms out in the FOBs and PBs (Forward Operating and Patrol Bases) - we are not allowed outside the wire."

This is not the first time the civilian engineers from DSG have worked alongside their military customers. For a number of years, DSG, a MOD Trading Fund, supported the British Army Training Unit Suffield in Canada, and has deployed on operations in Iraq and Kuwait. While in the UK, DSG employees work in garrisons providing in-barracks equipment support.

The 97 DSG mechanics and support staff currently working in Camp Bastion overhaul all manner of vehicles and equipment in the military fleet - from the front line Jackals, Ridgbacks, Huskys and quad bikes, and the logistic fleet of MAN trucks, tankers and loaders, to plant equipment such as excavators, bulldozers and generators. They even have facilities for repairing sophisticated surveillance equipment and loudspeakers.

"They all come in, they all have a full inspection and a 932," Faulkner says.

"When they go out they are classed as what is called 'task worthy' and fit for service in theatre. We do a lot of upgrades as well, modification work and up-armouring.

"Our portfolio is continuing to expand. At the moment we do 60 to 65 platforms a month but over the next three months that is going to go up to 85 with the additions we are getting."

Servicing a vehicle in Afghanistan is not a case of changing the oil and checking the brakes. "Suspension, all the running gear and the electrics take a battering," Faulkner says, adding with a smile, "we also see a lot that come in with some pretty severe damage." He points to the skeletal remains of a Cat 257, a type of tracked digger: "That one was dropped out of the back of a Chinook - it lost its top cab on the way down. We have put a lot of it all back together again and straightened it out. It will go back out and will be fine."

With a working pattern of 10-hour

is a guy out there getting shot at that needs this vehicle. We were one off our production target last month on Friday morning so the guys worked into the night to get it finished because they wanted it done to go out."

For Roy Gibbs, a vehicle fitter usually based at Longmoor in the UK, the sense of feeling his work is connected to those out in the FOBs and PBs has been extremely satisfying. Working on light field generators used in remote bases to power everything from laptops to kettles, he has become known affectionately by the soldiers as 'generator man'.

"The boss used to come along and tell me I was known as the generator man, which I thought was just rubbish, until some of the guys came in and said how they do appreciate it," Gibbs said. He explained that many said a reliable generator can make a real difference to life in a remote base: "When they come and tell you that it's good.



**Underrated:** a vehicle mechanic replaces the brake shoes on a Mastiff

shifts, six days a week, for a one-year tour in the less than salubrious surroundings of Camp Bastion, you might think that volunteers to carry out the work would be hard to find, but far from it; many DSG employees are desperate to do their bit in Afghanistan.

"A lot of the guys here are already lining up to come back," says Faulkner.

Of course, employees are rewarded with monetary allowances for the long tour in such conditions, but for many it is more about the sense of contributing to the front line that drives them on and makes them want to come back.

"The priority for us here is completely different," says Faulkner. "There is a real can-do attitude. The front line is just 15 miles away and people realise that there

"The regular updates on operations and the vigils we go to bring it home to you what they are going through, so whatever you can do to make it easier, you do," he adds.

Mark Davis, a vehicle mechanic currently working on MAN trucks, also says that hearing about the effects of his work out on the ground is a great motivator, but as a TA Corporal in the Royal Wessex Yeomanry, he perhaps understands it more than most.

"You know you have to get it right because ultimately the work you do here is saving lives out there," he says. **DF**

Find out more about working as a civilian in theatre at Support to Operations through DII People Services > Moving Jobs > S20



Picture: Harland Quarrington

# A LONG TIME IN POLITICS

## JUST SEVEN DAYS INTO HIS NEW JOB AS SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE, PHILIP HAMMOND SPEAKS TO IAN CARR

**T**hey say a week is a long time in politics – so how would you describe this week? I ask the new Secretary of State for Defence, Philip Hammond, just seven days into his new job. My new boss is polite enough to smile at my clichéd opening.

He is quietly spoken, calm and precise. Not surprisingly time is tight for this interview, but he does not give the impression of being rushed. “Extraordinary really, it’s been an amazing week,” he says.

Over the last seven days, on top of having to get to grips with arguably one of the most complex ministerial briefs in government, Mr Hammond has represented his new Department at a ceremony conferring the honour of “Royal” to the town of Wootton Bassett, given a briefing on Afghanistan to Parliament and then there was the little matter of the events in Libya to contend with. With the death of Gaddafi it shouldn’t be long until NATO declares the mission over and the new Defence Secretary describes our Armed Forces’ work in Libya as a huge credit to them.

Mr Hammond had been in the job for less than 24 hours when he had the sobering task of writing his first eulogy for Gurkha Vijay Rai who had been killed in Afghanistan. Surely a duty which, perhaps more than any other, brought home the particular responsibilities of the new job?

“It did indeed. There have been a number of things this week that have brought home the way in which this Department is so different from any other.

“Having responsibility for the Armed Forces engaged on active service is a privilege. They are a hugely impressive organisation, very committed, very professional and loyal.”

As you might expect, the new Secretary of State has already received a huge amount of briefing on Afghanistan and has met with senior officers of 3 Commando Brigade,

recently returned from their tour of duty.

“Meeting them has really brought all that briefing to life,” he says. “Listening to their experiences on the ground and being able to ask them questions about the interaction with Afghan political figures has made it all much more real. And of course I will be taking an early opportunity to visit.

“From the briefing and intelligence reports I have seen, I am pleasantly surprised by what I am seeing about the effectiveness of the Afghan National Security Forces, which is crucial to our ambitions to leave Afghanistan by 2015, leaving behind a stable and increasingly successful and viable Afghan nation. There is reason for optimism, but obviously plenty of pitfalls to negotiate.”

Getting the tap on the shoulder to take over as Secretary of State from Dr Fox must have been a surprise. While his predecessor had spent five years as the shadow defence minister, few would have linked Hammond’s name to this job I suggest, learning quickly that it’s a mistake to underestimate the new boss.

“I worked very closely with Liam Fox in opposition on the challenges we would face in Defence, working with him on his plan to put Defence on a sustainable basis. No-one doubted Liam’s commitment to the Armed Forces,” he continues, “but he was the first person to say that you have to have it on a sustainable basis, in a way that the economy can afford.”

Does this mean that he sees his job as continuing the course laid out by Dr

Fox? “Liam has completed the initial stage of the plan. He has got us through the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) and put in place a series of plans for implementing the necessary key changes for the transformation programme. All of that is mapped out. I’m not saying it’s all set in concrete as there are some things to be resolved.”

Mr Hammond describes this as a continuous process. With the SDSR now complete, he says that the implementation of the outcome of that review is the baton he has been handed. “It’s going to be tough, because we are trying to do a number of things in parallel and developing the programme to do them in real time. We are reducing the size of the Department, we are reducing manpower overall at the same time as reshaping our forces; changing the way the Department works in terms of financial accountability along with a big rebasing programme. Layered over that we will be withdrawing our forces from Afghanistan. So, there are some really big transformations going on in parallel which I know is quite unsettling.”

He is clear that after operations, reform and procurement are his big priorities, which means getting the equipment plan resolved with a budget that is credible.

“This Department has lived, for many years, with an equipment programme, a business plan if you like, that nobody thought could be delivered. It was not a credible programme. We have to

**“ Having responsibility for the Armed Forces on active service is a privilege ”**

reconstruct the programme so that we can move forward in such a way that we know with a high degree of certainty that it can be delivered, so that our contractors can plan on the basis of real not phantom procurement and that we can do it in an efficient way.”

Mr Hammond argues that the focus is efficiency and getting the maximum military bang for our buck, with the SDSR having defined what the UK’s ambitions should be and set out how we need to configure our forces to deliver them. “I’m confident that we can do that,” he says. “We have always punched above our weight and I suspect we will carry on doing that.”

