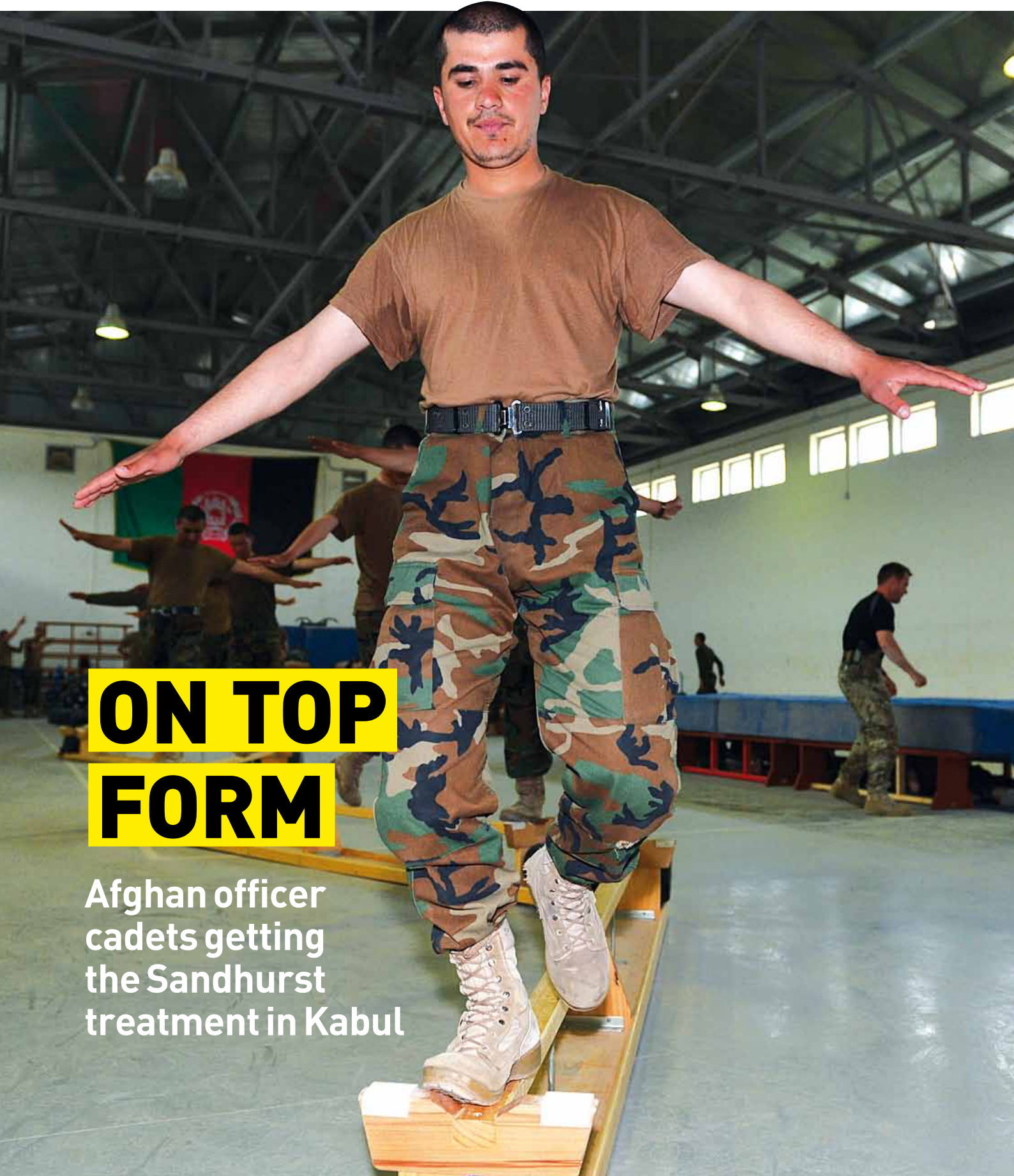


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ON TOP FORM

Afghan officer cadets getting the Sandhurst treatment in Kabul

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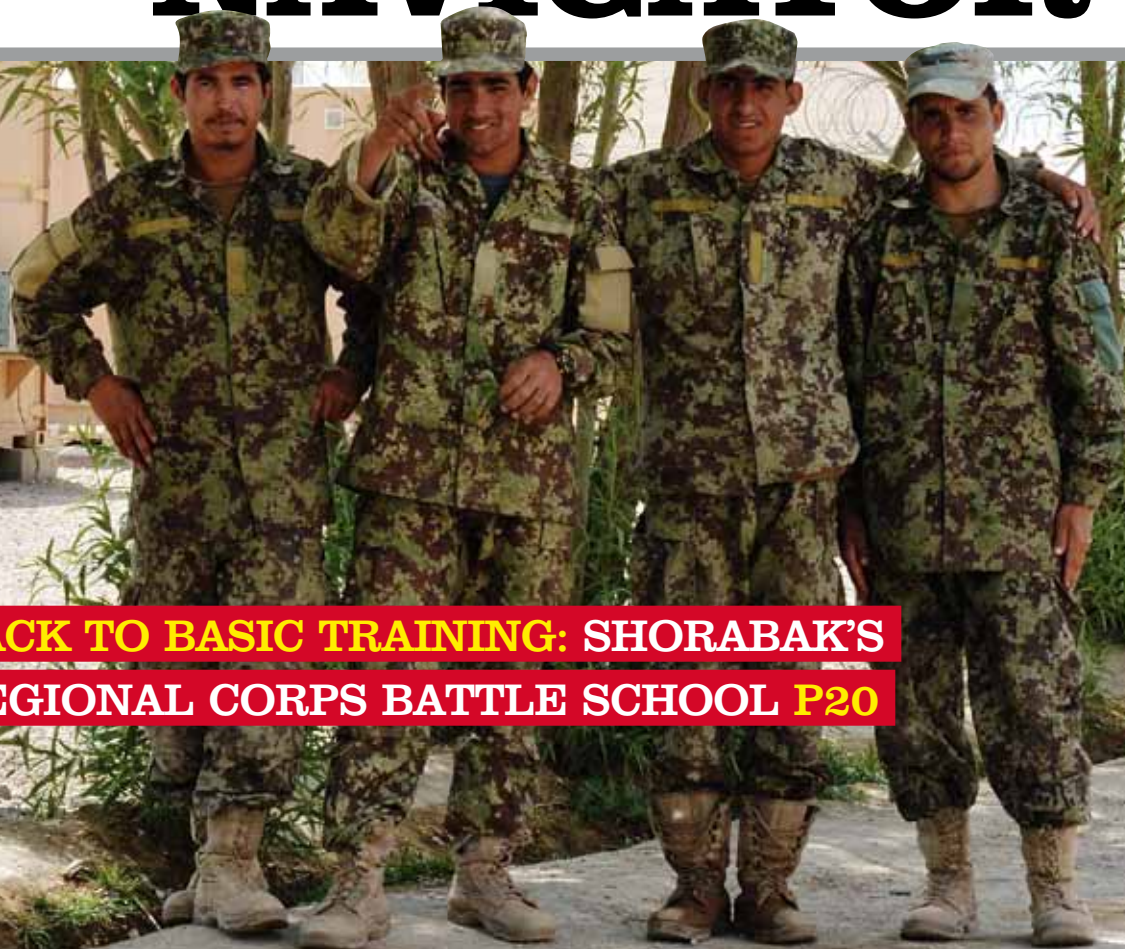
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Picture: Corporal. Obi Igboebisiokwu

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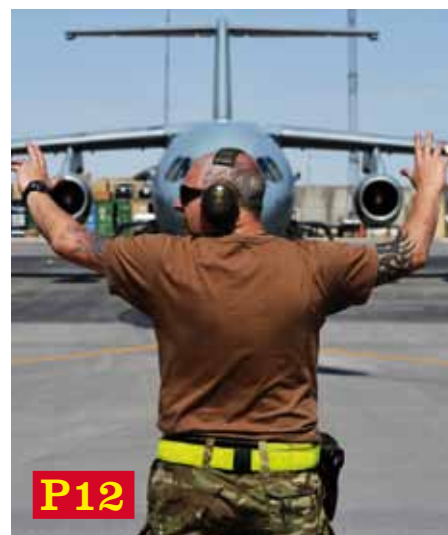
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Picture: Corporal. Obi Igboebisiokwu

EDITOR'S NOTE

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FIONA SIMPSON



Back in July 1989, when Brazil were still good at football and Sonia was number one in the charts, MOD embarked on a new venture, a staff magazine.

Snappily titled *Focus*, the *House Journal of the Ministry of Defence* it promised to be 'the link between civilians and servicemen and women, administrators and scientists, specialists and industrial and support staff serving throughout the UK and overseas'. And it has fulfilled this role and more over the past 25 years.

We have covered conflicts in Iraq (twice), Sierra Leone, Bosnia and Libya, and 13 years of war in Afghanistan. We've seen some big changes over the quarter-of-a-century too. The expanding role of women in the forces, lifting the

ban on gay personnel, defence spending cuts, the expanding role of reservists, and Army personnel returning from Germany.

We have interviewed ministers, permanent secretaries and chiefs of the defence staff by the bucket-load. We met senior personnel from all three Services, civil servants, members of the public and even a few celebrities.

In earlier editions we even had reports from MOD personnel of the holidays they had been on! Including cycling in France and a nice break in Norfolk.

But the times they are a changin'. After 25 years of service, *Focus* as we know it is being demobilised. It's not the end. All our content will be going online. There'll still be *Focus*-branded features from the front line and information on what is happening across Defence.

I know it's sad but we thought the 25th anniversary was a fitting time to bring it to an end. So all that is left for me to say is thanks to all our readers over the years, and goodbye.

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A SHOW OF FORCE

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE CELEBRATED THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE ARMED FORCES AT HUNDREDS OF EVENTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY TO MARK THE SIXTH ANNUAL ARMED FORCES DAY

Parades and parties took place across the UK on 28 June to celebrate the men and women of the armed forces community, past

and present. In Stirling, the national event saw tens of thousands turn out to show their support as more than 400 Service personnel, 1,200 veterans and 200 cadets

marched through the city. Following the parade was a drumhead service, a flypast of old and new military aircraft and an aerobatic display by the Red Arrows.





