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Op OVERLORD staff ride to get to the NATO ‘summit’

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RAF DOMINATE PODIUM AT INTER SERVICES
A summary of the annual Inter Services Triathlon race.

Xtreme aerobatics IN SOUTH AFRICA
The Red Arrows might be the public face of the RAF with their aerobatic sequences, but is the best pilot in the Service an engineer? Phil Burgess recounts his first appearance representing his country at the World Aerobatic Championships

Ex EAGLES NEST
The Eagles Scheme... the opportunities are endless!

RAF MOUNTAINEERING CLIMBING HIGHER
Royal Air Force Mountaineering and Climbing Team in Partnership with The Royal British Legion

CLASH OF THE TITANS
Al Clarke recounts representing the UK in the International Military Gliding Championships in Germany this summer.

Shawbury Cycling Club trip to the Pyrenees, including a TdF stage

An offshore sailing expedition from RAF Akrotiri.


Send us your articles. RAF Active publishes every 3 months, Feb-Apr, May-Jul, Aug-Oct and Nov-Jan. Let us worry about the deadlines, we just want to hear from you. Send your article to any of the editorial team or use the online form at www.rafactive.co.uk, thanks!
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Submission Deadlines
Articles should be submitted to Sub-Editors for consideration before 13 December 17 for Issue 75.
As we go to press, the RAF Sports Awards have just taken place. While I’d congratulate all of the winners and nominees, and particularly the associations’ officials and administrators, who make it possible for everyone to take part, we also had an award to give out. Liam Houghton’s ‘Road to the Invictus Games’ came an incredibly close second place to Michael Masters, who was awarded the RAF Active Magazine Article of the Year for his piece “Vertically Challenged”. As I read through the longlist before it was sent for judging, I was chuffed at how many outstanding tales we’ve been lucky enough to tell in the last 12 months. So...as ever, thank you for sharing your stories, and keep them coming.

The articles are only part of the story as far as I’m concerned though. While the longlist entries were judged solely on the words, the magazine itself features photography that serves to illustrate and enhance the writing. We’ve been asking our contributors to take photos at high resolution (even a phone will give you that option), and I believe it shows. Taking things to the next level however are a spread of photos from the 2017 RAF Photographic Competition. With a sporting focus, these images showcase the skills of the RAF’s cadre of professionals. If you think you can top them, the DIN for next year’s competition will be out in early 2018.

From a personal perspective, the work-life balance has been tipping one way for some time, and taken its toll mentally and physically. Having a sporting outlet has been pretty pivotal in avoiding a complete mental derailment over the last few months. Luckily for me, the UK has a lot of long distance running events to enter, in some pretty spectacular places. The most recent of these was the Open Adventure Lakes in a Day 50 Mile, which runs from the northern to southern boundaries of the Lake District National Park. I first ran this in 2014 with the previous Editor, Matt, and it was enough to put him off ultra running for life (so he claims).

The first half of the run has about 10,000’ of climb and descent, heading over Blencathra and the Helvellyn Ridge to Ambleside. The second half is a little flatter, tracking Windermere down to Cartmel. Being October in the Lakes, the weather was epic – the first ten miles was a cloudy rainy slog over the moors, with a couple of sporting river crossings and a lot of bogs. Coming on to the exposed knife edge ridge of Hall’s Fell however, the wind started gusting upwards of 50 knots, which apparently when combined with greasy rocks underfoot is the right amount of wind to blow over a 16 stone Yorkshireman (happily not next to a cliffy bit). The almost solo 5+ hour ascent of the Helvellyn Ridge was a lonely affair, with cloud and horizontal rain reducing visibility to a few feet, so the descent into the Ambleside feed station was a welcome one.

I joined up with two other guys (Simon and Bob) as I continued south, the sun setting with 20 miles to go. Headtorches and maps out, and onwards, bonding over past races and befuddlement over current events across the Atlantic. The banter made the miles a lot more bearable – there was little chance for the demons to appear, unlike when running solo. Having been dropped while suffering in the past, I was determined that we would stick together until the finish. Despite a case of hypothermia and/or hypoglycaemia for Bob, together, we made it through knee-deep sections of Windermere, the treacherous ankle-deep muddy climbs and descents, fatigue-induced tantrums and quite a lot of chafing.

Crossing the line together was quite an emotional affair, with such strong bonds, forged in mutual suffering and Lake District mud. With 50 hard miles done, I was physically knackered, but had not had a thought of work for 18 hours, and was (quite surprisingly) mentally refreshed (even if not quite ready to face the inbox just yet). If you too need to let off some steam, entries are open at www.lakesinaday.co.uk now.

Why not check out the RAF Active Facebook page?
A team pursuit of Operation OVERLORD…

With the NATO Tactics Meet being held in Landivisiau near Brest, France, there was only one thing for it – we’d have to cycle there, conducting an Operation OVERLORD staff ride through Normandy and Brittany ‘en route’.

This force development epic, named Exercise TIGERS BREST, was undertaken by a team of ten riders alongside a two-man support crew, primarily comprising of members of RAF Benson’s 230 ‘Tiger’ Squadron. A challenging, yet highly memorable physical and intellectual adventure ensued, over the course of seven days and 600 km.

The first of ten staff ride stands was conducted by Joe Belton in the new Station Ethos & Heritage Room prior to departure, covering the use of air power in the planning and preparation of Operation OVERLORD. Proudly wearing (with a tinge of embarrassment) bespoke lycra cycling jerseys, the ride itself began in Sainte-Mère-Église at the US Airborne Museum. Miserable weather did not deter the intrepid group, cycling over the sacred ground that cost so many lives on D-Day. Dan Magrath delivered a first-rate stand on the airborne landings, complete with hand-drawn (though not water-proofed) visual aids. Via the famous Pointe-du-Hoc and Omaha Beach, the 80 km leg concluded at the vast and deeply humbling American Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer, where a wreath was laid.

With so much historical interest in a very small stretch of coast, the emphasis for the second day was on the staff ride element. Dialling military history back 950 years, the Bayeux Tapestry could not be missed, before visiting the largest Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery in Normandy and saddling…

The Tigers progress through the Normandy ‘bocage’
Once in the saddle again, and crossing into Brittany, some geographical confusion kept Mont Saint-Michel in sight rather longer than intended…

up once again to view the Mulberry Harbour remnants at Arromanches. The final site visit of the day was a shrine for British airborne troops and, understandably so, Pegasus Bridge. The 2nd Battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, 6th Airborne Division achieved the remarkable feat of landing next to the bridges in gliders, capturing them intact and holding them. It was the first mission conducted on that momentous day and required breath-taking levels of courage and skill.

Heading south and inland, we covered 105 km via an excellent, if nutritionally unsound, lunch stop in Camembert, to study the decisive action in the Battle of Normandy, where two German armies were virtually encircled in the ‘Falaise Pocket’. The resulting ‘Couloir de la Mort’ (Corridor of Death) is vividly described at the museum of Mont Ormel (Hill 262), where Mark Austin-Carroll’s stand on combined and joint operations provoked vigorous debate. Having slogged up there, the weary and sun-kissed riders had earned the splendid descent down to a rustic farmhouse for the night.