In a letter to all Defence staff sent during his first week here, Mr Hammond said that he intended to be a strong advocate for the MOD and the Armed Forces, both within government and the public. Does this mean, I ask, if like his predecessor, who had a reputation for being something of a bruiser when the government was talking about cuts, that he intends to be robust with the Treasury?

“I don’t recognise this model of the MOD and the Treasury at war with different agendas,” he says. “Everybody I have spoken to in this department recognises absolutely that the size and ambition of our military power is linked to the size and growth of our economy. It can’t be otherwise. What we have to do is deal with

the problems in our economy, and the MOD can’t be exempt from that.”

As a successful businessman, no-one knows better than Mr Hammond that achieving success depends on a motivated workforce. Given the massive changes to come, how will that affect the way that MOD personnel put their shoulders to the wheel?

“What we need to do is bring the uncertainty to a conclusion as soon as possible. Nail down the plans and be open and honest and transparent – even if some of the things are painful. Let’s make sure everybody understands what we are doing and where we are going to end up: how the plan is going to deliver the sustainable high capability Armed Forces that we all want, what the trajectory will be over the next 10 years so they know what to expect and they can plan accordingly for it.”

Of course stability at the top of any organisation is important, especially when you are trying to motivate staff through times of great change. But the MOD has had seven Secretaries of State in less than seven years. That can’t help. “I absolutely recognise that there has been a lack of continuity in the past,” Mr Hammond replies. “But I hope that in terms of policy, people will see what I’m doing as a continuum of what Liam Fox was doing. We share a clear view of the future of the role of the Armed Forces and the MOD. I used the phrase earlier, ‘picking up the baton

from him’ very deliberately.”

I ask, for the benefit of those in the Department who don’t know him, what sort of a boss he is and how does he like to work?

“I like to see as much information as possible, but it’s got to be in digestible form,” he says. “I’m interested in detail. But what you need to make a Department of this size work is effective people who quickly demonstrate their capability so you can put complete trust in them. The whole approach for the plans about restructuring are about devolving authority, responsibility and accountability and giving the right people in the right places the powers to do what needs to be done and learn how to work within a constrained environment.”

So far, the Defence Secretary says he has been very impressed with the briefings he has been given and by the quality of the people he has met. He acknowledges that it will take him some time to fully master the complexity of some of the issues here.

“I’m hoping by the end of the year we will have broken the back of that and we will have a Secretary of State fully in command of the brief and we will have a credible business plan, we will know where we are going and how we are going to get there. That I think will start to restore confidence and begin to raise morale.” He says this quietly, but with belief. **DF**



Picture: LAIPHOT/Andy Laidlaw

**Intelligence: the Commanding Officer of 45  
Commando Royal Marines, who Mr Hammond  
recently met, at a shura in Helmand**

# REAL ACTION HERO

**ACTING SERGEANT DIPPRASAD PUN HAS BEEN HONOURED BY THE NATION AFTER SINGLE-HANDEDLY FIGHTING OFF A TALIBAN ATTACK. REPORT BY LEIGH HAMILTON**



**Pride of Britain: Freddie Flintoff, Acting Sergeant Dipprasad Pun and Myleene Klass at the awards ceremony**

Picture: Adam Sorenson, Daily Mirror's Pride of Britain Awards

**A** lone on sentry duty, Acting Sergeant Pun found himself under continuous attack from Taliban fighters who pounded him with rocket-propelled grenades and AK-47 gunfire for more than 15 minutes. During the fire fight, the Royal Gurkha Rifles soldier fired more than 400 rounds of ammunition and launched 17 grenades, as well as detonating a mine in order to protect his fellow soldiers inside a nearby compound, who were unable to reach him.

"Initially, when I saw two Taliban about 200 metres away, I was scared," he said. "Once I opened fire at them, there were many other Taliban firing towards me, I thought that they were going to kill me.

"But those thoughts didn't last for long. I knew I had to do something before they killed me and my comrades.

"I thought, 'before they kill me, I have

to kill as many of them as I can'."

This all took place during his deployment on Op HERRICK 12 in 2010. He came under attack while on sentry duty in the Babaji area of Helmand province.

While under fire, Acting Sergeant Pun retreated alone to the roof of a building so that he could get a better line of sight of his attackers.

After a quarter-of-an-hour's close combat, two insurgents gained access to the roof of the compound; Acting Sergeant Pun shot one with his SA80 rifle, but when his weapon jammed, he grabbed the gun's metal tripod and threw it at the second attacker, knocking him to the ground. Finding he was out of ammunition and with two more enemy fighters still firing at him, Acting Sergeant Pun detonated a Claymore mine, forcing the last of the Taliban attackers to flee.

On reflection, Acting Sergeant Pun said of his actions: "After a couple of days, it was out of my mind. I felt more confident after the incident as I thought that the Taliban don't have as good fighting capability as us."

Acting Sergeant Pun's actions earned him a Conspicuous Gallantry Cross as well as a Special Recognition Award at the recent Daily Mirror Pride of Britain Awards. He was presented with his trophy by former England cricketer Freddie Flintoff and singer Myleene Klass.

Mr Flintoff said: "His bravery and selflessness is something I can't get my head around. I think it's shocked a few people, and hearing about what he's done is just amazing."

Ms Klass added: "When you hear Dipprasad's story, it sounds like something you would see at the movies. When you think that one person single-handedly took on so many insurgents, let off 400 rounds of ammo and lived to be able to tell the tale, it just defies understanding."

On meeting the celebrities at the star-studded ceremony at the Grosvenor House Hotel at the beginning of October, Acting Sergeant Pun said: "It's a great opportunity to meet all these celebrities. I'm really enjoying it." **DP**



**Action man: Gurkha Pun single-handedly fought off a Taliban attack**

Picture: Specialist Picture Service Ltd

Newborn: a baby sits with his mother in the main hospital in Gereshk, Helmand province



Picture: Sgt Alison Baskerville

# LIVING PROOF

## TRISTAN KELLY REPORTS ON THE DRIVE TO IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTHCARE IN HELMAND

**A**fter decades of conflict, the provision of healthcare in Afghanistan leaves a lot to be desired. The Afghan Government now sees this as a priority area which if improved could help turn the population away from the Taliban insurgency.

"It is letting the population have the basic human services that they need and showing them that the government is supporting them and is providing those services," explains Captain Samantha Toop, from the Royal Army Medical Corps, who is currently Medical Liaison Officer in the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT).

"It also needs to be impartial, and that's why we don't stop the Taliban using the facilities," she continues. "It is not something the Taliban can take a message from saying, 'oh look they are picking and choosing sides and who is getting what'. And it helps boost people's opinions of what the government is doing. They realise that they are being catered for and they are being looked after and by sticking with

the government they will get what they are entitled to."

Maternal mortality is a particular priority area. In Afghanistan, 24,000 women die in childbirth each year, due largely to early marriages and frequent pregnancies, as well as the lack of healthcare services. The Afghan Ministry of Public Health wants to provide more midwives and female doctors as part of its drive to improve services across Helmand and the Helmand PRT is aiding this effort through their health team.

Captain Toop explains that maternal mortality and prenatal health quickly became a special interest of hers. "Initially I was the first female on the health team so I took that on as one of my main focuses because the biggest problem in health is maternal mortality," she said. "A lot of our projects are pushing to improve that side of things.

"Their healthcare system only came into play in 2005, so it is quite junior," she adds. In fact in 2004 an estimated one-quarter of the population had no access to healthcare. In 2003, there were just

11 doctors and 18 nurses per 100,000 population. According to the World Health Organization that number had almost doubled by 2010.

Health services are now contracted to the Bangladeshi organisation BRAC Afghanistan. Although in Helmand services still cover quite a range; from a husband and wife team trained in very basic healthcare and based in a village of around 500 to a regional clinic for 15,000 people and finally to district hospitals such as that in Bost in Lashkar Gah.

Recently a major pre-service midwifery education initiative was launched by the Ministry of Public Health to train and graduate new midwives.

