

# *SCRIBBLINGS*

*Journal of The Pen & Sword Club*

*News, views, opinion and analyses of the news for the military media  
operations community*

*January 2018*

*Editor: Mike Peters*

## **Ministry and Media need to talk**

Someone, once said: If it a'int broke, don't fix it, writes Mike Peters. There will be much debate, and hot air, over the Mail on Sunday story that the Army's slogan of the last quarter century was to be ditched for a "more inclusive" brand. *Scribblings* is no fan of the expensive and loudly persuasive advertising and branding industry or its often unintelligible corporate-speak. This is an industry that often gets it wrong.

But is the Secretary of State right to scrap the new image plan at the last minute and potentially harm the Chief of the General Staff? Only time-will-tell

The Twittering classes, furious with the broken centralised recruiting system, now have another hammer to batter a Ministry already on the back foot and defensive. Following hard on the footsteps of the "leak" that never sunk HMS Queen Elizabeth came the Christmas Eve classification of the Army as Scrooge for allegedly only adding a £1 per person to festivities in Afghanistan. This adds to the contention that the Ministry and the Media need to get-together and take a meaningful look at how they deal with each other.

## **Surrender! 'Lunacy' as British Army spends £2million to ditch elitist 'Be the Best' motto - but Defence Secretary dramatically steps in to put PC plans on hold**

By: Mark Nicol for The Mail on Sunday, December 24, 2017

DEFENCE SECRETARY Gavin Williamson dramatically intervened last night after The Mail on Sunday revealed that the British Army was 'wasting' millions of pounds of taxpayers' money to scrap its famous 'Be the Best' motto – because top brass say it is elitist.

An official document leaked to this newspaper also revealed that from January, the Army was to drop its historic crest, depicting a set of crossed swords, a crown and a lion, after expensive image consultants deemed the cherished emblem 'non-inclusive'.

But late last night, in an extraordinary intervention after the exclusive MoS story broke, the Defence Secretary stepped in to halt the plans which had been spearheaded by the head of the British Army, General Sir Nick Carter.

## What's inside? See Full Index on Page 11 Post Script: Goodbye 2017 – when the PR battle was lost

An MoD spokesman said: 'The Defence Secretary, right, believes that the British Army is the best of the best and has put these proposals on hold.' Williamson's astonishing undermining of the top brass is certain to further sour the already strained relations between the Government and Britain's military chiefs.

Last night a senior officer raised concerns over Williamson's 11th- hour move. The officer, who cannot be named because he is still serving, said: 'By stepping in to block the branding changes at such a late hour he risks showing contempt for the Army's chain of command.'

Critics had earlier described the planned image overhaul as 'futile lunacy', and experts predicted the move would cost millions at a time when the Armed Forces are facing an unprecedented funding crisis.



Last month The MoS revealed that nearly 200,000 personnel will not get the one per cent pay rise in April 2018 that they were promised in the autumn Budget. We reported how defence chiefs must save £9.8 billion to afford essential military equipment. The decision to spend huge sums on a rebranding exercise will also cause anger among hard-up junior troops who are forced to spend Christmas in damp, rat-infested military accommodation.

The MoD last night confirmed it had hired top advertising executives to reassess the Army's public image. Industry experts had said the year-long project, which included extensive market research, is likely to have cost about £1.5 million. The cost of replacing these signs – as well as the reprinting costs for logos and letterheads – could run into millions of pounds.

The project is the brainchild of General Sir Nick Carter, below left. His team also wrote the document The Army Brand, which was circulated among senior officers last month. It attempts to justify the removal of the Be the Best slogan from all Army documentation and imagery, saying: 'Be the Best was a recruitment strapline from 1993 and has appeared on Army branded material ever since. But it was never a researched or defined brand.'

'Market research in May 17 found that Be the Best did not resonate with many of our key audiences and was considered dated, elitist and non-inclusive. The ECAB [Executive Committee of the Army Board] therefore agreed that its use should be phased out as soon as affordably possible. The retirement of Be the Best will commence immediately with all planned refreshes of Be the Best branded material cancelled in favour of brand compliant products.'



Julian Lewis, chairman of the Commons Defence Select Committee, spoke against plans to ditch the slogan, saying: 'Being the best is nothing to be ashamed of – it is a matter for pride and a very positive message to transmit. Why should we be afraid of excellence when we are constantly saying our Armed Forces are the best in the world?'

The document also claims that establishing the Army as a brand is necessary to protect its 'institutional credibility' and to 'reinforce the pride and sense of belonging of soldiers and their families'.

But Colonel Richard Kemp, the former commander of UK troops in Afghanistan, said: 'Credibility is secured by our abilities on the battlefield, our fighting spirit and our resources. And at a time when the defence budget is being squeezed, it is lunacy to squander money on a futile branding project.'

'Be the Best is popular because it encapsulates the desire for our troops to be better than their enemies. 'It has never been about them looking down at anyone in society, so any suggestion it is elitist is nonsense. The Army needs to be



the best and to know that it is.' The official launch of The Army Brand next month would have followed a 12-month collaboration between Gen Sir Nick and advertising bosses.

An official document leaked to The Mail on Sunday revealed that from January, the Army planned to drop its historic crest, depicting a set of crossed swords, a crown and a lion, after expensive image consultants deemed the cherished emblem 'non-inclusive'. The launch was to include the unveiling of the Army's new logo: a fluttering Union Jack with Army written in bold letters underneath.

Responding to the plans an officer told The MoS: 'The Army's own research has consistently shown support for the crossed swords over the Union Flag as the Army's main logo. Also, Be the Best was an aspiration and instilled pride. It was certainly better than 'This is Belonging' – the tagline used in recent Army recruiting TV adverts.

'A lot of people are angry. The document used by the Army to promote the branding has also been ridiculed for its meaningless, corporate-speak language.'

The Ministry of Defence confirmed it had hired top advertising executives to reassess the Army's public image" Gen Sir Nick's efforts to rebrand the Army may be to no avail, according to PR expert Mark Borkowski. He said concerns about the state of Britain's Armed Forces would work against the project.

He said: 'Somebody at the top of the Army has looked around them, seen a world changing faster than ever and, in a bid to grasp some sense of modernity, they've hired external influencers. The whole project would have cost at least a million pounds.'

The squeeze on the defence budget has also led to major Army battlefield exercises being cancelled, orders for much-needed equipment such as tanks and armoured vehicles being frozen, and funding for Army museums across the UK being cut off.

Since 2010 the size of the Army has shrunk from 102,000 to 78,000 soldiers. Last night, the MoD said: 'Like all organisations we adapt our brand to make sure it is up to date. Be the Best has been used since 1993 and, following detailed research, we've decided to update our branding at a cost of £520,000.'

## **Who got it wrong? Media or Ministry? armchair 'experts' or a silent industry? The little leak that should never have become top-of-the-news dribble**

AHWWWW! COME ON! Scribblings has leaped to the defence of the main stream media on occasions when it has been criticised for breaking embarrassing stories about the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces. But the pre-Christmas headlines, started by The Sun, and the top slots on morning TV and radio on December 19 shrieking that HMS Queen Elizabeth, the Royal Navy's new flagship, had sprung a leak, were just over the top.

With the breaking news there came allegations of a cover up; fake news about the cost to the taxpayer: comparisons with the price of Scotland's baby boxes and their unused condoms, plus dubious comments on social media.

Yet again the old-and-the-bold and the armchair experts were wheeled out and it was hardly edifying that khaki and light blue “experts” intervened and took the opportunity to Knock the Navy.

A guru of the media relations industry contacted *Scribblings* and complained: “The willingness of some of the retired and, I believe, serving military to gleefully knock the other Services when they have a PR problem is a woeful machine gun in the foot for defence.

“Somebody has to make them all see how counter-productive this is for the wider cause.”

So, what went wrong with the Ministry of Defence’s public relations? Was this symptomatic of the news desks suffering from lack of defence knowledge?

Were the defence correspondents directed by their editors to write this non-story? Were they even asked? This story opened a Pandora’s box of questions.

Did News desks take a poke at the Ministry of Defence and the Government? Did the defence correspondents have even an inkling of the successful progress of sea trials on this massive project?

Did the ministry’s media & communications team hide a potential story which some commentators say was already known among the ship builders and the engineering branch of the navy.

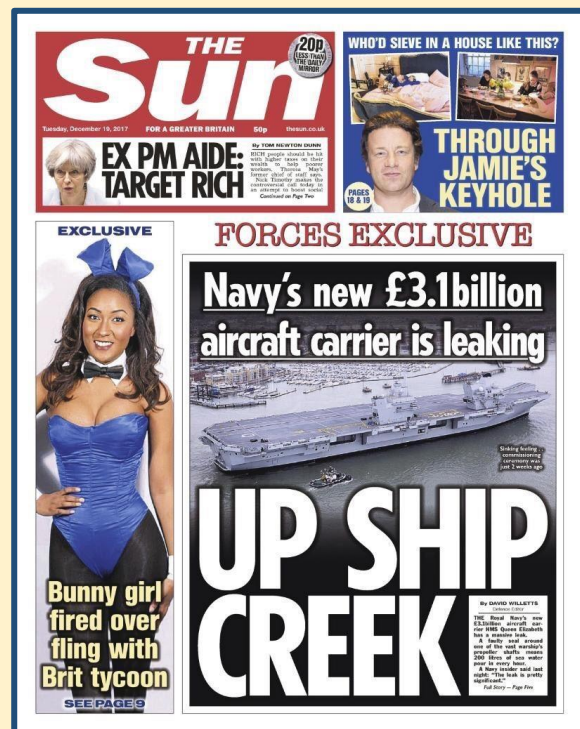
Was it a political decision to stay quiet, as a matter of media policy, even though the sea trials were going well? Or was it just considered so routine that it was placed on the minor snagging risk without the public relations team highlighting that the little leak in such a costly programme just might cause a larger media frenzy?

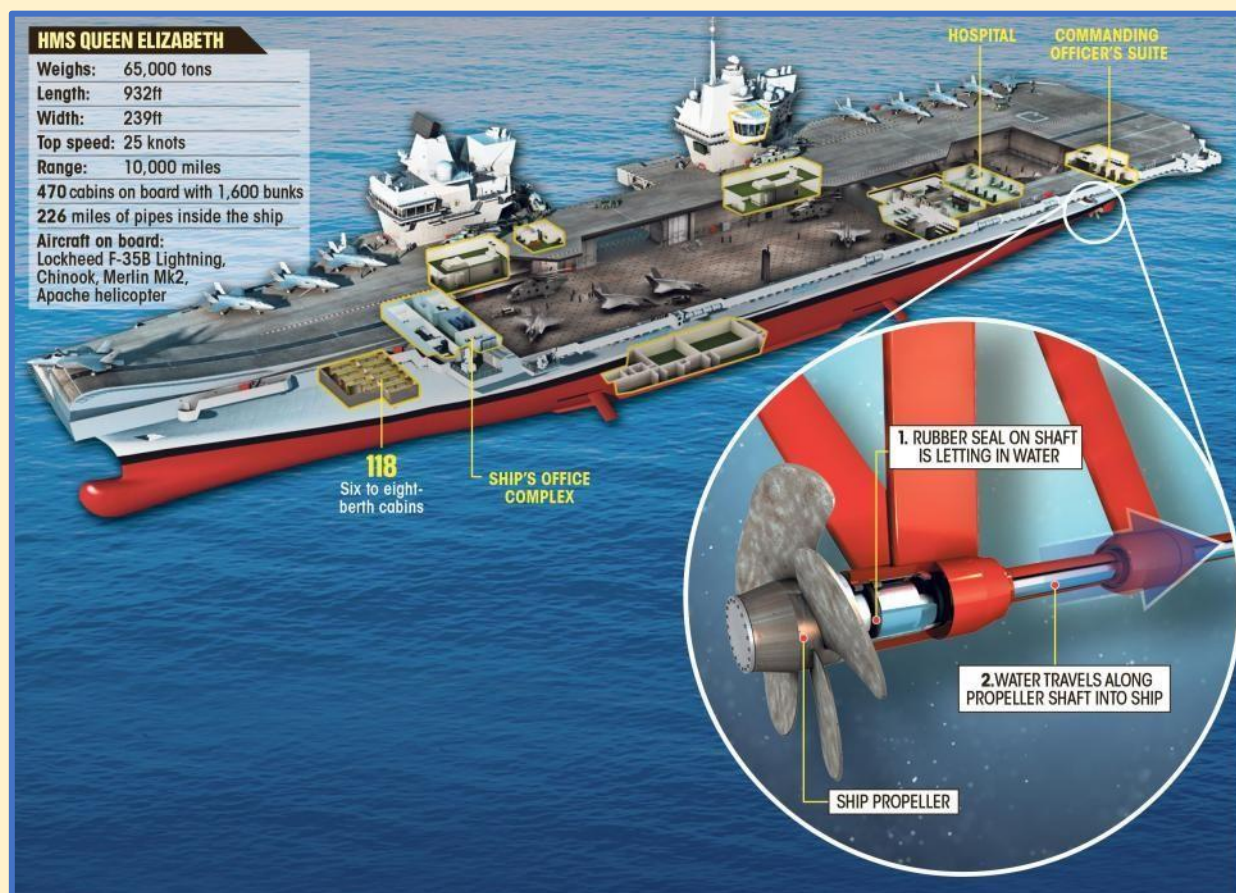
Did defence correspondents starved of regular briefings and unhappy with the micro management of military news let the story run? We might never know but this is an opportunity for a serious get together to thrash out a more sensible way of doing business that will not do so much harm to our military and the reputation of the country.... and the professionalism of the media.

An analysis of the stories on Dec 19 and the Twitter Tangles that followed between Royal Navy supporters and the reporters shows that some defence correspondents repeated the story, first carried by The Sun, with an explanation but others set out to use the word “embarrassing.” Others believed that the MoD hype about the ship as a strategic asset meant that any problem was bound to be highlighted. And a few journalists persisted in their view that the leak was a major story.

That Deborah Haynes of The Times sought out and found knowledgeable maritime comment was clear and welcomed, while Jonathan Beale, the BBC’s defence correspondent defended his corner on social media saying he had specifically asked the MoD to comment on the progress of sea trials without receiving any indication of the leaking prop shaft. Why did the MoD not give answers to such questions when it should have been obvious from the line of questioning there was a story brewing? There are so many questions to answer.

What we do know is that this great ship has a real story to tell but its significance as a strategic asset is not fully understood by the public and there is a niggling and persistent line of media questioning that - because it is such a prestige project - any problem or incident is fair game for a headline.





*Courtesy of The Sun*

here also appears to be a line of thought that the ship is symptomatic of problems with the defence budget.... and defence policy. Commentators and public are also concerned that this is by no means the first time that less than good news has been tucked away in a corner by the Ministry of Defence. Only last year the news of a Trident missile failure was withheld from the House of Commons with a resulting storm of criticism.

The requirement to fix a leaking shaft seal -producing about half a bath tub of water every hour – is of some interest but why did the media give this story such prominence. There has to be an underlying reason.

It also should have been obvious to the media that even a garden pond pump could cope with such a dribble. The carrier is a warship designed to absorb damage and carry on.

The Royal Navy are masters at damage control and the ship is compartmentalised and could handle a much greater ingress of water. Indeed, all ships are designed with bilges and multiple pumps to deal with flooding.

The sea trials are continuing and the ship has not been confined to port or sent to a dry dock. The builders are set to fix and pay for the repair.

This media treatment of the story, and the ministry's PR approach, will not go down well with anyone serving or supporting the military - be they Admirals or matelots or soldiers or airmen. It will not amuse British industry and the host of companies which have worked on our new flagship.

What this story confirms is another setback in the continuing saga of military and media relationships which *Scribblings*, among others, has been striving to improve. And it gives ammunition to those who want to say the media cannot be trusted.

Message to new desks: Involve your specialist defence correspondents. If you do not have one get one quickly and listen. Message to the Ministry:

Time to rethink policy and practice on dealing with the media. Message to both: Get together and sort it!

First to enter the fray in support of the Royal Navy was Defence Blogger, Sir Humphrey. A former MOD civil servant and Reservist Officer he swung into action on Twitter announcing that he is proud to have served across defence and saying "I do not work for, and have no professional connection to MOD or UK Armed Forces. But he hit back hard under the headline:



## **Trials and Tribulations**

THE HEADLINE NEWS across much of the UK media today was that HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH has reportedly sprung a leak during sea trials and will require repairs. This is the cause of woe, despair and misery and is apparently a huge embarrassment for the Royal Navy.

Sea trials are an integral part of a ship's life, they are designed to take a complex mechanical creation, built from millions of parts and make sure it all works together as expected without any major problems. The purpose of sea trials is akin to not only testing things work, but also working through the 'snagging list' that identifies issues that perhaps didn't quite work as expected, or where minor issues need tweaking. It also occasionally identifies more serious issues too.

Every warship in modern history has undergone some form of sea trials, and without fail every warship will have identified some form of problem as a result. That HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH has experienced a very minor issue is not remotely unusual or unexpected.

This problem is not particularly serious, the MOD has already explained that it will not impact on her wider programme, and that she will sail as planned. There is no need to dry dock her either, which implies it is an easily fixable issue.

The suggestion of a 'leaking ship' sounds serious to laymen — after all, hulls are supposed to be watertight, aren't they? In reality leaking propeller glands are a fairly regular occurrence, and not particularly worrying or serious.

Already Humphrey has spoken to retired naval officers whose view on this issue is simple — if something as minor as a leak, and one with a very low rate of inflow (apparently less than a power shower produces per hour), is the worst thing encountered during trials, then the trials are going very well indeed.

One only has to look back at recent years to see that other ships have had far more unhappy trials periods. For instance, Admiral Woodward wrote during 'One Hundred Days' of the tribulations he experienced with HMS SHEFFIELD back in the 1970s, or during WW2 when HMS PRINCE OF WALES went into action with the builders still onboard fixing fundamental problems with her main armament. Every ship has issues, and it sounds like QUEEN ELIZABETH's is extremely minor.

Every warship in modern history has undergone some form of sea trials, and without fail every warship will have identified some form of problem as a result. That HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH has experienced a very minor issue is not remotely unusual or unexpected. There is no need to dry dock her either, which implies it is an easily fixable issue.