Our own ‘longest day’ followed, heading due west for 137 km with over 1400 m climbed! A free lesson in Gallic charm awaited us in Domfront, learning from an angry French chef that, despite his menu offering a steak sandwich, only teenagers eat bread and that the carb-free option was not especially appreciated at that stage! Persevering nevertheless, via Mortain (of German counter-attack fame) and General Patton’s strategically vital Pontaubault Bridge for Rob Daugherty’s stand on air power in the subsequent campaign, the magical outline of Mont Saint-Michel finally came into sight. The remarkable medieval island commune of Mont Saint-Michel provided a morning of respite, though the endless sets of steep steps weren’t welcomed by all. We did eventually reach Saint Malo, a historic port whose pivotal role in the logistical sustainment of the Allied advance was excellently described by Mike Forwood, who expertly related it to modern sustainment challenges and capabilities. With Toby Sawbridge (OC 230 Squadron) joining the heroic Damien Lewis (Logistics Squadron) on the support team for the day, refreshments were already poured by the time we reached the night stop in Trégon!

Over the final two days of cycling a further 161 km were covered, and included a coffee-stop first with a harpist continues over page >>
providing the musical accompaniment, a fabulous seaside burger-based lunch, brutal hill climbs followed by epic descents, and a fine example of a 19th Century viaduct in Morlaix; viaduct enthusiast Austin-Carroll was especially thrilled and it provided an imposing backdrop for a special operations stand (yep, they scaled and took it) from Phil Goss. As per our very first day, the weather was dreadful as we rolled into Brest on day seven, but the elation was undiluted after an unforgettable journey. After the congratulatory man-hugs, and the few remaining stands being delivered, majoring on leadership (Liam Friel) and the psychological impacts of war (Nick Upton, 28 Sqn), the group took part in the rain-drenched but rousing opening ceremony of the Tiger-themed NATO Tactics Meet.

Returning home across The Channel, 73 years to the day after our military forefathers conducted the largest and most complex operation ever undertaken, we all reflected on the excellent force development vehicle that TIGERS BREST had been. Most notable being the development of teamwork required to safely cycle so far through foreign fields, and the unquestionable benefit of studying historical operations and their contemporary relevance.

One of many navigational discussions is held at a junction in western Brittany

A wreath is laid by 230 Sqn at the British & Commonwealth War Cemetery in Bayeux

A keen cyclist who often leads squadron personnel on various mountain biking adventures, Richie Morgan from 4624 RAuxAF Squadron based at RAF Brize Norton, once more took to the road to participate in his third Prudential Ride London-Surrey 100 mile bike ride. Yes, his third!

Participation in the event, which took place in July 2017, was not only for his personal fitness but also in memory of a dear friend, Barbara Hunter, who sadly lost her battle with cancer in November 16. The long-term partner of Mal Beavis, also from 4624 Squadron, Barbara was, as Richie says, “a larger than life character, full of boundless energy and always with a smile on her face”.

Barbara was an avid supporter of Race For Life since her diagnosis in 2008 and it is for this reason that Richie’s charitable cause was Macmillan Cancer Support. On the day his cycling jersey bore her name and he was very noticeable. Bev Peart, Commanding Officer 4624 Sqn, had pledged £50 if Richie wore a tutu and fairy wings! As can be seen, he grasped the challenge, much to the amusement of other participants and raised an amazing £1,300 in the process.

Edited by Ben Lonsdale

Reservist Rides London by Caroline Krolikowski

A wreath is laid by 230 Sqn at the British & Commonwealth War Cemetery in Bayeux
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Looking to defend not only the individual titles but also the team classification, the RAF entered strong teams into the ever-popular race. Team managers Ben Terry and Lynsey Carveth had a tough job with selection due to the impressive results RAF Tri are pulling in week on week. Defending champions Samantha Rose and Luke Pollard were both on the start lists looking to add another year on their tallies. Also looking for gold was 2015 champion Lucy Nell who has had stellar results throughout the year.

The rain poured all morning but a break in the clouds just before the start was a welcome sight. The men’s race was first off, with a manic swim start. Terry and Pollard for the RAF led together out of the water creating a gap on the lead Army contingent. The packs came through the first transition with all the team in the mix. Onto the bikes, the roads were a little slippery in places but Pollard extended his lead further, meanwhile Scott Hill tore through the field posting the 3rd fastest bike split of the day. Another notable bike performance was from duathlon specialist Peter ‘Oz’ Ellis who made up over 30 places over the 40km.

From bike to run is where the real race began, it’s where true endurance is shown and identifies who has paced their day correctly. In the Vets Category Chris Carre and Chris Rowland came into their own and were not only 2 of the fastest Vets runners but also scalping plenty of the younger racers too! Pollard came through to take the tape in 01:54:40 over 3 minutes ahead of the next competitor and winning his third consecutive Inter Service title. Pollard stated, “Winning for a third time is as exciting as the first, I always work hard towards the Inter Service Champs, it’s a race that always carries a lot of prestige.” Terry placed a credible seventh but unfortunately the Army team had 7 in the top 10 earning them the team trophy. After the race, he
said “it is disappointing that we have failed to defend the team title. The RAF team included a number of individuals making their Inter Service debuts, all gave excellent accounts and show great promise for next year, where we will aim to reclaim the team title.”

The women’s race was a close-fought battle from the get go with Nell and Rose in the lead pack out of the water accompanied by a top Navy swimmer. On the bike leg, the Army had some strong cyclists and started to close on the RAF duo who were up ahead, but the girls held their nerve and kept them from catching. In the female Vet Category Penny Grayson stormed the bike leg posting a quick time and put herself in amongst it. Nell was first onto the 10km run and looking to extend the lead further. Despite her efforts, one of the Army’s top triathletes caught up and the two began battling it out, neck and neck for the subsequent laps around the lake. Nell, confident in her finish, put in a burst of speed to break away from the Army runner and take the win for the RAF in a time of 02:11:44. She said “I’m thrilled to have won the Inter Services Triathlon for the third time. I knew it would be a tough race with strong competition across the services and tired legs following the London Triathlon at the weekend. I’m happy that my legs held out and I was able to take the win.”

Although Rose wasn’t going to leave empty handed she had a fantastic run and came home to take a well-deserved bronze shortly afterwards. Commenting on the final stages of the run she said “I knew I’d just have to knuckle down and try and hold on to a medal position for the RAF. Out on the run I didn’t feel particularly strong, but I kept pushing along and was really happy to finish in third.” Also taking home silverware was race organiser, Grayson, who followed her great bike time with a strong run and took second in the Vet Category.

All the RAF women raced extremely well but unfortunately it was the same tale as the men in the team classification with the Army having plenty of numbers in the top 10, thus moving the RAF women’s team to runners up.

Team manager Carveth was pleased with the team’s performance stating “There were exceptional performances across the ladies’ team, taking gold and bronze on the podium, and some making their debut to the Inter Services race. Noting the marginal win of the Army, the ladies are more motivated than ever to bring back the Inter Services title in 2018 in our Centenary year of the Royal Air Force!”