"There is only one female doctor across the whole of Helmand province," says Captain Toop. "I think there are roughly 36 midwives but there should be 70 odd. So there is a big shortage. But the ones that are employed are in the district hospitals where they are able to do more complex births such as caesareans."

In addition to having the staff available to deal with deliveries, Captain Toop explains that one of the biggest barriers to improving the survival rates of pregnant women is the lack of awareness amongst women that they need to go to a clinic.

She explains that about 90 per cent of women give birth at home, traditionally helped by a 'birth attendants'. But such birth attendants are often religious figures usually with no medical training. Across the country just 14 per cent of births are attended by a skilled health professional, according to the United Nations Population Fund.

"These unqualified attendants are not able to recognise the dangers, so women are dying from postpartum haemorrhage where they're just bleeding too much. They aren't able to have transfusion services at home so they die," explains Captain Toop. "A lot of the women are too young, anaemic, fragile-boned – they are just not able to cope with the complications of birth. It is not the lack of clinics, the clinics are now there - it is just trying to get them and their husbands to say, 'look there is something seriously wrong, get to a clinic, they can deal with it'."

The complex gender roles in Afghanistan contribute to the problem. "There are still lots who would say it would be better to die than have a man treat me," Captain Toop explains. "So until we get the female staff things will be held back, but I don't think that is something the PRT can solve. It is just going to take time to educate the men."

One way of getting the message across to men about the importance of maternal healthcare has been through the use of traditional shuras, or village meetings. Captain Toop explains that in Musa Qal'ah health teams from the PRT have spoken at such shuras and taken a message from the District Governor that maternal healthcare is important, not only for the woman as an individual but for the family as a whole.

"The people go from these shuras and tell others the message, so by Chinese whispers it becomes more acceptable to take women in labour to a clinic," Captain Toop says.

The main role of Captain Toop and the PRT health team in all this is to make sure that all the health agencies are working together and to an agreed aim. Captain Toop acts as the interface between the Military Stabilisation Support Teams (MSSTs) and the PRT.

"So it is making sure that out on the ground, the stabilisation advisor or the district team, whether that is any of the military actors, governance or anything, follow the Helmand plan in the health sector.

"I go out and visit the district centres and find out how they are getting on and whether they need any advice on any health projects. For example in Lashkar Gah we



**Expectant: Dr Abdul Latif and father to be Abdul Manan (19) and his younger brother wait outside the maternity wing of the main hospital in Gereshk. Abdul and his wife Firoza (18) have travelled almost 20km to use the new facility**

Picture: Sgt Alison Baskerville



**Scrubs: a midwife in Gereshk Hospital**

Picture: Sgt Alison Baskerville



Picture: Steve Dock

**Captain Toop in front of one of the new ambulances**

have a number of provincial projects that are being developed so it is just making sure that those are continuing steadily and there is a plan in place on how they are going to be used: "they are not just going to be a big shell that is going to get abandoned after a while."

One issue she is having to rein in is the desire that some people in the PRT teams, such as the MSSTs and Female Engagement Teams, have to intervene directly. "I have to say let them get on, give the Afghan people advice and help build their capacity - ultimately it must come from the Afghans."

However, she says that they can help in other ways. For example, by recommending improvements such as a security wall for a clinic compound or a separate entrance for women.

One of the recent achievements that Captain Toop is particularly proud of is the provision of three new ambulances. These new vehicles, supplied and funded by the PRT, will be used to transfer women experiencing complications in labour from regional clinics to the main provincial maternity hospital in Lashkar Gah.

"This is about setting up a scheme

where they can call an ambulance and get emergency support. It is about making sure there is a good referral process so when a clinic can't manage or when it is too technical, a caesarean for example, we can then take them to hospital and offer that service rather than relying on a hired car."

Captain Toop explains that she goes out once or twice a month to each different district to make sure every new ISAF stabilisation team that comes through understands what the goals in health provision are. "I make sure they understand that we are capacity-building rather than getting directly involved in medical care – making sure that the district health officer, the Afghan guy, is actually linking into the line ministry and has good communication, that health education is working well, the clinics are functioning."

So apart from being a good thing for the Afghans, what benefit does all this bring ISAF in Afghanistan? "Improving healthcare is quite crucial, even though quite a lot of people forget about it," she says. "It is a massively good thing for counter-insurgency. It's winning over the population" **DF**

# SUPERSTARS OF THE SEA

**COMMODORE BILL WALWORTH, HEAD OF THE ROYAL FLEET AUXILIARY, TALKS TO IAN CARR ABOUT SHIFTING STUFF**

**DF: What does the Royal Fleet Auxiliary do?**

**BW:** Our role is to manage, crew and operate the ships that provide the maritime operational support to the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines that they need to conduct their missions. These include Fleet replenishment tankers, ammunition and stores ships, the primary casualty receiving ship Argus, the Fleet maintenance ship Diligence and three landing ships dock (the Bay class) which are designed to transport loaded landing craft, amphibious vehicles and troops into an amphibious landing area.

**DF: So it is of vital importance?**

**BW:** We are as vital a part as any other component of the Royal Navy. A task group is a collection of capabilities; different ships, aircraft, submarines and personnel, all interdependent. You can't have one without the other.

Essentially we provide the sustainability and the glue that enables the combatants to operate globally and for extended periods away from the UK. We're the sea part of the supply chain.

**DF: In operations how do you make sure you are in the right place at the right time with the right stuff?**

**BW:** You've hit on the most challenging part. When you



**I'll send you a line: Using an SA80 RFA crew send across a gunline**

have a task group dispersed over a wide area, embarked helicopters with their own demands, and your logistic sites may be days away, it's a complex business.

Ultimately we go where we are sent, but it is essential to have an experienced understanding of what's needed. An operations officer's job aboard a big RFA is always demanding and nerve-racking but there's a lot of team work in the planning. Where our people earn their money is by being able to see what higher command is trying to achieve and then to offer solutions. On operations you are always planning what you would do if the supply chain breaks down. I think that's the great adventure of it all.

**DF: So do you have enough ships?**

**BW:** Of course any commander always wants more assets. As a result of the Strategic Defence and Security Review we lost three ships and reduced our manpower accordingly.

We had to reduce our running costs by 10 per cent. We have reviewed and managed our costs and we are confident that we can meet the requirements but there will be no fat at all. We will continue to sweat the assets as we always have done.

**DF: The Navy's surface fleet is also shrinking, how does that affect you?**

**BW:** As the navy contracts it needs to use every asset to maximum capacity and we have risen to the challenge. We have versatile ships and personnel and we have found ourselves doing tasks we would



**Over to you: A replenishment at sea**



not have been asked to do 10 years ago, such as involvement in counter-piracy work and hurricane disaster relief.

**DF: Will replenishing the new aircraft carriers require you to learn new techniques?**

**BW:** It's a long time since we supported ships on that scale. The core skills will be the same as the older Invincible class, but at a substantially higher tempo.

Fortunately we have a good relationship with Military Sealift Command in the US, so we will be drawing on their experiences. We also hope to have the new class of replenishment tankers by then. There's been a lot of sums done to make sure we've got enough ships to support them when they are operating at maximum capacity.

**DF: Why are RFA crews civilian and not Navy?**

**BW:** Our people are full time mariners with their origins in the merchant service – which is shifting stuff, which is what we do, but in a more complex environment.

The big cargo carriers load up, cast off then go in a straight line to their next port of call. We never go in a straight line but we follow the commercial shipping business model of sweating the capital asset. We deploy our ships for years at a time and rotate the crews.

The Navy has found over centuries of experience the best way to operate warships. We think we've worked out a pretty good way of supporting them.

**DF: Being part of expeditionary operations must mean that you are sometimes in harm's way?**

**BW:** Yes of course, and you can't just leave because it gets a bit unpleasant, and with wider areas of surveillance these days you can't just hide over the horizon.

We learned a lot of lessons from the Falklands campaign. It taught us that we didn't know enough about warfare and being aware of what was going on around us. It made the Royal Navy realise that they were vulnerable.