CADETS DOUBLE UP THE HILL AT THE AFGHAN NATIONAL ARMY OFFICER ACADEMY IN KABUL



Picture: Corporal Obi Igboebisokwu



A hand up: Afghan cadets tackle an obstacle course

ARMY CADETS FIRST CLASS IN KABUL

IAN CARR RETURNS TO THE AFGHAN NATIONAL ARMY OFFICER ACADEMY TO SEE HOW ITS FIRST BATCH OF CADETS ARE DOING

Staff Sergeant Kate Lord is grimacing in the gym. No, she hasn't twisted an ankle. She is wincing as she watches one of the Afghan instructors struggle to keep his balance as he demonstrates to the officer cadets how to negotiate one of the stations in a circuit of exercises that they will be tackling in a few moments time.

"Actually, I'm being a bit unfair," she tells *Defence Focus*. "In fact he is one of our best instructors. But he could have landed better off that box." Staff Sergeant Lord, one of the physical training instructor (PTI) mentors at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy (ANAOA) is hard to impress. Yet she herself has been greatly impressing the Afghans with her levels of strength, fitness and toughness.

Her ability has not only inspired the Afghan men to make even greater efforts, but it has also taught them not to underestimate what females are capable of in the military.

There are 270 cadets on this, the academy's first intake of recruits. They were selected from more than 10,000 applicants and will complete the 42-week-long course in September. By then, over the course of three intense terms, they will have studied leadership, strategy and tactics, military and Afghan national history – including past victories over the British Army, religious and cultural affairs, physical education and English. The lessons are delivered by Afghan instructors who are platoon commanders and sergeants trained by a mix of mentors from Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Denmark.

It is the aim of the academy to take raw recruits and turn them into



Pulling together: cadets take on a non-leader task

leaders. When it is running at full capacity as many as 1,350 men and 150 women will pass through its gates each year.

Located 14km to the north of Kabul, the campus nestles in the base of a vast bowl surrounded by a ring of snow-capped mountains that soar up to form the edge of the Hindu Kush.

Although the concept and approach of the academy is modelled on the elite British Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst (RMAS), it does not mirror it in every detail. For one thing, officers passing out of RMAS know that they will be going on to experience professional trade training. But, due to the war, Afghan officers cannot be so sure of their future.

Because the Afghan army has had to grow rapidly from virtually nothing to a force of 200,000 in just 10 years, while at the same time fighting a

determined enemy, the development of many institutional functions such as growing an officer cadre has had to be put on hold. "If you are an Afghan artillery officer and you arrive at the front line and there's a shortage of infantry officers, you would have to join the infantry instead," said Lieutenant Colonel Alex Turner.

"Sandhurst is a vehicle for developing character, but here we have had to take it a shade further and accept that it's also about giving survival skills to officers who may not go on to full or relevant trade training.

"So we started by looking at what training the Afghans were already giving, and took it from there. If you are not careful there's a danger when setting up training missions like this to teach what you know rather than what is actually needed."

So it has not just been a case of dragging and dropping a version of RMAS in the heart of eastern Afghanistan.

"We have taken the texture and the fabric of Sandhurst and put it into an Afghan context, and we have looked at the training gaps that needed to be addressed," said Lieutenant Colonel Turner. "We start by looking at the things that their army, let alone their officers, need to know to keep themselves alive. So there's a lot of emphasis on counter-insurgency



Active learning: PTI Staff Sergeant Kate Lord

techniques, counter-IED and low-level battlefield intelligence-gathering.”

Over three terms the cadets are taken from basic training through the foundations of leadership, the rudiments of man-management, the responsibilities that you have to your men, and planning.

“We even strip this down to the bare metal. In a culture not predisposed to forward thinking we ask them ‘what is the purpose of planning? what is the purpose of organisations?’” said Lieutenant Colonel Turner. “Because you can’t take it for granted that they will know.”

A lot of emphasis is placed on Afghan-specific situations. For example, the ANA in the field get their rations from the local population, unlike the British Army who would source a reliable contractor. Which means there are things they need to think about when they are doing that, like the effect they are having on a local economy, and whether there are health issues.

In the third term the war-fighting training such as counter-IED tactics ramp up. Throughout there is plenty of practical work such as command tasks.

Out in the training area a group of Afghans hoping to be selected for the academy are about to tackle a non-leader training task. They have just run across rough ground to get to this station, so they are winded before they start.

“It’s pretty obvious what they have to do,” says Major Craig Halford, who is mentor for this element. “They’ve got to get the barrel out of this roped off area without it touching the ground. This is testing their intellectual and physical abilities, command, that sort of thing.

“During these problem-solving exercises what you find is a lot of arguing, and if it goes wrong it’ll all implode.”

But this time, despite the shouting, the exercise seems to go well. However, the inscrutable Colonel Safgas Ali, who is evaluating the group, has noticed that one of them put his foot inside the rope at the last moment. He makes them do it again.

Further on in the training-the-trainer compound, where the ANA’s instructors of the future are learning their trade, one of the academy’s master mentors, platoon commander Abdul Samand Kamalri, explains the five-day exercise that he has designed for the students. “They will be out for four nights. The exercise is in four phases, establishing a camp that can be defended, recce patrolling, dealing with ambush and how to attack,” he said. “We need leaders and officers for the future. This academy is a very good chance for us to secure the future of Afghanistan.”

Another future-facing feature of the academy is the integration of female



Lean on me: Captain Danielle Huggins

mentoring the female instructors’ lessons is Australian platoon commander Captain Danielle Huggins. “Right now, there are no female Afghan instructors to teach the women how to instruct, so all the females in this cadre will become the academy staff and teach future cadets,” she said. “So we want to make them the very best instructors that they can be and that will have a positive effect on the cadets.”

These women have gone through the training alongside their male counterparts, but, in order to build their confidence before they deliver lessons to mixed audiences, they practise among themselves.

“They understand the military subject matter very well. I’d say half are already confident, but we’re just helping them to overcome their nature to be submissive to the men,” said Captain Huggins.

To augment this, there is a lot being put into the male syllabus about working alongside female colleagues, including women’s rights and integration.

“It’s not just about training women, it’s about changing men’s attitudes as well,” said Lieutenant Colonel Tony Casey the mentors’ chief of staff. “Having Staff Sergeant Lord, the female PTI, here has really helped with that. She’s probably done more to overturn people’s assumptions about women than anyone else I can think of in this mission.”

All of which probably proves that whether the lessons are being taught at Sandhurst or in Kabul, actions do speak louder than words. **DF**

cadets and instructors. Sergeant Fatima Khan is taking a five-minute break from one of her instructor training lessons.

“The Afghan army needs women, because in our culture only women can search other women. We also need women in the army to bring change to our lives so they can feel stronger in society and so they can help our country to become independent,” she said.

“My family feels good that I have joined my brother in the army, and I want my other sister to join too,” she said. At the moment,



Afghan’s future: Instructor, Sergeant Fatima Khan

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High flier: Flight Lieutenant Lucas Meza

HAVE TO FLY

THE PILOTS OF 32 (THE ROYAL) SQUADRON RECKON THEY HAVE THE BEST JOB IN THE AIR FORCE WRITES IAN CARR

Boastful taxi drivers may like to ask 'do you know who I had in the back of my cab last week?' But they'd struggle to compete for celebrity bragging rights with the pilots from 32 (The Royal) Squadron.

Not that these dashing airmen would be so crass as to name names. Besides, that's just part of the job, and one they don't like to make much of a fuss about. But, just in case you're interested, one recent passenger was Angelina Jolie. And, because she is a keen pilot herself, she asked if she might sit with the pilots to talk aviation. It seems they said yes.

Flying BAE 125s, BAE 146s and Agusta twin-engined, eight-seater helicopters, the squadron provides in-theatre transport for VIPs such as heads of state, military top

brass, royalty and A-list celebrities. But it is no stranger to operational action. The squadron has been involved in every major conflict since Gulf War 1.

It is this mixture of elite and operational work that attracts pilots like Flight Lieutenant Lucas Meza, who has been with the squadron for eight years and has been captain of the BAE 146 for two-and-a-half years. His co-pilot, Flight Lieutenant Nick Bell, also likes the life. He has six years' experience with the squadron, and has just transitioned from flying the smaller 125 aircraft.

"It's one of the best flying jobs in the air force, in terms of the variety," said Flight Lieutenant Meza. "It's certainly why I've been in the squadron so long. It's not just the variety of destinations but the jobs too."

While experienced commercial pilots in a 20-year career may be able to boast 50 airfields in their logbook at most, Meza has already flown into nearly 300.

It's not just the variety of place that is so attractive but the challenges they represent to their flying skills. The pilots need to be able to negotiate airfields from Chambery and Lugano in the Alps to Aspen in Colorado, which is a dead-end valley. "So you have to make your decision at five miles to land. And then you land, because once you're committed there's no other option. And then there's places like Bogota which is an airport at 8,500 feet," said Meza.

Flying VIPs around the world to many exotic places may seem glamorous but it has a hard-edged purpose. Much of the work that the squadron does at this end



Back seat drivers: pilots Squadron Leader Garry Reader (left) and Flight Lieutenant Nick Bell

of the spectrum can be categorised as defence diplomacy, preventing conflicts before they erupt.

Being on hand to fly the Foreign Secretary or the Prime Minister to Paris or Brussels at extremely short notice for discussions about the Ukraine is crucial. "They love having that flexibility because there's no way of knowing how long these things will take. Having us at their disposal for these internationally important meetings gives them a flexibility they just can't get with charter flights."

Perhaps because of the 'Royal' part of their title, many assume that it's all about silver service flying with pilots dressed in smart shirts and shiny shoes. But there are plenty of opportunities for them to don full body armour and fly steep tactical approaches into operational areas. The squadron has battle honours spanning from the Western Front in 1916 to the Gulf War in 1991, and has seen operational action which includes the Balkans, Iraq, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan, transporting troops as well as VIPs.