The RAF Triathlon team are now preparing for the 2018 season and will be holding a RAF training weekend in February 2018. For all those interested in joining the team or giving triathlon a go, please contact either Ben Terry or Lynsey Carveth, or get in touch via the website http://cui5-uk.diif.r.mil.uk/r/354/Triathlon/default.aspx. We look forward to hearing from you.
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Every two years, the best aerobatic pilots in the world meet to contest the title of World Aerobatics Champion. This year the event was held at Malelane in South Africa and Phil Burgess was selected by the Royal Aero Club to join Team GBR as part of this elite group of pilots.

An Avionics Technician by trade currently at RAF Waddington, I gained my private pilot's license in 2003 and began teaching myself aerobatics four years later, prior to beginning competitive flying. Over the next few years I enjoyed success on the UK competition scene including winning the 2011 Queens Air Race Cup, the 2015 Masters and the Advanced British National Championship.

This journey really began several months prior with the confirmation that sponsors would contribute to about one quarter of the overall cost of participation. This enabled a partnership to be formed with Mr Gerald Cooper, the highest placed British pilot of all time, in order to both share his state-of-the-art competition aircraft, the XA-41 Xtreme and to act as my mentor. Over the next few months, we attended training camps at Wickenby, receiving expert coaching from 3 former World Champions.

At the end of June and with just a week to go until the British National Championships, I suffered a dislocated shoulder. This represented the lowest point in the journey and exclusion from the British Nationals was a crushing blow, throwing my entry into the World Championship into doubt. After four weeks of frustrating rest and physio, I convinced the Aviation Medical Examiner that I was fit to fly and training resumed. Still with a great deal of training to complete before the start of the contest, this new condensed schedule was extremely demanding, flying two or three times a day for several consecutive days. The cumulative exposure to extreme G-force and physical discomfort was exhausting, and the pain from repeatedly pressing 96kg of body weight at minus 10G into perpetual bruises from the seat harness was excruciating. Fortunately the shoulder remained intact, though the threat of a repeat episode was a constant distraction.

With the training again progressing well, and with only a week to go before the aeroplane was due to be dismantled for shipping, it was damaged following a brake failure on landing and had to be sent to the factory in Germany for repair. Whilst an alternate aircraft was sourced so training could continue, it returned...
the day prior to being shipped to South Africa, allowing little time for last-minute training flights.

Arriving in Johannesburg, Gerald and I took the short drive to Rand Airport where the aircraft was awaiting reassembly. The following morning Gerald made the 300km ferry flight to Malelane, while Team Manager Peter Rounce and I completed the journey by car - possibly the most dangerous part of the trip, with poor road safety standards, constant threat of car-jacking and all manner of animals free to wander the roads.

On arrival, a brief was delivered on the format of the four days of training flights prior to the start of the contest. Malelane has a single, very narrow, runway with an apron at one end. With all pilots wanting to maximise their training ahead of the event, it was critical to fly as often as possible. Slots were organised for three aircraft to get airborne every 15 minutes to one of three training areas. On the single runway, aircraft would
take-off to the west and land to the east, all talking to each other on the radio. Though passing without incident, these operations were very worrying and the thought that even a minor incident could take Great Britain out of the contest was a heavy mental burden.

The XA-41 Xtreme is widely regarded as the most demanding of all aerobatic aircraft to fly. Constructed of carbon fibre composites, it is extremely strong and light weight and its highly tuned engine can produce enough thrust to enable the aircraft to hover in the vertical attitude. Designed to perform the dramatic and dynamic manoeuvres usually seen at air shows, this level of performance and agility demands a precise hand to score well. Geometric accuracy in all three axis is required, as the aerobatic figures are flown in a specific sequence known in advance by both the pilot and the panel of judges.

The World Aerobatics Championship format comprises four programs flown over several days. First is the ‘Free-known’ in which 5 aerobatic figures are published at the beginning of the season. Pilots select a further 5 manoeuvres from a catalogue, submitting their sequence to the officials in advance of the event. The next three programs are ‘Free-unknown’ 1-3, with each team submitting a single aerobatic figure for each program at the start of the event. Teams then prepare a sequence of these figures for the judges that each pilot will then fly. Once the event begins, there is no opportunity for any practice flights and the three programs represent the greatest mental and physical challenge to the pilots during the event. Experiencing +/- 10G without the aid of a G-suit is extremely demanding. Add to this the 38°C ambient temperatures and high altitude of the host airfield, physical fitness is a key factor for success as each pilot attempts to fly the prescribed sequence.

The hospitality of the South African hosts was remarkable with a very entertaining opening ceremony featuring a traditional display of dance and song. The pilots’ mood was changing as the joviality and camaraderie in training was replaced with the focus for the task ahead. An early night ensued for most, as the contest flights would begin at 0830 the next morning. As I had drawn to fly toward the end of the group, I got a further day to reflect on things and try to keep my nerves in check. Completing the first program, I scored 66% and a rank of 30, compared to the defending World Champion, whose score of 80% put him in first place. However, I was relieved to have completed the first flight without making any significant mistakes or damaging the now very precious aeroplane.

In the first of the unknown flights, I made a huge improvement now I was more comfortable with the format of the contest and with a little more experience under fire to draw from. A score of 74% propelled me to 11th place. However, in the next sequence a mistake, under-rotating a vertical roll, took me back to 24th place. Ahead of the final program, a decision was made to allow only the top 50% of pilots to fly the final program to ensure that those at the top of the field would complete all four flights. Fortunately however, there was just enough time for the remaining pilots to fly again, and drawing the penultimate slot, I landed with just 30 minutes of daylight remaining. Taxiing back, I had an overwhelming sense of relief now this very challenging ordeal was over.

The final scores from each program are combined to give an overall World Ranking. Finishing with a ranking of 21 was far beyond my expectations, considering the high standard of the 36 competing pilots.

As the bills continue to pour in, all that remains is to thank all the sponsors, large and small for their contributions that enabled this endeavour; so a huge thank you goes to the RAF Sports Lottery, BAeS, RAFFCA, Inzpire, Hatched Brands, Sitta and British Aerobatics. For the full results and for further information visit www.philburgessaerobatics.com

Edited by Kev Morley
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In August, I was lucky enough to be selected for one of the many weeks available in the Eagles Scheme, specifically EAGLES NEST. EAGLES NEST facilitates personal development through self-discovery which can be aligned to leadership consolidation and further development.

EAGLES NEST takes place at the RAF Force Development Training Centre (FDTC) in the picturesque Allgäu region of Bavaria, Germany. The staff at the FDTC supports Ex SNOW EAGLE (a skiing/winter survival exercise) from January to April and Ex EAGLES NEST from May to November.

EAGLES NEST is a five day trip, with a one day staff ride followed by four days of Adventurous Training (AT). The staff ride element can vary between visiting Dachau a Second World War concentration camp to the northwest of Munich or going on a rise of Adolf Hitler tour in central Munich. Whereas the AT activities are a little more flexible depending on both the weather and instructor availability and can very over the four days. Activities could include walking, mountain biking, Klettersteig, rock climbing, canoeing and canyoning… and we got to experience most of them.

