

The Ushtar Eagle Has Landed

The UK's NATO ally Albania hosted over 200 RAF Reserves and Regulars in numerous locations around the country as they trained together developing operational teamwork and friendships on Exercise Ushtar Eagle 17.

Exercise Director and Officer Commanding 8 Force Protection group, Wing Commander Phil Hateley said:

"The UK is committed to NATO, and despite the fact we have are leaving the European Union we are still committed to European security, and our deployment of troops in Albania is a clear demonstration of that. Coming to Albania has given us many opportunities that we could never replicate in the UK. The freedom to be able to go and conduct military training in and amongst local villages is the hallmark."



Drawn from 18 individual RAF stations across the UK, Reserves from specialisms including the RAF Regiment, RAF Police, logistics, medical, intelligence and Media Operations worked alongside their Albanian counterparts to hone their war-fighting, peacekeeping and humanitarian skills.

The Balkan country provided a stunning backdrop for a series of gruelling drills and training scenarios that UK and Albanian troops could carry out on operations together in the future. Gunners and soldiers bonded together over tactical training, physical exercise and some social time in the evenings.



Interest in Ushtar Eagle reached presidential levels in the first week with a visit from the Albanian President, Ilir Meta, who watched a combined tactical demonstration by the RAF Regiment Reserves and soldiers from the Third Battalion of the Albanian Army. He was joined by the British Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Stuart Peach, who was in Albania's capital Tirana for a NATO conference.

An Albanian naval establishment close to Durres was the setting for members of 2503 and 603 Squadrons and the Third Battalion of the Albanian Army to storm a building suspected of being a "terrorist safe house". Under the cover of smoke the combined assault team entered the building, making an "arrest" and extracting the "suspect" with the

help of RAF and Albanian police.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach said:

"I would like to thank the Albanian people for the warmth of their welcome and the exceptional training facilities they provide. We have come a long way together through our shared military history and shared experience in NATO. I am confident as the UK Chief of Defence that our future is much more secure as a result of our alliance."



The Albanian Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, Brigadier General Bardhyl Kollçaku, who also attended the demonstration, said:

"This is a demonstration of the excellent cooperation we have between the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Albania, and the assurance that this cooperation will extend and will continue even more in the future in the interests of peace and security, not only between our countries but also in the region and beyond."

Moving from the coast to more rural areas in the mountains for the second week the exercise featured section attacks, patrolling through Albanian villages, ambushes and defensive tactics. Enduring temperatures over 35 degrees the RAF and their Albanian counterparts trained from dawn till midnight, pushing themselves physically and mentally. The gunners received a warm but curious welcome from the local population as they went about their daily business.



LAC Alex Hand, from 609 Squadron, and the youngest Reservist on the exercise, said:

"Opportunities like this to train abroad are one of the reasons why I joined the Reserves. I have been pushed out of my comfort zone but loved every minute of it. Working with the Albanians has been very interesting and meeting other Reservists from around the country has made me realise the scale of the organisation I belong to."

This is the first time the RAF Reserves have worked and trained so closely with the UK's NATO ally Albania. The two countries are developing a close working relationship after the Royal Navy and British Army previously completed exercises and training.

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News story: Drones – are you flying yours safely? (and legally?)

Most people will either have flown or seen a Quadcopter type drone being flown about. But how many of you are aware that drones present a hazard to aviation and are subject to the law through the Air Navigation Order?

What is meant by the word 'drone'? The public and press use the phrase for almost anything that flies and does not have a pilot – we in the services generally prefer the terms; Remotely Piloted Air System (RPAS) or Unmanned Air System (UAS), you may even hear Unmanned Air Vehicle (UAV). This article however is not about the RPAS', UAVs or UAS used by the military, these systems (from the large (Reaper) down to the very small), are generally well regulated, procured correctly and flown/operated by trained individuals who understand the hazards involved. This article and the use of the phrase 'drone' focuses on those systems that are affordable, commercially available and weigh no more than 20kg, though the majority weigh considerably less.



A Black Hornet nano helicopter unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). Crown Copyright. Photo: via MOD.