"During Op Ellamy (Libya), we landed on the ground 58 times during the conflict, which I think was more than any other squadron," said Meza. While much of the early work in Libya was performed by Hercules transport aircraft, later it was considered that the sight of big military planes might look too offensive. "But a smaller, white aircraft that looks like a private jet was more discreet, so you can do things without people paying you much attention," said Flight Lieutenant Meza.

As well as ferrying troops, the squadron can also scope out airfields. "In Libya we looked for places to use as bases. We flew to all the airfields and could say 'we can put Typhoons here for example'."

Having to fly in such a diverse range of conditions, from landing somewhere that's small and dusty to negotiating the pulse-quickening complexity of London Heathrow, means that the pilots have to put in a lot of flying training hours to keep current. "There can be times when guys are not getting enough hours in one environment, and too many in another. Then you have to retrain to make sure you can switch back, for example to European international airfield mode with your VIP pilot head back on," said Flight Lieutenant Meza.

But that's all in the nature of the squadron's business and the pilots accept that. They certainly prefer it to the life they could be leading as commercial pilots who all fly in an identical fashion to a tight set of regulations and where career progression is on a time-served basis, and after 10 years of unexceptional flying they can expect to put on a captain's cap.

"In the air force, you are seen as an individual," said Flight Lieutenant Nick Bell. "It's a meritocracy. You can't always apply rules and guidance for every situation, especially in operational situations. You have to think on your feet a lot. You have a lot of responsibility and people trust you to make the right decision."

It is perfectly possible for squadron pilots, if they demonstrate that they have

the right stuff, to make captain within three years. Which means being able to sit in body armour in a cockpit nursing the avionics systems as it cooks to 65 degrees while the aircraft sits on the tarmac in Basra. Only when they are airborne can they treat themselves to a bit of air-conditioning.

It also means coping with flight deck technology and flight control systems that have been round the clock once or twice. "This is a 30-year-old aircraft," said Flight Lieutenant Meza. "It flies great, but rather than the TV screens and automatic fault detection and solving systems that you get on say an Airbus, we fly with old instruments. If there's a problem we have to sort it out ourselves. It's classic flying."

And when the passengers are VIPs, there is the extra pressure of getting them smoothly to their destination without a hint that bad weather has meant some pretty short-notice decisions have had to be made about fuel levels, flying time and whether or not to look for an alternative place to land.

Even if sometimes, secretly, a little bit of appreciation wouldn't go amiss. "We got on well with Angelina Jolie because she has a good knowledge of flying. But when I landed she didn't say 'whoa, nice landing'; I could've dined out on that for ages," said Flight Lieutenant Meza.

Shame. Maybe next time. **DF**



Ground sign: a BAE 146 taxiing

14 hour days. Full body armour at 50°C. Medals. And he's only IT Support.

Most people just soldier on in the same old job. But Paul D. isn't most people. He and his teammates put in weeks on end in Helmand, even in combat zones and lockdowns, for home leave that's over all too soon.

It sounds a bit like the army. And Paul has proudly picked up four medals in war zones from Iraq to Afghanistan. Like everyone else on the team, he's a different kind of service man.

A civilian who happily commits to 14-16 hour days to implement changes to military IT systems when they're in downtime. Because for obvious reasons, you can't work on them when they're in use.

Like many others, Paul is always ready to go back, again and again. Hardly the attitude of a cog in a machine.

It's the teamwork of people dedicated to a vital task. Maintaining systems that cannot be allowed to fail, despite the climate, the conditions, the intense situations.

If IT Support went down here, it would be all over the front page. This is the first time Paul has appeared in print.

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AYE AYE CAPTAIN

AFTER HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH'S NAMING CEREMONY, CAPTAIN SIMON PETITT TALKS TO LAURA BROOKS ABOUT MANAGING THE BUILD

DF: How did it feel to be chosen as the Senior Naval Officer of the new carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth?

SP: I was, as you can imagine, mightily surprised, pleased, and wondering whether they'd actually chosen the right person. Once they had confirmed I was the guy that they wanted I felt rather proud.

DF: What had you done previously that prepared you for the mammoth task?

SP: I have served on HMS Ark Royal twice. As one of the engineering commanders I brought her out of refit. I then worked on the Future Carrier project around the time of the signing of the manufacturing contract, so I was party to some of the design work. All of that helps to understand the challenge of bringing a big ship out of a dockyard.

DF: What was your first day like?

SP: I arrived with my team of 12 and after a small period of induction they all turned to me and said 'right what do we do now sir?'

Starting anything off from a blank piece of paper is difficult, especially when the first thing you need to do is actually order the paper to write on. However, I had been given time to work up a plan and we just got straight on to deliver it; writing orders and working out relationships with DE&S and industry. In essence I said 'let's get on and prepare this ship for sea'.

DF: What makes these carriers so different to anything the Royal Navy has commissioned before?

SP: Firstly, the size of the ship; she's three times the size of our current carrier HMS *Illustrious*. Secondly the ship design, which I am really impressed with. I was party to some of the design work in the early stages of the project and now I see the ship coming to life, and see there were not too many compromises made. And thirdly, the state-of-the-art technology.

DF: Tell me more about the technology; with the amount of money spent on the carriers, can we expect to see lots of high-tech gadgets?

SP: Carriers are not so much about high technology; it's about logistics. It's about the flow of people, engineering, information – everything needed to deliver aviation.

The ship is designed around 36 jets co-ordinating up to 72 sorties a day and I think the design of the ship



Historic moment: the Senior Naval Officer of the Royal Navy's largest warship

Picture: Ian Arthur

“ It's the most monumental bit of my career ”

is really well suited to that. From reducing the burden on the man, to focusing on the flexibility to make this ship last her 50 years of service, the technology has been acutely focused to the needs of the ship, her company and her ability to adapt to future demands.

DF: Like how?

SP: There is a highly mechanised weapon handling system, which is much like an automated warehouse linked to a car production line for the assembly of

weapons to go on the aircraft.

The bombs come from unmanned magazines into a preparation area and move along a production line. Sailors then take the weapons off the line, assemble them, and put them on flight deck trollies. So technology is focused on reducing manpower.

Technology is also about life-cost. It's about efficiency and making sure our engines operate in the most frugal fashion that they can.

So we've got a power plant, four big diesel engines and two gas turbines and all they do is produce electricity to drive electric motors – not dissimilar to the newest of the electric hybrid cars or Formula 1 racing cars. And that improves fuel efficiency enormously.

DF: I guess you want to use taxpayers' money in the most efficient manner? What will they be getting for their money?

SP: This ship is about flexibility, versatility and agility. It's about delivering a ship with huge capacity to perform across a wide range of roles. The carrier is a strategic defence asset.

With a four-and-a-half-acre flight deck, that can be used flexibly by military planners to put into practice political policy around the world, and that's the key bit from a capability perspective. And she will have a 50-year life. To get that longevity in your mind, the last captain of this ship has not even been born yet.

DF: So Defence, and the Royal Navy, should be happy with the finished product?

SP: Absolutely – but it is not just about the ship; capability is delivered by people. My focus is to organise them, give them procedures, and then make sure they are well-trained and confident in operating the ship and preparing her for sea.

My team are embedded with the industry side to help the contractors understand our requirements and make sure that we know how to use the kit.

As soon as the kit is handed over to the Navy it's absolutely essential that we can take it and deliver what we are required to deliver quickly.

DF: How else are the ship's company training to use the carrier?

SP: We've got a lot of pilots working with the US Navy and US Marine Corps to make sure they maintain their experience levels on flying jets from the sea. We will, over the next few years, continue to work very closely with the Americans and the French to hone our skills in operating the ship. We are also working with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary who also have big, lean-manned ships.

But at the end of the day this isn't an American ship nor is it an oil tanker – it is something unique. Certainly, this generation of sailors has never crewed a carrier this big; this is the return of the Navy to the big deck carriers like the *Ark Royal* of the 70s. Having a bit of time to learn about the ship has been hugely helpful.

DF: And does training on this huge carrier involve trying to navigate around the ship? How will people not get lost on something the size of a small town?

SP: We are still pondering over that one! In the initial

throws of people arriving we are going to be giving them iPad-like tablets so that they can easily find their way. Around the ship there will be QR codes, like you see at bus stops, which they can scan using these tablets or their smartphones and it will tell them where they are in the ship.

There are a lot of things that we are considering such as naming some of the big passageways after streets in London and Edinburgh, our two affiliated cities. Luckily, unlike a town, you can't wander beyond the outskirts as you will bump up against metal at some point.

DF: So now that she has been named, what next for HMS *Queen Elizabeth*?

SP: There is still a lot of cable to be put in the ship, still a lot of pipework as well as a lot of equipment to commission.

She will go on contractor sea trials in 2016 and be accepted into service in 2017. Our absolute focus is to be operating jets off her in 2018 off the east coast of America – that's what the ship is about. It's very much a crawl, walk, run approach.


DF: And will you be in charge of those sea trials?

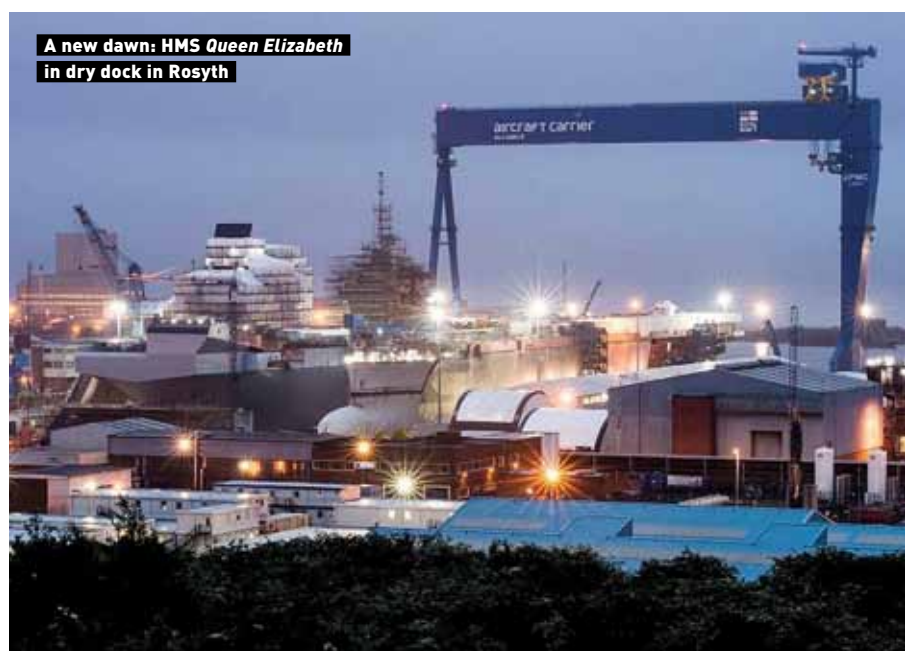
SP: No, I am an engineer by trade. As the Senior Naval Officer, I command the ship's company prior to the ship being ready. I will hand over to Captain Jerry Kyd, a warfare officer, and he will be the first commanding officer at sea.