The opening day involved the entire group visiting Munich for ‘The Rise of Adolf Hitler Tour’. Although the events occurred almost a century ago, these are pertinent today given the recent rise in extremism throughout the world. On the tour we visited many sites connected with Hitler including the office of the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (DAP) who were the forerunner to the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei National (NSDAP). Here Hitler met the head of the DAP, Anton Drexler and his talent for public speaking was first shown. We then visited the Hofbrauhaus to witness the Festsaal, where Hitler gave his first speech to a large crowd in 1920. Later on we entered the Haus der Kunst, an art gallery constructed by Paul Troos which is the first example of Nazi Architecture. This building still has ornate Mosaics in the roof entrance of Swastikas, something that given the political history in Germany probably qualifies as the only legal example in the country of this reviled symbol. All in all, it was a fascinating tour that also highlighted how close Hitler came to death on multiple occasions prior to his rise to leadership of Germany, as well as his humble beginnings war dodging and being a struggling artist.

The second day was a walk straddling a ridge along the border between Austria and Germany. We took the minibus which left us at the end point of our walk in Kornau, famed for its Allgäu Coaster, a Rodelbahn/Alpine Coaster. We then caught the local bus that took us over the border into Austria. Here we stopped at the village of Riezln for a hot chocolate with cream before taking the cable car in the direction of the Hammerspitze. From the cable car station we then embarked on a walk that took in the summits of the Kanzelwand and the Fellhorn before dropping down back to Kornau for our bus back to base.

Day three was mountain biking in the forests and hills to the north of the Großer Alpsee. We were taught correct positioning on the bike as well as skills such as bunny hops! Needless to say, despite our expert tuition into how to
control the bike, several members of the group still fell off (including myself), luckily without severe injuries! The gruelling bike ride ended at a café on the Grosser Alpsee where we all had a swim to wash off all the mountain bike-related debris.

The fourth day was canyoning which involved travelling down a river canyon using a mixture of abseiling, Klettersteig, zip wires and jumping from heights into the depths of the river. We traversed two canyons, the first one in the morning was close to the FDTC and finished with a zip wire across the canyon. The second canyon was in the shadow of the Grünten Mountain which was more challenging and finished with a slide down a waterfall. It was a highly beneficial day for many in the group who had to challenge their fears regarding both water and heights.

The final day was the Klettersteig, which was conducted around the Tannheimer Tal, an area historically connected with smuggling between Tirol and Bavaria. Klettersteig, (otherwise known as Via Ferrata) is the climbing of a cliff or mountain using
Some of the routes were rather exposed. A steel cable that is periodically fixed to the rock face. You then attach on and off the cable with two carabiners making your way up the directed route. For our Klettersteig, we parked up in Oberjoch, which is Germany’s highest altitude village, before taking the chairlift up towards the start point. The klettersteig was physically demanding, requiring you to have good upper body strength to pull yourself up the mountain. The route I did was relatively easy apart from one challenging section that involved an overhang. Nevertheless, everyone in our group overcame our fear of heights and powered on up to the summit, where we were rewarded with stunning views of both Germany and Austria. The Day was completed at a Café in Oberjoch, which had a natural swimming pool...perfect!

The staff ride was a highly rewarding and exciting five days at nil cost to myself and provided an easy opportunity to do activities that would normally require a lot of organisation and finance to undertake.

EAGLES NEST runs for 27 weeks, and the week I was there was only 17 and was almost at full capacity, but not many are. You might also be interested to know...I applied for space at relatively short notice and still managed to get a spot. This shows that the Eagles Scheme is easy to get involved with and also that it requires more people to get involved to secure the future of this valuable opportunity for AT. Further details of the Eagles Scheme can be found by touching base with your Stn PEd flight or search for ‘Eagles Scheme’ on the Defence Intranet.

Edited by Rachael Lee
Some of the routes were rather exposed...
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RAF MOUNTAINEERING

CLIMBING HIGHER

by Sophie Foxen and Catherine Henshaw

The RAF’s indoor climbing fraternity is taking things to higher levels (apologies!) and this has only been possible using the excellent support provided by the Royal British Legion and other sponsors. For this, the Mountaineering Association is most grateful.

Air Vice-Marshall N J E Kurth CBE, Hon Vice-President RAFMA

All photographs by Gordy Elias
A new partnership has been forged between the Royal British Legion (RBL) and the RAF Climbing Team and RAF Mountaineering Association (RAFMA). The RAF Climbing Champs 2017 was the first event to showcase this mutual support and it was a fun day! Catherine Henshaw, Armed Forces Partnerships and Development Officer of the RBL tried her hand at climbing and Yorkshire Community Fundraisers Debra Westlake and Mia Senior observed the competition. They were able to speak to a wide variety of people and help them understand the work of the RBL and thereby promote it to those who could benefit.

The Royal British Legion is at the heart of a national network that supports the Armed Forces community through thick and thin – ensuring their unique contribution is never forgotten. It’s been there since 1921 and will be there as long the Armed Forces community need them. The Legion supports serving members of the Royal Navy, British Army, Royal Air Force, Reservists, veterans and their families. Support starts after 7 days of service and continues long after life in the Armed Forces.

The Legion helps veterans young and old transition into civilian life, helping with employment, financial issues, respite and recovery, through to lifelong care and independent living. From rehabilitation courses, to tailored personal support for recovery, homelessness and financial advice – the Legion is by veterans’ sides, every step of the way. Every year the Legion even takes thousands of families on breaks, so they can spend some much needed quality time together. The Legion also supports older veterans with home adaptations, nursing services and through
six dedicated care homes, run just for ex-
service men and women.

The RAF Climbing Champs at Awesome Walls in Sheffield had a turnout of
78 climbers, with many more people
supporting and administrating. The day
started with registrations, handshakes and
hugs to old friends, then safety briefs.
Soon people had harnesses and shoes on,
and were chalked and timed top-roping
began. Top-roping is where the rope
is attached at the top of the wall and
someone belays you from the bottom.
There was a time cap of 3 minutes. You
can’t fall far, but you still get high on the
wall. Belayers, who were controlling the
ropes, had to be careful not to pull the
climbers up, thus keeping it fair. Each
person tried to complete three top ropes
of increasing difficulty. The highest score
for each top-rope was 100, for getting
both hands on the final hold. The holds
below the final hold scored gradually
less and less. As a venue Awesome Walls
is known for the length of its climbs so
stamina, as well as power was required.

Using the top-rope scores people were
separated into Beginner, Intermediate and
Advanced categories, with each group
having a semi-final. For the Beginners an
even tougher top-rope was set. For the
Intermediate and Advanced climbers lead
climbing began. Lead climbing is where
the climber must clip the rope as they
go up the wall, meaning there is much
greater potential for long falls, swings
and the additional difficulty of clipping
the rope. Both routes were overhanging
and technical. There were grunts and
falls; there was sweat and almost tears.
For the final, the top ten climbers of the
Advanced and Intermediate categories
were taken into

isolation. Isolation meant they were
hidden in another part of the centre, so
they could not see their rivals attempts
at the route. Therefore, once they
had made their effort on the route
they didn’t know how they had fared
compared to others before them. It
was great to watch, with massive
support from the crowd.