Most of the commercial drones come in the form of Quadcopters, Hexacopters or even Octocopters, and vary in price and capability. At the bottom end of the market are models that are simply toys, small very lightweight, with limited range and endurance. About £100 will get a Quadcopter with a camera, whilst not of 'professional' quality these drones can weigh in the region of 1kg and can have a range that takes them beyond the operator's line of sight. For several hundred pounds, you can purchase a drone which has full HD video, a range of beyond 1km and decent battery endurance. These drones weigh in the region of 3kg, perhaps more if purpose built or exceptionally capable. Almost all of these drones, with the exception of the very small toys, have the capability to fly to several thousand feet.

In addition to the standard drones – controlled by a hand held 2 stick controller and operated by eye, increasingly there are those which are operated by what is called 'First Person View'. This is where the operator will fly the drone using a normal controller but will be viewing images transmitted by the drone either through a set of goggles or on a screen.

It ought to be mentioned that legally, model aircraft are also considered drones. These range in size from small light weight models to gas-turbine powered scaled replicas – capable of very fast speeds and weighing close to 10kg.

Drones are readily available on the high street and internet, and are being sold in their thousands, and it is not hard to see why. Not only are they affordable and capable, but they are great fun to fly or operate, and have great utility. Whilst most people use them for personal recreation, they are also very popular with photographers and those that use photography in their business, like estate agents or the media. Those who work at height now use them to get information before climbing or instead of climbing, survey companies use them and large parcel delivery companies have an aspiration to use them for deliveries.

So, drones are here to stay, but what is the problem? In simple terms, for the vast majority of drone users, there isn't one, but there are those who operate their drones too high or too close to airfields. In 2016 there were over 50 reports from pilots of commercial airliners that their aircraft had almost hit a drone. Military aviation is not immune, there have been near misses with Chinooks at Benson and Odiham, likewise for fixed wing aircraft at Cranwell, and in 2016 a Navy Lynx at 2000ft missed a drone by an estimated 30-50 feet. Whilst there is work ongoing within the aviation industry to fully understand the implications of a drone hitting an aircraft, it doesn't take much imagination to understand the likely consequences of 3kg of metal and plastic, including the lithium-polymer battery, hitting a helicopter windshield or, perhaps worse, the tail rotor at 100mph. Likewise for a fixed wing aircraft but at greater speeds, hitting the canopy or disappearing into an engine intake. So if you or members of your family are one of the many owners of a drone, or are thinking of buying one then you need to read on.

If you are using a drone for personnel use then you are governed by the Civilian Aviation Authority (CAA) [Air Navigation Order 2016](#), specifically Article [241](#) (endangering the safety of any person or property), Article [94](#) (small unmanned aircraft) and Article [95](#) (small unmanned surveillance aircraft). This is the law and you can, and individuals have been, prosecuted for breaking it. The new Drone Code is available to download at <http://dronesafe.uk/> along with a useful Drone Assist App created by the CAA and air traffic control body National Air Traffic Service (NATS) to help individuals understand their responsibilities.



Quadcopter with a camera. Crown Copyright. All rights reserved.

Essentially your responsibilities are:

- to know how to fly your drone safely, and do so within the law
- to understand that the operator is legally responsible for every flight
- to keep your drone in sight at all times – stay below 400ft
- not to fly your drone over a congested area, never fly within 50 metres of a person, vehicle or building not under your control
- ensure any images you obtain using the drone do not break privacy laws
- avoiding collisions – you should never fly a drone near an airport or close to aircraft. It is a criminal offence to endanger the safety of an aircraft in flight

There are several other things to think about – what is your drone going to do if it runs out of power or fails? Is it going to land/fall somewhere safe? Are you far enough away from people, buildings and more importantly airfields if you lose control of your drone? Also bear in mind that you can be several

miles away from an airfield and still be a hazard to manned aviation. Height is very difficult to judge from the ground, you might still be able to see your drone, just, and yet be well above 400ft. You should also consider that many military helicopters will often return to an airfield from all directions at 500ft and fixed wing aircraft can start descending from 1000ft about 3 miles away. So the message is this – if you are going to use drones, have a really good think about where you are, keep your drone in sight, consider what aircraft might be flying about and keep clear – it is your responsibility.