We've had a lot of training to close that understanding gap. We put more of our people through warfare training. It's not about making them into warriors, it's about understanding what's in the commander's mind, not compromising manoeuvres and being in the right place at the right time with the right gear.

**DF: So, do you feel the RFA are unsung heroes?**

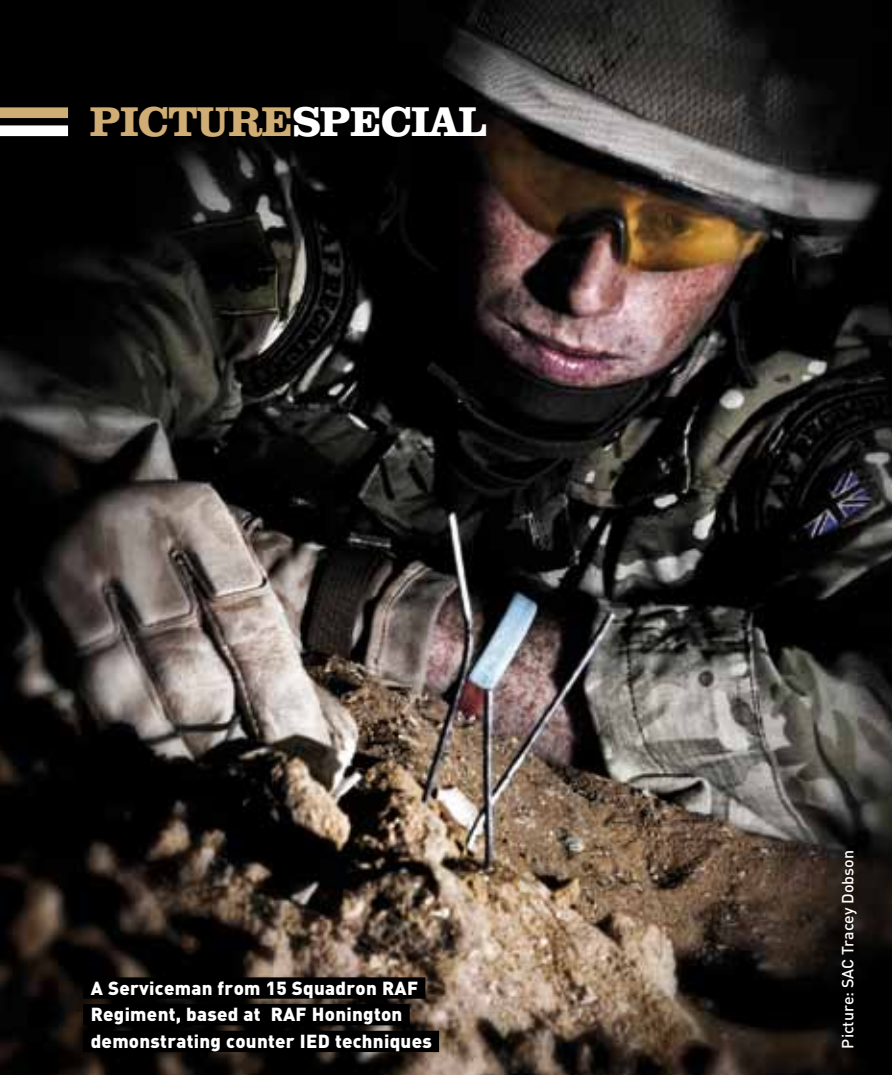
**BW:** I think we used to take a perverse pride in being unsung heroes. Our strong ethos has always been just to get on with things without flapping.

These days that doesn't work. When resources are tight you need to make sure the decision makers know who you are and what you do. And getting credit is good for morale.

We are developing more of a communications effort now and we are in the media more, and sometimes we even get mentioned without being called HMS! **DF**

“ We used to take a perverse pride in being the unsung heroes ”





A Serviceman from 15 Squadron RAF Regiment, based at RAF Honington demonstrating counter IED techniques

Picture: SAC Tracey Dobson



A PR portrait advertises officer cadet training in the RAF

Picture: Cpt Kryssy lees

# PICTURE PERFECT

SOME AWARD WINNING IMAGES FROM THE RAF AND ARMY 2011 PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITIONS. SEE MORE AT [WWW.MOD.UK](http://WWW.MOD.UK)



Practicing winning to a vessel in the North Sea. Flight Lieutenant Johnston, E Flight 202 Sqn, RAF Leconfield.

Picture: Flight Lieutenant A Johnston



AirCraftswoman Shuel laughing on graduation day

Picture: Kate Parrott



**Private Ian Kirton with Vigo a protection dog from the Theatre Military Working Dogs Section**

Picture: CPL Mark Webster



**A soldier from 3 Scots rests against a tree during a clearance patrol on a pre-deployment exercise at Thetford**

Picture: Opt Jamie Peters RLC



Picture: Sergeant Ian Forsyth RLC

**Young officer cadets from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst take part in The Sandhurst Cup at the United States Military Academy at Westpoint, USA**



**Fusilier John Bryant, an 18-year-old soldier from A Company, 2nd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, in the muddy compound where he lived in Helmand province**

Picture: Sgt Rupert Freere RLC

# AT THE HEART OF DEFENCE

**PROBLEMS DON'T ALWAYS HAPPEN IN WORKING HOURS. SO WHO KEEPS THE WHEELS OF DEFENCE IN MOTION WHEN MOST OF US ARE SLEEPING? REPORT BY LEIGH HAMILTON.**

In a corner of Main Building, an apartment-come-office is used by four individuals who take it in turn to be there on duty every night and weekend in the role of resident clerk.

The clerks – soon to be renamed ministerial duty officers – are the first port of call for any issues affecting defence out-of-hours, including fatalities in Afghanistan, counter-piracy incidents and more unusual events like the arrival of new defence secretaries. It is their responsibility to contact relevant people to advise them of situations or to get advice on how best to handle an issue.

"They are vital to the successful out of hours management of defence," said Barry Burton, the Defence Secretary's private secretary. "Ministers and senior officials rely on this team to ensure they can continue to fulfil their role when everyone else has gone home. Often, the duty officer is informed of breaking news before anyone else in MOD. It's a responsibility that can't be taken lightly. It takes a clear head to make the necessary decisions to deal with the situation appropriately, they must also be able to keep a secret.

Team leader Emma Frost was on duty when US forces tracked down and killed Osama bin Laden. Emma received the phone call from Number 10 in the early hours of the morning

reporting the incident.

She explained: "It was around 2.30 a.m. when the PM's private secretary told me that I was allowed to tell the Defence Secretary but no one else until President Obama went live on CNN, which didn't happen until two hours later. I was watching TV waiting for the President to start talking about this before I could begin making phone calls to the rest of defence."

Each resident clerk is expected to work one night shift a week and one weekend in four. This is in addition to their normal full-time day job within the Department.


"A duty officer will start at 6.30pm from Monday to Thursday and finish at 8.30 the following morning," said Emma. "Weekends can be quite long starting Friday evening and ending Monday morning. We are able to sleep in the flat if we're not being disturbed, but if there is a requirement for us to be up all night to support something, then we do that."

The pressure of dealing alone and immediately with serious events can bring out the best in people. Those who are given the responsibility of being a ministerial duty officer must meet certain requirements.

"We look for someone with a bit of get-up-and-go about them, who can think through problems for themselves, who have sound judgement and are prepared to use their initiative," said Emma.

"They have to be able to maintain their integrity and support their judgement when they're dealing with issues for the Department and be prepared to take some risks. You're working on your own and you're working long hours at pace, you have to know what is essential and what is only "nice to have" in order to get the job done."

"Though at times highly pressured, this is a key role and I can think of no better way for staff to learn about defence and engage in topical issues affecting the business of defence," added Barry.