There was also a fun bouldering
competition with 25 problems set
of varying difficulty. Bouldering
has short problems that you climb
without ropes, but with crash mats
below you. Bouldering is usually
more technical and certainly made
climbers think about how to
complete the problems.

As well as the regular RAF
Competitors, there were University
Air Squadrons, Defence Technical
Undergraduate Scheme students,
at least one reservist and at least
one veteran. There were even
some Army personnel. For high
altitude mountaineer Colin Scott,
this represented his last day in the RAF
and his performance showed that he is still
fighting fit.

The organiser of the Champs was Dan
Heath who also managed to win! His
coolness under pressure, technique and
endurance shone through. There was an
array of fantastic prizes; from stays at The
Orange House in Spain, to finger boards
from Entre-prises. Many thanks to the Royal
British Legion, DMM, SCARPA, Brigantes
Consulting Ltd, La Sportiva, Entre-Prises
and The Orange House for their support,
prizes and banter throughout the event.
The photographer Gordy Elias has done
a great job, although someone managed
to sneakily avoid putting on shoes for the
photo, despite being requested to!
**Female Climbing Category**

1st  Chantal Edwardes  
2nd  Polly James  
3rd  Christiana Naziris

**Advanced Climbing Category**

1st  Dan Heath  
2nd  Paul Easton  
3rd  Emyr Jones

**Male Masters (over 35)**

1st  Paul Easton  
2nd  Emyr Jones  
3rd  Philip Rossiter

**Male Open**

1st  Dan Heath  
2nd  Lee Thistleton  
3rd  Tom Musgrave

**Junior Male (under 25)**

1st  Alex Whitmore  
2nd  James George  
3rd  Brad Hargreaves

**Intermediate Climbing Group**

1st  Stu Quinn  
2nd  Ben Braybrook  
3rd  Andrew Gobbi

**Novice Climbing Group**

1st  Jamie Davies  
2nd  Rachel Fairclough  
3rd  Mark Harper

**Bouldering – Male**

1st  Lee Thistleton  
2nd  Brad Hargreaves  
3rd  Lewis Wilson & Craig Marsden

**Bouldering – Female**

1st  Sophie Foxen  
2nd  Chantal Edwardes  
3rd  Polly James

**RAF Station**

1st  RAF Odiham  
2nd  RAF Waddington  
3rd  RAF Brize Norton

**UAS/DTUS:**

- DTUS Typhoon

**Best Guest:** Mathew Burson

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The website for RAF Mountaineering is www.raf.mod.uk/rafmountaineering. RAFMA are now not only on Facebook, but also on Twitter! @RAFMountaineer and soon to be on Instagram too! The Publicity Reps love to chat climbing and mountaineering so you can contact Dino Stock or Sophie Foxen on RAFMA. Publicity@gmail.com

To find out more about The Royal British Legion see http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/, visit one of their 16 pop in centres or find them on Twitter. If you want to become a member please visit http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/membership/become-a-member/

Edited by Leigh Posthumus
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As it gets light, the 14 players and 3 officials appear from a distance to be automatons, making each tackle mechanically, focused solely on getting through the match after 12 hours straight on the pitch. They aren’t even at the halfway point; with tired brains and bodies, the risk of injury is getting higher by the hour, and neither side can afford to lose a player.

Originally set up by a number of rugby enthusiasts from RAF Brize Norton’s Parachute Training School under the leadership of Phil Thomas, the Horus Rugby 7s team (so named after the Egyptian god of the sky) has become one of the better known 7s teams on the circuit, due in large part to the huge support and bright pink gazebo they bring to every tournament. The team was set up to support Rob Bugden, a Brize-based parachute instructor, rugby player and endurance runner who suffered life-changing injuries in a parachuting accident in 2016.

After a successful summer competing around southern England, Horus have come together with Witney Barbarians at Witney RFC to make an official attempt on the marathon Rugby 7s World Record, and to raise at least £2000 for Cakes for Casualties and the RAF Benevolent Fund along the way. The current record is somewhat unclear, but the aim is to play uninterrupted for 30 hours, starting at 1700 on a Friday evening. The amount of planning required and Guinness regulations to satisfy are immense, and it takes a huge effort from Airborne Delivery Wing’s airmen and women, civilian staff, officers and families just to get to the kick off, in late July.

In addition to the players and match officials, independent officials are required to document and adjudicate the entire event, with scores, subs, breaks and names recorded to the minute, with all details subsequently sent off to Guinness. That includes an uninterrupted video of the entire event, which is where I would play my part; set up in one corner of the pitch under a gazebo, I would spend the next day and a half in an endless chain of filming, downloading, backing up and recharging. 24 guys are about to push themselves to their physical and mental limits. I am definitely NOT one of those
guys, but I’m pretty keen to ensure that, however they get on, the record won’t be lost due to me missing videoing a minute of the match.

As predicted, both teams set off from the whistle as if they’re playing seven minutes each way in a 7s tournament, rather than the opening moments of a 30 hour marathon record attempt. With squads of 12, and 7 to be on the pitch at any given time, it takes a good half hour for the realization to set in that this is very much a marathon effort. After every hour of play, they guys are allowed a 5 minute break to regroup. Phil, the Horus Captain and driving force behind the event isn’t taking any chances however, and the timekeepers are well briefed to ensure all the players are back on the pitch with time to spare.

With just a fraction of the time gone,
the heavens open and we’re greeted with the kind of extra-wet rain most often found in the Highlands. While it adds yet another dimension to an already challenging night for the players, it makes for some atmospheric photos. The rain doesn’t stop until gone 11 at night, by which time the players and officials are starting to flag. With players required to stay pitch side as well, hot showers aren’t an option. The temperature drops as midnight passes, and everyone on and off the pitch is shivering with cold and tiredness as we enter the small hours.

Despite fatigue causing the odd mistake, the match is played throughout in the true spirit of rugby, and with significantly fewer penalties incurred than would be seen in a normal match. The team spirit and fair play are exemplary, with everyone on and around the pitch driven by a common goal.

Simon and Jenni, two of the other key figures in this event, are busy throughout contacting various radio stations (particularly BFBS at Brize Norton and in Cyprus) and giving interviews and using Facebook live and twitter to keep people at home in the picture. The messages of support come in from RAF personnel around the world, and shouted from the sideline or played over the loudspeaker to motivate the guys. I’m chuffed to be able to get my quadcopter up for a couple of photos (after checking with ATC) to give people an idea of what it’s like playing in the pitch black on what could quite easily be a small green island in the darkness.

