

News story: Hundreds of Service personnel support London Poppy Day

Servicemen and women descended upon the capital today to lend their support to The Royal British Legion's (TRBL) annual London Poppy Day.

Around 980 personnel from the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force greeted commuters at underground and mainline railway stations across London. It was part of a bid to raise more than £1 million for TRBL in 24 hours.

The day began with the official fundraising launch in Covent Garden, where Service personnel joined celebrity supporter Phil Daniels, star of Quadrophenia and EastEnders. At noon fellow EastEnders actors Barbara Windsor and Shane Richie visited Liverpool Street Station, where The Band of the Parachute Regiment performed.

Military bands played at a number of stations to brighten up the day for those heading to work while uniformed collectors gathered donations. Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin showed her support at Westminster tube station in the morning while Defence Ministers Earl Howe, Mark Lancaster and Tobias Ellwood helped the fundraising efforts at Waterloo Station at lunchtime. The Band of the Grenadier Guards livened up the busy Waterloo concourse in support of the appeal.

Scotland's capital city was also awash with poppies for Edinburgh Poppy Day, with military volunteers collecting on the streets, transport hubs and shopping centres.

Remembrance Sunday falls on 12 November this year and members of the Armed Forces around the world will mark the occasion. Today's Armed Forces are inspired by their predecessors and continue the proud traditions of service and achievements of those who have gone before them.

News story: New nurseries open for UK forces families in Cyprus

The opening of the early years facility is a significant milestone for BFC, DCYP and the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), which has overseen the project, funded through LIBOR fines set aside by the government to support MOD infrastructure improvements for childcare facilities on the defence estate.

BFC currently has over 3,000 military personnel serving abroad, over 300

civil servants and over 3,700 spouses and children. The return of UK troops from Germany within the next 2 years will see BFC become the UK's largest permanent overseas military base.

Before this year, childcare for forces families on the island consisted of crèches that were housed in military buildings that were not designed as creches. In 2014, BFC, DCYP and DIO began a project to build 4 bespoke nurseries for the children of British families serving in Cyprus.

Full design work began in 2015 through DIO SD for 4 nurseries. DCYP, the MOD's professional lead on all matters relating to service children and young people, managed the funding for the improvements. DIO worked with them and BFC to scope locations, develop plans and manage the construction and launch of new nurseries in Ayios Nikolaos, Dhekelia, Akrotiri and Episkopi.

Ayious Nikolaos, Akrotiri and Dhekelia nurseries were completed in July 2017 and opened for business after staff training for the September 2017 term. The Episkopi nursery will be complete later this year and will open in early 2018.

Speaking at the ribbon cutting ceremony, Major General Illingworth was keen to highlight this key issue and congratulate all those involved in seeing the project through to completion. He said:

I am delighted to be here alongside our colleagues from the Directorate for Children and Young People, to officially open this fantastic early years facility.

This is the culmination of a lot of hard work and demonstrates our commitment to early years learning here in Cyprus.

Investing in early years education is very important, and I have no doubt that the children of our military and civilian personnel based here in Cyprus will reap the benefits of this wonderful facility for some years to come.

DCYP director, Mike Cooper was equally enthusiastic:

I echo the comments from Major General Illingworth. The importance of education, even at an early age, cannot be overstated.

These fantastic new settings in Cyprus offer an excellent foundation for lifelong learning and support the government agenda for extending access to high quality childcare.

They also provide great employment opportunities for spouses seeking a skill that will be valued on their return to the UK.

Gary Brownlee, DIO area manager, said:

This project is a good example of how DIO works together with our armed forces customers to deliver a project that meets their requirements, taking into account their needs, respecting the local environment and contributing to the quality of life for armed services personnel and their families abroad.

We are pleased to see the nurseries being enjoyed by children, families and staff. It is very rewarding to see the many years of planning and construction come together successfully.

Thank you to all of the staff within DIO, our contractors and our colleagues in BFC and DCYP for their hard work.