For more information contact Emma Frost on [DCCAugmentation@mod.uk](mailto:DCCAugmentation@mod.uk) 







**Maestro: Gareth Malone with the wives and girlfriends of Armed Forces personnel at RMB Chivenor**

# COMBAT CHOIR

**TV CHOIRMASTER GARETH MALONE HAS FORMED A CHOIR ENTIRELY FROM MILITARY WIVES AND GIRLFRIENDS. INTERVIEW: LORRAINE MCBRIDE**

**F**OR the new series of his BAFTA winning programme, 'The Choir', musical maestro Gareth Malone has embarked on his most ambitious and emotional challenge to date – teaching wives and girlfriends of Armed Forces personnel serving in Afghanistan to sing.

The three-part BBC2 series is called *The Choir: Military Wives*. It sees Gareth working with the families of tri-Service personnel based at Royal Marines Base Chivenor in north Devon from just before the troops deploy on operations to their homecoming parades several months later. Gareth describes this period as "an emotional roller coaster" for the women.

"I think a tour to Afghanistan is always difficult for military wives," says the presenter during a rare break from filming.

Over eight months, Gareth threw

himself into life on base with the fearless and funny military wives.

"It was very interesting because we hear a lot about troops which is positive but we never hear about the women," explains Gareth. "To my mind, we only ever see military wives when something tragic happens. I wanted to show what they are doing and literally give them a voice."

Gareth describes choral singing as harder than people think and teaching novices is a challenge. "It is vocally and emotionally demanding," he continues. "And at times, it's like doing a crossword, you have to really concentrate and use your brain." But, he adds, it is also very rewarding to sing in a choir.

"There is something special about singing in harmony and being part of a pack. It gives great benefits to people."

Gareth, a born diplomat, describes

the standard amongst his troupe as surprisingly high: "There are some great singers, some not so great..." And he debunks any ideas that all that military discipline somehow rubbed off on the wives. "Sometimes they were a bit shambolic and ambled in late, clutching their cappuccinos," he says, arching an eyebrow.

"It is never going to be a military choir but it definitely has a flavour. Trying to teach these women and get them to work as a team like the military meant I had to break them down a bit. And at times I felt like a sergeant major whipping them into shape!" he chuckles. But what won him over was their enthusiasm.

The choir began gently with hits by Adele alongside *The Grand Old Duke of York* and gradually picked up a military sensibility as they grew in ability.

Despite the pressure – "It's really

hard work, stressful and terrifying if you've never performed before," says Gareth – the wives and girlfriends got their greatest support from the front line.

"The biggest stress for troops while they are away is if things go wrong for their families back home," says Gareth. "So it felt like they were really supportive because it gave the women a focus. They obviously have their daily lives, kids and jobs, but this was for them. It gave them a chance to knuckle down together and that's been really positive."

Gareth had no military ambitions himself, although his dad, Jamie, is a former TA soldier, while his granddad loyally served in the RAF: "He stands up to salute as soon as the Queen comes on TV." Gareth admits that as a music-mad youngster, he spurned his boy's grammar school cadet force for the lure of the choir.

"At my school there was a real divide and they never broke down the barrier," he says. "There were kids in the Combined Cadet Force and kids in the choir. And I'm afraid that was me, namby-pamby Gareth going off to choir practice while everyone else did press-ups."

Gareth, a classically trained tenor at the Royal Academy of Music, has an enormous respect for military bands. "They are absolutely incredible," he says. "We work with the Band of the Royal Marines at one point in the series which was just such an honour."

Ask how important his work has been with the Armed Forces and it's clear that the project is close to Gareth's heart. "For me, all my work has been about getting singing more broadly accepted and it felt like singing and the military were two polar opposites.

As far as I was aware, there was no singing in the British military whereas the Americans have their battle chants, when they jog, "I DON'T KNOW, BUT I'VE BEEN TOLD."

"We don't do that, we're British, good lord," he jests. "No, it's been really interesting trying to challenge that preconception."

One of the series' highlights, says Gareth, was performing for the locals in Barnstaple. "It felt really important to see what they made of us," he says.

"We had a fantastic reaction and it was just a memorable moment when they all stood up and sang. It was incredibly emotional because for those women to know that they have the support of the town and the impact that had on them was unbelievable."

Asked for his own impressions of Britain's servicemen and women, Gareth says: "They are a really inspiring bunch.

## “ A tour to Afghanistan is always difficult for military wives ”

I've learnt a lot through this, about finding grit in tough times. They are amazing and some of their families are in the direst circumstances, really having to think about possibilities that the rest of us just don't think about. It's incredible and the can-do attitude of Britain's military is just exemplary."

Gareth trained with some of the rear party and sampled the 'Marines playground' in full kit. "It involved a lot of mud and was absolutely gross," he reports. "But I perversely enjoyed it and it gave me a new respect for their fitness, dedication and camaraderie. Even though they give each other a hard time, they are so knitted together, it was endearing and I think that's what the women got out of the choir experience, that sense of togetherness."

I ask Gareth if he has a message for troops. "I think there is so much support and understanding for what they are doing

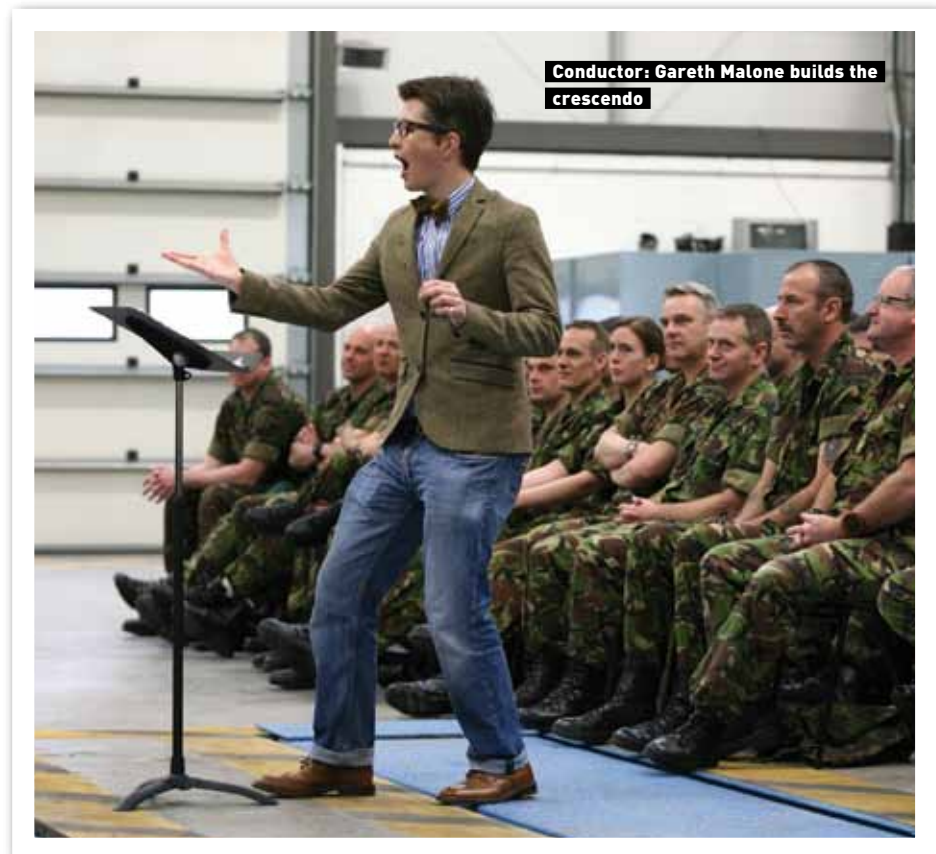
than even a few years ago and I hope that our work has made them feel a bit better about going away and leaving their wives at home."

Gareth has a baby daughter, Esther, but would he support her if she opted for a future career in the Armed Forces?

"I suppose it depends what the world looks like in 18 years," he says. "Before I came into this, I found it very hard to understand how a mother could watch her child go off to danger zones but for a lot of these women, their fathers, uncles and grandfathers all served so there is that tradition and immense pride.