DF: What will you do after that handover happens?

SP: I don't think it's going to be a simple handshake. It will be a gentle handover with some overlap so that he can get his feet under the table.

After that, I'm quite sure that the First Sea Lord will have some plans for me, potentially in Portsmouth.

The ship will first enter Portsmouth late in 2016 so having someone there experienced with her will be advantageous. 



IN STEP

FROM MAP-READING TO CONFIDENCE BUILDING, CADETS ACROSS THE COUNTRY SPEAK ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES OF BEING IN THE COMBINED CADET FORCE



First time fliers: cadets from Glyn School getting ready for take off at RAF Benson

James Miller is only 13 years old but he's already hooked on army life. He is a member of the army section of the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) at Glyn School in Surrey.

Learning life-skills such as self-reliance and leadership, James feels he's preparing for the challenges he'll face later in life.

And now more young people like him can get the same opportunity. The CCF – mixed cadet units that are based in schools across the UK – will benefit from the £1m bursary scheme provided by the Libor fines imposed on banks. The scheme will help state schools afford the running and staff costs for the CCF.

Having been a cadet for just a year James is excited by the many new adventures that lie ahead.

"We get lots of opportunities to learn a variety of things like navigation and first aid and the importance of team work.

"I've learnt a lot of skills which will go towards my Duke of Edinburgh's Award and I've made some really good friends."

The new cadet bursary scheme will also help fund cadet activities including expeditions, sailing, first aid, leadership training and charity work.

Sergeant Major Naomi Semilore, aged 18, has been a cadet for five years and is in her final year with them at the Thomas Deacon Academy in Peterborough.

Having been through the cadet experience from the start, Naomi knows that at the age of 13 she made the right decision to join the CCF.

"I used to see the cadets wearing their uniforms around school and I thought 'I want to be a part of that'," said Naomi. "Then when I started going, I realised there were so many new skills and opportunities for me."

Even though Naomi is yet to decide what her career will hold for her, she

knows that the cadets will always be a big influence in her life.

"When the uniform comes off, the core values like leadership and sacrifice for others that I learnt at cadets never leave me," she said. "I'll take those values with me into whatever I do throughout my life."

Another cadet at the Thomas Deacon Academy is Staff Sergeant Tom Conroy, aged 17. Studying for his A-levels he has been a cadet for three years. His positive experience with the cadets has given him the talent to be able to teach the junior cadets a range of subjects.

"Confidence in myself and my abilities has grown," said Tom. "If it wasn't for the cadets, I would never have been able to stand up in front of a group of twenty 13 year olds to teach them map and compass techniques."

Tom also feels that if it hadn't been for the CCF he wouldn't have been given the opportunity to work as a part-time supervisor at a local sporting attraction.

Tom applied to work as a waiter at the Peterborough greyhound track, and during his interview he was asked about his role in the cadets. Impressed on hearing about the leadership and discipline qualities that Tom had gained through the CCF, not only did the company offer him the job, but they also offered him a position as a part-time supervisor.


Seeing the success being a cadet has brought him, Tom feels his future lies with the military, especially as his dad is currently a reservist after having served in the regular forces.

"I'd like to join the Royal Logistic Corps and ideally I'd like to work in air despatch," said Tom. "I've thoroughly enjoyed being a cadet and I'm sure my experience will help me in whatever the future holds."

Contingent commander at Thomas Deacon Academy is Major Chris Thompson; he is the person who is responsible for delivering the scheme to the students.

The CCF has been at the school for seven years and he feels that seeing the positive influence that the cadet experience has had on young people, every school should have a CCF.

"The cadet force is invaluable in any state school," said Chris. "It changes the ethos not only for the school but also for the individual.

It's about changing young people and putting the right kind of people into society. If we think about adhering to standards and discipline, the perfect vehicle for that is the CCF." 



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BATTLEFIELD

IAN CARR MEETS THE TEAM OF US AND UK MILITARY ADVISORS HELPING THE AFGHAN ARMY TO DEVELOP A TRAINING INSTITUTION OF ITS OWN

Pictures: Corporal Obi Igboebisiokwu

Stepping through a narrow doorway in the thick mud wall of the compound, the translator leads the way. He retrieves some pages torn from an exercise book fluttering on the ground.

They are notes scribbled by an Afghan instructor who has been giving a lesson on how to enter and search a compound to Afghan National Army (ANA) recruits as part of their basic warrior training (BWT).

"It was written by an instructor called Nasim," the interpreter tells us. "It talks about sentries covering the corners, being



Battle-ready: Afghan soldiers in training

to tailoring and delivering the training that the Corps needed, with a tighter control of how students would develop their skills. This would begin with improving the basic training and how the soldiers would then go on to learn their specific trade skills.

“Before, a recruit would be taken out of his village, pushed through his eight weeks’ basic warrior training, and then be told ‘well done, you’re now a soldier, go and join your kandak (battalion)’,” said Lieutenant Colonel Danny Mackness, commanding officer of the RCBS.

While the ANA was urgently trying to build up numbers, it had to get soldiers through their training and out to the front line as quickly as possible. Now that it is at full strength it is time to rethink that, and RCBS is leading the way.

“During the whole of their basic warrior training, new soldiers only got to fire 25 rounds. It’s not surprising then that they emerged as basic light role infantrymen with limited marksmanship skills,” said Colonel Mackness.

And as it is not the Afghan tradition to offer soldiers refresher training, it was hard to see how they would ever formally master those skills.

Only a few of them would then go on to experience what the British Army calls phase two training, where individuals learn the specific skills and craft they need for the branch of the service they wish to specialise in, such as infantry, logistics or artillery.

A form of phase two training is conducted at the national branch schools in Kabul, but the number of places are extremely limited. For a cadre of 1,400 soldiers completing BWT there are a mere 53 vacancies on offer.

And those who are lucky enough to go can become the victims of what Colonel Mackness calls ‘the tyranny of distance’. “We’d send 215 Corps guys off to Kabul and often we wouldn’t get them back as they got posted to somewhere else,” he said. Now, thanks to the RCBS, 215 Corps can take care of all that locally. The basic warrior training has been extended to 12 weeks, and the route through to further training made more effective.

“We are an advisor team, pretty much half-and-half between the US Marine Corps and Brits,” said Colonel Mackness. “Our role is to advise the Afghan staff who run the RCBS and prepare them to take over.”

The UK and US team of advisors began setting up the school in April last year. The facilities in the purpose-built camp include an assault course, counter-IED lanes, compounds for practising patrol and search skills, a driver training area and a £20m four-kilometre-wide firing range complex.

To deliver the programme of

watchful for enemies. Then he is reminding the soldiers that they exist ‘to bring peace to our country for our people.’ On the back is a simple sketch of a bird, possibly symbolic.

Here at the Regional Corps Battle School (RCBS) at Camp Shorabak, there is a strong emphasis on pride. At strategic points, such as guardhouses and on the parade ground, there are life-sized murals showing soldiers the correct way to stand at attention and how to give a salute.

“Colonel Shawali (the Afghan commander) does enjoy a salute,” says

Regimental Sergeant Major Philip Ingram, who is showing *Defence Focus* round. As well as the painted soldiers, there are slogans urging the students to remember ‘God, Country – Job’.

RCBS was set up in September 2013 to professionalise the ANA’s 3rd Brigade 215 Corps training by developing an Afghan-led, sustainable institution in which the Corps will deliver its own training over a range of infantry and junior leadership skills.

It was felt that there was a need to take a regional rather than a national approach

TRAINING



Mapping the future: Afghan soldiers learn to map-read

instruction that the ANA Training and Education Command required, the team established progressive blocks of organised training. This formed a simple route map that the kandaks could use to develop their soldiers in a logical and effective way.

In all there are 23 courses, from the basic warrior training through to more advanced courses teaching military skills and leadership training, which includes moving from developing static live firing skills up to supported platoon and squad sized attacks.

Within the tiered training, arguably the most influential training blocks are those that teach the Afghans to become instructors, and the training-the-trainer course that is helping the Afghans to grow their own instructors. It is the success of these elements in particular which has led to the quick tempo of success at the RCBS.

During the first blocks of training that the school ran in September, the advisors identified those Afghan students

who showed that they had the potential to become instructors. These individuals were then trained to take the lead in subsequent lessons.

“On the very first course the Afghans were wary, it was something new and they didn’t want to lose face. So our instructors did all the training in things like first aid, vehicle mechanics and so on,” said Colonel Mackness. “But we identified 144 students who we said should be instructors. So we trained them up.

“Now we have 440 of them. We’ve gone from a 30 per cent Afghan lead to 85 per cent. In the next phase we will step back even more, so hopefully 100 per cent of the course will be delivered by Afghan trainers, with us just standing in the background.”

Since the RCBS was set up, it has trained almost 4,000 students, which, as a visiting brigadier pointed out “that means you have trained more troops than have passed out of Catterick military training centre in a year!”



Salutes you: how to do it right

The next nut for the RCBS team to crack is perhaps the toughest of all. “The phase we are in now is institutional development, and it’s the biggest challenge,” said Colonel Mackness.

To ensure that the progress made so far is sustainable, the Afghans need to be able to think about what sorts of training they will need for the future and plan their own courses to satisfy that need.