The US Navy ZUMWALT class is also experiencing trials challenges, only last week major electrical problems forced the abandonment of sea trials to resolve electrical issues, while the USS ZUMWALT experienced mechanical failure just after delivery while in the Panama Canal.

The French navy experienced major problems with the CHARLES DE GAULLE, including discovering the flight deck was 4m too short, and experiencing the loss of a propeller



Finally, to avoid suggestion that it is merely the West who have problems, the Russians too experienced issues when the post refit trials of the former ADMIRAL GORSHKOV carrier, below, refitted for India led to major problems as well which required extensive rectification and repairs. The key point here is that these ships all experienced problems, but went on to rectify them and enter service as planned.

The issue affecting QUEEN ELIZABETH seems extremely minor, easily fixable and not remotely in the same league of problems that other ships have had. It is a testament to the quality of British shipbuilding skill, and the strength of the CVF design that she has come through trials with only very minor problems.

The battle for the Royal Navy though is pushing this narrative against a media determined to make a minor technical problem into a major PR disaster for the Navy. In the public mindset the front-page news today will help set the narrative for the ships early life, regardless of how utterly untrue it is.

Part of this stems from a lack of understanding on the purpose of sea trials, or that faults will occur, but that they are easily fixable. It also stems from the problem that as papers have scrapped their specialist journalists, the days when deep experts like Desmond Wettern could be relied on to provide deep knowledge and understanding, spotting when an issue was a nonevent, or equally when what the RN wanted to make out was a non-event was actually a scoop are long gone.

There are some very good journalists writing on Defence issues on Fleet Street today, but it is fair to say that many of them probably didn't enter journalism to become a defence journalist.

This problem is exacerbated further by the recent culture in the MOD, which appears to have adopted an increasingly fortress like mentality towards journalists, in turn making those who want a story rely on finding sources to give sensationalist headlines. It is hard to escape the sense that the whole structure is broken, there are neither many expert journalists in specialist areas on most papers these days, nor does the MOD cover itself in glory in being accessible or explaining its activity and actions in a manner which helps the public realise what is going on.



Matelot humour strikes back. This image of a leek found in the Queen Elizabeth, went viral on Twitter

Consequently, we have reached a state of affairs where the public think that the QUEEN ELIZABETH is a late, leaking and broken white elephant without any planes. To challenge this assumption, to point out that she is an astonishingly capable warship, a testament to the sheer ability of UK industry and will be a world beating asset that is the envy of nations and navies.

Scribblings recommends Sir Humphrey's blog - available at [www.thethinpinstripedline.com](http://www.thethinpinstripedline.com) which adds links to the detailed problems experienced by the major navies of the world with newly launched ships and looks forward to reading comments from the defence trade press which has been much neglected by the Ministry in recent years.



## A New Year Message from the National Chairman

FIRSTLY, I HOPE that all members had a peaceful and enjoyable Christmas and the Club's Committee wishes you a Prosperous New Year. Reflecting on 2017, it has been a year of considerable moment in many ways. A new and unpredictable US President - but in my view, not so unpredictable if you try and understand him as a businessman and not a politician - an 'unfortunate' General Election which saw the elevation of Corbyn effectively through the energy of younger Labour supporters and their informed use of electronic means; the ever present and presented manifestly risk of terrorist activities; unpleasant evidence of the politicising of certain police officers (retired) in their determination to carry out a personal vendetta; the scandalous squandering of police funds and withholding of vital evidence in their determination to posthumously blacken the reputation of eminent people and to obtain convictions, by whatever means, in cases of sexual offence.

And also in the latter context, an almost daily and increasingly tedious exposé of yet another case of inappropriate behaviour by yet another celebrity -

already some employers are thinking twice about the wisdom of employing women.

And, almost as boring, machinations over agreeing Brexit - enough said, other than a plea to 'get on with it!!' And over much of this hangs the veil of social media. Fake news, trial by an increasingly vituperative and vindictive section of society who, uncontrolled, seem to stop at nothing in exerting their biased views on others and, of course the new fad of expunging from the pages of history those historical figures we don't like.

But would they condone demolishing the British Library since Karl Marx was a frequent visitor and wrote many of his works there!

But of course, there were many good stories - although perhaps harder to find. The Royal Navy's new aircraft carrier put to sea (albeit not without faults - see above!). I am, however, reminded of the words of General Pierre Bosquet, '*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas . . .*' It does appear that she needs many of the RN's increasingly small fleet of warships in protecting her when on deployment. What will be the effect when she is joined by the *Prince of Wales*? But HMS Queen Elizabeth is certainly more impressive and effective than 'old smokey' Admiral Kuznetsov.

April sees RAF 100. It was not so long ago that many pundits questioned whether we would still have a separate RAF by 2018. We are now reassured by the fact that 617 Squadron will still exist and be equipped with the F-35 - our last manned fighter before remote control replaces the pilot?

Like the departure of the ravens at the Tower of London presaging the fall of the Crown and Britain with it, one feared that the demise of the 617-number plate would surely forecast the extinction of the Junior Service. Let us all rejoice in this centenary which of course falls in the same year as the more sombre commemoration of the centenary of the end of the First World War (recognising for the historians that the Peace Treaty was of course not signed until 1919.)

And for the Army, in which the origins of the Pen & Sword Club lie, much is quietly achieved without much public awareness and therein lies an underlining problem suffered by all services in 'getting the message across'. Other than social media there is so often a vacuum of authenticated news, gathered and disseminated in the traditional way and this is a problem that needs to be addressed with some urgency by the MoD. Let us see what 2018 brings in this respect. These subjects and many other topical issues are the subject of our monthly 'Light Lunches'. It seems a bit trite to say that they just get better and better, but this is really the case. Held under the Chatham House Rules, much truth is expounded in a way that would maybe not be possible in more formal surroundings. Do come along if you are in London.

And in closing may I thank Colonel Mike Peters for his indefatigable dedication to producing an increasingly influential 'Scribblings', Doreen Cadwallader's tireless attention to keeping everything in order, Malcolm Davidge for his quiet and efficient 'behind the scenes' activity at the Naval and Military Club, once again the hosts for our excellent Christmas Lunch as well as some of the monthly events, and finally to Club President, Hugh Colver, for his overall watch and valuable advice on our activities.

## Forward into the New Year

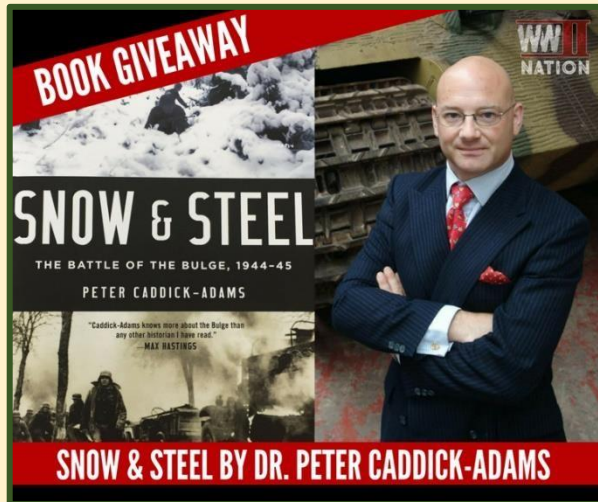


There is no doubt that 2017 has been the best year yet for the Pen & Sword Club. Our events programme finished in early December with a packed Christmas lunch in the splendid surroundings of the In & Out Club in St. James Square. Indeed, we had a reserve list because all seats were taken even though we persuaded the club – through the good offices of Malcolm Davidge – to squeeze in another ten per cent. Next year we plan a larger venue.

In 2017 we were privileged to have a wide range of guest speakers. We heard from Westminster via the Chair of the House of Commons Defence Select Committee, from the media with guests from The Times, The Daily Telegraph and The Sunday Times, from two of academia's defence specialists, Professors Stephen Badsey and Paul Moorcroft, both authors of authoritative publications on the military and the media; and an in-depth analysis of media relations across NATO from club Vice President and Head of Strategic Communications at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, former BBC Defence correspondent, Mark Laity

The club's 2018 programme will start with the annual general meeting at The Cavalry & Guards Club on January 18???? This is the time when we decide the future of the club and how it serves our members. Please make an effort to attend.

We continue in February with an interesting perspective on the Middle East Conflicts from a former member of the Israeli Defence Force's Spokespersons Unit. For security reasons the details will be released directly by email to club members who apply to attend.



The Spring programme will be released shortly but we expect to host The Times Defence Correspondent, Deborah Haynes, Lt Gen Sir Gary Coward, who was British spokesman in Bosnia, and one of our own, Major Peter-Caddick Adams, academic, author and battlefield tour specialist who will compare the media handling skills of Field Marshalls Montgomery and Erwin Rommel during the Second World War.

For mid-summer we are investigating a request for a club get together in the House of Commons and a separate Media Operations Group (V) function, possibly in The Tower of

London as guests of the Royal Fusiliers. The MOG (V) annual re-union is scheduled to be at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in October.

The year will see a very special event at The Cenotaph in November – the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War One. If you are interested in marching with the Club please contact Club Secretary, Doreen Cadwallader. Security is tight for this event and we will need to establish our attendance early in the year.

This first edition of Scribblings for 2018 starts with a serious comment on the media and military relationship in the United Kingdom. It remains febrile and both sides of this divide need to look closely at a less combative and a more productive way ahead. The Ministry and the Armed Forces should endeavour to mend fences and be more open and the media needs to do its job of holding authority to account while at the same time understanding the needs for security and the complexity of modern military operations.

Scribblings will continue to examine the main stream media and social media and trawl for the stories that provide interest to club members. The journal will endeavour to gain more media management stories from operations and exercises; encourage the revival and growth of media operations as a necessary skill in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, show the photographic skills of the Armed Forces and at the same time look back at past successes and failures!

Our recent publication of current and historic photos has been well received and Scribblings will look, in the coming, year for the photographs of the month and tease our membership with illustrations from the past.

This month, Editor Mike Peters, has chosen another aircraft photograph from his collection to head this story. It is not one which will be instantly recognisable – except by the aficionados - but at the beginning of the Second World War it promised much as day interceptor and night fighter and, later, as a fighter/bomber.

The Westland Whirlwind fighter was fast and furious sporting four nose mounted 20mm cannon, a concept way ahead of its time that reflected Westland's initiative. Did you know the first aircraft to fly over Mount Everest in 1933 was a Westland Wallace? Like many of the aircraft of its time, the Whirlwind was rushed into service and suffered its share of development problems.

Not the least of these were its Rolls-Royce Peregrine engines which gave the fighter the high speed of 355 mph and the ability carry two 500lbs bombs underwing. Sadly, the Peregrine development was pushed to the back of the queue as the Merlin took precedence in production. In service the Whirlwind was popular with those who flew it; its twin engines gave a reassurance and its massive firepower was known to the enemy. While many have asked why did Westland not retrofit Merlins to the advanced and high technology design, the answer was simple. The Merlin was too big for the airframe.



## What's Next in Scribblings?

Russia simulates war with NATO

Russia is at war with Britain!

Rifles Back from Baltic

A Spot of Nostalgia

CV Teething problems are not Bob's Best of Both Worlds unusual  
Five plus a Pigeon on D-Day

Britain embarrassed by lack of  
ships

Large and convenient media target

Fourth Rate Fourth Estate

Pain in the Butt journalist

Israel's Social Media War

Using the Truth

Did the Royal Marines Surrender?

You've Been CAPITA'd

Recruits cannot register

MPs scrutinise F-35

BBC's Independence Tested

The Lost Reporter

Press Freedom Worries

The British Soldier

The Bomber Command Medal

Goodbye 2017- PR battle lost Fight

## Russia simulated a war against NATO during Zapad 2017

**BILD Exclusive: December 2017: Intelligence sources reveal that Russia's largescale September exercise, the capture of the Baltic States, bombings of**

Germany and other NATO members, as well as attacks on neutral countries were rehearsed.

By Julian Röpcke veröffentlicht, December 19, 2017

SINCE 2009, the Russian Federation's General has been conducting the "Zapad" ("West") exercise every four years (one was previously conducted in 1999). Its aim is to train the "defensive capacities" of the Russian Federation's army in the Western Military Sector. Last September, the Russian army announced: "The Zapad 2017 anti-terror exercise is a purely y defensive one."

However, BILD recently spoke to two leading analysts from a western intelligence service who revealed that Zapad 2017 was neither an "anti-terror exercise" nor "purely defensive", but a "dry run" for a "full-scale conventional war against NATO in Europe".

According to these sources, the drill rehearsed the capture of the Baltic states (and Belarus) as well as a "shock campaign" against Western European NATO nations such as Germany and the Netherlands, but also against Poland, Norway and the non-aligned states of Sweden and Finland.

## Capturing the Baltic states within a week

According to the two sources, Kremlin forces rehearsed capturing NATO's "region of vulnerability, according to the Russian view", namely the three Baltic states. "To realize this, you would have to quickly do the Suwalki gap operation" in order to cut off Poland and NATO reinforcements from Lithuania. This is exactly what Russia did, creating the artificial state of "Veyshnoria" at the exact location of the 40-kilometre land bridge between Poland and Lithuania (carried out on Belarussian territory, however).



At the same time, Russia rehearsed “neutralizing or taking under control air fields and harbours (in the Baltic states), so there are no reinforcements arriving from other NATO states there”. The sources emphasized that, in the case of an emergency, this would, in the first few days, be a purely military operation.

“This does not mean that you have to occupy the countries and declare ‘Peoples’ Republics’ or something like that, but that you have to occupy the harbours, airports and so on”.

## Rehearsing the bombing of Western Europe

The sources revealed that “Russian air force strategic aviation, long-range aviation, took part in the exercise on two days and conducted simulation flights over the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. They exercised bombings of Western European targets, approaching the German and Dutch coast from the North Sea as well as Swedish, Finish and Polish mainland from the Baltic Sea. The drill included waves of Tu-95 strategic bombers as well as support aircraft like fighter jets and refuelling planes.”

These bombers rehearsed launching missiles and cruise missiles. They returned to their bases before reaching NATO shores. In a real-life situation, their targets would include “critical infrastructure, that is, air fields, harbours, energy supplies and so on, in order to shock the countries and make the populations demand from their governments that ‘we shouldn’t be involved here, we should go for peace instead”.

In war, another aim of these Russian activities would be “to prevent them (NATO armies) from taking military action, deploying troops and reversing Russian army gains in the Baltics”. Hence, German naval bases at the Baltic Sea and the North Sea would be prime targets for such aerial attacks. Although the sources did not know which German, and possibly Dutch, targets exactly the Tu-95 bombers were directed at, they stressed: “This was part of their exercise in September!”

The sources added that, “of course, in war time, Russian bombers would have approached from the East as well, but in ‘peace times’, this attack direction (towards Germany) along the Norwegian coast would make sense”. Russia could not practice strategic air attacks from the East due to the Belarussian and Ukrainian airspace between Russia and its potential targets.

Moreover, the sources made it clear that strategic air raids would have been flanked by largescale missile attacks on NATO targets, using Iskander tactical missiles in the Kaliningrad region for targeting NATO strategic assets in the Baltic Sea countries. It is “not clear, but likely” that such attacks were also rehearsed in the Zapad 2017 drills.



According to the sources, these risky manoeuvres (over the North Sea) could show that Russia has planned “show of force attacks” that deeply penetrate Western-dominated air space and a “surprise element”, as NATO missile defences are better prepared in the East of Europe than in NATO states like Norway, Denmark, the UK, and Germany.

### **Baltic Sea drills against NATO**

In order to cripple NATO’s capacities in the event of a large-scale ground offensive against Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the exercise involved “anti-submarine warfare and air-defence drills throughout the Baltic Sea”. The focus area was the eastern Gotland Basin.

Russian naval forces also rehearsed anti-aircraft and anti-ship operations in the area, as well as anti-combat-diver operations. The obvious aim of such exercises was the destruction of NATO forces in the Baltic Sea that might try to reach Baltic waters and ports in order to help NATO allies under attack there.

### **Attack rehearsals against Finland, Sweden, and Norway**



*Tanks of the Russian army practice during the Zapad 2017 exercise Foto: Russian Ministry of Defence*

According to the interviewed Western intelligence sources, Sweden and Finland would come under attack in the case of a real war against NATO. These attacks were also rehearsed in September. “We know that, in case of a war with NATO, Russia would not expect Sweden and Finland to remain neutral, although they are not part of NATO. Stockholm and Helsinki would allow NATO aircraft to use their airfields and so on”. The source alleged that most Swedish and southern Finnish air fields would therefore come under Iskander missile attacks.

The sources pointed towards the Murmansk region on the Kola peninsula, bordering on Finland and Norway. “There were very interesting activities here, which makes us think that they were practicing something for northern Finland, but unfortunately I cannot tell you more, as we are not the source of this information”. Pushed about the issue, the sources revealed that, during the Zapad 2017 exercise, “Russian army forces from other parts of the country were moved to Kola that do not belong there. This makes us think that they did not just play out the scenario on the map, but also in real life. The point of this operational direction is to defend against NATO air attacks. So, we think that they planned to neutralize assets in the region as well”.

In October, a Norwegian magazine reported, referring to six Norwegian defence establishment sources, that Russia had practiced bombing and invading Svalbard, the Norwegian archipelago in the Barents Sea, during Zapad 2017. According to the report, two waves of Tu-95 and Tu-22m3 bombers rehearsed bombing runs on the strategic islands between Russia and the resource-rich Arctic Ocean. Fifty vessels participated in the drill in the Barents Sea. This confirms with what BILD learnt from its two Western intelligence sources. From Russia’s strategic perspective, it would be necessary to carry out parallel attacks on Finnish and Norwegian mainland targets.

## **What would trigger such war between NATO and Russia?**

One of the sources explained to BILD what a trigger for such events could be. “I am always asked, is this an offensive or a defensive operation? The answer is, it is an escalation operation”. So-called “coloured revolutions”, for example in Belarus or other post-Soviet states, could lead to the war that was trained in Zapad 2017.