"When a lot of the guys joined up, I doubt they were thinking about going off to Afghanistan. It was a very different world 18 years ago but if it was my child's decision to join up, I would support her and be incredibly proud." **DP**

*The Choir: Military Wives starts on BBC2 at 9pm from 7 November.*



Pictures: BBC



Back in Afghanistan: Kemp returns to TV with his new series

# KEMP ON COMBAT

ROSS KEMP RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN WITH 45 COMMANDO ROYAL MARINES. INTERVIEW: LORRAINE MCBRIDE

**F**IVE years after Ross Kemp seamlessly morphed from jobbing actor to BAFTA-award-winning documentary maker, he has few regrets.

"I think enjoying a Winnebago and a bacon sandwich every morning as opposed to being kicked awake to go on patrol with the Royal Marines after a camel spider tried to eat me all night is appealing," he says. "But I really enjoy what I do. It's very fulfilling, particularly the loyalty among the friends that I've made through doing this, who will hopefully stick with me for the rest of my life. We've got some 'dits' [*stories*] to spin - which I probably wouldn't have had if I'd stayed an actor and I certainly wouldn't have met as many interesting people."

Kemp's new five-part series on Afghanistan marks the 10th anniversary of 9/11 and British troops' arrival in Helmand and Kemp is brimful of facts and

figures. "It's the longest war we've been involved in since the Second World War and it's the most expensive in financial terms," he says.

Five years ago, Kemp stepped off a plane in stifling heat on Operation Herrick 6 and spent time with the Royal Anglians, accompanying the troops on the front line. Now he is back following the fate of 45 Commando Royal Marines to find out what has changed in the ten years ISAF forces have been in Afghanistan. The programme covers six months, with Kemp examining bin Laden's legacy, meeting warlords and tribal elders and pounding the patrols with the Bootnecks.

#### OPINIONATED

Ross Kemp is blunt, fiercely intelligent and opinionated, but the real surprise is that his speech is peppered with military jargon; 'dits', 'scoff' 'scran' and 'contacts'.

He explains that the new series is about the story of why British troops went into Afghanistan and explores some of the early mistakes made.

"We weren't equipped as well as we should have been. We didn't have enough soldiers to do the job. We were also pretty culturally unaware with a lot of the mistakes made on the ground."

On his latest visit he also spent time with the US Marines Corps and gained access to Lieutenant General William Caldwell, the Commander of NATO's Training Mission - Afghanistan, tasked with training Afghan soldiers and police. And Kemp says that it's the ability of the Afghan Army and Police to keep out the insurgents after 2014 that will be the real litmus test.

"We've got three years so a lot can happen," he says. Pause. "I should say they have got three years," he grins as the meaning of what he's just said sinks in.



## MORALE-BOOSTING

"How can you ever take a police statement or call in an attack helicopter if you can't even write your own name?" asks Kemp, adding that in the war-torn country where corruption is a problem and many can't even read or write, the answers are far from black and white. "There are massive issues and it is indicative of General Caldwell that he sees it as important to teach these people to read and write rather than load a rifle."

The new TV series shows how much the strategy for dealing with the insurgency has been transformed. Kemp says: "Rather than taking out the guy on the ground with a 200-pound bomb which we used to do, we now follow him back, see where he lives, see where his contacts are, and hopefully find the boss who gives him instructions way up the command and remove him, therefore saving far more ISAF and UK lives."

To prove his point, he examines how much the situation on the ground has changed. "Our area of operation has shrunk by nearly 80 per cent from being half of the UK to the size of Kent. But we've still got the same number of policemen on the ground, which makes it very hard for the Taliban, which is maybe one reason why the number of attacks has dropped."

Kemp also describes how the complexities of Afghanistan's famously tribal land add up to a Spook's nightmare. "You can have a family in Helmand that soldiers are trying to profile," he explains. "One member could be in the Afghan Army, one could be in the Police, two could be in the Taliban, one is a narcotics smuggler and the other five could all be farmers, so the complexities don't bear thinking about. Trying to identify all the riot suspects in the UK was difficult enough, so imagine trying to do it in a war zone."

Since his last visit, Kemp has seen dramatic improvements in body armour, 'pelvic protection', helmets, weapon systems and food that have given UK troops a morale-boosting lift.

At the time of going to press, 383 British troops have lost their lives in Afghanistan so does he consider the sacrifice worth it?

"I can't say that," he says firmly. "That is down for the families to decide and hopefully the Afghans who will be able to stand up on their own two feet after we leave. I can say that I've never not been impressed by the professionalism, integrity and bravery of the British soldier and marine."

Over the course of the series, Kemp oozes ice-cool courage, ducking in a ditch as bullets crack just inches over his head. He wasn't even daunted when he met the Taliban because the previous two series

## “I found the Marines very welcoming. They do good scran.”

had already hooked them in.

"They are very media savvy and want to get their point across and hopefully they trust us to know we would give them that opportunity," says Kemp.

Expressing firm opinions on why the Taliban should be given air time he adds: "There is no way that the solution to Afghanistan will come at the end of a rifle. It will come through negotiations and undoubtedly the Taliban have to be involved, so the sooner we start listening to what they believe, what they want, the sooner we will hopefully come to a settlement. They weren't clichés. They have beards and they wear black turbans but they are all individuals."

Kemp also believes that no one should be thinking about trying to turn Afghanistan into a completely democracy-embracing country: "They are Afghans and they live the Afghan way. It will never be the same as ours and why should it be? But it would be a heck of a waste of time and life if we leave that country and things haven't improved. But I'm hoping and praying that they will."

## AT HOME

As an actor, you sense that Kemp adapts to his surroundings like a chameleon. "I am always for whichever team I'm with at the time so if I'm with a load of Rangers fans, I'm a Rangers fan," he confesses. "I found the Marines to be very welcoming. They do good scran but the Army does good scoff," he says, deftly underlining his point.

You also get the feeling that down-to-earth Kemp is equally at home chatting to private soldiers as he is with the Chief of the Defence Staff, whom he admires.

"To me, General Richards is a soldier's soldier, an airman's airman and a sailor's sailor. He knows it from top to bottom and doesn't lay it on thick which is important when you're that important."

Kemp's strength is his own everyman appeal and he has made lasting friendships aplenty that are on speed dial. "Of course, all the way through," he nods. "When you share life experiences you stay friends."

As we wind up our interview, I ask him to share an abiding moment from Afghanistan. "Coming home to Brize Norton and seeing patterns of beautiful colours of the British countryside as I fly over is always something that warms my heart." Yet he also treasures the camaraderie and humour, even under fire.

"I have never laughed so much in my life as when I was shot at with those guys. It was a natural reaction of coping with danger."

He recalls a pivotal moment after a friendly fire attack from an earlier series when three soldiers were killed while Kemp was back in the UK. Eight days later, the company were sent to Sangin to recuperate, and when Kemp returned to the frontline, he met the men of B Company and 7 Platoon to tell the story of how they were affected.

"They lived in the back of an old shed and we stayed with them for four days," says Kemp. "It was cathartic because they started talking and it was an amazing moment as we saw those guys come to terms with what happened. They treated us as friends. It's things like that that will stay with me. It's incredible how much it bonds you."

*Ross Kemp: Back on the Frontline starts on 30 October on Sky 1.* **DE**



Listen in: Ross Kemp at the patrol base in Catina

**MILITARY CROSS**

I found out I was getting an MC in the latest round of Operational Honours which was announced in October 2011 and I think this is the medal I'm most proud of.

My third tour of Afghanistan was on OP Herrick 13, over the winter of 2010-2011. I was taking part in a vehicle patrol with the Afghan National Army when some of the soldiers dismounted their vehicle after coming under fire from a group of insurgents.

One of the ANA soldiers was injured after sustaining a gunshot wound to his leg, so I exited my vehicle to get him to safety. While still under heavy fire, I managed to drag the soldier back to his vehicle so he could receive medical attention.

Once he was under the vehicle's cover, I ensured the other Afghan soldiers returned to their vehicles so the patrol could escape from the ambush.