Already they have a resource management system akin to the British Army’s JPA. “So individuals can record their specialisms, and that means that the Corps can manage how people are deployed and organise future training,”

The Afghans will also need to plan how they are going to develop a healthy churn of instructors at the school and give them a career path to follow. What may help is the RCBS concept of developing mobile training teams who can take the training to Afghan troops at the front line.

“Everyone used to ask us if the ANA can sustain and tend this school,” said Major Ernest Adams, the RCBS operations officer. “I think they are not only proving that they can, but that they want to. The next team that comes here will really be able to focus on just the planning aspect, and that will be our job done,” said Colonel Mackness.

As self-declared masters of their own exit strategy, the RCBS advisors were aiming at developing the Afghans so that they could take over by October 2014.

To that end they had hoped to reduce RCBS advisor numbers in July by 50 per cent. Thanks to being three months ahead, they are now set to reduce by 75 per cent.

What better measure of success, or of motivation, can you ask for than getting on an earlier plane home? **DF**



Up and under: the Corps assault course

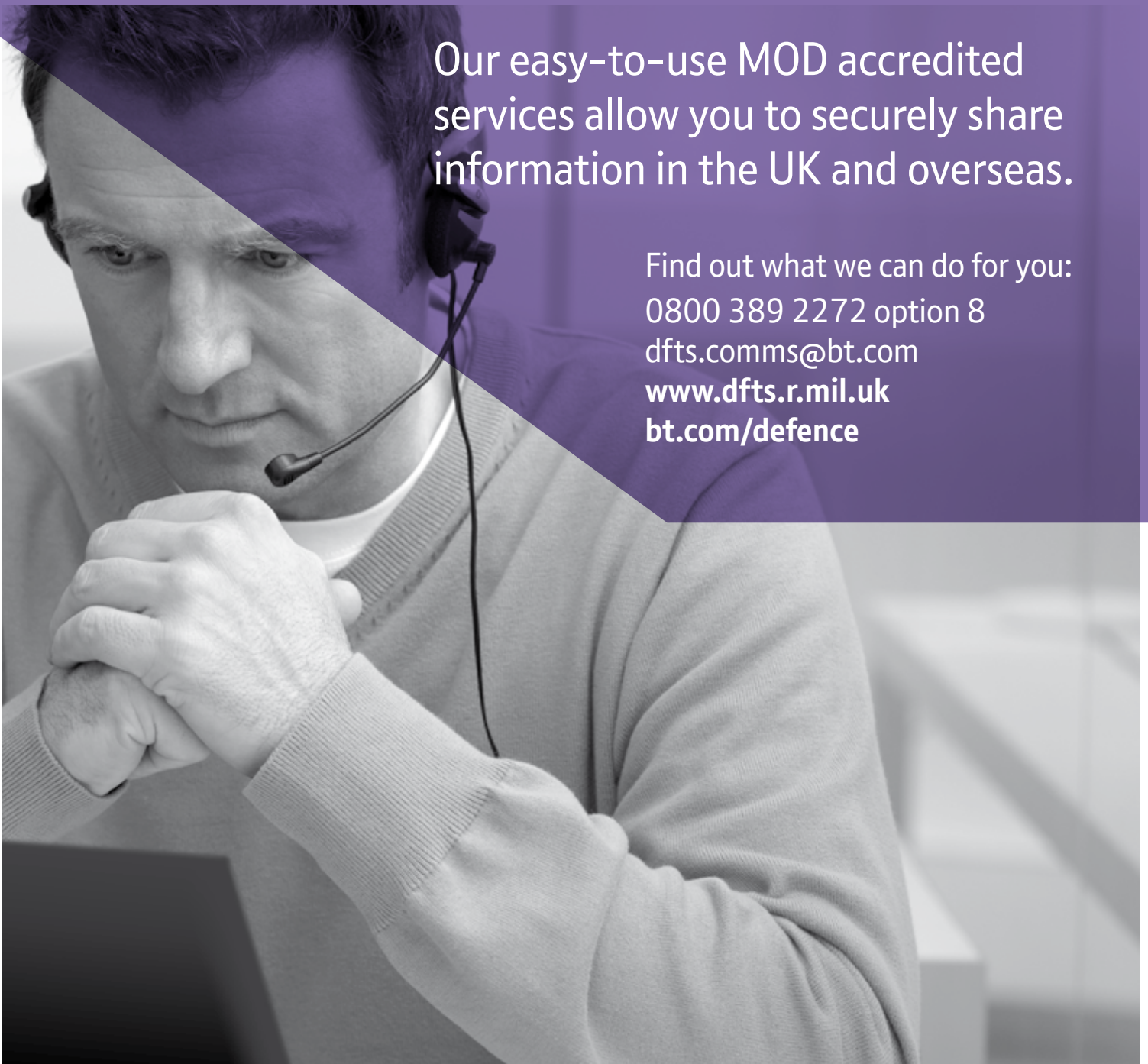
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HEAD MEDIC

GAMING TECHNOLOGY IS BEING DEVELOPED TO GIVE MEDICAL TRAINING A BATTLEFIELD REALITY WRITES IAN CARR



In sight: the virtual reality helmet



Goggle-eyed: a view of the battlefield through Oculus Rift

For most people, getting immersed in a computer war game is all about racking up the body count. So it's ironic that the same simulation technology is now being developed to help train real Armed Forces personnel to cope with battlefield casualties during a fire fight.

Last year, the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) funded through the Centre for Defence Enterprise (CDE) a six-month project worth £75k to look into the potential for using simulated environments for defence medical training.

Plextek Consulting, a company which develops technology for the defence and security market, won the work. They impressed CDE by proposing to take affordable gaming technology and use it to develop an immersive simulated battlefield environment to test the teamwork and decision-making skills of soldiers and medics who are the first on the scene to treat casualties.

Using Oculus Rift, a virtual reality head set, and navigating with a hand-held controller, a medic, a platoon commander and a pair of foot soldiers must work their way towards a soldier who has been seriously injured by an IED, and then apply medical treatment while under fire.

"This is a concept system," said Collette Johnson, Plextek's medical business development manager. "So we are testing the prototype model to make sure it is as realistic as possible.

"At the moment we have only one casualty in the simulation, but after we have proved the concept, increasing the number of wounded will be one of the many things we will want to develop."

Once the team have donned their helmets, the scenario begins with them trying to locate the injured soldier from their moans and sounds of chaotic breathing.

A controller can change the situation, making it more difficult to locate the casualty by drowning out their cries with gunfire. Or their medical condition can be made to deteriorate.

Team stress levels can be further boosted by ramping up the fire fight, introducing a sniper into the mix, increasing the explosions, or by stirring up a dust cloud.

Experienced trauma surgeons who have tried the simulation have been surprised by how realistic it is. "You can hear the distress and the poor breathing of the casualty, and because the helmet closes you off from the room, you soon get swept up in it," said Collette.

"I'm not a computer game player at all, my background is medical, but when I tried it, within 30 seconds I'd adjusted. I forgot I was in a simulation. Your heart starts pumping and you immediately just get on with wanting to triage the casualty and get them to safety. The longer you leave them the more distressed they get."

In fact, Collette admitted afterwards, when she had taken the helmet off, it took a lot longer to adjust to being back in a meeting room with a lot of businessmen.

To make sure that the scenarios are as real as possible, and that the simulation answers the training requirements, Plextek have been consulting widely with medical and military experts.

"Dstl defined the requirements, and we will be working closely with them when we develop the concept," said Collette.

you are a shade out', things like that, and getting the breathing states correct are really important to make people feel that it's realistic."

Role players can see and interact with their colleagues in the simulation. They can also see their own bodies, which, Collette says, adds an extra subtlety as you are forced to take care as you move around the casualty. "You also have a simulated medic's bag and you can take things out of it, like tourniquets."

This kind of virtual reality adds another dimension to moulage training where casualties are simulated either by mannequins or by actors wearing make-up or prosthetic wounds.

Future developments could include the use of haptic models where motion-sensitive dummies can give users immersed in virtual reality something lifelike to touch.

At the moment the intention is to use the simulator primarily for refresher training and to augment skills. Because the kit is fairly simple, and relatively inexpensive, it is extremely portable.

"That was important to us. We didn't

want to end up with a big hefty load of kit. All you need is a laptop with a good graphics card and Oculus Rift headset, and you can take it pretty much anywhere.

"You could train in remote places or make it really accessible so people can train on it without having to set up rigidly formal training sessions," said Collette.

Another area that is being looked into is how data can be recorded during an exercise to be used afterwards during debriefs when assessing how well the students have performed, and to identify any skills gaps that may need addressing.

"It's been a fascinating project," said Collette. "Our work with Dstl is enabling us to revolutionise the way medical treatment can be applied in the battlefield.

"It's really exciting working on something that brings such benefit to people who really want it and thinking about all the potential applications."

The intention is to develop the prototype with a view to producing kit for training within the next 12 to 18 months. So, it would seem that as far as this project is concerned, it's game on, not game over. **DP**

“Losing that much blood your face would be this colour”

"We haven't had any soldiers involved in the trials yet, but that is an important next step which we hope to start in August or September, and Dstl will help us with that.

"Once we prove the concept to defence medicine and training stakeholders we can start to look at building up extra scenarios and applications by adding modules onto the basic model, and develop different ways of exploiting it. Which will mean talking to the appropriate authorities in MOD."

On the medical side, Plextek have been working with many hospitals such as Addenbrooke's in Cambridge and talking to senior trauma surgeons.

"Physiological realism is a real strength of the model," said Collette. "We show the simulation to surgeons and they tell us where to tweak it – for example, they say 'if you were losing that much blood, your face would be this colour;

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DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES

NURSING INITIATIVES ARE GIVING THE POWER BACK TO THE PATIENT. LAURA BROOKS REPORTS



Picture: RCN Publishing Company

Worthy winners: Veterans First receive the Nursing Standard mental health team award

For many of us, owning something designed specially for us feels like a privilege. Wearing a tailor-made suit, for example, makes us feel good. So why wouldn't we apply this principle to our health care?

Three award-winning medical practitioners in the field of defence have done just that.

In their separate areas of expertise they have created unique, bespoke treatment plans, putting the patients' needs at the centre of what they do. It would seem the doctor knows best notion

is being done away with and the power is in the patients' hands.