For those who wish to use drones commercially, i.e. for commercial gain, then permission is required from the CAA. They will expect you to attend an accredited course that will train you and assess your ability to safely operate drones. The courses include flying competence, knowledge of the law, risk assessments, decision making and more. They exist to ensure that those who wish to legitimately use drone technology in their business can do so safely and not expose the general public or aviation to unnecessary danger. Further information can be found on the [CAA website](#).

Finally, we all know how useful drones are on operations and some units may consider that these commercially available drones can be put to use to meet service non-core aviation requirements – photography, multimedia applications, surveys etc. If you are considering this, then you need to know that in this instance any drone use for the MOD, will be regulated by the [Military Aviation Authority \(MAA\)](#). Specifically, Regulatory Articles [1600](#), [2320](#) and most pertinently [2321](#). The requirements in these regulatory articles are similar to those required by the CAA. If your unit does not have any aviation expertise you may wish to consult the MAA direct for advice, or, for those with access to the Defence Intranet – view Defence Instructions and Notice (DIN) [2015DIN06-023](#); Alternatively DINs [2016DIN07-112](#) and [2016DIN04-178](#) issued by 700X Naval Air Squadron are a good starting point.

In summary, drone technology is extremely useful, great fun to use and is here to stay. But used wrongly it does pose a genuine hazard to manned aviation, so make sure you know the law, stay within the law and fly safe.

10 things you need to know about flying drones

1. drones can and do present a very real hazard to manned aircraft – pilots (including military pilots) have reported over 50 near misses with drones last year alone
2. drones (including model aircraft) are subject to the law through the Air Navigation Order
3. it is your responsibility to fly safely and within the law – if you don't (and individuals have been) you could be prosecuted.
4. never fly a drone near an airport/airfield or close to aircraft. It is a criminal offence to endanger the safety of aircraft in flight
5. keep your drone in sight and below 400ft
6. do not fly over congested areas and never fly within 50m of a person, vehicle or building not under your control
7. if you wish to use a drone for commercial purposes (get paid) then you need to have permission from the CAA

8. ensure any images obtained do not break privacy laws
 9. if your unit wishes to buy a commercially available drone for Defence activities (photographs, multimedia, and surveys at height) it becomes regulated by the MAA and you must follow their rules
 10. finally, Follow the [Drone Code](#), have fun and fly safe
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News story: False Caliphate faces collapse as UK marks three year tackling Daesh

Daesh fighters are being pinned down by the Royal Air Force in their former stronghold of Raqqa as the UK marks three years of tackling the barbaric cult in Iraq and Syria.

Royal Air Force aircraft destroyed 17 targets in Syria in a single day last week as the air campaign intensifies, forcing Daesh to splinter and retreat from areas it ruled when the UK voted to begin air strikes in September 2014.

British aircraft have struck Daesh 1,340 times in Iraq and 262 times in Syria. In that time the group has lost territory, finances, leaders and fighters as the 73-member coalition has liberated cities in both countries.

Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, said:

Britain has made a major contribution to the campaign that has crippled Daesh since 2014, forcing this miserable cult from the gates of Baghdad to the brink of defeat in Raqqa. By air, land and sea UK personnel have played a tireless role in striking targets and training allies.

As the second largest contributor to the Global Coalition's military campaign, the UK has flown more than 8,000 sorties with Tornado and Typhoon jets and Reaper drones, providing strikes, surveillance and reconnaissance, refuelling and transport.

Since 2014 the UK has hit Daesh with over 1,500 strikes, bombarding targets including heavy machine-gun positions, truck-bombs, mortar teams, snipers and weapons stores.

RAF Typhoons, Tornados and Reapers have hounded Daesh day and night, striking from Raqqa and Dayr az Zawr in Syria to Qayyarah and Al Qaim in Iraq.

Air Chief Marshal, Sir Stephen Hillier, said:

This has been an immense effort by RAF airmen and airwomen over the last three years of continued operations, countering Da'esh in Iraq and Syria. However, the tempo continues with RAF aircraft destroying 17 targets in Syria in a single day last week.