As 0500, the 12 hour mark, comes round (and the sun would be coming up, if not for the clouds), I’m very bleary eyed (and all I’m doing is taking the photos!); I can barely imagine how the lads on the pitch are feeling (though the fact that they seem to be taking it in turns to drop with cramp while sprinting for the ball is a good indicator). I set my alarm for 10 minutes’ time to avoid missing a camera change and get my head down in the back of the car. The arrival of Wayne, the other member of the photography team, cheers me up no end…mainly because he has passed by McDonalds en route and brought me a hash brown and a Bacon and Egg McMuffin. With my cholesterol boosted back up to my normal unhealthy levels, I’m able to hand over the GoPro-swapping to Wayne for a couple of hours...
and start editing some of the stills and video for the media team to put online and keep the supportive messages for the lads coming in.

During the morning, the crowd swells and provides a much needed lift to the players. A stack of bacon butties arrives from somewhere (for the players), and the odd beer (for the spectators). Approaching midday, and with the injuries starting to mount, the pitch-side physios are massaging and taping almost non-stop. A 'sore hand', incurred early in the match and subsequently discovered to be broken, is well taped up. Irrespective, the lads play on. A management decision is made however to get safely past the 24-hour mark and then stop (which will still set a new record if ratified); it is collectively agreed that risking longer-term injuries by playing in to a second night is not a great idea.

As the clock hits 24 hours and 30 minutes, a firework is let off and the final whistle blows. In a film, the players and crowd would rush the pitch in slow motion; in reality, everyone is just moving that slowly, after this epic effort. There's a lot of hugging, hand shaking, three cheers for the officials and the teams, and a bottle of bubbly appears in Lindsey Thomas's hands, aimed at Phil. They, among others, have lived this event for weeks and months, and it's finally over. Looking on through my camera lens, everything seems to have gone a bit blurry for some reason.

At time of writing, all of the evidence has been sent off to Guinness, including links to a raft of media articles, BFBS recordings, and all of the videos, including 24.5 hours of non-stop footage of the event. Irrespective of the outcome however, no one can dispute the epic nature of this team of 24 players and uncounted volunteers who sweated, bled, staggered around like zombies and otherwise put themselves out to support this great cause.

You can follow the team and check out their media archive on social media @Horus7s. The team would like to thank Event Fire Solutions for their support throughout the season, and all of the event sponsors, without whom the record attempt could not have been possible.

Edited by Rachael Lee
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It was the last day of the Military European Gliding Championships. I was representing the UK and lying in a solid second place to the German team and bar some disaster almost guaranteed a podium finish. Could I win or would the unthinkable happen - I push my luck, land in a field and ruin my chances? Or should I play safe, fly conservatively and retain second place?

A few years ago I was in France at the same Championships when the UK team were approached by a German Colonel inviting us to participate in Holzdorf, Germany the following year. We were keen to accept but had no idea where it was until the then RAFGSA Chairman pointed out that it used to be on his target list in the Cold War Days, being about 100km south of Berlin. So that is where we found ourselves again this year, a small UK team consisting of myself, Paul McLean and Anne McLean. Travelling 900 miles with a glider trailer in tow can be quite a challenge but the main attraction, apart from the better weather than the UK, is huge areas of unregulated airspace to fly in compared with at home.

The Germans are great hosts and encourage teams from all over Europe. This year attracted entries from the UK, France, Belgium, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Denmark and Switzerland, in total 64 gliders split into 3 classes. We arrived at the airbase at 2am having arranged accommodation with the Luftwaffe but without realising that the overnight staff were civilians with no authority to let us in; the sunrise was spectacular when viewed from a Vivaro Van… Once finally admitted, we spent the day catching up on sleep and booking in to the event, an extensive process to ensure all our procedures and paperwork...
were aligned with the German system. Following 2 much-needed practice days where both myself and the glider needed technical adjustments (the radio microphone had fallen off and the instruments had gliding data for the UK not Europe) we were ready to fly. Unfortunately, the weather got too hot and stable, preventing the required soaring conditions and subsequently the days’ competition was cancelled and we were forced to endure a day swimming and sunbathing instead.

The next day, having cooled below 35°C, was a competition day and I flew 330km at 81kph for 6th place, a reasonable result as I was still suffering from instrument gremlins. How do you fly a competition in gliding? The rules are complicated, but in essence you use thermals - columns of rising air - to fly around a pre-set course as fast as you can, with the winner being the fastest. If you fly between the thermals too slowly you will lose the day, but if you fly too fast you will descend quickly and risk landing in a field far away from home. For example, the course on Day 4 was 430km around Eastern Germany, with the North/South leg extending in to Poland.

The next day was too hot again - as were several days during the competition - so we went to Berlin and did the touristy bits. If you haven’t been, Berlin is a beautiful city with a fascinating history. I was amazed by the number of parks and open spaces, until it was pointed out to me that a lot of them exist courtesy of the RAF, which was a little sobering. On other days we visited the towns around Holzdorf which also have colourful histories, being the stomping ground of Martin Luther who was converting the Germans to their version of the Protestant faith about the same time as Henry the Eighth, but a bit less violently. There are many impressive buildings such as the Schloss at Torgau which rival the Chateaux in France. These towns and castles had escaped the attentions of the RAF in the last War by the fortune of being too far East.

“...If you fly between the thermals too slowly you will lose the day, but if you fly too fast you will descend quickly and risk landing in a field far away from home...”
Despite the days lost to weather, there were some good competition days, all over 300km distance and by the penultimate day I had flown some 2000km, averaging just under 5 hours flying each day. The last day posed the dilemma identified at the beginning of the article: should I stick or twist? The answer lay with the Swiss team who were next to me on the grid and with whom we had formed a good friendship. They had suffered a technical problem on (flying) Day 2 of the competition, which had put them down the field. Consequently they were therefore not a threat, but with a good performance they could achieve 3rd place. We decided to start late, the gliding equivalent of putting hard tyres on in Formula 1. By flying together we could extend our ability to find thermals and reduce the risk of landing out. Having flown fast enough we should start catching the gliders who had started much earlier and would also be marking the thermals for us. The tactic worked a treat and as a result I won the last day and with it the competition, the Swiss narrowly missing out and finishing 4th.

If you wish to experience gliding yourself, the RAF Gliding and Soaring Association have clubs at Cranwell, Halton, Cosford, Marham, Odiham, Keevil (near Devizes) and Easterton (near Lossiemouth). Additionally, the Royal Navy and Army operate recreational gliding clubs at Culdrose, Yeovilton and Lee-on-Solent, Wattisham and Upavon. All offer opportunities for Service personnel to fly at lower rates than comparable civilian clubs and generally fly at weekends, Bank Holidays and during Grant periods. Alternatively, the RAF Eagle scheme offers weekday courses at RAF Halton - your PEd Flt will have details.

Edited by Kev Morley
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Back in June, nine members of RAF Shawbury’s Cycling Club travelled to the Pyrénées for six days of challenging riding in the Ariège Region. The ultimate intent was to take part in a locally run event, to ride Stage 13 of the 2017 Tour de France (TdF) from Saint-Girons to Foix, though some of the preceding days proved an even greater challenge.

