

News story: Tenth Annual Armed Forces Day celebrated across the country

Men and women from the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force, both Regulars and Reserves, are being recognised alongside the wider defence family including cadets and veterans.

The National Event is taking place in Llandudno, North Wales, attended by Her Royal Highness Princess Anne The Princess Royal, representing the Queen and the Royal Family. Prime Minister Theresa May and Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson are also attending the event, alongside the thousands of attendees who will gather to watch parades, displays and a record number of flypasts.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Today we mark the tenth Armed Forces Day and it remains a valuable opportunity to honour our troops who work so hard to keep us safe. Our servicemen and women are on hand every hour of every day to protect us from the threats we face and today I encourage people across the UK to come together and salute them for their tireless commitment.

I commend Llandudno for an outstanding event and thank organisers across the country for their efforts to mark Armed Forces Day.

The Armed Forces have had a busy year at home, including helping those struggling in heavy snowfall providing emergency assistance in the aftermath of the Salisbury attack.

They are currently working in more than 25 countries and are ready to respond whenever they're required. This year we saw over 2,000 personnel deployed to the Caribbean in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, on operations in Iraq and Syria as part of the fight against Daesh, and continue to reassure NATO allies in Europe.

News story: DIO restores much loved Wiltshire monument

Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) has worked with partners Landmarc Support Services (Landmarc), the Army, the New Zealand High Commission and local volunteers to restore a kiwi carved into the chalk on Beacon Hill,

above the town of Bulford in Wiltshire. Affectionately known as the 'Bulford Kiwi', it was created in 1919 by soldiers from New Zealand at the end of World War I as they awaited their return home.

The figure has recently become a scheduled monument, which means it is recognised as a nationally important archaeological site and it is now protected from destruction or change. The monument has been looked after by the New Zealand High Commission and various local groups and companies over the years.

As part of a conservation project to ensure the historic significance of the kiwi is preserved, 100 tonnes of chalk were dropped from an RAF Chinook helicopter and raked into place by volunteers from the 3rd (UK) Division Signal Regiment, Operation Nightingale – a project established jointly by the DIO and The Rifles, which sees ill and injured service personnel and veterans assisting archaeologists with excavations on the defence estate – Landmarc, the New Zealand High Commission and local conservation groups.

Sir Jerry Mateparae, the New Zealand High Commissioner said:

I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting and working with so many willing volunteers today. The links between the UK and New Zealand are still strong and it has been touching to see so many people involved in looking after and protecting the kiwi for generations to come.

It has been great to be involved in helping to protect and restore such a significant monument.

The kiwi stretches to 130 metres (420 feet) high across Beacon Hill and is a much loved monument locally, nationally and internationally.



A Chinook delivers bags of chalk to re-chalk the kiwi for the first time in 30 years. Crown Copyright.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Britain and New Zealand have deep and longstanding ties and it's important that we play our part in preserving valuable monuments like these for future generations.

The MOD is responsible for conservation of our land, allowing it to offer much needed habitats for a variety of flora and fauna to thrive, and for public enjoyment.

While we need to make sure our military training facilities prepare the armed forces for operations worldwide, we must never forget that conservation is extremely important.

The work is not just an act of conservation but recycling as well. The chalk has been made available because of the excavations on Salisbury Plain to build new housing and infrastructure under the Army Basing Programme. The conservation project has been undertaken by DIO, which plays a vital role in protecting and maintaining monuments across the MOD estate.

Richard Osgood, DIO archaeologist, said:

Thank you to everyone who has worked together to get the kiwi

looking its best again. It has been a truly collaborative effort and we are also grateful for the involvement and support of the High Commissioner of New Zealand.

It has been a brilliant project to be involved in and is a perfect example of the work that DIO does to protect and maintain the many historic sites across the estate.

News story: DIO restores much loved Wiltshire monument

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News story: The Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre is gifted to the Nation

The ceremony, attended by the Duke of Cambridge and the Prime Minister Theresa May, saw the newly built centre gifted to the Nation.

The centre, which has been purpose-built on the Stanford Hall Rehabilitation Estate, will provide world-class rehabilitation facilities for members of the Armed Forces who have suffered major trauma or injury during their service.

Its proximity to the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine and the University of Birmingham Hospital Trust, the main receiving hospital for UK military casualties, will facilitate the joint provision of care that is required during the complex rehabilitation pathway.

Surgeon General Lt Gen Martin Bricknell said:

The facility is a fantastic endeavour for which I am most grateful to the Duke of Westminster and charitable donors, who have helped to make this vision a reality.

The potential it offers to build on the legacy of Headley Court is unparalleled, enabling the UK to remain at the forefront of trauma rehabilitation. Plans are on track for the current capability to relocate to the new facilities later this year.

News story: Over 10,000 troops from nine nations ready to meet global challenges

The agreement marks the end of the establishment of the JEF framework and is a key milestone in preparing the force for action. With the UK at the forefront as the framework nation, the JEF can now deploy over 10,000 personnel from across the nine nations.

Speaking at the event at Lancaster House today Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Our commitment today sends a clear message to our allies and adversaries alike – our nations will stand together to meet new and conventional challenges and keep our countries and our citizens safe and secure in an uncertain world.

We are judged by the company we keep, and while the Kremlin seeks to drive a wedge between allies old and new alike, we stand with the international community united in support of international rules.

Launched in 2015, the joint force has continued to develop so that it's able to respond rapidly, anywhere in the world, to meet global challenges and threats ranging from humanitarian assistance to conducting high intensity combat operations.

The JEF, made up of nine northern European allies Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, is more than a simple grouping of military capabilities. It represents the unbreakable partnership between UK and our like-minded northern European allies, born from shared operational experiences and an understanding of the threats and challenges we face today.

In May this year, the JEF demonstrated its readiness with a live capability demonstration on Salisbury Plain. It featured troops from the nine JEF nations, including troops from the UK Parachute Regiment, the Danish Jutland Dragoon Regiment, the Lithuanian "Iron Wolf" Brigade and the Latvian Mechanised Infantry Brigade, which conducted urban combat operations with air support provided by Apaches, Chinooks, Wildcats and Tornados.