Three years ago Daesh was barely an hour from the gates of Baghdad, but today it has lost more than 73 per cent of the territory it occupied in Iraq and 65 per cent of its former territory in Syria.

The Royal Air Force has played an essential role to allies, helping Syrian Democratic Forces engaged in ground close combat and the Iraqi Security Forces who continue their advance having liberated Mosul and Ninewah province.

More than 5.5 million people have been freed from Daesh's rule and over 2 million displaced Iraqi civilians have returned to their homes. In Mosul alone, it is estimated that over 265,000 people have returned.

On the ground, around 600 British soldiers are in Iraq, helping to train that country's forces. UK troops have so far helped train over 58,000 Iraqi Security Forces in battle winning infantry, counter-IED, engineering and combat medical skills.

Recognising the valuable contributions made by many serving military personnel, Sir Michael announced an Iraq and Syria Operational Service Medal during his recent visit to Iraq.

The UK's commitment from all three Services to the fight against Daesh across the region now numbers just over 1,400 military personnel, with the latest uplift of 44 Royal Engineers announced in September demonstrating the UK's contribution to the campaign.

News story: Defence Equipment and Support Chief Executive to depart

The Ministry of Defence has today [28 September] announced that Tony Douglas, CEO of Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S), will stand down from the role at the end of this year.

After more than two years in post, he will return to the private sector having led DE&S through the delivery of significant project milestones, including the launch of Queen Elizabeth Aircraft Carrier and the negotiations for the procurement of Type 26 and 31e frigates.

Since joining in September 2015, he has also driven a far reaching, major programme of organisational transformation which is making a real difference to the delivery of equipment and support to the UK Armed Forces.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

I am personally very grateful for the help and support Tony has provided to me personally and been very impressed by the significant progress he has achieved in his time with the MOD, we will be sorry to lose him.

He is responding to an unexpected opportunity in the private sector which he has decided to pursue and I would not want to stand in his way from taking on that fresh challenge.

I am confident that the momentum he has generated will be maintained by his executive team and, in due course, his successor ensuring that DE&S continues to deliver using the foundations he has put into place.

Tony Douglas said:

It has been a very difficult decision for me to make. I will leave DE&S at the end of 2017 but I will do so having thoroughly enjoyed our time together. We have made very real progress on project delivery and transformation and we should be individually and collectively proud of what we have done.

In part, my decision to leave DE&S has been made easier by the knowledge that it will remain in capable hands. I have decided to leave because I have been offered a compelling opportunity to lead a large and complex organisation in the private sector and in an industry, unconnected with defence, which I know well.

Minister for Defence Procurement, Harriett Baldwin said:

I have very much enjoyed working with Tony Douglas; we have made considerable progress together on the delivery of individual projects and on organisational change. The foundation he has laid allows that good work to continue and I wish him every success in his new role.

DE&S Chairman, Paul Skinner said:

Tony has been an inspiring leader of DE&S, he has brought real innovation to its commercial approach and the way we do business. We are determined to build further on his impressive achievements.

Tony Douglas joined the MOD in September 2015 after being Chief Executive Officer at Abu Dhabi Airports.

The process to find his successor will begin immediately and an internal interim leadership will be put into place to manage the time that will take.

News story: Defence Secretary names new warship HMS Belfast in Northern Ireland

The second to be named in the City Class of eight brand new, cutting-edge, anti-submarine warfare frigates, HMS Belfast will provide advanced protection for the likes of the UK's nuclear deterrent and Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carriers. The Defence Secretary revealed the name at Belfast shipyard Harland and Wolff, which built the Royal Navy's last HMS Belfast, in 1938.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

I'm hugely proud that the second name announced of our eight cutting-edge new Type 26 frigates will be HMS Belfast. She and her sister ships will form the backbone of our Navy well into the 2060s, keeping us safe by protecting the country's nuclear deterrent and new aircraft carriers.

It's apt to name this ship at the famous site which built the very first HMS Belfast. Thanks to our ambitious new National Shipbuilding Strategy, this shipyard once again has the chance to be involved in building a British warship thanks to the competition to build a new class of light frigates for our growing Royal Navy.