We arrived mid-afternoon to a disappointingly rainy Toulouse having departed an uncharacteristically dry Manchester earlier that morning. On arrival at our accommodation near Saint-Jean-de-Verges the rain was lashing down. Undeterred, though somewhat unenthusiastic, we donned our cycling kit and set out on a short ride to test and adjust our rental bikes. Drenched within the first few kilometres, the situation could only improve and indeed the sun eventually broke through to dry off at least one layer before we made it back. Thanks to the 3am wheels from Shawbury, the first night was a quiet one with early nights all round. Mike (our British guide, who ran the accommodation) had promised us an 88 km route for the following day so plenty of rest was required.

As the first morning dawned and we all jostled for the Nutella (other chocolate and hazelnut spreads are available) we were kept amused by the first of many renditions of ‘what Barnsey said in his sleep last night’. These night-time mutterings ranged from nonsense to a declaration of ‘hating effort’, which from an RAF Physical Training Instructor, is surely tantamount to trade group treason! As we set out, fully fuelled, the forecast for more rain did not come to fruition and we were treated to sunshine all day which caught out a few through
lack of sun protection - the signature ‘cycling tans’ were well underway by tea-time. Our first full day on the bikes took us on a scenic route through the foothills of the Pyrénées so we were not challenged by any real climbs – those would come later. The rolling countryside was more reminiscent of Shropshire and it did not hint at the mountains that would follow. The highlight of the route was riding through the caves and gorge of Le Mas-d’Azil – a culturally significant prehistoric site. The route gave us the ideal terrain to practice our group riding skills as it became quickly evident that there were many varying conventions that individuals had picked up from different clubs over the years. It was finally agreed (begrudgingly by some) that to communicate vehicles approaching we would use car up (behind) and car down (ahead) but this had varying amounts of success throughout the week. Similarly, those new to chain ganging (a way of group riding which rotates the lead rider so everyone gets their fair share of effort on the front) seemed to struggle with the term and it morphed from chain ganging to chain linking to daisy chaining. In truth this was more of a deliberate error as it caused obvious irritation to veteran rider Phil Llewellyn, much to everyone’s amusement.

Our second day of riding was perhaps the most challenging of the week. This was the day we tackled the classic TdF climb of Plateau de Beille. The approach to the mountain was fairly flat, giving us an easy warm up to the first coffee stop though half the group then decided to tackle a short but steep climb which did little to prepare the legs for the big one. This shorter climb, approximately 8km long, started gradually but ramped up for the final 5km just as the sun started beating down. Hot and aching we reached the top to be greeted by the welcome sight of a water trough and drinking fountain. It was all we could do to not get in it! A very steep and technical descent brought us back to the village of Les Cabannes where the climb to Plateau de Beille would begin. A quick ice-cream to refuel and we were off. It was a punishing climb of 15km, two thirds of which had gradients averaging 9% and rarely dropping below 7%. With little relief during this section of the climb it challenged even the most seasoned riders and the midday sun did not help the situation. For Aide Vine this was his first significant mountain pass ridden and what a baptism of fire! If you can survive the first two thirds of the climb then relief eventually comes as the gradient begins to lessen in the final few miles and, of course, the air cools as you get higher. For those who managed to look up, through the sweat and suffering, the views were spectacular and the obligatory selfie by the ‘Plateau de Beille’ sign at the top was absolutely necessary. For those who enjoy descents this was apparently a good one. I, however, rode the brakes all the way down.
and finally made it back to the café with my arms, neck and shoulders seized up. A gentle ride back to St-Jean-de-Verges was in order followed by a long stretching session that frequently broke down into hysteria as cramp seized and contorted various members of the group.

The next day was something of a recovery ride following the challenge of Plateau de Beille and we were back into the foothills for another pleasant day of undulating riding. With somewhat uncooperative legs we set off but soon warmed up again. This ride took us to the beautiful medieval town of Mirepoix where some of the guys treated themselves to the very decadent elevenses of coffee alongside a selection of French patisseries. With 90 km behind us we made it back to our accommodation to rest and refuel, and consider the plan for the next challenge.

The TdF Stage Day was upon us and the plan was to join in with this local event. The event organisers would support the riders at the top of each of the three cols with food and drink and then a gathering at the finish line in Foix. This inclusive event also enabled participants to dip in and out of the race, completing segments rather than the whole stage depending on their ability. With the top of the cols due to be in cloud, the riders would be cool in the climb and then wet and very cold on the descents. Beyond the obvious issues with this, we also had to consider how much control we would have over our bikes with numb hands, arms and feet. Taking everything into account the decision was made to ride the reverse of the Col de Pégüère meeting the race at the top of this 1375m col following a 16km climb before turning around to ride to the finish in Foix. Upon reaching the top of the climb we were greeted by a selection of French cheeses, pastries and charcuterie, coffee and even wine (not that we dared partake, with miles of descent to follow). It was a very French spread, the likes of not seen at any race in the UK! As predicted we were cold and soaked which made for a very cautious descent. There was a café midway down in which we tried to regain feeling in our hands with hot chocolate drinks, though it did little to warm us up and eventually we had to don our wet jackets and helmets again and tackle the final section of the descent, dreaming of hot showers. Very wet and cold we eventually made it back safely, knowing we had made the right decision not to ride the full stage.

With the big challenges of the week behind us, our final day in the saddle was a very scenic 71 km back in the foothills to warm down before our flight home. This wrapped up a rewarding week of cycling, challenging us physically and honing our group riding skills. Thanks are due to the incredible hospitality of Rhino Velo Pyrénées (www.rhinovelopyrenees.com) who looked after us royally and guided us on six spectacular routes whilst showcasing exactly what the Pyrénées has to offer.

Edited by Andy Knaggs
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“There is nothing, absolutely nothing, half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.” Wind in the Willows’ Ratty announced. These days we now call it a ‘team building’ exped, however in essence, I couldn’t agree more!

Imagine then, my excitement when I found out that you can now use one of Akrotiri’s extremely well kept training yachts for an exped. We successfully bid for the first available slot, which was in June when the temperature is not too crazy hot. My First Mate and I swiftly assembled a crew made up of very eager volunteers from Ground Radio and the Aerial Maintenance Section. Techs and Riggers working together in harmony, surely a Trade Group 4 poster campaign would follow. None of the crew had ever sailed before so this was a fantastic opportunity for them to experience life on board, learn a few things and hopefully go on to enrol themselves on a RYA training course, here in Cyprus.

I won’t bore you with mine and the crew’s admin and travel arrangements as the 5 minute drive across camp from the quarters to the Marina was pretty uneventful! Fully equipped and ready on our arrival, the fantastic Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 36i was to be our home for the coming 5 days.
Once the required safety brief was completed, kit issued and the food loaded, we were off. Firstly we carried out a successful man overboard practice out in Akrotiri Bay, just in case anyone fancied an unannounced swim. After that we covered Tacking and Gybing procedures and before we knew it, it was time for lunch. A busy and energetic morning had built up all of our appetites and the noon heat required a swim to cool us all down. A short detour to Ladies’ Mile beach located between Akrotiri and Limassol was a great choice in providing some shelter from the increasing winds.