New Red Arrows team pilots announced for RAF centenary year

Red Arrows announce new team pilots for RAF centenary year

A new line-up of Red Arrows pilots who will be part of the team in the Royal Air Force's 100th anniversary year has begun training.

The latest appointments to the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team will spend seven months preparing and working towards the 2018 season, which is the Service's centenary.

Among those pilots joining is a new Team Leader – Squadron Leader Martin Pert, who will fly as Red 1.

It is his second term with the Red Arrows, having been a team pilot between 2012 and 2014, and is now returning following a tour flying the Typhoon aircraft on the frontline.

The 37-year-old said: "I'm hugely proud to be leading the nine Red Arrows aircraft as the Service enters RAF100.

"Every member of the Royal Air Force will no doubt acknowledge the significance of being part of the Service in such a momentous year but, in some ways, it will be business as normal for the Red Arrows.



"We always strive to the highest levels of precision and excellence, so however the team assist in marking the anniversary, those watching can be assured it is befitting such a unique event and all that the celebrations honour.

"In increasingly unpredictable times, honouring 100 years of the RAF with our iconic red, white and blue trails will hopefully bring some comforting familiarity to all those celebrating with us."

Born in Scotland but educated at Parmiter's School, Garston, Squadron Leader Pert was commissioned into the Royal Air Force in 2000.

Team Leaders are always former Red Arrows display pilots and are responsible for all aspects of the aerobatic show, running the training programme and creating the routines.

He succeeds Squadron Leader David Montenegro, whose three-year tour with the team officially finishes this month.

Squadron Leader Pert said: "During my previous tour on the team I was proud of seeing the impact the Red Arrows team had on youngsters.

"Whether it is simply taking time to wave at an airport, or engaging at the numerous science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) events the team support, I'm looking forward to engendering more ways to keep young people interested in all things flying.

"Having also seen the effect digital media has had in just the three years since I was last on the team, I will also be keen to embrace novel ways to bring the Red Arrows, and the Royal Air Force, to more people."

Completely new to the Red Arrows, and flying alongside the six other pilots continuing from the 2017 line-up, are Flight Lieutenants Jon Bond and David Stark, who passed a tough team recruitment process.



To apply to join the Red Arrows, Royal Air Force pilots need to have at least 1,500 fast-jet flying hours, to have completed a frontline tour and be assessed as above average in their flying role.

If they make the shortlist, they then have to attend a week-long selection of tests, interviews and peer review.

Once they have finished their three-year tour with the team, the pilots return to frontline, instructional or staff duties.

Flight Lieutenant Bond, who was born in Epping and attended Chigwell School before going to Loughborough University, joined the Royal Air Force in 2006 and has also flown the Typhoon operationally.

The 33-year-old, who will fly as Red 2 in 2018, said: "My dream was to become a pilot from a very young age and through a series of fortuitous opportunities it eventually became a reality.



"I used to drag my parents around to airshows across the UK when I was a boy and the Red Arrows were probably the main attraction for that.

"We lived next to North Weald airfield and I used to see them from the back garden whenever they were displaying there and can remember saying that's what I wanted to do!"

Born in Geneva, Switzerland, before moving to the UK, Flight Lieutenant Stark was educated at Nottingham High School. He joined the Royal Air Force in 2005.

Flying the Tornado GR4 operationally, the 35-year-old, will be Red 3 for the 2018 season, said: "It will be an incredible challenge but I can't wait to earn the honour of wearing the red flying suit with everything that it represents.

"The Red Arrows reflect the excellence of the UK Armed Forces and the nation as a whole.



"Core values such as determination, professionalism, teamwork and innovation are vital to the delivery of the flying displays and can be found in every member of team, from engineers to aircrew.

"I'm very proud to be in a position to fly for the team and help to highlight such fundamental UK values."

Also joining the team is a new Red 10 – the Squadron's Supervisor – and the first change in this position since 2011.

Squadron Leader Adam Collins takes over this safety role, which also involves commentating on the team's display at shows, from Squadron Leader Mike Ling, who completed a record six consecutive seasons.