It was at this year's Nursing Standard Nurse Awards where the work of these defence health practitioners was recognised. The awards celebrate the exceptional and innovative work nurses across the country do to better the experience for patients.

For Nurse of the Year 2014, pain specialist nurse Sarah Lewis, setting up a bespoke nurse-led pain management service at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC) in Headley

Court was her way of making a difference.

Speaking about when she first joined the DMRC in 2010, she said: "It was a stove-pipe system with many facets; managing pain but with no consistency. What I introduced was a thread to pull services together in an individual fashion for each patient depending on their needs."

With patients arriving at Headley Court with a wide range of injuries from the battlefield to the rugby field, Sarah and the multi-disciplinary team design pain management plans tailored to the individual patient.

And this has resulted in a remarkable improvement in the rate of rehabilitation.

One way in which they achieve this is by maintaining pain relief while reducing the side effects of medication. Sarah said: "This makes a big impact and their families see it too. It is when you see patients who have been in severe pain now walking around, smiling, with a completely different demeanour about them, that makes it so rewarding."

But in her nothing but professional and humble manner, Sarah views the exceptional work she does as just part of the bigger picture.

Likening herself to the chocolate in a marble cake, she said: "I interweave all parts of the service, putting together a pain relief plan in a unique way for each patient." She credits MOD-provided resources as being key to her having won the award.

These resources, Sarah believes, are what sets defence nursing apart from civilian nursing: "In the NHS I felt I was managing pain sat on my hands as the resources were frequently not there, but at the DMRC I'm allowed to do my job and I do it well."

All of which bodes well for the next generation of defence health practitioners given the recent investment into UK medical facilities. Thanks to a £300m upgrade to rehabilitation services, the world-class services delivered at Headley Court are to be moved to a new and larger base in Loughborough in 2018, while a £138m revamp at DMS Whittington will house the latest, state-of-the-art medical training facilities. A clear demonstration of a commitment to provide first class medical care for our wounded personnel.

With improved facilities and with training forever evolving from lessons learned in conflicts like Afghanistan, operationally-ready medical personnel are continually produced to an exceptionally high standard.

But it hasn't just been lessons learned in Afghanistan that have initiated changes; the battlefield has always driven advancements in medical care. In particular, the way mental health problems are treated has progressed for the better.

Gone are the bad old days of the world wars when shell-shocked men returning from battlefields were expected to keep a stiff upper lip and soldier on. Today, mental health is talked about and managed through the Care Programme Approach.

Much like Sarah's work, it recognises that every patient and every case is different. The patient is in the driving seat working together with the carer to create a plan specific to their mental health needs.

It is this approach that the winners of



Taking away the pain: Nurse of the Year 2014 Sarah Lewis

the Nursing Standard Mental Health Award adopt. Veterans First, part of the North Essex Veterans Mental Health Network, was established to provide veterans of all ages with a place to go to deal with their mental health issues. At a time when it was felt there was a lack of support for those suffering with such issues in the North Essex area, Veterans First was very much welcomed.

Co-founder Diane Palmer said: "While most people leaving the military do make a good transition, for those with more complex psychological trauma, the readjustment can be more problematic."

Cases vary from alcohol abuse to muscular problems, homelessness to fraud and debt. Even needing to find a handyman to help out around the house can be an unexpected problem for some.

Veterans First go that extra mile to help out returning Service personnel, providing



Using his initiative: Sergeant Letso Rapoo with his Health Care Assistant Award

them with somewhere to go to talk to a professional.

And it's obviously working, with a 100 per cent of patients expressing satisfaction in surveys for two years' running, Veterans First are being held up as a shining example in helping improve the lives of service men and women.

By assessing the environment around them, these deserving winners have used their initiative to see how they can ensure the independence of patients. Which is just what Sergeant Letso Rapoo, a Health Care Assistant (HCA) at Headley Court, did.

Sergeant Rapoo's success in establishing a ward for patients requiring lower levels of supervision run by HCAs was recognised by the Nursing Standard Nurse Awards panel. "A truly inspirational development and one that is crying out to be replicated," the judges remarked. So what is it that makes Sergeant Rapoo's ward initiative so inspiring?

At a time of high patient turnover, the introduction of this HCA-led ward freed up the registered nurses, allowing them to deploy to areas where their capabilities were most needed.

But it also empowered the patients themselves. Sergeant Rapoo said: "When I looked at the patients' requirements, I realised a lot of them were capable of doing things for themselves."

"It got me thinking that the opportunity for more independence could help with the patients' rehabilitation."

The idea that patients, with the support of HCAs, could ready themselves for discharge without the supervision of a nurse was a huge advance in allowing patients to be more independent.

"Patients have reported a feeling of greater autonomy doing everyday things like making their own beds, which has helped their confidence and rehabilitation," Sergeant Rapoo said. "They feel they are trusted to look after themselves."

It has been this shift towards creating care plans designed specifically for the patient which is making the nurse-patient relationship stronger than ever.

According to Sarah, while the medical model in which the patient allows a health care professional to manage their health does work in most cases, at Headley Court, the requirements can differ.

She said: "The biopsychosocial model we work by at DMRC lets us, as health care personnel, to empower patients to take control of their own health."

With this mentality, and bespoke solutions for patients happening across defence medicine, it certainly seems like patient knows best is the much healthier solution for the road to recovery. **DP**

POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

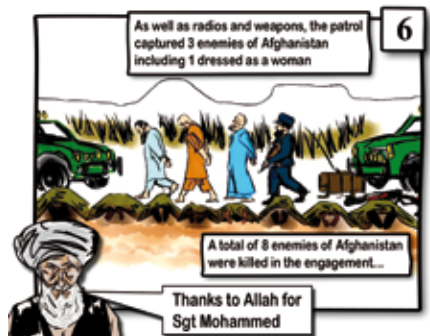
EMILY BIRD LOOKS AT THE IMAGINATIVE WAYS INFORMATION OPERATIONS OFFICERS HAVE HELPED TO BUILD CONFIDENCE AMONG THE AFGHAN PEOPLE

The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in Helmand province have a challenging task ahead. By the end of this year UK combat troops will have left Afghanistan and the ANSF will have total responsibility for security there.

It wasn't long after the UK military's drawdown from Afghanistan was announced that apprehension among Helmand's Afghan security forces started to bubble under the surface. This feeling of uncertainty grew.

Lieutenant Colonel Cochran, who deployed on Herrick 17 and 18, was given the daunting task of looking at how to build confidence within the ANSF. As part of the information operations team, Colonel Cochran had to find ways to rekindle the ANSF's will and inspire the self-confidence they needed to take up the challenge of protecting the population.

"We needed to find ways to say to them 'you can do this, you are going to do this and you're good at it, so be confident about it,'" said Colonel Cochran. "The Afghans knew that with us leaving they were going to be in a difficult place. They were reminded on



a daily basis how hard their life was. But they were a credible organisation that was improving on a daily basis. They just needed to believe in themselves so that the local population would too.”

Colonel Cochran and his team began to analyse, assess and integrate all information activities that were going on in Helmand. Then it was a matter of finding creative ways of helping the Afghans to communicate effectively with their countrymen.

“Finding a way of inspiring one Afghan to repeat a message to another Afghan was particularly challenging, especially in a semi-literate society,” said Colonel Cochran.

“We called on the Afghan National Police, through the 2 SCOTS Police Mentoring and Advisory Group, to help. So they went out and asked the police to tell them something about their work that had made them feel genuinely proud, that could then be used as the basis of a story.”

STORYTELLERS

The team knew that reproducing the stories just using the written word would fail to engage many Afghans. So the stories were retold in the form of a comic strip drawn by Stephen Hartley, a NATO civil servant and amateur artist in the team.

The comic strips were distributed at every checkpoint in Helmand province. This very simple way of story-telling was attractive to the literate person, and the not-so-literate ones could understand the story by following the pictures.

“One story was about an Afghan Uniform Police hero who had been trained as a bomb disposal expert and who had defused more than 50 IEDs,” recalled Colonel Cochran. “He was frustrating the opposition, but unfortunately one day he was blown up and killed by an IED.

“Even though he had died, the Afghans who were learning bomb disposal felt his spirit would always be present in the classroom, watching over them. This type of thinking might be alien to western minds, but it was vital to get the importance of the Afghans’ message across in their story.”

These short stories started to spread and have an impact on local communities.

“Once they were retold, the village elders could see for themselves the brave actions of the Afghan police and the good that they do,” added Colonel Cochran. “It’s very important that we understand the power of information and how it can change people’s behaviour.”

Colonel Cochran’s team didn’t just use paper; another more modern way

“ It’s very important that we understand the power of information and how it can change people’s behaviour ”

of getting the ANSF message out was through viral videos.

The Taliban had already been using videos to communicate with the local people. The military found propaganda on mobile phones seized from captured insurgents; horrific scenes that were set to religious music or poetry. These videos had been sent to locals to convince them that the Taliban’s actions were acceptable.

Although the videos were disturbing, this way of communicating intrigued Colonel Cochran. Deciding to turn it on its head, he and the embedded psychological support element created their own positive footage of the ANSF using images of the good work they were doing and also set it to religious Afghan poetry and music.

“Once the video was made, we loaded it on phones and showed it to the locals who loved it,” said Colonel Cochran. “We then gave them the phones to bluetooth the videos around and soon enough they were going viral.”

TALK TALK

Another breakthrough for Colonel Cochran’s team was when they came up with an imaginative way to communicate to the Afghan people that there were viable alternatives to growing poppies.

“A Royal Navy reserve officer and farmer, Lieutenant Jo Nicholson, devised a strategy to market traditional farming in Helmand,” said Colonel Cochran. “But to get people talking about it we had to get the farmers to listen in the first place.”

With the help of the local radio station, Radio Tamadoon, and the gardeners within Lashkar Gah, who provided the editorial control, a one-hour radio show called *Crops and the Farmer* was devised and launched.

This included a 20-minute radio soap opera followed by a 40-minute call-in. The programme was based on the story of a young man who had to feed his family and sought farming advice from his village elder.