With the crew refuelled, we took advantage of the strong afternoon wind and set sail with a well reefed in mainsail. Following the coastline east, working our way on a course so as to keep well clear of the colossal ships at Anchorage. Our first port of call and safe haven for the night was at the St Raphael Marina. Once moored up, the boat was ‘put to bed’ (sails and rope stowed away). I volunteered to make our first meal. Get in early and then be waited on for the next few days, was my plan. Over a delicious carbonara we discussed what had been a great day’s sailing. All points of sail were covered and I’m pretty sure a lot of both mine and Phil’s nautical terminology was starting to sink in with the crew.

We motored out of the Marina on what was a beautifully clear second day. Passing the fish farms dotted along the coast, hoping to see a swimming turtle or even a pod of dolphins in the clear blue Mediterranean Sea. The turtles are the size of dustbin lids but dive deep down at the first threat so you have to spot them quick. Dolphins on the other hand are very happy playing in the yacht’s bow wave for quite some time. Our wildlife spotting proved fruitless and it wasn’t long before the required winds picked up and we were set on a perfect broad reach. Arriving at Cape Kiti beach just in time for lunch, sandwiches and a quick snorkel gave everyone much needed relief from the rising heat. Post lunch, the wind and sea state in Larnaka Bay really picked up which gave the crew the opportunity to experience such a stark contrast to the morning’s extremely calm conditions. Taking no chances, the mainsail was once again reefed in as the afternoon sea breeze reached 20 plus knots. Heading down wind and clocking a good speed we soon neared the visitors’ berth at Larnaka Marina, we knew our fun in the bay was drawing to an end. We timed our visit well as a fair had descended on the promenade that week and the crowds and stalls filled the main street.

On Wednesday we awoke to the sound of our creaking mooring warps; with absolutely no wind it was only the wake of a passing boat making us sway. We motored out across the bay on our return leg to Akrotiri. With the wind due to pick up in the afternoon we decided on an early long lunch at our now favourite spot, Cape Kiti. Whilst our chef for the day was looking up ‘how to boil an egg’ on Google, the rest of us were back in the water diving down annoying the fish and clams. Once we had finished our leisurely lunch we set off around the cape. The rising, yet light winds allowed us to go full main and genoa all afternoon. Taking wide tacks along the coast we made steady progress across to the small fishing Marina of Zygi. Our poorly chosen chef for the day managed to create an

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unintentionally vegan spaghetti bolognaise. After the boiled egg Google saga earlier in the day we only had ourselves to blame. Still, after a long day on the water anything remotely edible was greatly appreciated.

I woke up bleary eyed in the early hours of Thursday morning with the noise of the small fishing boats setting off all together as an armada to supply the local taverns with fresh stock, only returning at breakfast. With another still morning ahead we made our way under power further along the coast towards the edge of Limassol, passing uncongested beaches interspersed with the necessary industry buildings. With near perfect timing we once again arrived back at St Raphael Marina in time for lunch. This time we moored just off the beach for our usual midday sandwiches and snorkel. With the ice cream shops shut for no apparent reason we picked up the once again strong afternoon wind. The now slick crew had the sails up and reefed in a blink of an eye. On a close reach beating a course along the surprisingly long Limassol coastline, we eventually arrived at the ‘new’ Marina for the final night of our grand-ish tour. The previous night we had been the largest yacht in the Marina, now passing a £100 million yacht (with a never-to-be-played grand piano on the fifth floor a particularly nice touch) at the Marina entrance, we were quickly put back in our place and in a sad state of yacht envy. The Marina staff even gave me a lift on a moped to carry out my skipper duties with the official yet ever friendly port police. A lovely meal in the old town square rounded off yet another great day of sailing.

An early rise on our last morning and a short hop across Akrotiri Bay back in time for a pre booked fuel fill and hand back the yacht. We had all had a fantastic week of sailing in all conditions. My shipmate and I had logged up good mileage and plenty of experience of the Cyprus waters. The crew had experienced ‘life on board’ and gained a greater appreciation of the huge effort and team work that goes into sailing a yacht of this size. Now that the week was over all that was left to do was sit down and finalise the next sailing exped planned in October!

Anything that involves being in or around the water has always held a strong attraction for me. It was this absolute love of the sea and my desire to promote all activities to others that pushed me to throw my name in the hat and become the latest RAF Active’s water sports editor. The great thing about being in the military is you have a lot more opportunities to try everything than you realise. To those who regularly read this magazine I am surely preaching to the converted, however there are many more out there that need to know this. You too can sail a yacht in Cyprus, race dinghies in the Falklands, fish for Tuna in Ascension, scuba dive in Gibraltar, body board on the Isle of Tiree in Scotland, Wakeboard in North Wales and do many, many more activities.

Whether you serve for just 3 years or reach the grand old age of 55, it’s all there waiting for you. So please, please, please get out there and do something, anything. Just don’t forget to tell me and others about it!

Edited by Rachael Lee
Currently we own a Monohul Sailing Yacht for chartering, as bareboat or skippered. The skippers of the vessel including the owner are examined to the standards approved by the Maritime Coastguard Agency, and Royal Yachting Association (MCA/RYA) as Yachtmasters Offshore or Day Skippers.
The RAF's photographers have been hard at work again, catching RAF personnel in action for the RAF Photographic Competition 2017. We’re privileged to bring you a selection of the entries from the Sports Category, which is sponsored by the RAF Sports Federation.

Tally-Ho. Polo Teams from across the country came to RAF College Cranwell to compete for the Bebbington Trophy. This annual event, sponsored this year by Mountain Recycling, was won by Hackett Army. Paul Saxby

Girls Who Box. Image taken of Stephanie O’Connell from RAF Lossiemouth for the RAF Boxing Association and Active Magazine. When this image was taken Steph was training for a big fight in Wakefield and spent most lunch times training at the 51 Squadron boxing ring. Laura Bullas

Into the Blue. Luke Pollard is a Brize Norton Supplier...he also swims, cycles and runs as an RAF Triathlete and is part of the RAF’s elite athlete programme. Paul Oldfield

Knockdown. Henlow Boxing show 18th May 2017. Bout 8. Referee Terry Whitehouse sends SAC Fox to the neutral corner as Cpl Coster struggles to get to his feet after being knocked down. Richard Beattie

EEETZZZZ. Image of an RAF powerlifter performing a single Sumo Lift in a disused hangar. Lee Matthews
Why the Long Face? RAF Lossiemouth Saddle Club taking part in an equestrian show jumping competition against RAF Valley Saddle Club at Equus Scotland Riding School, Roselise. Image shows Flt Lt Sarah Shekdar on her horse warming up in preparation for the competition. Charlotte Hopkins

Winning photos from all categories can be found at [https://www.raf.mod.uk/photo-of-the-year-2017/](https://www.raf.mod.uk/photo-of-the-year-2017/). All photos printed here are Crown Copyright.

Forest Flyers. RAF Cycling Association Downhill Inter-Station Race at Descend Bike Park, Hamsterley Forest, County Durham. Mark Parkinson
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