When I look back I think it was a bit crazy as I put myself in real danger. But if I was asked to do it again, I would as helping a fellow soldier is in my nature.

**NORTHERN IRELAND**

From 1993 - 2004, I went to Northern Ireland about six times. The first time there, I was working with 11 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Regiment who deal with bomb disposal. I was the Ammunition Technical Officer's (ATO) driver, taking him to investigate suspected explosive device related incidents across the county of Londonderry.

Over six months we went to about 60-odd suspected explosive device incidents. It was pretty much guaranteed that something would be happening somewhere which made for a very busy deployment. My job was to drive the ATO who went out to deal with these devices and make sure that he had everything he



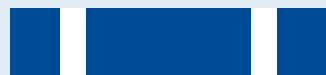
**MY MEDALS**

Warrant Officer Class 2 James Palmer has had a colourful military career driving all kinds of vehicles for units, including the Royal Marines, across the world. Interview: Leigh Hamilton.

needed to do his job.

I also had to make sure he was safe when he was travelling to and from incidents. There were a lot of threats against the ATO himself as he wasn't very popular with certain people in Northern Ireland who were laying the devices.

Obviously when you think about it, being so close to suspected explosive devices was quite frightening at the time, but that tour was a fantastic experience.



**BOSNIA**

In 1996, I was based in Split, Croatia, attached to 122 Supply Regiment as one of the Junior non-commissioned officers in charge of maintaining all the vehicles.

When we pushed forward I had to do all the servicing and maintaining of vehicles in all the outstations.

I did a summer tour there and it was completely different from any of my experiences before then as I had more responsibility than previously.

Because of my trade as a driver, I was put in a section looking after the vehicles so I was the subject matter expert. I advised the Sergeant on how we should maintain the vehicles and make sure that people were using the right procedures when we were pushing forward to Bosnia.



**AFGHANISTAN**

In 2002 I was attached to 45 Commando Royal Marines for a short amount of time in Kabul on Op Jacana. We were on the second UK operation there and I was again in a driving role.

I was on exchange with the Marines and although I was still in the Army, I had to do the Commando course to be able

to work with them and I was treated like a marine.

In 2007 I went to Helmand for the first time, with 42 Commando, which was a completely different experience as there was a lot of war fighting and I moved around a lot more than before.

I was on a six-week rotation moving around as a platoon sergeant and was used wherever I was needed doing lots of different jobs including driving, so I spent a lot of time in Nal Zad, Sangin and Musa Qal'ah. It was a really busy time. I made a lot of friends in 42 Commando and I feel like I'm still an honorary member of the marines.

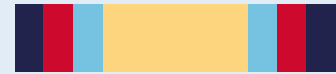


**IRAQ**

I was still attached to 45 Commando as a driver in 2005 when we went to Iraq. Because of my driver background, the Marines used me as a subject matter expert on vehicles.

I was a sergeant, working for the Officer Commanding and it was my job to make sure that all the vehicles were running well and were available to be deployed whenever they were needed.

Although I didn't really see a lot of action, I was on the command team and was involved in the planning processes, which was an important behind-the-scenes role within the operation.



**GULF**

In 1991 I was the driver for 4 Squadron Royal Corps of Transport (RCT), attached to 8 Regiment RCT on Op Granby. I was driving a DROPS (Demountable Rack Offload and Pickup System) vehicle to transport ammunition to dumps.

It was a six month tour and I had just turned 19. A long time ago!



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# BANISH THE FLU BLUES

**DON'T SUFFER FROM LURGIES THIS WINTER, A QUICK JAB IS NOT TO BE SNIFFED AT SAYS OUR HEALTH ADVISOR**



By Nick Imm, a Naval Surgeon Commander at HM Naval Base Clyde.

Hello from the Medical Centre at HM Naval Base Clyde. This month I thought we'd talk about the flu vaccination.

Every autumn the NHS runs a flu jab campaign. Studies have shown that immunisation can reduce the number of people admitted to hospital as a result of contracting flu by 60 per cent. Although, unlike most vaccinations, the current flu jab only lasts for one year.

Flu is caused by a virus. It's really infectious and is passed on from one person to another by coughs

and sneezes. Tiny particles in the air get breathed in and the infection spreads from one person to another. For most people it causes an unpleasant illness, requiring a few days off work or in bed. But, if you're older or have other medical problems it can be much more serious.

So, who is the flu jab for? If you're pregnant or older than 65 years, you can get this vaccination. Older people tend to be more vulnerable to the infection and are more likely to get secondary conditions such as pneumonia.

Some patients with long-term medical conditions can have a reduced resistance to the flu virus and should receive the flu jab.

See your medic or GP about the flu jab if you're 65 or over, or if you have any of the following problems (however old you are):

# VITAL NUMBERS

## THERE ARE PEOPLE OUT THERE READY TO HELP YOU

**RN Benevolent Trust:** Grants, advice and income supplements for veterans. Call 0239 2690112 or email [rnbt@rnbt.org.uk](mailto:rnbt@rnbt.org.uk).

**RN Association:** Comradeship for all serving and ex-service members of the RN, RM, QARNNS, WRNS, Reserves, RFA and RNXS. [royal-naval-association.co.uk](http://royal-naval-association.co.uk)

**Royal Marines Benevolent Fund:** Relieves hardship among serving and former Marines and dependents. [royalmarines.charities@charity.vfree.com](mailto:royalmarines.charities@charity.vfree.com) or call 02392 547201.

**ABF The Soldiers Charity:** Support to soldiers and veterans. [www.soldierscharity.org](http://www.soldierscharity.org) or call 0845 241 4820.

**RAF Benevolent Fund:** Help for RAF personnel past and present. [rafbf.org](http://rafbf.org) or call 0800 1692942.

**Civil Service Benevolent Fund:** Helps anyone who has worked for the Civil Service and their dependents. Advice about support and financial help. [csbf.org.uk](http://csbf.org.uk) or call 0800 056 2424.

**Army Welfare Service:** HQ AWS has relocated to Upavon. Confidential support for soldiers and families. [army.mod.uk/welfare-support/family/default.aspx](http://army.mod.uk/welfare-support/family/default.aspx) or call (UK) 01980 615975.

**RAF Association (RAFA):** Comradeship and care for current and former RAF members. [rafa.org.uk/welfare.asp](http://rafa.org.uk/welfare.asp).

**HIVE:** Tri-Service information covering issues like education and health. 167 offices. [hive.mod.uk](http://hive.mod.uk).

**Royal British Legion:** Charity providing financial, social and emotional support to vets and serving, and dependents. [www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk) or call 08457 725 725.

**SSAFA Forces Help:** Supports serving personnel, veterans and the families of both. Practical and financial assistance and emotional support. [ssafa.org.uk](http://ssafa.org.uk) or call 0845 1300 975.

**Harassment, bullying or discrimination:** JSP 763, The MOD Harassment Complaints Procedures, is a guide for Services and civilians. Navy: 023 9272 7331. Army: 94 391 Ext 7922 (01264 381 922). RAF: 95471 ext 7026. Civilians 0800 345 7772 (+441225 829572 from overseas) or em: [PeopleServices@pppa.mod.uk](mailto:PeopleServices@pppa.mod.uk).

**Matters of conscience** and whistleblowing under the Public Interest Disclosure Act. Call 0800 3457772. Select option four.

**Confidential support line:** Support for Forces personnel and families. Lines open 10.30 to 22.30 every day. UK, 0800 7314880. Germany, 0800 1827395. Cyprus, 800 91065. Falklands, 6111. Anywhere in world, (call-back) +44 (0)1980 630854.