“Such a revolution, which would of course be ‘a plot by the CIA’, according to them, could get Russia involved. If the US or another NATO country then gets involved, this could be the starting point for the scenario they trained for in September”.

In general, a military operation against the Baltic states would be a “responsive operation”, meaning that “Putin would feel a real threat” to his interests. In other words, a military confrontation in Russia’s defined “sphere of national interest” would trigger the trained scenario. Examples would be Belarus, Ukraine, or Georgia. “We know that, in 2008, they had the contingency plan that if the US gets involved in guarding Georgia from their invasion, the Baltic states would have become a target”.

The source also mentioned events that would NOT trigger a war, such as the NATO accession of Sweden or Finland. “They threaten to take military actions if these two countries join NATO, but we don’t think this would be their red line”.

Not even a direct military confrontation between the US and Russia in Syria would trigger a war against NATO, the source believes. “They would rather withdraw in the worst case, but this would not lead to a war in Europe”.

## **The threat of a nuclear war**

The sources pointed out that the scenario Russia trained for would be the last step before a nuclear war with the West and – ironically –



Russia's attempt at preventing such a war by simultaneously achieving a "quick victory" in the Baltics and conducting a successful "shock campaign" in Western Europe. "Of course, if all of this does not help, Russia would signal the West that, if it tries to reverse its military gains in the Baltic space", the next step would be the use of tactical nuclear weapons, in all likelihood followed by the use of ICBM. However, the Kremlin would "try to avoid such a scenario".

### Russian manpower used in the exercise

According to the two sources, 12.700 troops participated in the Belarus drill (including 7.200 Belarusian soldiers). "The declared numbers here were correct, which makes sense, because you cannot force Belarus to give false numbers if they don't want to."

However, another 12.000 Russian ground troops took part in the Leningrad and Pskov regions "near the Estonian borders" and almost 10.000 were involved on the Kola peninsula.

Taken together with a high number of naval personnel, air force staff, and support forces, more than 100.000 Russian troops ((soldiers??)) participated in Zapad 2017, the sources said. Additionally, 20.000 Russian National Guard troops (soldiers) and further FSB units and Ministry of Emergency Situation personnel also participated, which makes the overall number even higher.

The sources pointed out that the sheer number of involved ground forces was "a violation of the Vienna document". An exercise number of 13.000 or more participants requires observers. "And make no mistake. There was not a single observer, although this is what the Russians want to tell the public. There were 'invited guests' from NATO countries which were allowed to watch some bombings. Observers would have been allowed to go wherever they wanted and to talk to all involved units. This did not happen."

### Extent of the exercise area

While Russia announced several training grounds in Belarus, the Kaliningrad region, and Pskov as well as the Leningrad oblast, the real extent of the exercise was much larger. There were more training grounds within the announced areas. Moreover, and more importantly, the Murmansk oblast on the Kola peninsula also took part in the exercise. Naval force manoeuvres took place over a wide area in the Baltic Sea and Barents Sea. Aerial drills were carried out over the Baltic Sea, Barents Sea, and North Sea. There were also other military exercises happening simultaneously in the Black Sea region and on occupied Crimea, aimed at a potential NATO response from Bulgaria and Romania.

## Russia is at war with us, claims defence secretary Gavin Williamson

By: George Sandeman, December 9, 2017: The Times

RUSSIA IS FIGHTING BRITAIN in a new "cool war" on multiple fronts, the defence secretary has said. Gavin Williamson warned that the Kremlin's network of social media trolls and bots was undermining British interests and that President Putin's government also posed a conventional military threat.

“Russia are fighting a war against Britain on so many different levels. We are in a cool war but one where Russia is incredibly active in trying to do damage to British interests,” he said. Mr Williamson, 41, who replaced Sir Michael Fallon as defence secretary last month, told the Daily Mail: “You’ve got a Russia increasing its submarine activity in the north Atlantic tenfold.

“You’ve got a Russia that is trying to challenge NATO, Britain, the United States in eastern Europe. You’ve got a Russia that is quite content to cause us both economic and military damage, if they can do so, and looking at how they [can] increase their military footprint.”

Last month Theresa May accused Moscow of meddling in European elections by planting fake stories in an attempt to “weaponise information” and sow discord in the West.

The Prime Minister, who was speaking to business figures at the Lord Mayor’s Banquet in London, said: “I have a very simple message for Russia. We know what you are doing and you will not succeed because you underestimate the resilience of our democracies, the enduring attraction of free and open societies, and the commitment of western nations to the alliances that bind us. The UK will do what is necessary to protect ourselves, and work with our allies to do likewise.”

Mr Williamson said that Russia’s use of cyberwarfare showed that it fought by “different rules” and that the British military needed to “change the way we tackle them”.

The British army has launched the 77th Brigade, dubbed the “Twitter warriors”, which has the task of meeting the demands of modern conflict and possesses some elements focused on social media. “I don’t think you can ever do enough to dispel what Russia is doing,” Mr Williamson said.



## **Border force: Riflemen spill the beans on their Baltic mission**

FREEZING temperatures, dense forest and a seemingly-endless stream of visiting VIPs – it sounds like the perfect storm of training exercise scenarios but for anyone deploying to Estonia in the near future it is just the start of the challenges they will face. After a ninemonth stint leading NATO’s enhanced forward

presence to protect the country’s border with Russia, members of 5th Battalion, The Rifles have returned to UK soil.

And as they explained to Soldier at their homecoming parade, being one of the most battlehardened units of the British Army didn’t mean Operation Cabrit came without its fair share of tactical demands. Located in the small town of Tapa, the armoured infantry battalion deployed in two phases, undertaking numerous training packages under an Estonian brigade while exposing their Warrior vehicles to a very different type of terrain.

“It’s been a really good experience but a steep learning curve,” admitted Maj John Mob, officer commanding Fire Support Company. “The soldier in Estonia needs to be a Brecon tactics kindof-bloke. “He needs to be able to operate in close wooded country in his armoured vehicle, and deal with an Arctic environment too – we saw temperatures get down to -17 degrees Celsius.



“Fighting in woods and forests in armour is something we had to think long and hard about.” For platoon sergeant Sjt James Hopkins, it was a happy coincidence that some of his soldiers had been on a jungle warfare package shortly before deploying.

“People associate Estonia with Eastern Europe, but it is 70 per cent forest,” he explained. “I had never operated in that sort of environment before, but having served for 13 years I thought, ‘I’ve soldiered pretty much everywhere else so I’ll be fine’. “But it’s different when you’re on the ground and fighting through it. We learnt a lot of incredibly valuable lessons. “The kind of tactics you would deploy in the jungle work just as well in Estonia – there’s times when you’re in swamps up to your waist.

“Movement from A to B is also a lot more complex than somewhere like Salisbury Plain. “The Estonians were very good at camouflage, which is something we don’t have as much experience of.”

## A Spot of Nostalgia

As the nation awaits the next round of cuts and sales for the Royal Navy, Scribblings indulges in a spot of nostalgia....and features the last British battleship and the legendary Ark Royal, the last British flat-top

HMS Vanguard was a British fast battleship built during the Second World War and commissioned after the war. She was the only ship of her class, the biggest and fastest of the Royal Navy's battleships and the last battleship to be launched in the world.



Vanguard had an overall length of 814 feet 4 inches (248.2 m), a beam of 107 feet 6 inches (32.8 m), and a draught of 36 feet (11.0 m) at deep load. She displaced 44,500 long tons (45,200 t) at standard load and 51,420 long tons (52,250 t) at deep load. The ship was significantly larger than her predecessors of the class, almost 50 feet (15.2 m) longer, and displaced about 6,000 long tons (6,100 t) more than the older ships at deep load. As a fleet flagship, her complement was 115 officers and 1,860 men in 1947.

The engines were designed to produce a total of 130,000 shaft horsepower (97,000 kW) and a speed of 30 knots (56 km/h; 35 mph), but achieved more than 136,000 ship (101,000 kW) during the ship's sea trials in July 1946, when she reached a speed of 31.57 knots (58.47 km/h; 36.33 mph).

After trials, the three-bladed propellers on the inboard shafts were replaced by five-bladed propellers in an unsuccessful attempt to reduce vibrations of the inboard propeller shafts.

The ship's main armament consisted of eight 42-calibre 15-inch Mk I guns in four twin hydraulically powered gun turrets. They fired 1,938-pound (879 kg) projectiles at a muzzle velocity of 2,458 ft./s (749 m/s); this provided a maximum range of 33,550 yards (30,680 m). These guns were also capable of firing the same projectiles while using supercharges which gave a maximum range of 37,870 yards (34,630 m). Their rate of fire was two rounds per minute. Vanguard carried 100 shells per gun.

The secondary armament consisted of sixteen 50-calibre QF 5.25-inch Mk I dual-purpose guns in eight twin gun mounts. Short-range air defence was provided by 73 Bofors 40 mm AA guns in a variety of mountings.

On 9 October 1959 the Admiralty announced that Vanguard would be scrapped, as she was considered obsolete and too expensive to maintain. She was decommissioned on 7 June 1960 and sold for £560,000.

## HMS Ark Royal (R09)

HMS Ark Royal (R09) was an Audacious-class aircraft carrier of the Royal Navy and, when she was decommissioned in 1979, was the Royal Navy's last remaining conventional catapult and arrested-landing aircraft carrier. She was the first aircraft carrier to be equipped with angled flight deck at its commissioning.

Her sister ship, HMS Eagle, was the Royal Navy's first angle-decked aircraft carrier after modification in 1954.

She was launched in 1950, and her completion took five more years. About a year after commissioning, her forward port 4.5-inch (110 mm) guns were removed to improve aircraft operations over the angled deck. Four years later, the port deck-edge lift and the forward starboard 4.5-inch guns were also removed.

After the 1964 refit only one twin 4.5-inch gun mount remained aft on port and starboard side.[4] From 1967 to February 1970, she underwent a refit which was a major rebuild to her structure, but only an austere update to her electronic equipment, and was confined to changes needed to operate the RN's version of the Phantom. Prior to, and during the refit, concerns over costs, the age of the hull and changing political opinions over naval requirements threatened the refit and even a possibility that the ship could be scrapped however convincing arguments to retain and upgrade the carrier won through.



The refit cost around £30 million; far less than the modernisation of Eagle but also added several improvements, which allowed her to comfortably operate the larger Phantom and Buccaneer Mk.2 aircraft. Like Eagle her modifications included a full 8.5° angled flight deck, new and far more powerful steam catapults, bridle-catchers, heavy-grade jet-blast deflectors (both of which Eagle did not receive), and heavy-weight arrestor cables. Initially on entry into service, the ship had a complement of up to 50 aircraft comprising Sea Hawks, Sea Venoms, Gannets, Skyraiders and various helicopters. As later aircraft types grew in size and complexity, her air group fell to below 40 when she left service in 1978.

The 1966 Defence White Paper planned the end of British aircraft carriers in the early 1970s but she went into dock for her refit to head off dockyard redundancies and the likely political issues. A new government re-examined the case for carriers finding that shore-based aircraft could not provide adequate cover for British concerns "East of Suez".

By 1970, Ark Royal had a complement of 39 aircraft. This typically comprised 12 Phantom FG Mk.1s, of 892 Naval Air Squadron, 14 Buccaneer S Mk.2s of 809 Squadron, 4 Gannet AEW Mk.3s of B Flight 849 Squadron, 6 Sea King HAS Mk.1s of 824 Squadron, 2 Wessex HAR Mk.1s of the Ship's Flight and one Gannet COD Mk.4. later replaced by an AEW3. The Buccaneers doubled as tanker aircraft, using buddy refuelling pods, and as long-range reconnaissance aircraft with bomb bay-mounted camera packs.

In 1972, the Buccaneers aboard Ark Royal took part in a long-range strike mission over British Honduras in Central America shortly before its independence as a constitutional monarchy named Her Majesty's Government of Belize to deter a possible Guatemalan invasion, who had long-standing territorial claims.



She entered HMNB Devonport on 4 December 1978 and decommissioned on 14 February 1979. Like her sister Eagle, she had a relatively short (24-year) life, and when the White Ensign lowered for the last time the Royal Navy no longer had fixed wing aircraft at sea, a situation that persisted until the commissioning of the Invincible-class light aircraft carriers, with their complements of Sea Harrier VTOL aircraft, in the early 1980s.

On 29 March 1980, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) announced that she would be sold for scrap and so ended plans to preserve her. the final process of being broken up there. Breaking up of Ark Royal took until 1983.

While Ark Royal's career spanned 24 years from the time of her commissioning (her name was a household word), she spent as much time in refit; repair and reserve and modernisation as in commissioned service (12 years). It required a lot of effort from her engineers to keep her serviceable between yard periods.

Ark Royal had been poorly preserved during its lengthy construction[13] from 1942 to 1955, and much of its machinery was obsolete by its completion, including its dated DC electrics, supplemented later by some AC systems, resulting in a ship which experienced regular defects and mechanical failure.[14] Eagle was a more reliable and well-built ship,[15] and spent far more time at sea than her sister. The scrapping of Ark Royal in 1980, two years after Eagle, marked the end of conventional fixed-wing aircraft operations aboard Royal Navy carriers.

## Teething problems with HMS Queen Elizabeth are not unusual

Deborah Haynes, Defence Editor December 19 2017, The Times

IT IS FAR FROM IDEAL for the Royal Navy's largest and most expensive warship to leak. However, it is not a disaster yet. HMS Queen Elizabeth, the £3.1 billion aircraft carrier that was commissioned into the navy by the Queen less than a fortnight ago, is the first ship of its kind. As a result, teething problems are to be expected.

During the ship's maiden voyage over the summer — a period of sea trials — the carrier had to moor for longer than expected off Invergordon in the Highlands after a problem was discovered with the propeller shaft.



The fact that this latest glitch, involving a faulty seal around one of two propellers, is not deemed sufficiently serious to take the vessel out of the water and put it in dry dock is a signal that the problem is manageable. The navy also knew about the problem when Admiral Sir Philip Jones, the First Sea Lord, agreed to take ownership of the Queen Elizabeth from the aircraft carrier alliance, which built the ship.

**A real embarrassment:** In the last days of the year defence journalists have shown that they are highlighting the problems facing the United Kingdom's Armed Forces and airing their contention that it is their duty to scrutinise Government and military decisions. *Scribblings* has long maintained that the Media is Neutral: within the Rules of the Game; and it is a game to be played with commitment and professionalism if the country's Armed Forces are to do their job, garner public support and be given the tools to do the job. *Scribblings* re-publishes this Times story which is truly surprising.

## Cutbacks leave Britain with no major warships overseas

Deborah Haynes, Defence Editor. December 20 2017, The Times

BRITAIN HAS NO MAJOR WARSHIPS on operations anywhere in the world for the first time in living memory. The absence of any of the Royal Navy's 19 frigates and destroyers overseas was a "strategic embarrassment for the country and a strategic embarrassment for defence", a senior serving military officer said.

All six Type 45 destroyers are in Portsmouth because of a combination of mechanical problems, routine maintenance, a shortage of manpower and the need to give sailors leave over Christmas. The navy's 13 Type 23 frigates are split between Portsmouth and Devonport in Plymouth for similar reasons, though HMS St Albans is on duty protecting home waters.

The senior officer said that the inability of the navy to have at least one of its "main surface combatants" deployed overseas was a significant landmark after decades of cuts. It would damage Britain's reputation among allies and foes of always being able to deploy at a time of its choosing, he said. "It is bad news for defence and for our country," the officer said.

Vice-Admiral John McAnally, right, national president of the Royal Naval Association, below, said that the absence of deployed frigates and destroyers was unprecedented. "This is an indication that the navy is too small," he told The Times. "I am distressed and alarmed. I do not see that it is easily remedied. The only answer is an increase in the defence budget. It is too small to meet what government want the armed forces to do."

Frigates and destroyers have been the workhorses of the navy for decades. Navy sources said that they could not recall a time when Britain had not deployed a main surface combatant on operations overseas, meaning that this could be the first time it has happened since the modern Royal Navy — known as the senior service — was formed some 500 years ago.

The other main surface vessel, HMS Albion, is next week due to take over the role of fleet flagship from HMS Ocean, a helicopter carrier that is going out of service. It will be on a heightened state of readiness. A new aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth — commissioned into service this month — will not be operational, with F-35 warplanes, for another three years.



The reason for the navy's predicament is a failure by successive governments to invest sufficient resources in defence, the officer said. Cost-saving cuts have been made to the maintenance contracts that keep ships afloat. In addition, the introduction of a new fleet of frigates has been delayed, meaning that the lifespan of the Type 23s is being extended, raising the risk of breakdowns. There is also a fault with the engines of the much newer Type 45 destroyers. A contract to fix it will not be awarded until next year.

The navy usually has at least one frigate or destroyer deployed to the Gulf on a permanent, rotating basis. The number was at least two until recent years. HMS Diamond, a Type 45 destroyer, had been due to fulfil that role, but returned to Portsmouth at the start of the month after suffering a propeller fault. HMS Duncan will deploy in the new year on a NATO task to the Mediterranean but will also spend time in the Gulf. HMS Sutherland, a frigate, is due to deploy to the Asia-Pacific early in 2018.

Frigates and destroyers used to rotate through the South Atlantic — a role that at present is being filled by smaller vessels. A total of 13 surface vessels and submarines, including mine hunters and Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships, are on operations globally. They are not classed as major warships.

"The Royal Navy is deployed globally on operations and will be protecting our national interests throughout Christmas and new year," a MoD spokesman said. A Royal Navy spokesperson added: There will be 13 ships and submarines deployed away and in-home waters, as well as the at sea nuclear deterrent.

## HMS Queen Elizabeth – a large and convenient media target

NAVY'S NEW £3.1Bn aircraft carrier is leaking" screams the front-page headline in The Sun newspaper, The Daily Express then helpfully adds to the hysteria by claiming "the ship is sinking". The simple facts of this rather routine occurrence are that a leaking stern seal on one of HMS Queen Elizabeth's propeller shafts was discovered during sea trials and is allowing small amounts of water into the ship.