“Jo wrote and produced five episodes on different farming matters,” enthused Colonel Cochran. “The response was great and quickly we started getting phone calls asking us to do shows on specific crops,

like peanuts. The show would get farmers tuning in and having agricultural debates.”

Aside from the extra listeners tuning in to hear the *Afghan Archers*, the radio station itself had over 350,000 listeners in central Helmand, meaning that any messages broadcast over the radio reached a wide audience.

And to make sure Afghan soldiers could also listen to the show, the team provided each ANSF checkpoint with a number of wind-up radios preset to the right frequency and a dedicated call-in radio show for the ANSF was launched. Different checkpoints would call in and dedicate songs or poetry to other checkpoints, raising morale.

The radio shows were also an easy way to engage with women, who tend to be harder to reach as they are often prevented from mixing with men in society. The women could call in anonymously, so not only were they able to listen but also they could give their opinions without feeling threatened.


AWARD-WINNING

So, the Afghan people were engaging with the radio shows, reading the comic strips and watching the videos, but finding out whether this led to any behavioural changes among them was tricky.

It wasn’t long though before reports from the front line started coming in, noting the growth in confidence and morale within the local people and ANSF.

As the ANSF started taking more control, so their confidence became more apparent. The hard work that had gone into designing and creating the messages was indeed making a difference.

And the efforts made by Colonel Cochran and Captain Maria Egan from his team were recognised when they both received a Queen’s Commendation for Valuable Service.

“Ultimately the ANSF feel really good about themselves,” said Colonel Cochran. “We can now say to them ‘you know why we’re leaving? Because you are good enough to do the job, and the population want you to provide the security, now go tell your boys that’.” 

BOSNIA

I had been a Lance Corporal with C Company, The Rifle Volunteers, for just a year when I went on my first operational tour.

Being a reservist on my first tour, and tasked with a team of regular soldiers to manage, was a steep learning curve. But the team were a good bunch so we all just cracked on with the job in hand.

By the time I deployed in September 2000, the civil war was long over, but having seen the barbaric scenes on the news, I wasn't expecting the warm hospitality that we received from the locals.

Everywhere we went, people invited us into their homes and offered us food and coffee, or Slivo, the local plum brandy.

Although the fighting was over, Bosnia was still a war-torn country with a lot of burnt or totally bombed out buildings. Many of those that remained were riddled with bullet holes.

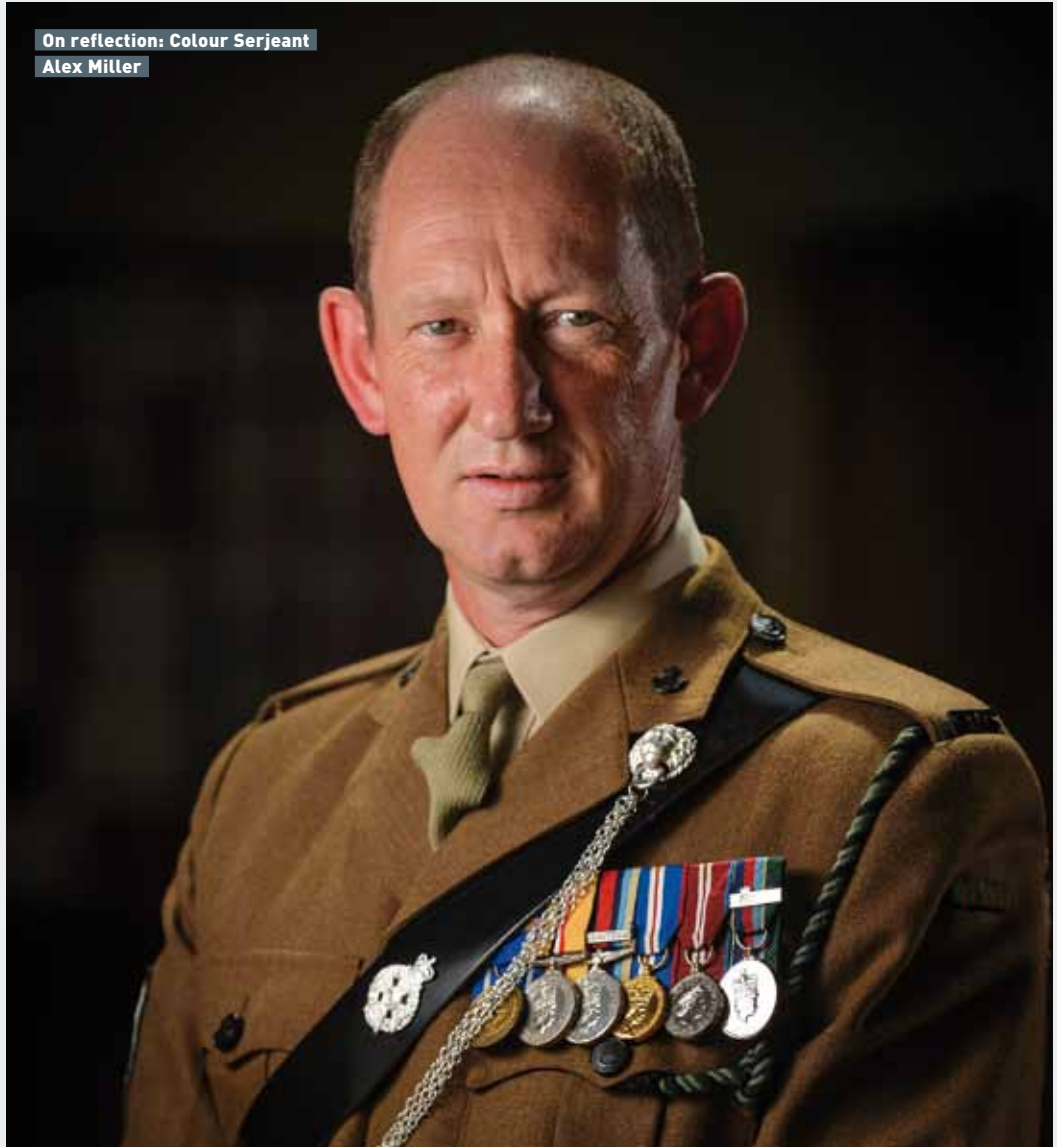
Some villages were totally deserted, but where there were people, they were slowly rebuilding their lives and we were there to monitor their progress.

Part of my unit's role was to conduct surveys of those villages and monitor the ethnic populations in our area of operations.

Another part of our job was to carry out inventories on the weapons of the Bosnian Serb Army, making sure none went missing.

We had to confiscate any illegally-held weapons, like the bombed-up, fully fuelled T-55 tank that was found hidden in a barn by one of our patrols.

It was a good tour. It taught me to be confident in my job. I wasn't sure of myself when I first arrived and I was apprehensive about what to expect, but I was welcomed into the team and I proved, mainly to myself, that I could do my job and do it well.



Picture: Corporal Si Longworth RLC

MY MEDALS

From the mountains of Bosnia to the poppy fields of Afghanistan, Colour Serjeant Alex Miller from C Company, 6th Battalion The Rifles, talks about being a reservist and some of his medals with Emily Bird



OP TELIC IRAQ

Salamanca Company of the Rifle Volunteers was deployed in April 2004 initially as the force protection company for Basra Palace. We ended up with a large area of operations around the palace and the

southern outskirts of Basra during what proved to be a very busy tour.

About three weeks after we arrived some fake pictures of Iraqi prisoners being abused were published by the British press. Two days later Basra exploded with violence.

My section was on quick reaction force duty, when, at about 0830 one morning, the

ops room received a report that a nearby police checkpoint had been overrun by insurgents. We were immediately crashed out to investigate.

There was a long straight road running up towards this checkpoint and as we approached it the atmospherics suddenly changed.

The streets emptied and we could see an occasional head popping up. We had been spotted. Suddenly, a rocket-propelled grenade passed about three metres in front of me, went over my top cover's head, and exploded in someone's front garden.

Rounds were everywhere but we soon established that the insurgents were in a building about 60 metres away.

Luckily they were appalling shots because no one got hurt even though there were nine of us on the ground. One round though, probably a ricochet, hit my serjeant's chest plate.

We returned fire and then held the ground until we were relieved at around 1700. We just had time for a shower and a quick bite to eat, then we went straight back on duty. That was a long day.

From then on the palace came under fire countless times. As this was before mortar alarms were installed, the first you knew something was happening was when you heard the whoosh of a rocket or the noise of a mortar firing in the distance.

Even though hardly anyone in the company had experience of such a kinetic environment, quite a number of the NCOs had previous operational experience from Northern Ireland or Bosnia, and it wasn't long before we were all on top of our game. I'm proud to say we did a good job, but, by God, did we work hard.



OP HERRICK AFGHANISTAN

Having studied languages at university, I volunteered to take the long language course in Pashto at the Defence School of Languages.

After I passed the exams I was deployed to Helmand province in May 2010 as a Pashto interpreter.

This was a totally different experience to anything I'd had before. I was attached to the Military Stabilisation Support Group and was the interpreter for one of the teams responsible for dealing with farmers' claims and stabilisation issues.

This meant helping the Afghans with compensation claims for damage to their property that had been caused by ISAF. For example, crops burnt by parachute flares or livestock accidentally killed during a contact.



My job also included going out on patrol. During one with Danish troops, an IED blew off a wheel from one of their armoured cars. They had been providing overwatch on some high ground as we were going into the green zone.

We continued our patrol to a village where we found another IED which we marked and avoided. As we came out into open ground, we could hear gunfire, and rounds started landing all around us.

We soon discovered that this was an attack on a police checkpoint about two kilometres away but the rounds were overshooting and landing on top of us.

We rapidly moved onto the high ground and back to our checkpoint. I had just come through the gate when there was an almighty explosion.

Another IED had detonated underneath one of the Danish armoured vehicles, killing one of the crew and injuring two others. We immediately put out a cordon while the injured were evacuated, then waited for the bomb disposal team.

Four hours later, as they approached the scene, one of the Danish soldiers on the cordon took a step back to let them pass and stood on a pressure plate.

The explosion took off both his legs and an arm and threw one of his grenades into

the air, where it detonated, injuring six members of the bomb disposal team.