**Service Personnel and Veterans Agency:** Pay, pensions and personnel support for the Services and veterans, including the JPA system, and Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre: 0800 0853600; 0800 1692277 or [veterans-uk.info](http://veterans-uk.info)

**MOD Occupational Welfare Service:** Confidential advice on work and personal issues. Call 0800 345 7047

**Service Complaints Commissioner:** To make a complaint or seek advice, contact: [SCC@armedforcescomplaints.independent.gov.uk](mailto:SCC@armedforcescomplaints.independent.gov.uk)


**Naval Personal & Family Service and Royal Marines Welfare** For out-of-hours' emergencies call the NPFS duty worker in the relevant next-of-kin area or RM unit. NPFS East and Overseas - 02392 726 159 (via Officer-of-the-Watch). NPFS North - 01436 674 321 - (via duty naval base officer Ex. 4005) NPFS West and Eire - 01752 555 220 - (via Officer-of-the-Watch). RM Welfare - 01752 836 395 - (via duty officer, guardroom RM Stonehouse).

- a serious heart complaint
- a chest complaint or breathing difficulties, including asthma, bronchitis and emphysema
- diabetes
- lowered immunity due to disease or treatment such as steroid medication or cancer treatment
- if you have a problem with your spleen or you have had your spleen removed
- if you have ever had a stroke

It is now advised that pregnant women should have the seasonal flu jab. This is because pregnant women are more prone to complications from flu that can cause serious illnesses in the mother as well as the baby.

You shouldn't have the vaccination if you are currently unwell with a high fever or if you have had an allergic reaction to a previous flu jab. You should also not have the regular flu jab if you have a serious egg allergy (alternative vaccines are available).

The vaccination is completely free and may well improve your chance of keeping well this winter. This year's seasonal flu vaccination also includes a vaccine to protect against swine flu. Stay healthy and I'll see you next month.

■ This is general advice only. If you have any medical concerns see your medic or GP. 

# SUDOKU

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

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9

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

Solution to the October 2011 puzzle

Send in your Sudoku solution by 30 November and you could win a Victorinox SwissFlash Laser 8GB Knife. Our address is on page 4. For more info, visit [www.victorinox.com](http://www.victorinox.com)



# CHESS



Compiled by: Carl Portman

Life is too short for chess, or so Byron alleged. Well, I disagree, and continuing to write this column after I leave the MOD will be a pleasurable use of my time.

Naturally, I shall strive to write interesting and worthwhile columns as I have been trying to do since September 1994. There will be some prizes now and in the pipeline and I can already reveal that one of them will be personally signed by none other than former world champion Garry Kasparov. There will also be chess DVDs, books and other goodies. You won't believe how many favours I now owe people.

Answers to my column will now have to be sent to my home email address, so please be sure that with immediate effect you use [carl.portman@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:carl.portman@hotmail.co.uk) for all your chess communications.

Thank you all for your continued support and all the kind things you have said – feel free to tell the editor by the way.

Life may be too short for chess but without it life would also be less fulfilling.

Study the following position from the game Kasparov – Lefstein, Baltimore 1997.



White to play. Kasparov demonstrates the power of his two bishops to force a breakthrough. How?

Send your answers to my new email address. The first correct answer wins a copy of The ABC of the Modern Slav, by Nigel Davies, donated by Chessbase. Please visit [www.chessbase.com](http://www.chessbase.com)

The answer to October's problem was 1.g6! h6 2.Kh5! and black cannot capture with 2...Kxf5 as this will be stalemate. He has no other way to improve his position though. If instead 1...hxg6 then 2.fxg6 f5+ 3.Kg5 f4 4.h5 f3 5.h6 gxh6+ 6.Kxh6 f2 7.g7 f1+Q 8.g8+Q and the game is drawn. Winner to be announced. September's DVD winner was Richard Harrop from DES.

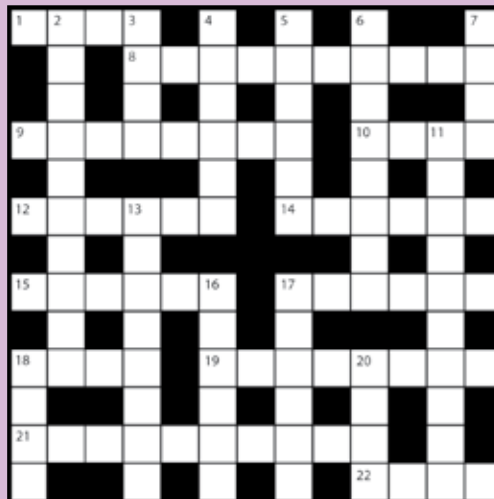
# TOPICAL CROSSWORD

## ACROSS

- Latvia's capital city (4)
- Host country of rugby union's 2011 World Cup (3,7)
- Born This Way is her 2011 album (4,4)
- Violent, explosive anger (4)
- See 3 Down
- Treeless area between the icecap and the tree line of Arctic areas (6)
- Brandy made from cherries (6)
- Minor earthquake (6)
- Belacqua, the heroine of Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy (4)
- Someone who rebels and becomes an outlaw (8)
- Graeme Swann, Sachin Tendulkar and Shane Watson (10)
- Bennett, who recorded a 2011 duet with Amy Winehouse called Body And Soul (4)

## DOWN

- Juvenile behaviour (10)



- And 12 Across. In 2011 he became only the seventh male player in tennis history to reach the semi-finals of all four Grand Slams in the same year (4,6)
- Perspiring (6)
- Person who has to pay rent to live in a house (6)
- Italian city whose tourist attractions include the Uffizi Gallery and Santa Maria del Fiore (8)

## SOLUTION (NO PEEKING)

- Across
- Riga 8. New Zealand
  - Lady Gaga 10. Rage
  - Murray 14. Tundra
  - Kirsch 17. Tremor
  - Lyra 19. Renegade
  - Cricketers 22. Tony
- Down
- Immaturity 3. Andy
  - Sweaty 5. Tenant
  - Florence 7. Idle
  - Gary Oldman 13. Research
  - Harvey 17. Tinder
  - Lock 20. Gust

- Monty Python comedian who wrote the musical Spamalot (4)
- He plays George Smiley in the film version of Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy (10)
- Scholarly investigation (8)
- 2011 Mercury Prize winner for her album Let England Shake (6)
- Dry twigs used to kindle fires (6)
- Security device operated by a key (4)
- Strong rush of wind (4)

# CHRISTMAS GIVEAWAY



WITH CHRISTMAS coming we are offering two lucky readers a selection of H.M. Armed Forces toys which will make great presents for any children, assuming Dad allows them to get a look in.

Imagine the glee on the faces of your little soldiers as they grind mince pies into the carpet under the tracks of a scale model

Challenger Tank.

Challenge yourself to catch your customary 40 winks after the Queen's speech while an Attack Helicopter, with real firing wing rocket action (whatever that is) buzzes the paper hat off your head with its rotating rotor blades. Good luck, but don't say we didn't warn you!

For more on all the latest action figures for the forces, each with a vital role in the military, check out [www.character-online.co.uk](http://www.character-online.co.uk)



**TO WIN,**  
just email your name, address and phone number to [dmc-newsdesk@mod.uk](mailto:dmc-newsdesk@mod.uk) by 5 Dec 2011. Include the phrase 'Action Stations' in the subject line.

## FITFOLIO FOR IPAD 2



Defence Focus has 15 FitFolio cases for your iPad 2 to give away. The FitFolio has a sleek, padded but lightweight design that protects your device. The custom cradle holds your iPad 2 securely in place, and the cover folds back into a stand, making this

the perfect iPad 2 case for reading, working, viewing, presentations and lots more. These cases have been created by Speck, a worldwide leader in durable and eye-catching cases for the life-changing personal electronics of the early 21st century: iPhones

and iPads, smartphones, laptops and e-readers. For more info, visit [www.speckproducts.com](http://www.speckproducts.com). **TO WIN:** Just email your name, address and phone number to [dmc-newsdesk@mod.uk](mailto:dmc-newsdesk@mod.uk) by 5 December 2011. Include the phrase 'Foliofit' in the subject line.



**TOGETHER  
WE REMEMBER.**

This Remembrance Day we honour the dedication of UK servicemen and women and their families. Together we remember all they have achieved and sacrificed.

 **BOEING**