Stern seals are one of the more challenging aspects of marine engineering. There are two opposing requirements when designing the seal, the propeller shaft must exit the hull and be free to rotate with minimal friction but sealed sufficiently tight to keep out the pressure of seawater. Modern mechanical seals use a series of spring-loaded rings that require lubrication by oil and seawater and are complex assemblies that often cause problems.

One very experienced naval officer commented today, "on every ship I served on we experienced issues with the stern seals at some point".

All ships are designed with bilges where water and oil tend to collect from small leaks. The bilges are equipped with powerful pumps that can discharge this water and, if necessary much larger volumes of water in the event of a serious breach of the hull.

To get some perspective on how insignificant this leak is, the 200 litres per hour that is leaking into the 65,000-ton HMS Queen Elizabeth is about the same as two bathtubs full of water and can easily be removed by pumps with a vastly greater capacity. The ship is also sub-divided into many watertight compartments, even in the highly unlikely event the stern seals failed completely, it would not sink the ship as it would be contained within a compartment. Aside from the ships ME (Marine Engineering) department on board QE, the rest of ships company were not even aware of this issue.

The ship went through a series of rigorous inspections before she was accepted off contract by the RN, almost unnoticed amongst the ceremonial hoopla of the commissioning day on 7th

December. The Sun article even claims the ACA had “mugged off” the RN by getting the ship accepted before this issue was discovered. The RN has hundreds of years of accumulated experience in managing complex warship programmes and did not just blithely sign on the dotted line. In fact, the leak came to light during sea trials, only by subjecting the propeller shafts to the forces experienced at sea and during manoeuvring can the seals be properly tested.



Furthermore, the ship remains under warranty and the cost of this repair and other snagging issues will not be borne by the taxpayer. ACA engineers are expected to be on board completing further snagging issues for the next six months or so. The media perspective seems to be we have paid £3.1 Bn for this ship so why is everything not working perfectly?

The whole point of the trials process of a ship that is a prototype, first of her kind is to expose any problems and remedy them.

There is not a single major engineering project in history that did

not encounter snags along the way that were overcome. With diver support, the seal problem is going to be repaired alongside in Portsmouth and it will not delay her departure planned for late in January 2018.

## The fourth rate fourth estate?

By midday, the BBC website and more serious news outlets were leading on this story and the general public, having been continuously drip-fed negative news on HMS Queen Elizabeth might be forgiven for thinking we have a leaky aircraft carrier with no aircraft. Journalists insist this routine occurrence is a big “story” and doubtless, their editors are very happy with them. It is a story because they have made it so, taking a small fact out of context and magnifying its significance is how one of the less reputable aspects of journalism works.

There are several very good defence journalists who have been helpful to the navy’s cause, particularly in the recent current defence funding crisis, but in this instance, the media is making something out of nothing and misleading the public.

We predicted back in 2014, long before QE was completed, that the size of the carrier project would make it an irresistible target for media criticism. In the last year, the progress of HMS QE has been covered extensively by media worldwide and we have endured overblown stories about, paint peeling off the hull, paint peeling off the deck, being stuck in port due to bad weather, breaking down at sea and now sinking alongside in Portsmouth.

It is just so easy to write simplistic news articles or draw silly cartoons about “aircraft carriers with no aircraft”, ignoring the timescale and complexity involved in delivery a project like this. It does not sell papers or get clicks on your website to talk about what a triumph of British engineering the QEC represents.

While many naval projects all over the world continue to experience horrendous technical problems at the outset, HMS Queen Elizabeth has passed her initial sea trails with relatively few issues, none of which have proved to be a show stopper.

It would be wrong to suggest there is a concerted conspiracy by the media to knock the carriers, this is just part of the cynical news cycle.

Last week The Sun was loudly proclaiming our “brave boys and girls” and trumpeting the achievements of sailors and the armed forces at their Millies Awards. This week the Navy is a bunch of bungling amateurs with a sinking ship. A brief media frenzy over this leak has ensued which will soon pass away, although it all adds up to further incremental damage done to the public perception of the Navy and the carrier project.

Putting aside the damage to the service’s image, the RN’s biggest concern is over the source of a leak to the press, rather than a routine, repairable leak on a ship.

## Getting on with the job

While the media circus surrounding the ship continues, the RN is getting on with delivering the carrier strike programme. Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) team is now aboard HMS Queen Elizabeth making their assessments and writing a training syllabus for a brand-new class of ship. Safety will be the focus of the FOST period that will be conducted when the ship sails in late January for the South West Approaches and Eastern Atlantic. Once completed, the formal Merlin helicopter first of type acceptance trials will be conducted, allowing full clearance to operate the type under a relevant SHOL (Ship Helicopter Operating Limits) essential to the QE’s overall capability.

Meanwhile, HMS Prince of Wales remains in the dry dock in Rosyth, the planned float-out has been delayed slightly, not because of any technical problems but because the ACA has decided it is easier and more efficient to work on her where she is, rather than afloat in the basin.

Last week the 14th British F-35B (ZM148 BK-14) was delivered by Lockheed Martin to the British Joint Lightning Force training contingent at USMCAS Beaufort in the US. The five-aircraft based a Beaufort (which will eventually number 12) will be allocated to 207 Squadron, Operational Conversion Unit which will officially stand up in July 2018 and provide training for UK F-35 pilots before they join the operational squadrons.

## I enjoyed being a right pain in the butt!

### Why Jeremy Wanted to Take the ‘Embed’ Out of War Reporting

British Forces News: December 15, 2017

JEREMY THOMPSON is a former Sky News presenter who became known for broadcasting on location - including in conflicts in Kosovo, Iraq and Somalia. He's given Forces Network some insights from his new book 'Breaking News'.

I don't mind admitting it, I was always a bit of a maverick. As a journalist, I liked doing things my way. I treasured my independence. I prized my freedom to stick my nose in where it wasn't always welcomed.

Frankly, I enjoyed being a right pain in the butt. But then a good hack should be if he or she is doing their job properly.

Not surprisingly the idea of being part of a pool, attached to a military unit or 'embedded', as it became known in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, wasn't my idea of fun. So, as Shakespeare might have put it: to embed or not to embed, that is the question.

It was nothing new. It had been going on since the Crimean War 150 years back, attaching news reporters to the military so they could get closer to the action, but with some protection.

Many of my news comrades liked the whole idea. The MoD certainly did. As one general neatly put it, they could 'dominate the information environment' by controlling the message and the messengers.

I thought it was an uncomfortable compromise. Journalists can end up being far too reliant on the military for transport, fuel, food, water, security, access and, above all, information. It can all get a bit cosy. Reporters seeing battle through khaki-tinted glasses.

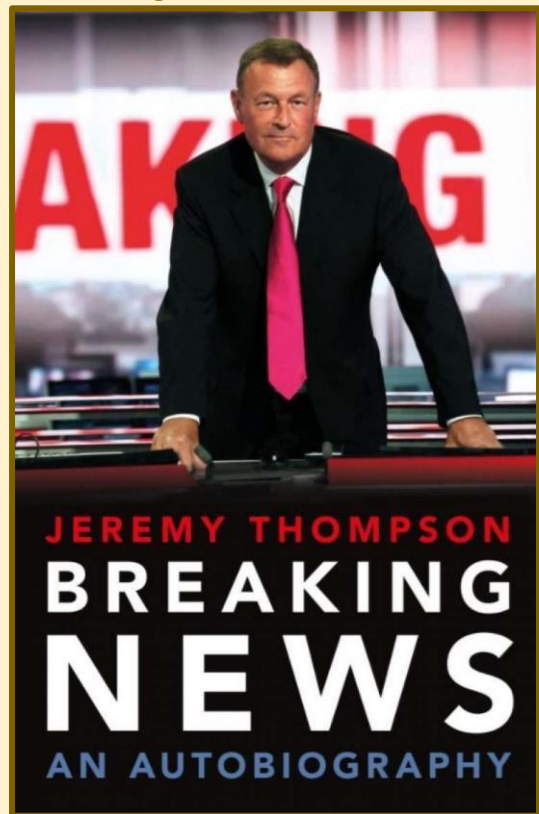
Through many years of war reporting around the world, I'd seen attitudes change towards journalists on the frontline. Under the relentless 24-hour news cycle and with the onset of social media, the old respect for independent observers had worn thin.

In the Yugoslav conflict we were increasingly accused of being partial, of taking sides. At times we were seen as combatants and targeted by rival militias. But come 2003 and my second Iraq War, I still fancied taking my chances as a unilateral. And so, it was, on 22nd March - my younger son's wedding day as it happened - I and my Sky News team barrelled through a gap in the frontier fence with a battered old satellite truck and two 4x4s and entered Iraq.

It was to be a historic and traumatic day. We were shot at, mobbed by bemused Iraqi citizens, we filmed British forces streaming past and I interviewed the Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon by satellite as I stood in the desert sand.

"Then came the awful news that my old ITN buddy Terry Lloyd and his team had been killed in crossfire a few miles to the east of us. His death changed our unilateral thinking and our mood."

Just up the road towards Basra we saw the comforting sight of the Desert Rats, the 7th Armoured Brigade, setting up camp. They agreed we could take shelter nearby. Not embedded, but in touch and more secure. Reporting war was always about minimising risks. We certainly felt safer within sight of British squaddies.



We returned the favour by getting the men and women in uniform on TV to send messages home. And our Sky links engineers rigged up a receiver dish so the lads could watch England play Ireland in the Five Nations rugby. It paid off handsomely when our new military mates tipped us off that the MoD was after me and my team.

The MOD had set up a much-vaunted Forward Transmission Unit, known as the 'Hub', a new super-embed for reporters, who were promised unrivalled access to the frontline.

The reality was that while I was reporting freely from inside Iraq, the Hub was still stuck in the sands of Kuwait and its frustrated hacks were giving their minders hell.

The embeds were describing us as 'embed sores' or 'blisters'. And I got word that the Hub's military spokesman had become 'almost obsessive about Jeremy Thompson's roaming maverick operation' and that High Command was 'determined to remove Thompson from Iraq and repatriate him to Kuwait'. 'You and who's army?' I thought, as me and my Sky team legged it into the desert for a day to avoid detection.

We even dug up a great story as we chanced upon the Black Watch paying their respects at a memorial where regimental comrades had died in 1914 on a previous British Expeditionary Force mission into Iraq.

As one MoD media officer told me weeks later: 'You really buggered up the embed system, but hats off to you. You got some great material and I admit we watched Sky all the time.' In the end it all worked out pretty well. My Sky News team pressed on to Baghdad in time to see Saddam's statue pulled down. And the Hub hacks saw some action around Basra.

Looking back on it, I think the mix was good for our viewers. The embed teams produced some excellent stories, while we mavericks added colour and perspective from different angles on the frontline.

The result was live TV war coverage as never seen before, courageous and high-quality reporting. And whether we were official or unofficial, we couldn't have done it without the help of the great women and men of the British forces.

More on Jeremy Thompson's experiences as a TV reporter in war and peace can be found in his new autobiography 'Breaking News', available from bookshops and Biteback Publishing.

*Scribblings examines Israel's use of social media in that most difficult of conflicts in the Middle East and finds it's not as easy or effective as some would claim. The Israeli Defence Force is heavily committed to the use of social media platforms to make its case. With a strong and highly trained Spokesperson's unit they, nevertheless find that Twitter, Facebook and the other sites can induce angry and contrary responses. Indeed, one Italian journalist believes the current Gaza conflict is the first battle to be lost as a result of the reliance on social media. One post on Twitter is quickly forgotten in the storm of conflicting comment that can follow.*

## Israel's Social Media War: How the IDF Uses the Internet to Fight Hezbollah

By: Callum Paton

ISRAEL has been fighting Hezbollah on the battlefield for more than three decades, most recently in 2006, but the country is increasingly taking the fight to their Lebanese rivals online too. Israel's chief military spokesman Ronen Manelis told journalists that the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) was conducting a "psychological war" against Hezbollah as well as preparing conventional operations against the Iran-backed group. Such operations, Manelis said, included the targeting of Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah. "There won't be a clear victory picture in the next war, though it's clear that Nasrallah is a target," he explained, according to Haaretz.

Israel and Hezbollah fought a war against each other in northern Lebanon in 2006, with the

Israeli army probing deep into Hezbollah territory in southern Lebanon and bombarding the Lebanese capital, Beirut. But the Shiite paramilitary group emerges from the war in Syria a stronger, more battle-hardened force.

*An Israeli flag flies from the Kidmat Zion Jewish settlement community on the outskirts of the Arab village of Abu Dis, where the Old City with its golden Dome of the Rock Islamic shrine is seen in the background, August 18, 2008 in East Jerusalem David Silverman/Getty Images*



Manelis said that the propaganda war is shifting from traditional media to online: "One of the things we talk about is the transition

from traditional media consumption to social media. We are also active in this theatre, and it is an operational theatre in every respect. Just in the past few weeks, we've taken a great many actions that caused consternation on the other side."

Since 2013 the Israeli government has been engaged in recruiting what it has referred to as "cover units," the Guardian reported. A mixture of international students and domestic students have been employed by Israel in a "professional trolling" capacity to defeat a wide range of enemies from the boycott, divest and sanctions (BDS) movement to foreign governments.

During the 2014 Gaza war the student group "Israel Under Fire" emerged as a key voice on social media promoting Israel's narrative of the conflict. "Social media is another place where the war goes on. This is another way to tell our story," the group's leader, Yarden Ben-Yosef, said.

Hezbollah has itself maintained a sophisticated media operation since the 1980s. In 1984 its political wing, the Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc, has published a weekly newspaper al-Ahad, and subsequently the party began broadcasting on two radio stations. In 1989 Hezbollah created its own television station, al-Manar.

According to the Jerusalem Post, more recently Hezbollah has bolstered its media presence operating more than 50 websites including the website of its leader Hassan Nasrallah. On the Hezbollah leader's website, the archives of his speeches and pronouncements are available.

Tensions have ratcheted between Israel, Hezbollah and the militia's backers in Iran in recent weeks. In a of recent statements Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has attacked Israel, saying Saturday Israel would be "eradicated" in the next war with Hezbollah.

The comments by IRGC commander Mohammed Ali Jafri came against a backdrop of increased sectarian pressure between Shiite Tehran and Sunni Riyadh. At a meeting of the Arab League in Cairo a week ago the body condemned Hezbollah and Iran, accusing both of supporting terrorism and extremist groups with advanced weapons and ballistic missiles.

In a Thursday interview with the New York Times Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Mohammed Bin Salman, said Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khameni, the Supreme Leader of Iran, was the "new Hitler of the Middle East." He went on to further compare the sectarian power struggle in the region between Riyadh and Tehran to Europe in World War II.



# Fighting a shaming campaign with the truth

By Ben Caspit, a senior columnist for Ma'ariv, Israel

December 25, 2017 20:48

IT HAPPENS WITHOUT ANY WARNING. First a hesitant little note, an email or twitter message, or something on Facebook. Then there's another, and another and several more; together, heralding the oncoming flood.

*Palestinian teenager Ahad Tamimi is arrested by Israeli security forces, December 19, 2017. (photo credit: IDF SPOKESPERSON'S UNIT)*



Within hours you discover that you've turned into Public Enemy No. 1, a modern-day pariah; a man who calls for the rape of young girls and destruction of families; a contemporary Nazi. A rare combination of circumstances, a phrase taken out of context, an inaccurate translation and a great deal of evil intention have planted in your keyboard things you never said, and in your brain, things you never thought. All that is left is to chase after the eternal wind in the cyber willows. The term "shaming" suddenly takes on a real entity, develops a shape that leads straight into your face. No one bothers to ask him/herself whether or not you've devoted your entire career to the peace cause, supported and continue to support all the peace agreements and proposals, support the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, see in the settlements an enterprise that has caused more harm than good and is considered in Netanyahu's office as one of the Right's greatest media enemies. Is it logical, therefore, to believe that such a man would issue a call on IDF soldiers to rape Palestinian girls?

What's it all about? A meeting between two IDF soldiers and the Tamimi family from the village of Nebi Salah that was leaked to the Israeli media last Monday. The video made every Israeli's blood boil, regardless of his/her political inclinations.

The picture of an IDF officer standing stone-still and silent opposite Palestinian teenage girls, shouting at him, goading him, pushing him and, finally, slapping him hard on the face, aroused a massive wave of protest against the behaviour of the officer and the soldier beside him. The main thesis behind this was the "harm done to Israel's deterrence." It is inconceivable, said most of the country's opinion makers, for a soldier in uniform to be so humiliated and beaten on camera. What will the Arabs think of Israel now?

I thought something completely different. Last Monday, I even had the courage to write my thoughts, even though I knew this would expose me to scorn and shaming from the Right. The dilemma that evening in Israel was whether to arrest 17-year-old Ahad Tamimi on the spot, or whether it would be better to exercise restraint, to repress our urges and carry out an arrest later away from the flashing lights of cameras, as the IDF has become accustomed to in recent years? A quiet night arrest, devoid of violence and victims.

My headline, which turned me into a contemporary Nazi was: “The Power in Restraint.” My subtitle was: “The video of the Palestinian girls lashing out at IDF soldiers is nauseating, but in fact, by not responding, the officer and the soldier demonstrate strength and common sense, since it was obvious that the girls sought the response that would ignite the entire region.”

Here, I made a connection to recent events along Israel’s southern border with Gaza: “This constraint is what Israel should exert vis-à-vis the provocation from Gaza. You should never start a war if you don’t know how you’ll get out of it.”



In the article itself, I praised the IDF soldiers, for their “superhuman restraint” against Palestinian provocation. I wrote that I was grateful for not being there in their place. I admitted that, in their place, I would not have been able to contain myself. “Sometimes, restraint is power and in this case, the soldiers are worthy of being decorated for valour, instead of being reprimanded,” I wrote in response to the news that the IDF was considering reprimanding the officer who refrained from arresting Ahad Tamimi on the spot.

I wrote that restraint, in cases such as this, is much harder than using force against teenage girls, especially when it is crystal clear that any raised hand on the part of an IDF soldier would be interpreted as a provocation that could set the whole region on fire, or serve as ammunition to shame Israel.