The Defence Secretary launched the [ambitious National Shipbuilding Strategy earlier in the month](#), and as part of that laid out plans for a first batch of another new class of frigates – the Type 31e.



A concept image of the new Type 26 frigate, one of which will be called HMS Belfast.

A competitive procurement process for those ships could see them shared between yards and assembled at a central hub. The warships will be built in the UK, with a price cap of no more than £250m, and will be designed to meet the needs of both the Royal Navy and the export market.

The Defence Secretary has personally committed to visiting all of the UK's major shipyards in the run-up to industry bringing forward its solutions for the Type 31e class, as he looks to grow the Royal Navy fleet for the first time since World War Two.

Just before the start of the Second World War, the original HMS Belfast was commissioned, having being built at Harland and Wolff shipyard. She went on to support the Battle of North Cape, the Normandy landings and the Korean War.

The original ship now belongs to Imperial War Museums and is permanently docked in London. Before the new HMS Belfast commissions, the original HMS Belfast will be renamed 'HMS Belfast 1938', the year the ship was launched.



The original HMS Belfast, belonging to the Imperial War Museum, based on the Thames. the ship will now be renamed as HMS Belfast (1938).

Diane Lees, Director General, Imperial War Museums:

IWM is delighted that the name HMS Belfast will return again to the Royal Navy's front line as a major warship. We welcome the opportunity this will bring for our internationally significant museum to have a close affiliation with the new Belfast, enabling a powerful link between the Royal Navy's past and present. Before the new HMS Belfast commissions, IWM's ship's identity will evolve to HMS Belfast (1938), the year the ship was launched, in order to prevent any possibility of confusion.

The new HMS Belfast is set to enter service in the mid-2020s and, along with her fellow Type 26 frigates, will have a truly global reach, protecting the UK's strategic interests as well as the likes of the UK's nuclear submarines, and delivering high-end warfighting capability wherever it is needed.

Its flexible design will also enable these capabilities to be adapted to counter future threats, whilst the ships will also benefit from the latest advances in digital technology.

Part of the MOD's £178bn equipment plan, the three ships being built under the first contract will safeguard 4,000 jobs in Scotland and across the UK supply chain until 2035. The Defence Secretary cut steel on HMS Glasgow, the first Type 26, in July, whilst the other is yet to be named.



The Defence Secretary visited Harland & Wolff, near Belfast, one of the UK shipyards that could bid for the new Type 31e frigates.

Admiral Sir Philip Jones, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, said:

The City class theme has been chosen for the Type 26 frigates in order to reaffirm the bond between the Nation and it's Navy. We want to honour some of the great centres of industry and commerce in all parts of the United Kingdom, and few cities have such a rich maritime heritage as Belfast.

The previous HMS Belfast (1938) is one of the most famous ships of the twentieth century, serving at the Battle of North Cape, in the Arctic campaign and at the Normandy landings, and later with the United Nations forces sent to Korea. It is wonderful that she survives today as a museum, but the Royal Navy believes that such a distinguished fighting name deserves to take its place once more in our operational fleet. A world leader in anti-submarine warfare, the new HMS Belfast will work with our allies in NATO and around the world to preserve the freedom and security that her predecessor fought so hard to secure.

The possible block building solution for the Type 31e reflects the way that the UK's huge new aircraft carriers were built, and also the UK's new polar research ship, the RRS Sir David Attenborough. That ship's central assembly

hub is Merseyside shipyard Cammell Laird, which the Defence Secretary paid a visit to on Tuesday. The company already provides the in-service support for a number of the Navy's Royal Fleet Auxiliary support ships.

Before heading to Harland and Wolff today, the Defence Secretary also visited Thales' air defence facility in Belfast. The site produces the 'Starstreak' short-range missile for the British Army and is also producing a new lightweight, multirole missile for the Army's Wildcat helicopters.

Whilst the second to be named, HMS Belfast is Ship 3 in the Type 26 programme. Ship 1 is called HMS Glasgow and Ship 2 is yet to be named.