

News story: Defence Secretary welcomes liberation of Raqqa

Following on from the liberation of Mosul, this is a significant development in the fight against Daesh. The fall of the capital of their so-called caliphate is a devastating blow to the terrorist group.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

With the fall of Raqqa, the head of the snake has been cut off and Daesh has lost its twin capitals in Iraq and now Syria. But the fight against Daesh's reign of terror is not over. We will continue to hit the terrorists hard in both Syria and Iraq while supporting efforts to rebuild – only by defeating Daesh for good will we reduce the threat to us here at home.

The UK has been at the forefront of efforts to alleviate the humanitarian situation since 2012, working tirelessly with partners on the ground to deliver more than 660,000 lifesaving relief packages including blankets, clothing and hygiene kits in Raqqa alone. We will continue to work closely with our Coalition partners to ensure that Raqqa's population will be able to return home safely as quickly as conditions allow.

Three years ago Daesh was almost at the gates of Baghdad, now it is failing but time and patience are still necessary to bring about their ultimate defeat. The UK is committed to maintaining the momentum and to keep up the pressure on the terrorists as the fight moves along the Euphrates River Valley towards the border with Iraq. The RAF and Coalition partners will continue to target Daesh in both Syria and Iraq, supporting local forces on the ground to decisively defeat our common enemy.

But despite military progress in Syria and Iraq, the threat posed by Daesh and their poisonous narrative remains substantial. Their continued ability to inspire attacks means that we must remain resolute in our work to defeat them in their branches worldwide and counter their propaganda.

The liberation of Raqqa, by non-Regime forces, has yet again proved that Assad can never be a partner against terrorism. This means a national political settlement that secures a transition to a government that can protect the rights of all Syrians, unite the country and end the conflict remains the only solution.

News story: New Navy ship named in Glasgow

The naming continues an association between the Royal Navy and the River Medway which, as home to the Chatham Historic Dockyard, has existed since Elizabethan times. The second of the Royal Navy's OPVs, HMS Medway is the tenth vessel to bear the name since the 1690s.

She was named by her Sponsor, Lady Wendy Fallon, in a ceremony at the BAE Systems Scotstoun shipyard in Glasgow. Lady Fallon's husband is Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, whose Sevenoaks constituency borders the River Medway.

Lady Fallon broke a bottle of gin on the bow in honour of the Chatham dockyard, where the gin was distilled.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

This year we have already named our second aircraft carrier, two Type 26 frigates and the first in the Offshore Patrol Vessel class. It is a privilege to see yet another ship named for the growing Royal Navy. Named after Kent's main river, my family has taken a particular interest in HMS Medway over the course of its construction and this is a proud day for all involved.

From counter-terrorism and anti-smuggling to securing the UK's borders, HMS Medway will help keep Britain safe.

The 90-metre ship is expected to enter service with the Royal Navy in 2019 and will go on to deploy across the globe on counter-terrorism and anti-smuggling operations.

All five of the new Batch 2 River class OPVs are expected to be in service before the end of 2020, with the first of class, HMS Forth, currently on sea trials.

The OPV programme is sustaining around 800 jobs in Scotland at BAE Systems and is maintaining the vital skills needed to build the new cutting-edge, anti-submarine warfare frigates, the Type 26s, for a Royal Navy growing for the first time since the Second World War.

The ship has a crew of 58 and is equipped with a 30mm cannon and flight deck capable of accommodating a Merlin helicopter, allowing it to undertake vital counter-terrorism and anti-smuggling operations. Displacing around 2,000 tonnes, she has a maximum speed of around 24 knots and can sail 5,500 nautical miles without having to resupply.

HMS Medway is officially affiliated with the Medway district through an

association with Medway Council.

Leader of Medway Council, Councillor Allan Jarrett said:

It is an honour that the vessel has been named after Medway, an area which has a rich naval heritage. Earlier this year we commemorated a significant event in naval history which took place 350 years ago on the River Medway. The Dutch Raid resulted in financial investment in the English naval fleet, leading to the Royal Navy becoming the most powerful in the world.

Today we celebrate a new vessel being added to the fleet to help protect UK waters and we would be pleased to invite HMS Medway to visit us on the River Medway soon.

Sir Simon Bollom, Chief of Materiel (Ships) for Defence Equipment and Support, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) procurement organisation for the Ministry of Defence, said:

The naming of HMS Medway is a proud moment for the Royal Navy, supported by DE&S, and our Industry partners and is a significant milestone in the delivery of this world-class fleet of five new warships.

I look forward not only to the deliveries of the final three OPVs, but continued good progress on the Type 26 programme which the OPV programme has enabled through the sustainment of jobs and skills.