Here, I moved to a comparison between the situation involving the girls and the soldiers to the one between the IDF and the terrorists in Gaza. I summed up by writing that like in Gaza where it is better to contain the events and not allow ourselves to be dragged into an all-out war, the same applies to the Palestinian girls. It was better, I wrote, to get our pay-back later, in the dark, with no witnesses and no cameras. In other words, to carry out the girl’s arrest without having it turn into another shaming video that would go viral on social media. I never imagined that this leftie and defeatist article (as it was tagged that day in Israel) would turn into a shaming campaign from the opposite direction altogether.

That same night, between Monday and Tuesday, the IDF arrested Ahad Tamimi, quietly, without provocation or violence, in a clean and well-planned operation. Israeli policewomen, and not policemen, carried out the arrest, and it was completed in utter silence.

On my 5 PM radio show that day, I celebrated the victory of my own approach and said that the “bad cop” in this story were “all those who are convinced that the immediate non-arrest of Tamimi caused harm to Israeli deterrence.” In my opening monologue, I attacked once again Israel’s constant pursuit for signs of respect and pride, and disregard for forethought, which is what is really needed in such a complex and explosive region like ours. I did all this following Tamimi’s arrest, which was carried out quietly and far from media intervention, just as I had recommended.

*Pictured right, Ben Caspit*



Almost all my radio show that day was devoted to the Palestinian girl’s arrest. I continued to state my position that the IDF acted with wisdom and sensitivity by avoiding any unnecessary complications. Throughout, I found myself facing fierce arguments from my colleagues on the show, as well as with interviewees, who insisted that the IDF’s response was weak, hesitant and too late. At one point on the show, I even read out a series of talkbacks from the Arab social media, in order to prove my thesis: the restraint displayed by the Israeli office is the best propaganda video presented by Israel in recent weeks, and the Arabs realize this, too.

Where, then, did the social media masses find the story, according to which I had proposed that the IDF should rape Ahad Tamimi under the cover of darkness? Where did the Satanic plan – accredited to me – to make Palestinian families disappear or to carry out terrible crimes on them in the dark of night come from? No one in Israel understood my article in this light because it was read in the right context – regarding the argument over the timing of Ahad Tamimi’s arrest. Outside Israel though, different forces were at work. These forces, which decided to adorn me with sick opinions, even enjoyed some partial success.

No one bothered to ask how a journalist, who supported the trial of IDF soldier Elor Azaria for shooting a wounded terrorist, and the prison sentence he was subsequently given, be connected to such allegations. Where did the call for rape come from? Over the last 50 years, there have been many disputes between the IDF and the Palestinian residents of the territories. Rape has never, ever, been a part of this very difficult reality. We have never been accused of this lie. And just like that I am the first to be so accused. As this article is being written, it has been announced that Ahad Tamimi’s custody has been extended by four days. Just as I had originally thought that it was best to arrest her quietly, I now believe that it is unnecessary to keep her for so long in custody.

In our part of the world overkill has never proved to be productive. If there is enough evidence of a crime, she will be charged. As far as I know, she is not suspected of terrorist activity, only of provocation, and it’s best to keep things in proportion. The problem with this opinion is that it could bring on me a new shaming campaign, this time from the Right. If that happens, at least now I’ll be prepared.

## Did the Royal Marines Really Surrender after Falklands Invasion?

Ricky D Philips, author of "The First Casualty – The Untold Story of the Falklands War", tells FORCES NEWS what he believes really happened when the Falkland Islands were invaded in 1982. December 14, 2017. This piece was sent to Forces News by the author and has not yet been independently verified by their news team.

"IT IS IMPORTANT to me personally that this story gets told as it happened, since I suspect there are those who would rather it wasn't". With these words, the Falklands' most beloved

governor Sir Rex Hunt opened his memoirs and told us (as much as he could) that, whatever we believed about the Falklands invasion of April 2nd, 1982, there was much more to the story than some, in the UK, would rather we know.

Sir Rex couldn't say it all and yet he told us in almost as many words to look beneath the surface of what has been 'established fact' for almost 36 years. Curiously, it seems that everybody else missed it entirely until I saw it.

The books tell us that during the Falklands invasion 60 Royal Marines as good as laid down for a small group of Argentinian Commandos, promptly surrendering after firing off a few shots - killing one and wounding three.



That's the story we have all read for over three decades. Any casual look at a history of the Falklands War will show that this episode gets, at best, a page or two to itself before moving on to the better-known aspects of the conflict; the sunken ships, Goose Green, Tumbledown... we know the rest.

"The First Casualty" was not a book I ever set out to write or a case I set out to 'prove'. It just happened like that. The fact is that I always knew – or thought I knew – that there MUST have been something more to this story. Do 60 Royals really just surrender, throwing in the towel after a token defence? The answer to that – perhaps not surprisingly – is no.

It was an almost casual curiosity which led me to begin to compile the facts and analyse the conjecture of that day; especially the stories of the Royal Marines of Naval Party 8901, which told a very different tale. This, however, was always seemingly 'explained away' by a convenient Argentinian cover story.

When the Royal Marines themselves appeared, and seemed overjoyed that someone, at last, believed what they had always said, I began to speak with them all. I made notes, conducted interviews and saw for myself that the story we were always told about that day wasn't just wrong. It was virtually criminal in its inaccuracy.

In short, it was contrived. Yet I know enough, as a historian, not to just take someone's word for it and the idea struck me that, perhaps, the Argentinian veterans who fought that day might want their stories told too. In this, I was not to be disappointed. From conscripts to full naval commanders, the Argentinian veterans wanted to add their stories to the tale and more than a few said that the 'official' version had largely written them out of it altogether and made the whole action look like the merest of skirmishes:

"They made it sound as if we just turned up and the Royal Marines surrendered", one officer told me. "It wasn't like that. This was a battle."

This was excellent news. The Argentines were saying the exact same thing and when the Falkland Islanders themselves started to come forward and tell their stories, there was no doubt whatsoever.

In all, almost 300 accounts from three countries, complete with private diaries, personal photographs and more, concurred that the story which had lasted for decades and had become 'set in stone' history, was one big, elaborate lie. My first task was actually to 'unlearn' the story you can read anywhere else.

It was so full of holes that it was virtually unusable in the light of primary evidence which, from three sides, stacked up absolutely. It amazed me that nobody had ever seen through it... but then, nobody had ever asked the Royal Marines or the Falkland Islanders.

The Argentines, meanwhile, had given their accounts in several books, yet they admitted that, as serving officers, the interviews on base were largely a sham, with the words; "Get it right" issued as a warning before they went in and told their stories. Now, as retired men, they could say what they liked. And they did.

The Falklands invasion began with the Argentinian Commandos hitting Moody Brook barracks, hoping to catch the Marines asleep in their bunks. The barracks had been evacuated but the story we are told is one of stun and gas grenades tossed into rooms. Ask anyone who saw it afterwards – I did – bullets through every bunk, fragmentation and phosphorous grenades, the electrical cables hanging out of the walls where grenades and bullets had torn the place to pieces. This wasn't a peaceful takeover. This was attempted murder.



*Amtrak 17, which supposedly never went to the Falklands and never saw any combat. It shows a large, ugly patch over a hole, exactly where Royal Marines claim to have hit it*

The Royal Marines, luckily, had had word of the invasion and were already deployed at Government House and along the Airport Road to Stanley, ready to face the invasion. The next chapter of the story concerns a landing craft which sailed in through the narrows of Stanley - the thin neck of water leading to the inner harbour.

That landing craft doesn't make it into the histories. Argentinian records state that they never used them. It would take several Argentinian officers to provide photographs to show that they had. You can hear Rex Hunt on the radio, broadcasting at the time and he mentions it twice.

Then it just disappears from the story. The reason for this was that the landing craft, packed with Argentinian soldiers, ran into an anti-tank rocket and turned over, taking its tightly-packed crew down with it. People even saw it get hit and explode.

The story could, of course, have been apocryphal until we went looking for it and suddenly there it was, dragged up from the narrows on its back with a gaping hole in the side, right about the water line. Then came the main amphibious landing with 21 'Amtrak' APCs, each loaded with 28 men, including crew.

You will hear, no doubt, how the Royal Marines 'were encouraged to think' they had blown one up with anti-tank rockets on the Airport Road, yet Argentina produced an Amtrak, scarred by

bullets and with the gunner's scope shot out, to prove that they had not. Sadly, for them, that wasn't the one the Royal Marines ever claimed to have hit!

With one 84mm round through the nose, just right of centre, a 66mm rocket through the back of the commander's cupola and another one to the left rear as the vehicle had swung right, off the road and become stuck on a bank, the Royal Marines claimed, credibly, to have left the Amtrak a smoking wreck from which nobody emerged.

This was one of the most fascinating aspects of the battle and more so when a rear left light cluster from an Amtrak turned up in the Falklands, with a 66mm rocket hole straight through it. Indeed, I have held it.

Then we found the Amtrak itself, complete with a large, ugly wound in the nose, just right of centre. A 66mm hole shows through the back of the commander's cupola – right where the Marines remember hitting it – and finally, although the rear left cluster was replaced, the armour around it is heavily pitted and damaged.

The left side of the vehicle had many bullet scores commensurate with a vehicle which had indeed turned right off the road... the Amtrak Argentina that had always put up as merely damaged had turned left, as confirmed by all.

The LCVP Landing Craft, right, which was dragged from the narrows, still denied after 35 years



It wasn't the same vehicle. Then, finally, certain people admitted it and others came forward to describe seeing the gory scene inside after the battle.

The Argentines who had been surrounding Government House and who had already taken three casualties in the back garden were being shot down in droves. Not just 16 men, as we were always told (tell that to the Royals and they can't stop laughing) but scores of them.

They were rushing in, four abreast, shoulder-to-shoulder, SWAT-style (incredible but confirmed by Argentinian sources) and were too easy to hit. Several of the Royal Marines described it as a 'turkey shoot' and the Marines' top sniper, Geordie Gill, is known to have killed a section commander, a rifleman and heavy machine gunner up on the ridge behind the house, to add to several other claimed 'kills'.

Meanwhile, in the streets of Stanley (where the official accounts state that there was no fighting and no Argentines) an eight-man section battled the odds, making several more confirmed kills as they fought street-to-street, firing off no less than 3,450 rounds... and we are told there was no street fighting?

Major Mike Norman's official casualty report, listing only the casualties absolutely seen and confirmed immediately after the battle by the Marines themselves, with five killed, 17 wounded, three prisoners and one Amtrak destroyed. It was never released

Eventually, when the damage to the town was increasing and Government House surrounded, Rex Hunt determined upon a ceasefire to save the people of Stanley. There was no surrender. Later he was to say: "I deliberately never used the word surrender as I knew it wasn't in the Marines' vocabulary". And yet, almost incredibly, that word 'surrender' is still used. There was no surrender.

From accounts of Royal Marines, their Argentinian opponents, people who found bodies in their gardens, on street corners and saw dozens floating for days afterwards in the harbour, from interviews with the hospital staff who described endless casualties, wards full of injured men, operations to save lives and 48 of the most hectic hours of their careers, I can physically count 107 Argentinian casualties.

And that's without the records for their field hospital, which was also very busy indeed. The Royal Marines walked out without a scratch. As to the Argentinian bodies, what became of them? They burned them with napalm on April 21.

The accounts are numerous, mentioning the unmistakable smell of the bodies which moved from one place to another, travelling to the nearby Tussac Islands just outside of Stanley, from where a change in the wind blew the carrion smell unbearably back towards the town.

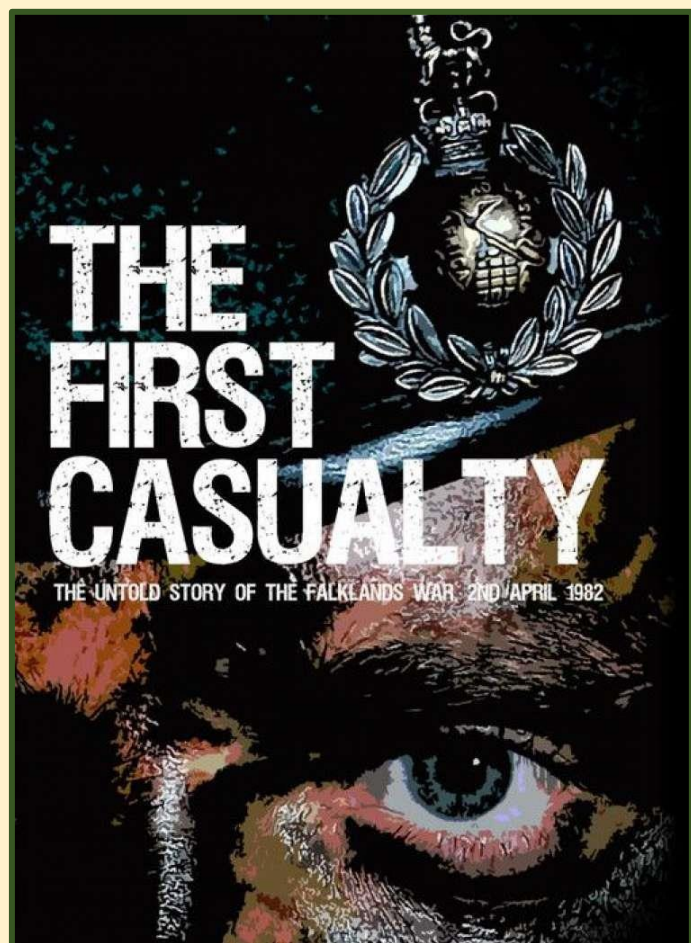
And then finally that unforgettable pall of white and then black smoke as the bodies were disposed of and the smell of burning flesh.

I could have filled another book with these harrowing accounts and even a photo of the incident, which was feebly explained and then totally denied. This was a battle like few others; of a handful of men against thousands of opponents and an epic defence which was hushed up. The only question is, why? There are theories aplenty and they are, of course, dangerous things.

There are some very, very good reasons which I have explored in detail, while Marines still have the letters handed to them when they came home, warning them to say nothing about what had really happened that day.

The full story, of course, is in my book and it is one which has received rave reviews in 40 countries and especially from the veterans and the civilians who saw this battle rage on their very doorsteps.

The Battle of Stanley is one which was blotted from the history books. No more. The book – a rollicking action story which has gripped and thrilled readers – is backed up by swathes of evidence and absolute proof.



It seems that the old saying was right; the first casualty in war really is the truth.

"The First Casualty – The Untold Story of the Falklands War" by Ricky D Philips is available at [www.beicbooks.com/shop](http://www.beicbooks.com/shop)

# Signing up for the RAF? Don't bother – you've been Capita'd

Nearly all Air Force recruiting grounded, online system blamed By [Gareth Corfield](#) 12 Dec 2017 at 09:04

CAPITA'S DISASTROUS Recruiting Partnership Project with the Ministry of Defence is so bug ridden that the Royal Air Force stopped taking on new recruits except for those in "priority roles". As revealed by The Register last week, Capita's crappy DRS system, as foisted on the Armed Forces for managing recruitment, has failed to the point that recruits are almost unable to sign up online. Now, more details of the Recruiting Partnership Project with the Ministry of Defence have come to light thanks to a briefing paper seen by The Register.

The RAF had "experienced a large number of technical issues" and restricted new applications only to applicants throwing their hats into the ring for a "priority role". These included engineers and aircrew, who have a tendency to quit for better-paid and less risky jobs with airlines once trained.



A separate MoD manpower report stated that applications to join the RAF Reserves declined by 27 per cent between September 2016 and September 2017. Applications to the regular RAF suffered a shrink of 1.5 per cent over the same period, suggesting that the Capita woes were not deterring wannabe regular airmen.

"The Royal Navy has experienced a large number of technical issues following the transition to DRS. To maintain support to the recruiting pipeline manual workarounds have been required," said the MoD's Capita RPP paper seen by El Reg. "It is not possible at this stage to exactly quantify any adverse effects on recruiting."

Most concerningly, the rollout of Capita's DRS system resulted in naval recruiters "implement[ing] business continuity plans to ensure that existing candidates continue to be processed." As we reported previously, these plans included recruiters manually emailing 500 online signups at a time to give them further information.

Business continuity planning is also known as disaster recovery planning, as illustrated by the ever-helpful British government. Meanwhile, Army recruiters found that "a small number of candidates have had their application details changed, i.e. from Regular to Reserve." Some potential Army recruits are being funnelled towards their local TA unit instead of the fulltime Army job they hoped for.

“There are several system interfaces, with data not always populating between the systems. Recovery plans are in place and incremental remediation is in progress,” the paper also stated.

Around 200 full-time reservists are being laid off in January to make way for outsourced civilians employed by Capita, The Sun reported in October. One told the paper: “When a potential applicant asks what it’s like in the Army, the civilian recruiters won’t have a clue.”

Sources who spoke to us previously described how, before DRS went live in mid-November, “there [was] every indication that the system was not ready. “The MoD told El Reg that “a short term drop in numbers was expected as the new system is bedding in” and that the Armed Forces “continue to manage and support an active pipeline of candidates.”

## **New Capita system has left British Army recruits unable to register online**

**Sandhurst personnel short of vital info on officer trainees who start in January**

**By: Gareth Corfield December 8, 2017**

**UPDATED** CAPITAS’S infamous Recruitment Partnership Project (RPP) for the Ministry of Defence has finally gone live, five years after the first deal was signed – and, surprise, surprise, it is riddled with bugs and missing critical functionality.

Sources with past and present involvement in the £1.3bn RPP deal told The Register the full system, intended to handle Army, Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and Royal Fleet Auxiliary recruitment, went live on November 13.

Instead of a seamless transfer from the previous system run by HPE, however, military recruiters encountered severe problems. Multiple sources described a large drop in the number of online applications received by the Armed Forces.



**"Pre-delivery testing was very poor," said one, a recruiting subject matter expert who spoke on condition of anonymity, "with there being every indication that the system was not ready. What was demonstrated shows a lack of understanding of what the Armed Forces needs."**

Another source claimed training personnel at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, have been left wondering whether or not they will have vital documents required to start training new officer recruits in January.

The existing recruitment system has been made read-only, said a further source within the MoD, who also spoke on condition of anonymity. This, we were told, has compelled the Armed Forces to start using workarounds – including recruiters manually emailing applicants with links to further information and a secure online portal, instead of this being done automatically. Some potential recruits have also taken to the Army Rumour Service forum to ask why they haven't received their activation links.