Red 10 is the team's Supervisor for all practices and displays, maintaining radio contact with Red 1 from the ground.

He also coordinates the season, takes the spare aircraft between locations and flies the team's photographers.

Squadron Leader Collins attended Solihull School in the West Midlands, where he was a member of the Combined Cadet Force and received an RAF Sixth Form Scholarship.

He went on to study aeronautics and astronautics at Southampton University and was a keen member of the University Air Squadron where he flew the Bulldog at Boscombe Down.

After completing fast-jet flying training, Squadron Leader Collins' first operational tour was flying the Tornado GR4.



The 39-year-old said: "The Red 10 role is certainly unique and its sheer variety is what really appeals.

"I will have the opportunity to fly regularly with the team, both in the backseat during rehearsals and also as the pilot of the 10th aircraft, transiting between displays and photo-chasing formations.

"I'm looking forward to having the opportunity to give people a greater understanding of what we do, through conversation or display commentary, which will be very rewarding."

A former Red Arrows display pilot has also recently returned to the team to take overall responsibility for the Squadron.

Wing Commander Andrew Keith officially took over as Officer Commanding, Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team (OC RAFAT), in August – succeeding Wing Commander Martin Higgins.

He is responsible for the Squadron's flying, engineering, administrative and safety matters.

Wing Commander Keith was commissioned into the Royal New Zealand Air Force in 1994 and graduated as a fast-jet pilot.

He transferred to the Royal Air Force in December 2001, completing frontline tours flying the Harrier and was selected to be a Red Arrows pilot from 2007 to 2009.

Wing Commander Keith said: "The Red Arrows approach the next season having completed a highly-successful 2017 campaign, which included a month-long overseas tour supporting UK interests across the Middle East and displaying to millions of people.



"The focus now is on detailed preparation, with careful planning and training taking place across the Squadron – both in the air and on the ground – to produce a display that will be part of the RAF100 events and activities.

"In keeping with other units and colleagues across the RAF, we hope the events planned in 2018 will commemorate, celebrate and inspire people during this special anniversary."

Based at RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire, the Red Arrows showcase the excellence of the Royal Air Force and represent the United Kingdom at home and overseas. The 2018 programme will be the team's 54th season and it is anticipated that millions of people will see the Red Arrows carry out a trademark combination

of precision flying and dynamic loops, rolls and close-passes. However, before the pilots can officially wear the team's famous red flying suits, they will have to complete winter training. Pilots fly three-times-a-day, five-days-a-week with each sortie filmed and scrutinised in detail. An assessment is then carried out by senior Royal Air Force officers in the spring and, if successful, public display authority is granted and the pilots can change from green coveralls worn during training to their red suits. Similarly, the Red Arrows' ground staff can switch to their royal blue coveralls. The 2018 team will comprise the following pilots:

- **Officer Commanding, Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team: Wing Commander Andrew Keith**
- **Red 1 and Team Leader: Squadron Leader Martin Pert**
- **Red 2: Flight Lieutenant Jon Bond**
- **Red 3: Flight Lieutenant David Stark**
- **Red 4: Flight Lieutenant Chris Lyndon-Smith**
- **Red 5: Flight Lieutenant Dan Lowes**
- **Red 6 and Synchro Leader: Flight Lieutenant Si Taylor**
- **Red 7 and Synchro Two: Flight Lieutenant Toby Keeley**
- **Red 8 and Executive Officer: Flight Lieutenant Matt Masters**
- **Red 9: Flight Lieutenant Mike Bowden**
- **Red 10 and Supervisor: Squadron Leader Adam Collins**

For more information about the team, follow @rafredarrows on Twitter, see the latest images posted on Instagram by following rafredarrows, like RAF Red Arrows on Facebook or visit www.raf.mod.uk/reds

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[News story: Science and tech at core of defence as Minister launches new strategy in Birmingham](#)

By setting out specific research areas and capability priorities, like autonomy, cyber and sensor technology, the strategy will encourage defence to be even more responsive to emerging opportunities and threats, whilst promoting more innovation and collaboration with suppliers.