I ended up doing four months of Op Herrick 12 and the first two months of Herrick 13, during which time, as well as the Stabilisation Team, I worked with the Danes at FOB Price and the Gurkhas and Irish Guards at FOB Khar Nikah.

I then had a four-month break at home before going back to do the whole of Herrick 14 with 1 Rifles, where I ended up as a patrol interpreter.

By the end, my Pashto was really quite good and I was known by the locals as 'Tarjaman Sahib' (Mr Interpreter). They were amazed that I could speak their language.

Having the ability to talk to the people out there and understand the issues that mattered to them made such a difference to our efforts.



VOLUNTEER RESERVES SERVICE MEDAL (VRSM)

After completing all training requirements and 10 years of service, reservists receive the VRSM, with a bar added for each subsequent five years. I received the VRSM in 2006 and a bar in 2011.

My time in the reserves

has been varied. As well as my postings on tour, I've filled a number of posts within C Company in both the rifle and mortar platoons.

From recruiting in Dorchester to providing security in Basra, to compensation claims in Helmand, to interpreting on patrol in the green zone, I've enjoyed each role and I'm proud to have done them well.

The main things I've learned from my years in the reserves are the importance of good management and the value of communication.

I always knew I'd end up in uniform as my father was in the Army for 30 years and my brother is still serving. I briefly joined the regular Army in 1989 but I also wanted to study. So after six months I left and went to university, and then joined the TA in 1996.

I've enjoyed my military experience and I now work full-time as the recruiting serjeant at the Dorchester Army Reserve Centre. So I don't have a civilian job at present.

This past year has been extremely hard in my personal life, but my time in the reserves has made me very resilient and adaptable.

There's a lot for me to think about for the future, like the possibility of promotion or maybe further language training or the next steps in a civilian career.

But whatever the future does have in store for me, I know that I will be able to face it head on.

C COMPANY 6 RIFLES IS ACTIVELY RECRUITING

■ If you're interested in joining, visit the Army jobs website at www.armyjobs.mod.uk or call 01305 264969 ext 2010

■ You can also find out more about the reserves on GOV.UK at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-defence/about/recruitment

BEACH READY

ESSENTIAL TIPS TO AVOID HEALTH RISKS



For most of us, preparing for the great summer outdoors usually includes a trip to the beach. Whether it's a relaxing day out wiggling your toes in the sand, or an active visit filled with water sports, it's important to familiarise yourself with some essential facts to avoid health risks, and to make sure you have a safe, trouble-free time.

SUN PROTECTION

At the beach, using sunscreen with a high sun protection factor is essential for when exposure is unavoidable.

The summer sun is most harmful to your skin in the middle of the day. Ensure you spend time in the shade between 11am and 3pm.

A common question often asked is 'should I reapply sunscreen if I swim?' The answer is yes; water washes off sunscreen, and the cooling effect of water can make you think you're not getting burned. Water also reflects UV rays, increasing your exposure to the sun.

VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is essential for healthy bones, and we get most of it from exposure to sunlight. When it comes to how much sun you need, the answer is, it's different for everyone.

So, while a trip to the beach is an opportunity to top up your vitamin D levels,

it is very important to take precautions and expose yourself to the sun safely.

Short periods of sun exposure without sunscreen during the summer months are enough for most people to make sufficient vitamin D.

The larger the area of skin that is exposed to sunlight, the more chance there is of making enough vitamin D before you start to burn.

DEHYDRATION

An active or relaxing visit to the beach is always enjoyable. However, due to the summer heat, it's important to make sure you have plenty of water to drink. Even on a cool day, the sun and wind can dehydrate you.

While spending time at the beach, drink plenty of fluids such as water, semi-skimmed milk, diluted squash or fruit juice. However, it's best to avoid caffeine, fizzy drinks and alcohol, as these cause you to urinate more often.

Some of the early warning signs of dehydration include:

- feeling thirsty and light-headed
- dark, strong-smelling urine
- passing urine less often than usual.

JELLYFISH STINGS

If you are unsure about whether your beach destination is prone to jellyfish, there are

a number of ways to find out. You can ask the lifeguards or you can check the local beach's website for warnings concerning jellyfish or any other potential issues.

SUMMER EYES

When the sun is out, it's important to take extra care of your eyesight. Sunglasses are essential for protecting your eyes from sun damage while at the beach.

If you are sensitive, or sunburn easily, try wide or wraparound sunglasses to cover delicate eyelids.

Reflected light can also be a problem, both from the sea or from light-coloured sand. You may find it helpful to wear a hat to help shade your eyes from harmful UV rays.

IN THE WATER

Every summer lifeguards respond to thousands of incidents on beaches around the world.


To avoid getting into any difficulty, it's best to swim at a beach patrolled by lifeguards. Trained experts are available instantly if there are any problems.

Always take heed of any information and advice you come across. Ask at the local tourist office to find out about the facilities and the best areas to swim.

Make sure you know your flag colours. At beaches patrolled by lifeguards, different flags tell you where it's safest to swim and which areas are for water sports.

FOOTWEAR

Feeling the sand between your toes is essential to the beach experience. However, when temperatures peak, the hot sand can feel uncomfortable and even cause burns.

Ensure you take a pair of shoes with you in case the sand gets unbearably hot, and for protection against broken glass, sharp shells or hard rocks. 



This article comes to you from CS Healthcare, the specialist provider of health insurance for civil servants. Telephone 0800 917 4325. www.cshealthcare.co.uk

This article is general advice only. If you or a family member have any medical concerns contact your GP or medic.



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 **BOEING**

SUDOKU

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

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

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

Solution to the June 2014 puzzle

CHESS



Compiled by: Carl Portman

It can be argued that chess is a military game; a battle on the board. You're in command of your army against an equally equipped opponent.

Essentially beginners learn to gain the centre of the battlefield, and take as much space as possible. This is one strategy, equally effective can be an attack from one or both flanks.

Coaching juniors is a rewarding pursuit, especially when they ask questions like 'why is it that I can never actually take the king, I just have to announce checkmate?' The answer I always give is that in battle a certain amount of respect is afforded the king of the opposing army and that capturing him rather than killing him is the more satisfying end.

I also suggest it's good to let him live to fight another day so that a new battle can be played out all over again. Even when a king appears to be safe behind his foot soldiers (the pawns) he can still be hunted down.

Take this position from the game Fressinet-Macieja from Plovdiv in 2008. It is white to play and capitalise on the fact that the black king has no space in front of him as none of his pawns have moved. Black's



passed pawn on a5 could win him the game, but it is too late. What did white play to win?

The first correct answer drawn wins a copy of Chess Monthly magazine kindly donated by Chess & Bridge Ltd of London.

Send your answers to me at carl.portman@hotmail.co.uk please.

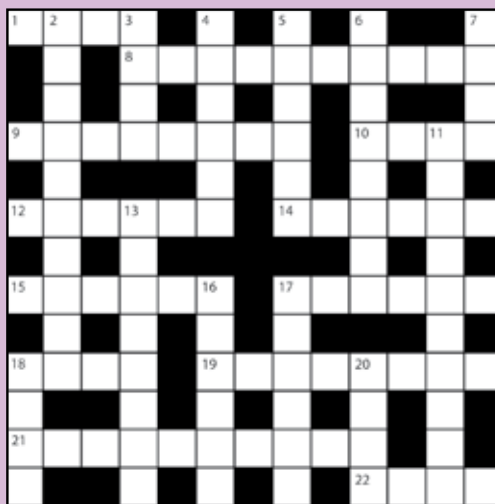
The answer to June's problem was 1. Rxd3! Now if 1...Rxd3 then 2.Qxa8+ and if 2...Qxd3 then 3.Re8+ wins.

Sadly, this is the last ever chess column in the last ever *Defence Focus*. After almost 20 wonderful years I have made good friends and hopefully brought chess to many people around the globe. Thank you for your support and remember to keep your king safe at all times!

TOPICAL CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- Sandler, whose films include *The Wedding Singer* and *The Waterboy* (4)
- Famous actress who married Frank Sinatra in 1951 (3,7)
- See 16 Down
- Hard seeds in a fruit (4)
- Planet circled by a system of broad, flat rings (6)
- Broad piece of metal used as protection against blows or missiles (6)
- Extreme or irrational fear (6)
- And 11 Down. Manchester City's Premier League-winning manager (6,10)
- Threesome (4)
- African nocturnal, burrowing mammal (8)
- City which hosted the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest (10)



22. *The _____ To Italy*, Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon's 2014 television series (4)

DOWN

- Household appliance (10)
- The *Wise Men* (4)
- His group Coldplay's new album is called *Ghost Stories* (6)
- Mallets used by auctioneers (6)

- Raising a child as one's own (8)
- Coloured part of the eye (4)
- See 17 Across
- Not damaged (8)
- And 9 Across. Writer who created Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple (6,8)
- Optical illusion in the desert (6)
- Friar who was a friend of Robin Hood (4)
- Slit in a garment (4)

SOLUTION (NO PEEKING)

- Across
- Adam 8. Ava Gardner
 - Christie 10. Pips
 - Saturn 14. Shield
 - Phobia 17. Manuel
 - Trio 19. Aardvark
 - Copenhagen 22. Trip
- Down
- Dishwasher 3. Magi
 - Martin 5. Gavels
 - Adoption 7. Iris
 - Pellegrini 13. Unbroken
 - Agatha 17. Mirage
 - Tuck 20. Vent

MINIATURE HEROES



PRIZE

This month *Defence Focus* is giving away this action-packed range of figures and kit

Does your little one fancy him or herself as a future member of the Armed Forces? Do they don war-paint and hide in the bushes at the bottom of the garden waving sticks threateningly at squirrels? Well now is their chance to do it in style.

Two lucky *Defence Focus* readers can make themselves very popular with their budding military heroes. The winners will scoop up a selection of H.M. Armed Forces toys.

The prizes include two self-pitching pop-up field tents, two military-style camouflage nets and two 105mm light field guns with real firing action and six shells included.

Each winner will receive one of each.

TO WIN

To be in with a chance of winning, just email your name, address and phone number to dmc-newsdesk@mod.uk by Friday 15 August 2014. Don't forget to put Action Figures in the subject line.



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