"The system doesn't separate between regular and reserve," our recruiting SME added. "It's also well known that as of [the] going-live [date], there is no reporting functionality."

This means senior recruiters cannot gain an instant overview of the numbers applying to join the armed forces. Instead they must manually count applications.



While our sources told us that the online system was not implementing age limits for military roles, our test registration for the Royal Navy found that these limits appeared to work as designed.

However, one cannot use the "+" symbol in an email address – meaning privacy and spam-conscious folk cannot use this very useful data breach-tracing feature.

Last year marked the four-year point of the project, with a fed-up sounding Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, left, telling the House of Commons that Capita had been pressed to give the MoD "as early a delivery date as possible next year".

In 2014 the then defence secretary, Philip Hammond, seriously pondered activating the £50m get-out clause in the contract to bin Capita and start over.

We were told, shortly before this article went live, that recruiters have now reverted to using the pre-Capita system. We are seeking confirmation from the MoD and Capita, though neither responded to our previous enquiries.

The MoD, responding on behalf of Capita and itself, told us that the impact on RMA Sandhurst is that documentation for new joiners is delayed rather than missing completely, and that new officer cadets "will receive the documentation they need in time".

The old recruiting system has been "retained in read-only mode" until February 13, while the process of recruiters manually emailing new signups in batches of 500 "was an agreed incremental approach to support a smooth transition to the new system".

We are also assured that reporting functionality does exist in Capita's system, with the man from the Ministry saying: "Application data is being produced as required. Active recruiting continues."



## Ensure UK gets the most out of F-35, say MPs

By: George Allison, December 21, 2017

A DEFENCE COMMITTEE report has examined the allegations made by The Times in its investigation into the F-35 programme and has compiled a list of recommendations.

The committee say that their report has drawn on the work of other studies into the programme, such as the 2016 Annual Report of the US Department of Defense's Director of Operational Test and Evaluation, and on the oral and written evidence they have gathered over the course of the inquiry, including from both Lockheed Martin and the Ministry of Defence.

Overall, the report concludes that:

The MoD's acknowledgement of the potential value of using the Multifunctional Advanced Data Link (MADL) for secure communications

between the F-35 and legacy aircraft is welcome. Without such a link and translation node, the UK will be underusing one of the key capabilities of the F-35 and we recommend that the MoD make provision for the procurement of a gateway translation node for MADL-based F-35 to Typhoon communication in the next Equipment Plan.

The broadband capacity on the Queen Elizabeth carriers will need to be beyond the reported limit of 8 megabits, and, in all likelihood, in excess of the 32 megabits currently available on the USS America, if the potential benefits of the F-35 to the UK's future carrier strike capabilities are to be realised.

The assurances from Lockheed Martin and the MoD about the rigorous level of cyber-testing of the ALIS software are welcome, as is the assurance from Lockheed Martin that the UK will have complete and unfettered use of the software for the sovereign operation of our F-35 fleet.

However, we ask for greater clarity from Lockheed Martin on the level of protection in place for the technical data gathered by ALIS in relation to the UK's F-35 fleet, including whether this data falls within the US Government's 'unlimited rights license'.

The MoD's failure to provide adequate cost estimates for its procurement of the F-35, either on an overall programme basis or on a per-aircraft basis, is wholly unsatisfactory and this unacceptable lack of transparency risks undermining public confidence in the programme. We recommend that the Department provides us with the 'rough orders of magnitude' it claims to possess for the total costs of the programme beyond 2026/7.

The F-35 has clearly experienced a number of software and hardware problems during its development phase, as might be expected from a project of this scale and technical complexity.

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However, The Times's investigation has provided cause for concern and these concerns were not alleviated by the disappointing nature of the initial responses from Lockheed Martin and the MoD.

During our inquiry, we received a number of assurances from the Government and Lockheed Martin that the issues with the programme that have been previously identified either have been, or are in the process of being, resolved.

For the time being, we are willing to accept these assurances.

The F-35 is a major investment in defence capability for the UK and we want it to succeed and become the cornerstone of a new and effective strike capability for this country. However, it is precisely because this project is so important that it must be subjected to the closest possible scrutiny.

We, therefore, recommend that the MoD provide the Committee with six-monthly updates on the programme, detailing the progress made in addressing the issues that have been previously identified, as well as any future problems. We also believe that these updates should include information on the ongoing cost of the programme."

## Ben gets the best of both worlds

Ben Lolley works in Projects and Programme Delivery (PPD) at the Headquarters of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation at Sutton Coldfield. He is responsible for developing DIO's capital projects delivery processes and managing a team that provides a number of project support functions such as IT, business intelligence and training. He has been a Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve Media Operations for the last 12 months.

In my Reserve role I provide media and communications expertise, on behalf of the Navy, to warships, land units and headquarters, alongside my regular service colleagues, on exercises and operations both at home and overseas.

*Ben Lolley, right, on the upper deck of the Danish warship HDMS Absalon. [Crown Copyright]*

I first considered joining the Reserve Forces not long after I joined DIO in February 2016. I had not long left the RAF and was beginning to miss the camaraderie, adventure and other opportunities that only the military provides.

Having served in the RAF for just shy of eight years I decided that I wanted to try something a little different so I began to do some research on the other Forces.

From the start I naturally gravitated more toward the Navy (although I'm not sure why as I'd never been to sea!!!). I decided to approach some of my former Navy colleagues to try and get a sense of whether it was really for me... After hearing story after story about life as a 'Matelot', including a number of 'dits' about epic 'Runs Ashore', I was hooked, and decided to pursue my second military career.

A few months later – I had a new uniform, a new cap badge, and a new ID card; herein commenced my Naval career!



The past 12 months have been filled with non-stop amazing experiences. I have been lucky enough to set foot on HMS Queen Elizabeth, have been to sea on numerous warships from coalition nations, have been to Cyprus to support a large weapons training exercise and will



shortly be heading off to the Gulf for two months in support of maritime security operations. Every time I put on the uniform I see and learn something new; I can honestly say it's one of the best decisions I've ever made.

*Ben in a Spanish Navy 'Seahawk' helicopter flying over two ships being replenished at sea. [Crown Copyright]*

Being in the RNR allows me to see what we do in DIO from multiple perspectives; I can understand and justify issues we sometimes face when managing and delivering across the Defence estate, but can also understand the needs of the from line command (FLC) customer – especially when that need impacts on people or capabilities. I use this perspective to not only aid my own decision making, but also to assist those around me that may not have had the exposure I have had to the forces.

Above this, the unique leadership opportunities that the Reserve Forces present allow me to develop my

management style at work so that I can operate better under pressure, whilst more effectively balancing the needs of a task, my team as a whole and my team as individuals.

I am also fortunate enough to currently be DIO's Reserve Forces Advocate. Reserve Forces Advocates were established earlier this year to provide a focal point within the organisation for DIO staff to ask questions about life as a reservist, to learn about recruitment processes and to ask more general questions about the forces.

I want to create a network of DIO staff that are interested in joining the reserves, as well as those that are already serving reservists, in order to encourage people to ask questions about our Reserve Forces and to share individual experiences. If you fit either of those categories and would like to know more or get involved then please get in touch at [DIOReserveForcesAdvocate@mod.uk](mailto:DIOReserveForcesAdvocate@mod.uk)

## Five People and a Pigeon Who Reported on the D-Day Landings

By: Amanda Mason, The Imperial War Museum

THE SECOND WORLD WAR was the most extensively reported conflict in history. By late 1944, the press camp at Supreme Allied Headquarters in France had 1,000 correspondents who filed three million words each week.

News organisations had been preparing for the invasion of occupied Europe well before D-Day. The BBC set up a specialist War Reporting Unit in 1943 to train and organise its reporters for what was expected to be the most significant campaign of the war to date.

Reporting on D-Day and the campaign in north-west Europe offered an unprecedented opportunity for correspondents. But it was not without risk. Amongst those killed were the BBC's Kent Stevenson, who died while reporting on a raid over northwest Germany two weeks after D-Day, and Guy Byam, who was killed in a US Air Force raid over Berlin on 3 February 1945.

### Richard Dimbleby - the BBC's main reporter on D-Day



*Richard Dimbleby interviewing members of the Army Film and Photograph Unit (AFPU) in North Africa in June 1942*

Richard Dimbleby led the team of BBC war correspondents reporting D-Day and the liberation of north-west Europe. He was present at the crossing of the Rhine and was the first correspondent to enter Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. In 1939, he had been sent out to France with the British Expeditionary Force as the BBC's first-ever war correspondent. He also reported the war in the Middle East. This photograph shows him interviewing members of the Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU) in North Africa in June 1942. **Martha Gellhorn - D-Day Stowaway**

Martha Gellhorn did not have official permission to report the D-Day landings as her then husband, Ernest Hemingway, was chosen ahead of her to cover the landings for Collier's magazine.

*Martha Gellhorn with troops at Cassino in February 1944.*

However, on 5 June she managed to get on board a hospital ship and hid overnight in a lavatory. On D-Day itself she saw the casualties being brought on board and later went ashore with the ambulance teams. Gellhorn had previously covered the war in Italy and this photograph shows her with troops at Cassino in February 1944.



### RAF pigeon Gustave - brought back first Reuters Despatch on D-Day

During the Second World War, pigeons were widely used for carrying messages by the Army, the RAF and the Civil Defence Services. RAF aircrew carried homing pigeons on board their aircraft so that if they had to ditch in the sea, the pigeon could fly back to base with their

location. Homing pigeons were also used to carry other urgent messages. Gustave - the subject of this newsreel film - carried back the first despatch for news agency Reuters on D-Day. Another pigeon - Duke of Normandy - brought back the first message on D-Day from British airborne forces.

### Edward Ardizzone - a war artist in Normandy

War Artists also made an important contribution to recording events in June 1944. Edward Ardizzone accompanied troops crossing over to France in a landing craft one week after D-Day - an experience he recorded in this drawing.

#### *At Sea on an LCI, 1944, by Edward Ardizzone*

Ardizzone was one of the most prolific war artists of the Second World War, producing over 400 works. He covered the British Expeditionary Force in France, the London Blitz, campaigns in North Africa, Sicily and Italy, and north-west Europe.



### Howard Marshall - broadcast from the D-Day beaches

Howard Marshall was another senior BBC journalist to cover the Normandy Landings. Famous for his cricket commentaries, Marshall was a contemporary of Richard Dimbleby at the BBC and served as their Director of War Reporting from 1943 to 1945.

On D-Day, he accompanied the British Second Army. The reports from Marshall and the BBC's other correspondents in the field were broadcast on the iconic 'War Report' programme. By May 1945, the BBC had broadcast some 235 War Reports, comprising more than 1,500 despatches.

### Bert Hardy - Picture Post photographer with the AFPU

The Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU) was set up in 1941 to produce an official record of the British Army's role during the war. Many members of the AFPU had been press photographers or cameramen in peacetime.

A new section of the AFPU - No. 5 - was formed on 15 April 1944 specifically to prepare for the landings in Normandy. Nine officers and 72 other ranks, including 39 sergeant cameramen and photographers, were recruited.

These included Picture Post photographer Bert Hardy, who took the photograph shown here of Royal Engineers embarked for the Normandy beaches



# Censorship and propaganda: The BBC's independence is tested

THE SECOND WORLD WAR proved to be a tough test of the BBC's independence. At times the Government and the military wanted to use the BBC to counter crude propaganda from the Nazis, and there was talk in Westminster of taking over the BBC.

The temptation to interfere was greatest in the early days of the war, when the Government was confronted with the startling success of William Joyce, known as 'Lord Haw-Haw' to the millions of British listeners who tuned to Radio Hamburg. Through the first months of the war - the 'phoney war', in which no direct threat to the UK was evident - Haw Haw's humorous take on Britain and the British proved light relief from the dull diet of the Home Service.

But the Corporation argued that to put out clumsy rebuttals at the behest of Government would dignify Haw-Haw's propaganda, and undermine the trust of the audience. In the long run, a trusted news source for audiences at home and abroad would be a more potent weapon.

In fact, the Government had recognised this long before hostilities broke out. Throughout the 1930s, as the Nazi threat was looming over Europe, then Director-General John Reith was in secret discussion with the Cabinet over broadcasting arrangements in the event of war.

It was agreed that the BBC should seek to report events truthfully and accurately, but not in such detail as to endanger the civilian population or jeopardise operations.

The result was that the BBC did report setbacks as well as successes. It would say, for instance, that bombs had fallen and that there were casualties. But precise number of casualties and the location and time of a bombing would often be withheld, so that the enemy would not know which of its missions had found the target.

But in practice, the BBC and the Government did not always see eye to eye in squaring what the nation needed to know with what the Ministry of Information felt should be concealed, and at times the relationship was difficult. Frederick Ogilvie, who had succeeded John Reith as Director-General in 1939, found the pressure too great, and he resigned early in 1942.

Listening to BBC broadcasts (or any other banned broadcasts) in occupied countries was often punishable by death. In Poland it was illegal to even possess a radio. For these audiences the BBC broadcast a special news service in Morse code, so that sympathisers could publish the reports in their illegal newspapers.

The correspondents were equally frustrated. Frank Gillard's report of the futile assault at Dieppe in 1942, when more than 3,000 Canadian troops were killed, wounded or captured, was heavily censored, to his life-long disgust.

And after the German surrender in 1945, Richard Dimbleby, above, as a war correspondent, threatened to quit if the BBC did not put out his report on the horrors of Belsen.



As it was, the Corporation delayed the broadcast for a day while it considered the impact that such stark revelations about the Holocaust would have at home and abroad.

In many ways the Second World War made the BBC. The fact that for decades after the war people in the Iron Curtain countries risked their lives to listen to the BBC is testimony to the reputation for integrity that it built up in the face of the Nazi threat.

## Guy Byam, the BBC's lost reporter

By: Vincent Dowd, BBC World Service

GUY BYAM was one of two BBC news correspondents who lost their lives on active duty in World War Two. Seventy years on, Michele Byam still hopes to learn more about the father she never knew. With great care Michele Byam hands me a scrapbook. The pages are large and yellowed and not wholly intact.

Letters and invitations and little black and white snaps trace the career of the young Guy ByamCorstiaens of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. (Later, broadcasting on the BBC, he would be Guy Byam.) The scrapbook was compiled by his mother.

I unfold two telegrams, each dated 14 November 1940. It was nine days after HMS Jervis Bay, the armed merchant cruiser on which Byam was serving, had been destroyed by German fire in the north Atlantic.

By then his mother must have been losing hope of ever seeing Guy again. It's impossible to say which message arrived first at the small hotel in west London where she was staying.

It may have been the official Post Office Telegram, which mangled the family name: HAPPY TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON SUB-LIEUT G BRYON-CORSTIAELS IS SAFE = REGISTRAR SEAMEN. Or the even briefer Western Union Cablegram, complete with censor's stamp, which Guy himself had sent: GOT A DUCKING BUT SAFE AND WELL HOME SOON

Guy's casual tone disguised the horrors he'd faced. Of the 254 men on the Jervis Bay only 68 survived. He lost the sight of one eye, escaping death by swimming through oil to his Swedish rescuers. Guy Byam



was invalided out. At 22 he needed a career. He went first to the engineering company Kryn and Lahy in Letchworth, Hertfordshire - but his heart was set on journalism.

It was that ambition to report which led to his death covering an air-raid on Berlin.

"My father died when I was a few months old," explains Michele Byam. "I don't recall there being photographs of him at home but my mother was known as Nan Byam when she worked for the BBC

and I've always used the surname in my publishing career. Then in 1948 my mother married a radio announcer who went on to become well-known on TV - the newsreader Robert Dougall.

"I remember at eight or nine wondering if my father might one day just walk in. It seemed quite possible because his body was never found. It sounds strange but I imagine post-war many people had similar thoughts.

"In later life I started to want to know more about Guy Byam - and the fact he'd been a BBC war correspondent gave me a place to start. I also think it's wrong that he and Kent Stevenson, who also died, are almost entirely forgotten. They gave their lives for journalism. "Kent Stevenson

The other BBC correspondent who died on active duty in WW2 was Kent Stevenson, killed on 22 June 1944. He was 36. Like Byam, he had been reporting on an air-raid over Germany. He was in an RAF bomber of 49 Squadron which took off from RAF Fiskerton in Lincolnshire as part of an attack on an oil refinery near Cologne. The Lancaster he was in was one of a number which did not return. His grave is in the Rheinberg war cemetery.

The BBC archives near Reading hold enough of Guy's personnel files to give an insight into the two-and-a-half years he spent with the corporation. He joined the BBC in November 1942 as a sub-editor in the corporation's French Service at a salary of £8 a week. By April 1944 Guy had joined the War Reporting Unit, set up to cover the invasion of Europe. His annual salary was now £750. A memo explaining the raise was sadly prescient:

"He is occupied in the invasion set-up and is in fact doing what will undoubtedly be the most dangerous and may be the most specialised of all the jobs, namely airborne..." Guy could have a short fuse. His final annual report reads:

"Corstiaens has done some excellent work for the War Reporting Unit. But he is temperamental and this sometimes affects his good relations with the departments.

"It must be recognised however that this condition is probably due to the pressures which the period since D-Day have imposed on him and is not necessarily a permanent characteristic. He is exceptionally keen and has been responsible for some outstanding broadcasts."

A handful of recordings survive. Probably the most familiar is his report on D-Day describing parachuting on to French soil with Britain's 6th Airborne Division. In the 1980s Michele heard it when the BBC issued an album of WW2 material.

"I remember thinking it sounded slightly literary, even over-dramatic. But perhaps that's unfair - styles change and possibly he was ahead of his time. Reporters like my father and Richard Dimbleby and the others were working in extraordinary circumstances. And it was one of the things which made me want to learn more about him.



"I went to Broadcasting House and sat in a cubicle and I listened to everything they had of his broadcasts. Obviously, there's an emotion listening to the voice of a parent you never knew."

There is a photograph of Guy and fellow correspondent Stanley Maxted, also sitting in Broadcasting House. They are talking to the press after their return from the Battle of Arnhem in late September 1944. They both look exactly the way the public wants war correspondents to look - intense and exhausted.