Delivery of the OPV programme is one of the key commitments laid out in the Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015.

[News story: F-35 jet and new batch of UK pilots cleared for Carrier take-off, Defence Minister tells Select Committee](#)

A new group of UK pilots are trained and ready to fly the UK's cutting-edge F-35 fighter jet which is now cleared for take-off from HMS Queen Elizabeth following successful trials using the ski-ramp design featured on the UK flagship, Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin announced at the House of Commons Defence Select Committee this afternoon.

Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin said:

With a new team of British pilots completing their training and the F-35 cleared to fly from the carrier, the momentum continues for this game-changing jet. These milestones come as our pilots prepare to return from the States, ready for next year's unforgettable flight trials from the deck of the nation's new flagship.

The UK currently has 12 F-35 jets out in the United States where they are being tested ahead of flight trials from the Royal Navy's 65,000 tonne carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, next year. Two more aircraft are set to be delivered by the end of the year.



The UK's F-35s have been successfully tested on the ski ramp design at Pax Rivers, Maryland, in the US.

The Defence Minister announced that the F-35 Integrated Test Force, which includes five British pilots, has now successfully completed ski ramp trials. That milestone clears the aircraft for take-off from the deck of the Carrier.

Speaking about the jet, Squadron Leader Andy Edgell, part of that Integrated Test Force, said:

She's marvellous. She has an incredible amount of thrust but it's more than just brawn that makes her so fantastic to fly – it's the brains behind her as well.

She's a masterful piece of engineering and it makes her so effortless to fly. It's impossible not to be exhilarated every time. She's a beast when you want her to be and tame when you need her to be. She's beautiful.

The launch of the F35s from the HMS Queen Elizabeth is a once in a generation historical event. To be the first to fly off the carrier, to have a front row seat, would be an absolute privilege. It wouldn't just be about the pilot – there are hundreds of people who have been working tirelessly behind the scenes to make this happen and the honour will be theirs too.

There are already 150 UK personnel out in the US working with the state-of-the-art jets, and the latest course of UK pilots have just finished their ground school training and are now ready to fly the F-35B at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort in South Carolina.



The cutting-edge F-35 fighter jet.

Amongst those to have graduated from that course are four pilots who started F-35 training straight from their advanced pilot training at RAF Valley, and Wing Commander John Butcher, who will be the Commanding Officer of the RAF's new 617 squadron.

The new home of 617 squadron, RAF Marham, continues to build towards the arrival of the jets next year, moving a step closer earlier this month when the runway intersection resurfacing was completed. 617 Squadron will be the first operational British F-35 unit.

And elsewhere, the Defence Minister also announced that last week, the first F-35 flight with the latest software was conducted on one of the UK's F-35Bs at Edwards Air Force Base in California. This software upgrade, technically known as Block 3F, represents the full warfighting capability the UK F-35s will have at Initial Operating Capability in December 2018.

UK industry will provide approximately 15% of the value of each F-35 to be built, more than 3,000, worth some £1 billion and generating around 25,000 British jobs. The programme remains on time, within costs and offers the best capability for our Armed Forces.

Find out about about the fifth generation F-35B Lightning and the important work of the Integrated Test Force [here](#).

[News story: Two World War 1 soldiers have finally been identified a century later](#)

Rededication services for 2 fallen World War 1 soldiers have been held today (Tuesday 17 October 2017) in Ypres, Belgium. The first for Rifleman William Dickson Evans of The King's (Liverpool Regiment) at Blauwepoort Farm Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery. The second for Private John Anderson of the 4th Battalion Gordon Highlanders at Birr Cross Roads Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery.

Both services, organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services, was conducted by The Reverend Paul van Sittert CF, Chaplain to the Highlanders (4 Scots).



2nd cousins to Rifleman Evans, Sue Muncher and Ann Trail (left to right). Also joining them are Tony Muncher and Les Trail (l to r). The maiden name of Sue and Ann was Dickson. Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved. Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved.

Rifleman Evans enlisted in Liverpool on 7 November 1914 as part of the Liverpool Brigade West Lancashire Division. He sailed from Southampton to Le Havre in February 1915 and joined the 15th Brigade 5th Division serving with the Expeditionary Force. His total service was 173 days before being killed during the second Battle of Ypres on 28 April 1915, aged 22 years old.



Newly placed gravestone bearing the name of Rifleman Evans. Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved.

Rifleman Evans was originally buried in Blauwepoort Farm Cemetery with his fellow comrades of the same regiment who were also killed at the same time. Due to ongoing fighting his grave was subsequently lost or destroyed.