The Defence Minister made the announcement while visiting Small and Medium-Sized businesses (SMEs) in Birmingham, one of the UK's up-and-coming tech hubs, at EEF's brand new facility in the West Midlands.

Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin said:

This new strategy puts world-beating science and technology right at the core of our Armed Forces. Investing millions into innovative ideas from dynamic British companies will help us defend the country in the face of intensifying threats and keep us ahead of the curve.

A world-leading centre for life sciences, Birmingham has over 36,800 digital jobs, with over 550 startups created from 2011 to 2015, making it a fertile ground for new ideas for UK Defence and Security.

Last year saw the department's direct spend with smaller business increase by over 10%. Many have benefitted from the MOD's £800 million Innovation Fund, with the department committed to spend 1.2% of its rising defence budget on science and technology.

The Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) is one way the finances are channelled, harnessing innovative ideas to give the UK a strategic advantage in Defence and Security through themed competitions and an 'Open Call' for Innovation.

Since its launch, the DASA has assessed nearly 700 proposals from almost 400 organisations and has successfully awarded its defence portion of the 'Open Call' budget for this year.

Ideas have included computer games to help military units develop more effective tactics, a device to reduce the noise of aircraft and vehicles and a redesigned geolocation tracker.

Over 40% of submissions received were from SMEs that have not engaged with defence before, reflecting the success of the MOD efforts to make it easier for SMEs to win defence business, maximising the innovative solutions they can offer the Armed Forces.

Last month the Defence Minister announced the launch of the MOD's new Supplier Portal, which brings together for the first time a range of useful information for new and prospective suppliers in one place.

A new Twitter channel, @defenceproc, is also being used to provide regular updates to suppliers on opportunities and events that the MOD is supporting, whilst the department also launched two simplified, plain English short-form contracts for use in lower value less complex procurements last year, reducing the existing baseline terms and conditions from 18 pages to three.

The new Science and Technology Strategy will be led by the MOD's Chief Scientific Adviser Hugh Durrant-Whyte, who joined this year following a career at the forefront of the robotics sector in Australia.

News story: British soldiers arrive in Estonia

British soldiers from 1st Battalion The Royal Welsh have deployed to Estonia, renewing the UK's commitment to our NATO allies in Europe and providing reassurance in the face of any potential aggression.

Taking over from 5th Battalion The Rifles, which has been in the country since March, 800 soldiers from the Royal Welsh battlegroup arrived this week.

Following an official ceremony earlier today, The Royal Welsh will now lead the multinational enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup, supported by elements from the King's Royal Hussars, the Royal Engineers and the Royal Artillery as well as soldiers from France and Denmark. The battlegroup will be part of the 1st Estonian Infantry Brigade.

The arrival of the Royal Welsh coincides with the second in a series of visits from four RAF Typhoons to Estonia, ready to train and work with UK personnel on the ground as well as our NATO allies.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Nobody should be in any doubt of our unwavering commitment to the security of Europe through NATO in the face of Russian belligerence.

In the face of intensifying threats, the UK has stepped up across Europe, with soldiers, tanks and Typhoons deployed from Estonia to Romania.

Our enhanced Forward Presence is a strategic tripwire that we will maintain on an enduring footing.

Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Owain Luke added:

Having completed a demanding period of training in the UK and Canada earlier this year, we are delighted to have finally arrived in Estonia.

We now look forward to training and operating with the 1st Estonian Infantry Brigade and our French and Danish allies as part of NATO's wider defensive posture across the Baltic states and Poland.

The UK's battlegroup forms part of the wider NATO enhanced Forward Presence,

with multinational forces deployed across the Baltic States and Poland, led by the US, Canada and Germany. The UK has a further 150 soldiers based in Poland, part of the US led battlegroup and RAF Typhoons have recently completed a four month deployment to Romania, patrolling the Black Sea skies.