But the scrapbook also contains another photograph, printed in the Radio Times a few weeks before the photo with Maxted was taken. It foreshadows Guy's death on 3 February 1945.

Everyone is beaming as the King and Queen visit RAF Thurleigh near Bedford a month after D-Day, accompanied by the 18-year-old Princess Elizabeth. The station had been passed over to the US 306th Bomb Group. Guy was there to witness the renaming

of an American B-17 as the Rose of York, a ceremony carried out by the princess.

In one picture he stands looking on through dark glasses, probably because of his damaged eye. Was it from this encounter with the American Air Force that the unusual idea emerged of sending a BBC reporter on a US bombing raid over Germany the following year?

On 3 February 1945 Guy and the nine-man American crew of the Rose of York took part in a large daylight raid on Berlin. Guy was recording to disc on one of the BBC's so-called midget recorders of the era, which resembled heavy record-players.

It's thought German anti-aircraft guns knocked out two of the aircraft's engines. The pilot radioed that he hoped to get back to Britain but the Rose of York and the men in it were never seen again. It's likely they crashed into the North Sea. This time there was to be no longed-for telegram. No "got a ducking but safe and well".

"You're not going to think the same things as an eight-year-old as 60 years later," says Michele. But I have always been aware of missing him, or of not having known him.

"I'm lucky that because he was in broadcasting there are a few extra reminders of my father. Even if I put aside being his only child I do think he had a very interesting war. So, I'd like a few more people to know who Guy Byam was and what he did."

## Global press freedom plunges to worst level this century

Study finds freedom of expression at lowest point since 2000 with reporters facing violence, prosecution and financial rout in dozens of countries, writes Graham Ruddick, right, the Guardian's Media Editor.

MEDIA FREEDOM around the world has fallen to the lowest level for at least a decade, according to a study that shows journalists are threatened by government censorship, organised crime and commercial pressures caused by the growth of the internet.

Turkey has experienced the biggest decline in freedom of speech over the past decade but Brazil, Burundi, Egypt, Poland, Venezuela and Bangladesh have also had a disturbing decline in the diversity and independence of the media, according to the report.

"For the first time, we have a comprehensive and holistic overview of the state of freedom of expression and information around the world," said Thomas Hughes, the executive director of Article 19, the freedom of expression campaign group, which produced the report in conjunction with V-Dem, a political and social database.

"Unfortunately, our findings show that freedom of expression is under attack in democracies as well as authoritarian regimes."

The report's authors measured freedom of expression in 172 countries between 2006 and 2016 through a metric they have described as the Expression Agenda. This is based on 32 social and political indicators such as media bias and corruption, internet censorship, access to justice, harassment of journalists, and equality for social classes and genders.

Hughes, pictured right, said journalists were threatened by intimidation, prosecution and even murder in some parts of the world; there were 426 attacks against journalists and media outlets in Mexico in 2016 alone.



He believes the UK was responsible for one of the most draconian surveillance legislation in the form of the Investigatory Powers Act, which “offers a template for authoritarian regimes and seriously undermining the rights of its citizens to privacy and freedom of expression”.

The freedom of the media globally is further threatened by the rise of the internet because online content is being controlled by a handful of internet companies whose processes “lack transparency”, commercial pressure on news providers has led to redundancies and cuts in investment, and the “vast majority of countries”, including China, restrict access to a range of websites.

The report found that 259 journalists were jailed last year and 79 were killed. Areas of concern include the vulnerability of journalists reporting on or criticising the “war on drugs” in the Philippines, Mexico and Honduras, and intimidation and malicious charges against opposing voices to the Erdoğan regime in Turkey.

As of April, this year, 152 Turkish journalists were in prison, according to the opposition. More than 170 media organisations have been shut down since last year’s coup, including newspapers, websites, TV stations and news agencies, and 2,500 journalists have been laid off.

On a brighter note, Article 19 said there were improvements in countries including Tunisia, Sri Lanka and Nepal, and also praised the introduction of freedom of information laws in 119 countries.

Another group, the Committee to Protect Journalists, warned there has “never been a more dangerous time to be a journalist”. It said Donald Trump’s attacks on the “fake news” media in the US was sending a message to authoritarian leaders that it is acceptable to crack down on the press, pointing to recent criticism of CNN by the Egyptian government for its coverage of the terrorist attack on a mosque in Sinai.

Robert Mahoney, the deputy executive director of the CPJ, said: “The United States has traditionally been a beacon of press freedom and defender of journalists but a barrage of antipress rhetoric from President Trump undermines the role of the press in a democracy and potentially endangers journalists. “Labelling reporting you don’t like as ‘fake news’ sends a signal to authoritarian leaders globally that it’s OK to crack down on the press. It did not take the Egyptian foreign ministry long to seize on Trump’s attack on CNN International this month to try to draw attention away from the message to the messenger.”

The head of the BBC World Service – the biggest international news broadcaster – warned that the rise of new economic powerhouses that do not fully support freedom of expression would threaten media freedom in the 21st century.

Francesca Unsworth, right, said: “We are dealing with a world I don’t think buys into enlightenment values of freedom of expression as part of economic development.”



“We see the rise of the economic powerhouses of the far east – China, Vietnam – which don’t have the values of freedom of expression going along with economic development. So, I think that is a real problem because if the 21st century belongs to those economies then that is going to shape the future of the world.”

Unsworth said China was trying to spread its influence in Africa and the Caribbean by investing in the local media alongside vast spending on improving infrastructure. “What the Chinese have seen is that alongside putting in a load of investment in infrastructure they also need to spend money on the media landscape in those areas,” she said.

“So, they have invested in partnerships with television and media companies in Africa and the Caribbean. It is a way of them getting a foothold in those countries in order to have some kind of influence on the agenda there.”

BBC World Service journalists face particular pressure in Iran over the London-based Persian service. Iranian authorities have frozen the assets of at least 152 BBC Persian journalists and former contributors – preventing them from conducting financial transactions or selling properties in their homeland – and summoned family members of BBC staff who live in the country for questioning. The BBC has appealed to the United Nations about the conduct of the Iranian government.



Father Kevin Bell, Vicar of All Hallows Church in Twickenham is the Pen & Sword Club’s Chaplain. His article was accepted for publication in the British Army Review as he finished a long and distinguished career with the Royal Army Chaplain’s Department

## The British Soldier: listening to their stories and listening to their silences.....

THE MEDIA HAS GROWN USED to seeing the British Soldier in all political weathers. They have scored his performance, counted his gains, weighed his losses and sifted his character. Changes of uniform have caught their eye. Advances in equipment have raised questions of cost, safety and suitability. Brave days have brought genuine admiration. Shameful days have brought heartfelt consternation.

Whenever he is “Up Against it” the pendulum of popular support swings in behind him. In between the wars, he binds his wounds and remembers, as the pendulum swings away, to his sadness and dismay. At those times comrades become his constant consolation. I mean the gloriously alive and the gloriously dead.

I am concerned to shed some light on who and what he is. Rather than what he is often perceived to be. I hope that by coming to his assistance in this way others may better know and love the British Soldier. My word is far from final. My opinion is my own. I cannot claim any special relationship or insight.

I can speak from the experience of over 25 years as an army chaplain. I want to give something back. I am about to retire through the barrack gate. I must say "Thank you" before it is too late. Perhaps the best way to achieve this is to say a little about why I became a military chaplain and why I stayed for so long.

**Nudges:** Various experiences moved me towards the day I became a Chaplain in the British Army. In 1974 I joined the West Midlands Police. I was only sixteen. In November that year I heard evening thunder but saw no storm. The IRA had bombed Birmingham and my hometown would never feel the same. Looking back, I realize that other things were changing. I had put on a uniform just in time to see the last of the war generation beginning to retire from police service. In those days we wore tunics and helmets. In several cases, medal ribbons were clearly visibly.

Those who wore them were tight lipped about where they had been and what they knew. One was a Lancaster bomber pilot. Another had survived the Burma Railway. There were younger men with a single purple ribbon for service in Northern Ireland.

In 1980 I left the police and studied in Salisbury to become a priest. The Falklands War took off. In College strong opinions were rehearsed. Yet the ones who were most critical were the same ones who went to Salisbury Plain to watch the military rehearse and then down to the coast to wave off the Task Force Fleet?

I was ordained in 1983. The next few years brought many encounters with former soldiers of all ages. My main effort was parish ministry but for nearly two years I served one day per week as a hospice chaplain. One encounter more than any other nudged me, towards becoming an army chaplain. My future wife was one of the nurses. I turned up one day in 1988 and some visitors were at the bedside of a new elderly patient. I agreed to visit the other wards and come back when he was alone.

Eventually I returned and asked if I could sit beside him. "Of course, you can Padre: be my guest". Only an old soldier would call me that. Yet another nudge from God!

We talked and I felt strangely drawn to him. I asked him about his military life. He had been an RSM in the Great War and was called up as Reservist in the second war, also as an RSM. "That really annoyed the Regulars." He said, "Because we delayed their promotions".

I asked him to tell me something that I would not find in books. He explained that in the First War rifles would be turned upside down and driven with their bayonets into the muddy ground. Helmets would then be put on top of the rifle butt to show where the wounded soldier lay. He said you could look out and see different helmets: theirs and ours. When a lull in the fighting happened then stretcher-bearers would go out into No-man's-land and bring in the wounded. He paused and the look in his eyes grew distant. Only then did he continue.

He said how one day they got all the lads together ready for a big battle. It was the first day they were going to use a new secret weapon that would win the war. It was a foggy misty day. Suddenly these new weapons rolled out. He said the men were terrified and some were ready to run. "We had to make the crews get out so the lads could see and understand that they were on our side".



Next the battle commenced and the tanks rolled towards the enemy disappearing out of sight in the fog. “Suddenly I could hear a terrible sound. It was a crunching sound and the screaming of men. I realized the tanks were crushing the upturned rifles and killing our own wounded. I have never forgotten that sound. Every week of my life since then I have woken from my nightmare to the sound of their screams”.

I was reduced to respectful mournful silence. Then he piped up. “Do you mind if I say something to you Padre?” I replied, “No, go ahead”.

He continued. “I think you are very brave.” I was stunned. “I am sorry.” I said. “I have to disagree. Why on earth do you think I am brave?” His reply has stayed with me ever since:

“I am an old soldier. I am not afraid to go into battle. I would go in the morning. I have been trained and I know what to do. To me this Cancer Ward is a battlefield. I have not been trained. I don’t know how to fight it and I am scared. You don’t have to be here and yet you have come onto this battlefield to be with me. That’s why I think you are brave”.

We said some final things and I promised to pray for him. When I came back next week his bed was empty. I checked with my wife and she confirmed that his last battle was over. I walked out of the building only to have an encounter with another old soldier.

“Excuse me Padre I am with the Arnhem Veterans Association would you like to be our chaplain or can you, recommend somebody? It’s just that our old Padre has died.” In that moment I made my decision: “OK God, I give in.”



**Courage:** The bravery shown in the Great War and at Arnhem was confirmed in the Falklands. In recent years a new generation have displayed that same courage in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet all these generations are like that RSM in the hospice. He never described himself as man of courage. He did not consider himself brave. He only counted himself as a soldier who had been well trained and knew what to do. He relied on his comrades and not just on himself. He was there for them just as much as they were there for him. How starkly this contrasts with contestants on the TV series The Apprentice.

There is rarely any hint of such humility or sense of simply doing ones’ job. Instead we see young adults who are largely inexperienced human beings yet see themselves as God’s gift to the planet and are amazed that Lord Sugar has coped without them until now.

**Compassion:** Early in my service I befriended a chaplain who served in the first Gulf War. To my ears his story was an unusual one. He was a key member of the Grave Registration Team. Being so new I asked him what this meant. Basically, his role kicked in after the Cease Fire. He wore a butcher’s apron and had a team of soldiers working with him. They used a bulldozer to dig ditches and it was their job to respectfully find and bury the enemy dead. He told me how moved his soldiers were when they found personal effects among the bodies of their enemy. He mentioned photographs in particular.

He was struck by the respect and humanity that they showed. He said they compiled records marking the graves with eight figure grid references and satellite markers. Apparently when the harrowing task was over the information was sent via diplomatic means to Iraq. His soldiers found it hard to accept that the Iraqi authorities never recovered those bodies. They found it

unacceptable that Saddam Hussein would not bring home the men that had died for him. I asked this chaplain how he responded to such difficult questions from his soldiers: "I simply told them that that is the difference between their army and ours. We care about our soldiers."

**Commitment:** In the army we rightly pride ourselves on being available for service on a 24/7 basis. This commitment in principle can lead to the ultimate sacrifice at any time and in any place. Sadly, during my time, the principle has become practice, for hundreds killed, and many more with life changing injuries. The cost to their loved ones, in my view, cannot be weighed.

This commitment has consequences little understood by those outside the military community. It fosters and demands a way of life. I mean the army dictates every aspect of a soldier's life, both on and off duty. This was especially so when I first joined up. Indeed, where you live, who you meet, what you do, who your friends are, were clearly defined.

One could live in Germany for years and not learn any of the language because we lived in a big bubble called the army. As St Paul remarked. "The soldier's only concern is to please his Commanding Officer and he does not get involved in civilian affairs".

However, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Military threat, there came, the 'Peace Dividend'. This translated into Government cutbacks of the Armed Forces on a grand scale. This process was known as 'Options for Change'. By the end of that cull I detected a change in attitude of those who remained. The Army had moved from being a way of life, and was now closer to the civilian attitude of doing a job and booking off. It was still a 24/7 Commitment but it felt more like 9 to 5. Basically, people in uniform felt somewhat betrayed. In many cases, the manner in which the news was broken to individuals made their dismissal a bitter experience.

We have since entered another cull of the army and this latest process is still not fully complete. I believe that lessons have been learned and the news is broken with greater compassion and after-care. Nonetheless, the ferocious close quarter battles that many of our soldiers have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan have been closer to the battles of the Second War than the tit-for-tat nastiness of Irish

Terrorism. With an amateur eye to history, I expect that those demobbed after Waterloo, had reason for resentment and cynicism. It is all the more remarkable then that the British soldier puts up, shuts up and get on with job in hand.

Likewise, with the Veteran, who may lose his way and end up sleeping rough, or stockpile some bitterness and regret, to share with his mates down the pub. Yet, remains immensely proud of the uniform that was worn and the medals that were earned. In all this we must not forget the Reservist soldier who has earned medals, bled and died or been wounded. They are closer to civilian life than the Regular soldier and vice versa. Indeed, they can act as intermediary and interpreter, in the work place, on a Remembrance Parade, or down the pub. Churchill was right to call the Reservist, "Twice the Citizen".



**Character:** The soldier may be buoyed up by public support. Indeed, few of us are indifferent to the good opinion of others. What actor would go on stage night after night with poor reviews and small audiences? That would take massive maturity and artistic integrity. Yet young men

mature quickly in war. They go on night after night. They are too busy to read reviews and there is rarely an audience. The difference being that their performance is no act.

When a veteran actor reads critical or even hostile reviews then feelings of irritation and hurt may privately surface. Friends and fellow professionals may reassure that the best thing to do is to carry on. In the cold light of day, the Theatre Critic may wield a skilful pen but most have never been an actor. The same is true of the Food Critic who has never been a Chef. To my mind this is equally true of the journalist or the politician who has never worn a uniform. It is easy to sit in judgment on the character and conduct of the soldier.

I call this white-gloved or armchair Ethics. I mean people with clean hands castigating the soldier for having dirty hands. Seemingly unaware they are only kept clean by the willingness of others to get dirty. Charles M Province is a US Army Veteran and some time ago expressed this truth most powerfully:

“It is the Soldier, not the minister. Who has given us freedom of religion. It is the Soldier, not the reporter<sup>SEP</sup> Who has given us freedom of the press. It is the Soldier, not the poet Who has given us freedom of speech. It is the Soldier, not the campus organiser “Who has given us freedom to protest. It is the Soldier, not the lawyer Who has given us the right to a fair trial. It is the Soldier, not the politician<sup>SEP</sup> Who has given us the right to vote. It is the Soldier who salutes the flag, who serves beneath the flag, and whose coffin is draped by the flag, who allows the protester to burn the flag.”

**Humility:** The army has six Core Values - Courage, Discipline, Respect for Others, Integrity, Loyalty and Selfless-Commitment- that are taught from Basic Training. These are re-enforced throughout the years of military service. They apply in peace and war. They all imply a seventh

Or, “I was only doing my job”. Or my favourite, when one recipient of a bravery medal was asked what it meant to him: “I would hand it in just to get back the lads we lost”.

So ingrained is this humility and team spirit, that soldiers of all ranks, will often sell themselves short, and struggle to get work on leaving the army. On their CV but especially at interview, they will often say, “We did this” or “We did that”. Instead of: “I did this” or “I did that”. How true it is that big things can hang on little words. I sometimes think that such values are counter-cultural in the modern world. The army seems a relic and a remnant of a world long disappeared. It is now commonplace to broadcast oneself on Twitter, Facebook and Linked-In, with every mention of “I” and little mention of “We”.

Nonetheless, the military do not have a monopoly on these values. Indeed, the policeman, the hospice nurse, or the child caring for a sick parent often display the Core Values of the British Army, in which they have never served. Yet the serving soldier and the veteran do still in my view have something special to share with society at large and if they will not talk about it, then others should, even people like me.

**Finally:** Soldiers prefer others to tell their story, even if others get it wrong. Soldiers are more concerned about the stories they share with their comrades. Veterans are just the same in my experience. It is important then for historians, politicians, authors and artists, to get alongside soldiers and just listen, to those stories.

I mean the ones that can be overheard. However, it is what soldiers do not say that can sometimes be heard in the silence, on Remembrance Sunday, in the pub or on the Cancer Ward. Indeed, when soldiers and veterans fall silent, like that RSM in the hospice, there is often a story that is not being told. I was lucky enough to have heard his story all those years ago. I have been equally lucky, to have been with soldiers for nearly 26 years, listening to their stories and listening to their silence. What I have absorbed recently led me to write a poem, PARADE, for soldiers and veterans alike. Please read the left-hand column first and then the right-hand side:

The walls of England

Stay with love

Are flesh and bone!