Standing by the graveside of Rifleman Evans his family; Regimental representatives and Deputy Mayor of Ypres; Sub Lt Fred Warren Smith; and Max Harris, trumpeter. Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved.

The JCCC understand that there is no evidence to suggest he is buried elsewhere. His relatives submitted a case to the JCCC in 2015 which has resulted in a headstone being placed in the cemetery near the entrance saying 'Buried elsewhere in this Cemetery'. Members of his family attended the service alongside the antecedent Regiment The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment.



Captain Gary Main laying a wreath at Rifleman Evans's graveside on behalf of the 4 Scots Regiment.

In the afternoon the rededication service for Private John Anderson took place. Private Anderson joined the 4th Battalion Gordon Highlanders in late September 1914. He saw active service in France and Flanders landing in France in March 1915. In May he was in the trenches in the area of Vlamertinghe, West Ypres followed by marching through Ypres taking over the whole front from Hooge. Reports from a fellow soldier to his family stated he was killed in the second Battle by shellfire on 28 May 1915, aged 20 years old.



Standing by the graveside of Private Anderson Regimental representatives and a Royal British Legion standard bearer. Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved.

Private Anderson was originally buried in Birr Cross Roads Cemetery as an unknown soldier of the 4th Battalion Gordon Highlanders. An identification case was submitted to the JCCC which was later accepted on completion of their research and investigations.



Reverend Paul van Sittert CF and Captain Gary Main both 4 Scots Regiment at the graveside of Private Anderson. Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved.

Regrettably Private Anderson's family could not attend the service. Regimental support was provided by the antecedent Regiment The Royal Regiment of Scotland. He is commemorated on the main village and district of Kemnay War Memorial and the Inverurie War Memorial. His brother Alexander was also killed in the Great War.

Sue Raftree, JCCC said:

These brave First World War soldiers fought for their country to make our lives better. It is a privilege for the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre to have organised these two very fitting services to ensure that finally these two soldiers have their own named headstones.

Reverend Paul van Sittert CF said:

Lest we forget. Powerful words, and so much more for us that have been part of these rededication services where two previously unnamed soldiers have now been named. It is an incredible privilege and honour to have played a part. So many have paid the ultimate price, named and unnamed, yet their sacrifice will not be forgotten. We will remember them.

News story: Mini drones set to investigate hazardous scenes, announces Defence Secretary

As part of a collaboration between the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office, the Defence Secretary has awarded funding to a range of small-and-medium-sized-enterprises (SMEs) with high-tech concepts to assess potentially hazardous scenes.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

With intensifying threats abroad and the risk of accidents at home, we need the very latest technology to respond to any incident. Competitions like this with our £800 million Innovation Fund will ensure Britain has the latest in cutting-edge technology needed help keep us safe.

The Defence Secretary made the announcement on the back of chairing the quarterly Defence Suppliers Forum last week, which brings together prime contractors, international companies and SMEs.

The Minister for Security Ben Wallace said:

This competition has the potential to see world-class equipment created to support the emergency services when they arrive on the scene of an incident.

Through this funding, the Government is able to collaborate with academics and the private sector to turn these innovative ideas into front-line tools.

Amongst the winners were:

- Snake Eyes, produced by Autonomous Devices Limited in Milton Keynes, which is small enough to be posted through a letter box and relay 3D images of a space and can detect chemical agents.
- Bath-based BMT Defence Services, who have designed an unmanned aerial vehicle with high-tech gas-sensing technology.
- Horiba Mira, based in Nuneaton, which has a robot with its own neural networks which can deploy on decontamination missions.
- Loughborough University, with a pocket-sized drone which can search for chemicals.

The awards, worth over £1.6m, came as part of the Autonomy in Hazardous Scene Assessment competition, aiming to bring designs into being, and eventually use, in a much shorter space of time than is usually possible.

Through the Defence and Security Accelerator, working with the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), the competition –to be named Minerva – is set to meet some of the challenges of assessing potentially hazardous scenes.

Peter Stockel, from Dstl, said:

After a fast-paced first phase, we are now delighted to rapidly move the project forward into phase 2 with four highly innovative and technically exciting system propositions to tackle this priority challenge we're for UK Defence and Security.

With continued involvement and demonstration with the user community, we aim to mature this emergent capability over the next 12 months to test the 'art of the possible' and accelerate this into the hands of the prospective users for further operational evaluation, both for MOD and the Home Office.

The first round of the competition saw 18 companies selected for funding. This, the second round, chooses four of those initial winning companies to further develop their concepts.

For more information on AHSA, or Minerva, visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/defence-science-and-technology-laboratory>