That never came home

To Gold and Scarlet  
Their hearts are sown  
Comrades trusted  
With their name  
Friendships form  
Their pride and pain  
They have been to places  
Where no one goes  
Medals shine  
From nightmare holes  
Memories march  
No more afraid  
Apprentices  
Who learned their trade!  
This spectacle  
Shows how it's done  
Since Waterloo  
When Freedom won  
The Union Flag  
Is still held high  
Streaks of blood  
Through English sky  
Colours guarding  
Crown and Sword  
Beasts and men  
Take history forward  
Ghosts of Empire  
On parade  
Saluting Honours  
For which they paid  
The wind is full  
old and new  
The soul enjoys  
Its own, curfew

Befriend the heart  
Forever alone  
Be quick to sniff  
The spine of straw  
Learn to live  
Through peace and war  
Lead follow or  
Get out of the way  
These men have bought  
Your brand-new day  
See the dark light  
In their eye  
Veterans know  
The reason why  
For some they are just  
A steppingstone  
But to me they speak  
Of all things home  
Breaking notes  
On dying breeze  
Because of them  
We stand at ease  
Choose your Creed  
Or none at all  
Build a bridge  
Or build a wall  
Keeping safe  
his land of choice  
Shades of silence  
Where all have voice  
Restless dreams Of  
May seep regret  
But England has promised  
She won't forget...

## The Bomber Command Medal – a postscript.

Pen & Sword Club National Chairman, Major John Boyes – Financial Controller at The Bomber Command Memorial Fund Limited, writes to Scribblings: 'Johnny' Johnson along with many other veteran members of Bomber Command bemoan the fact that there is no 'Bomber Command Medal'. (*Scribblings: December 2017*).

However, they fail to understand the nature of the 'Stars' that were instituted and awarded for the Second World War. All of them were for theatres of operations: 1939-45, Africa, Burma, Pacific, Italy, France and Germany, Atlantic, Arctic and last but not least Air Crew Europe.

Bomber crews were awarded the Air Crew Europe Star for operational flying over Europe from bases in the UK, for a period of two months between 3rd September 1939 and 4th June 1944. From 5 June 1944 the theatre of operations in which the bombers operated was 'France and Germany' and new bomber crews were thus awarded the France and Germany Star.

But the resentment has arisen because this Star was awarded equally to those who came face to face with the enemy, e.g. the bomber crews, but also, for example, those in the rear echelon who maybe never even saw the enemy.

Yes, clasps were awarded in specific instances, 'Battle of Britain' or to identify armies as the 1st or 8th clasps on the Africa Star.

Creating a specific medal for a subdivision of a theatre of operations would therefore be counter to the principles of the Stars, hence the 'Bomber Command' clasp and not a Star. It is really as simple – or as complicated – as that.

In addition, eligibility for the Stars was somewhat complex and this adds a further layer of potential problems. And don't imagine that there are not other veterans who believe that what they did deserves a medal but their voice is not quite so prominent as that of the bomber veterans who have, albeit deservedly, received much publicity in recent years.



## Goodbye 2017...when the PR battle was lost!

Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics - AKA 2017 in Review: Defence Blogger, Sir Humphrey hits the nail on the head.

AS 2017 DRAWS TO A CLOSE, it is a good time to take stock on the state of Defence, and in particular whether 2107 was 'the year of the Royal Navy'. The headlines in December focused on the perceived lack of Royal Navy ships overseas, with outbreaks of near hysteria among some commentators that the UK would somehow lose influence because of not having an escort ship deployed somewhere outside of home waters. This period perhaps summed up a year where Defence felt like it was on the back foot against often ill-founded criticism.



For the MOD 2017 has been a year in which much was promised, commitments were kept, orders were made, but somehow the public relations battle was lost. On the positive side the UK throughout the year continued to demonstrate its global reach, presence and capability. As the MOD reminded us over Christmas there will be thousands of British personnel deployed on 25 live operations in 30 countries.

There are UK assets deployed right now on every continent on earth, conducting complex and difficult work. Only two other countries have a similar global footprint – the United States and France.

The year has also shown that Defence retains the ability to deploy globally at very short notice to respond to a crisis, highlighting the investment in strategic airlift and logistics as key enablers. The response to Hurricane Irma (known as OP RUMAN) was a brilliant example of the sheer flexibility of the UK – an astonishingly fast deployment of significant capability to bring lifesaving equipment to bear and which was noticeably faster than any other country.

More widely the armed forces have worked tirelessly in support of a diverse and often hugely complex range of tasks. The ongoing operations in the Middle East, supporting operations in the Med and the standing commitments in the South Atlantic, Brunei, Diego Garcia, Cyprus, Gibraltar and so on have all been carried out with enormous professionalism. In home waters there has been continued delivery of long standing commitments ranging from fishery protection to counter terrorism duties.

Defence has had a very good year operationally, delivering without failing across all the continents of the earth. That's not bad going really.

The resource challenge is clear, Defence does not have enough money to do everything that it wants to do without either stopping some things, scrapping some things or deciding to do less than it currently does now. There is a clear resource challenge in the Department, which has led to a defence review barely two years after the last defence review. The findings of this review are reportedly nowhere near ready for decision making, which has left a void that can be filled with stories of leaked options (the 'save the LPD' campaign springs to mind here) and incomplete half-truths designed to influence as well as inform.

This steady drip of leaks from well-placed individuals within the MOD is, frankly, disgraceful. The people who are leaking material to the press are betraying the trust placed on them by the system, and more importantly are potentially having an adverse impact on the reviews outcome.

By trying to influence media, Parliamentarians and others to lobby against proposed cuts, all these people are doing is shifting the focus as to where the cuts go to other areas, threatening different cuts instead. There is no chance that more money will be found, and the ability of the MOD to put together a genuinely balanced force package is restricted by those who want to protect their narrow-vested interests. Humphrey has little time, and plenty of contempt, for those who would do long term harm to the nation to support their short term vested interest.

It is likely that the continued uncertainty on how Defence fares in the SDSR will continue into the new year, with the Prime Minister having to face the difficult choice between listening to the National Security Advisors recommendations, or overruling him and retaining the support of the



backbenches instead. The problem is that the sort of recommendations that will be reached seem likely to involve more spending on intangible but current threats, such as cyber security, counter terrorism and protecting national infrastructure, and less on physical military hardware.

Any reduction in force levels will enrage the back benches, who do not wish to be seen as the party cutting defence – particularly at a time when Labour, led by a committed pacifist is threatening them in the polls. But, is bowing to the backbenches and investing in hardware the right solution for the UK?

There is a school of thought that the MOD is doing badly in the review mainly because it is seemingly unable to articulate its case coherently and relying on leaks and ‘special pleading’ to insist

on more money, without always being able to justify this. The frustration is that every time the MOD looks like it’s getting close to a solution, the same old leaks emerge and suddenly it becomes essential to protect the Loamshires and their mounted troop at all costs

Similarly, there is a sense that Defence relies heavily on pleading for more money without necessarily being able to give a good account of how it is stretching every penny it has to deliver best effect at the moment. The MOD is a well-financed department, and has significant delegated latitude to spend money as it sees fit. It is within the remit of the MOD to move, change and alter spending levels if that is what is needed to deliver a capability. But this may mean closing somewhere, or doing less of something else.

The challenge is every time difficult cuts are mooted, which would free up cash to upgrades, investment and delivery of nice but essential kit that keeps the UK on the top table of global influencers, there is an outpouring of anger as people feel losing front-line capability is a disaster, regardless of whether it is needed to meet UK goals. This challenge will be only be more pronounced as greater investment is needed for enablers like cyber, C4ISTAR and other capability that is hard to explain in measured ways why this will deliver success over things like assault ships or other hardware.

The worry has to be that the longer the MOD continues to expect special treatment, without demonstrating that it is taking really tough decisions, the harder it becomes to make the case for more money. Why reward someone for bad behaviour, when there is no evidence to suggest this will change the problems? There is a strong case to be made for proper funding of Defence and National Security, and the level at the moment feels about right for the threats we as a nation face. There is also an equally strong case to be made that the MOD needs to be given the

room to take hard decisions on capability, locations and operations without it leaking or having their room to manoeuvre restricted by political or media pressure.

## THE MEDIA

At the same time though, Defence needs to make a compelling case for what it is delivering to the UK – sadly it has felt at times this year that the narrative on Defence has been pureed down to a bland mix of baby food, intended for easy digestion and little debate. One only has to look at

the manner in which the Department seems determined to hide from engagement with journalists or more openly, and how short and at times empty official statements are.

The trend seems to sadly be for the 'Defence in the Media' blog to rely increasingly on one or two paragraph rebuttals to stories that have been running for 24-36hrs, and which rely on the same bland lines to take. It is rare to see really effective press rebuttals that destroy factually incorrect stories, or which push the good news story.

There is also a sense that parts of MOD view anyone in Defence who speaks to journalists or the media as contaminated and must be treated with extreme caution. This is ironic given the manner in which some stories in the press are clearly leaked from very senior sources, yet there is a view emerging that the Department, its people and the Media are simply not able to play nicely together at the moment.



There is always a risk when engaging with journalists that you inadvertently betray a story that you shouldn't have, or that one foolish junior says or does something that writes the next day's headline. But if you make it so difficult for people to talk, to the point that it is seen in some areas as almost career ending to be even accidentally in the same location as a journalist, then the ability to influence and help shape good stories is lost. There needs to be a sensible level of engagement, not just in well organised and informative visits, but in interviews at all levels and allowing media to understand how the Department really works.

Bland press releases, heavily controlled access to senior figures and lines to take so turgid that they could be read out by mediaeval inquisitors as an instrument of torture do not make the case for Defence. What is needed is timely, proper and effective engagement, rebuttal and explanation of what is really going on. Frankly Humphrey cannot believe the number of times in the last 6 months that his short article on what is going on hits the streets 6-12hrs before the MOD one.

Paradoxically though, for all the fear of social media, the MOD is getting much better at trusting some of its units to do social media. With the right training, exposure and well-timed tweets, a social media presence can really deliver a huge effect. For example, some of the best Royal Navy feeds this year have been by (in no order), HMS ENTERPRISE, HMS PROTECTOR, HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH and HMS ST ALBANS.

This was because their tweets are interesting, they have great photos, give a really good human dimension to the story and are occasionally very funny. This potent combination means the RN can locally message about what it is doing very effectively.

This was seen to best effect during OP RUMAN, when well-judged tweets by the RAF units on the ground helped quickly shape and impact on the UK public consciousness, highlighting the level of UK presence on the ground, the speed and strength of our response and just how capable the UK armed forces are.

What is essential is that this freedom to tweet continues, and that there is not high-level approval required to send a tweet or image out. There needs to be trust delegated to the lowest possible levels to let units shout out about their amazing work, and more importantly there needs to be a culture of regular tweeting and information sharing – hopefully over time the role of Unit Press Officer as an ‘additional duty’ evolves into a permanent SO3 Influence role that is seen as a full time, highly desirable post to aspire to. Each unit should treat delivery on information on its activities as importantly as it does other training and operations.

Defence must do better at engaging with the media world, and not treat it as something which is an aberration. There are some green shoots of hope at local level, but it remains a depressing picture nationally. The sooner this is tackled, the better for the Department.



## On the news media and the Ministry of Defence...

By: Gareth Corfield, London based magazine journalist Dec 227, 2017

I WAS READING defence blogger Sir Humphrey's end of year roundup post and a couple of points he made about the MoD and its relationship with the media inspired me to give my own perspective on media relations with the MoD. One of things I like about Sir H's blogging is that it gives, if not quite an insider's view given that he's (now) on the outside, certainly a very well informed view that tends to give a sunnier perspective on an otherwise hugely expensive government department.

He writes, of the MoD's relationship with the press through its Defence in the Media 'news coverage we have had' blog: Defence needs to make a compelling case for what it is delivering to the UK – sadly it has felt at times this year that the narrative on Defence has been pureed down to a bland mix of baby food, intended for easy digestion and little debate. One only has to look at the manner in which the Department seems determined to hide from engagement with journalists or more openly, and how short and at times empty official statements are.

The trend seems to sadly be for the 'Defence in the Media' blog to rely increasingly on one or two paragraph rebuttals to stories that have been running for 24-36hrs, and which rely on the same bland lines to take. It is rare to see really effective press rebuttals that destroy factually incorrect stories, or which push the good news story.

This reflects my own experience as a specialist IT trade magazine reporter who happens to write about defence. To give you some perspective, we cover defence because a) there's a ton of fascinating science and tech in it and b) it keeps our existing readers engaged with our coverage beyond the business of making, selling and maintaining computers, servers, associated software and silicon chips, which is our core journalism.

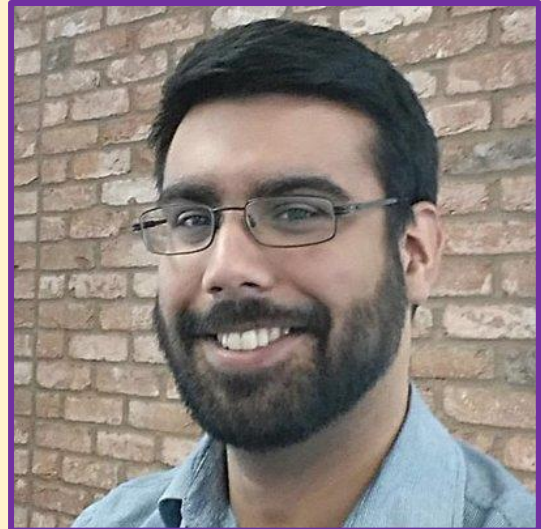
I wouldn't go as far as to say that the MoD hides from engagement with journalists altogether (disclaimer, every now and then they invite me on trips like this which both me and the readers enjoy, the latter via my writeups) but it is difficult to get any engagement at all on routine stories beyond the bland 'line to take' statement that they supply, which is copied to the Defence in the Media blog.

When covering companies and industries, it is normal to build a relationship with key people – execs, PRs, shop floor people, etc – and through that you get a sense of what deserves coverage and what looks shocking but is actually routine business with few ill effects. I talk to

people in companies on my reporting beats on a regular basis, as much to hear their success stories and their personal views of topical issues (it does help shape coverage to chew the fat, y'know!) as I do to put details of negative stories to them before publication in order to get their side of things. Often, that view – both on and off the record – has a big influence on the resulting slant and tone.

I don't get even a hint of that with the MoD, which I think stems partially from fear of things that happened a decade ago and partially from a sense that media coverage is a distasteful evil which it is best not to encourage. Granted, I'm small fry: I'm never going to get the same level of attention on defence matters, either from readers or the MoD, as the Times, Sky News, the Press Association or The Sun.

*'Gaz, the journo', is a London based journalist. Follow on Twitter*



To use the fashionable terms, my current employers are not a key influencer in the defence space. But I see the consequences of this policy of “say little, say nothing” reflected in the national media, particularly on the otherwise unremarkable story about the leak aboard HMS Queen Elizabeth. That got seized on because to the layman (i.e. 90% of defence correspondents) it sounds shocking and significant. People literally didn't know any better.

Sir H, the blogger, has it spot on about what the MoD should be doing to avert that kind of coverage: “There needs to be a sensible level of engagement, not just in well organised and informative visits, but in interviews at all levels and allowing media to understand how the Department really works.” I get the very strong impression that the primary tasking for the MoD's Directorate of Defence Communication is to attract potential recruits and trumpet political objectives (“we've spent £xxx with industry, creating nn,000 jobs!”) while giving the barest of bare minimum attention to news media other than for big set-pieces, such as HMS Queen Elizabeth entering Portsmouth in summer.

This is a unique approach to communications in the 21st Century. Consider how, for example, heads of NHS hospital trusts will talk about budgets and staff resourcing, or how teachers will debate the merits of different approaches to the curriculum. If a serving officer or noncommissioned serviceman ever speaks on TV or writes publicly on a topical issue, I have yet to see it. The nearest we get are things like speeches at Chatham House.

This strange combination of disdain for the press and the bunker mentality has infected the rest of the MoD's interactions with the non-defence world. Have you ever watched a sitting of Parliament's Defence Committee, the group of MPs tasked with scrutinising the MoD's activities and spending? I have. The level of understanding among those MPs is terrifyingly low.

Frankly I feel more informed than them and I'm just a London journalist in his late 20s. Consider also that they're asking fairly simple questions: how much does X cost? When will Y be delivered? What is the impact of Z? The MoD goes out of its way to evade answering those questions and generally gives one-liners in response when it can't dodge. This is not a department that is comfortable with external scrutiny or even a passing glance from the interested public. It betrays a fear of the unknown, an unhealthy fear.

*I could speculate about how this phobia of informed public engagement puts the British defence establishment at a huge disadvantage against Russian disinformation ops, but that's another topic.*

Rounding this unexpectedly long post off, what should be happening is the MoD ought to be fostering public debate and discussion on its approaches to the world's challenges and quantifying what the public gets from the money it puts in. Years ago I read something, which I

now can't find, alluding to 1930s Daily Telegraph coverage of the Navy's annual warship gunnery tests, or something similar. Imagine that today – imagine a national newspaper writing up the results of a major military exercise in a balanced and non-press-release-derived way. You can't, can you?

The media knowledge to write that kind of thing doesn't exist and the willingness to talk about such matters from inside Defence no longer exists either. Things like [this MoD-run Tumblr blog](#) are well-intentioned but completely miss the point that to have public credibility you need to acknowledge that not everything runs 100% perfectly 100% of the time. Warships leak and break down, aircraft go tech, armoured vehicles throw track pins and occasionally people make honest mistakes. That's human and understandable.

If you want an informed public that votes in favour of defence spending and job creation etc, you need a public that understands the key issues in a much more in-depth manner than today's MoD PR machine sets out to achieve. You do that, for the large part, by getting the media on side. You cannot treat the media as a binary "force multiplier or hostile" actor – it can do both, often simultaneously. Make a conscious effort to raise the level and standard at which the MoD communicates with the wider world and the effects may pleasantly surprise those who fear it.

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