

High-Light



THE TRI-SERVICE MAGAZINE OF HIGHLAND RESERVE FORCES' AND CADETS' ASSOCIATION



**ERS Gold Awards –
Pages 6 & 7**

Huan Davies takes the helm

Welcome to the Winter edition of *High-Light*. Reflection on what has passed and what is to come may occupy many people's thoughts at this time of year. It certainly does mine as I step into my new role as Chief Executive of Highland RFCA intent on channelling my experience and energies to new challenges.

I write this humbled by both the record of my predecessor Mark Dodson and his enormous generosity of spirit, time and insight as he has helped me prepare for my arrival. It would be remiss to also not mention and sincerely thank Tom Kerrigan for holding the fort so superbly over the interregnum.

This issue of *High-Light* is a bumper one covering the panoply of activities Highland RFCA is charged with delivering in support of the extraordinary community of Reserves and cadets in the Highland region. The Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Awards – celebrating the commitment of 14 recipient companies – underlines the importance of the civil-military links in our region and their important contribution towards a national effort on Defence and resilience. The official opening of the Dunfermline Army Reserve Centre by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal was a palpable milestone in that national effort. The Estates team and its many partners deserve praise for their persistent efforts over a protracted period shepherding this project from inception to delivery. It will provide a truly fitting and firm base for future generations.



Guests at the Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Awards.

Efforts to ensure that what Defence is doing is articulated clearly to wider society are central to Highland RFCA's mission. I'm delighted the Area Committee Meetings are covered in this edition. The Northern and Southern Committees are a vital part of our connective tissue and I commend the report on their proceedings to you. Equally, I'm delighted that RAF Lossiemouth hosted many of our regional employers for a rich programme and privileged look behind the wire revealing the Royal Air Force's role in our region and beyond. As I write this the Prime Minister is hosting his Norwegian opposite number at RAF Lossiemouth on the day the Lunna House agreement is to be signed with Norway. It marks a further tangible pivot towards a more robust northern defence posture and reminds us that in times of increased national preparedness our region has always been at the forefront of those efforts.



Employers being shown round a Typhoon during the RAF Lossiemouth visit.

Supporting the next generation is a sacred covenant in and of itself – and I'm delighted that our cadets' accomplishments are recognised and celebrated here. Whether achieving gold awards in military competitions, hosting well-received employer visits to cadet camps, or supporting our Area Committee Meetings with accounts of their lived experience, our cadets are a testament to the optimism, hope and potential of the younger generation. They are enabled by an amazing cohort of Cadet Force Adult Volunteers and the Permanent Support Staff whose selflessness and commitment I salute.

As I come to sum up I'm struck by the extraordinary community that the RFCA binds together. The winter solstice approaches and in the darkening days of autumn we have said goodbye to one of the Association's stalwarts – Lieutenant Colonel Alexander 'Sandy' Cram TD. His life was marked by the consistent and positive contributions he made and from which so many benefitted. My thoughts are with his family who so generously supported him in all his endeavours.

As you turn the final pages of this edition replete with a mince pie and whatever your accompanying tippie was, I would ask you to reflect on Sandy's legacy. As the light returns and the world renews think how you can ensure that his legacy (and many others before him) is not a historical footnote, but a call to arms.

My challenge to you all is to commit to a simple New Year's resolution – to introduce at least one person to the Association whether that be simply sharing your copy of *High-Light* or inviting someone to an event in 2026. The challenges of the 21st Century concern us all and the more diverse and robust our Association is the more impact it will have in helping to shape and support our thinking in a way that is well cast for our region. Reflecting that view into those areas where decisions are made and ambition, resource and priority are set remains as important today as it was a century ago.

As your Association Chief Executive I am looking forward to 2026 and the opportunity to hear first-hand from you – your ideas – on how my team and I can best support our region's cadets, Reserves, employers and communities.

Finally, may I take this opportunity to send Highland RFCA's warmest wishes for the season – a peaceful Christmas and a prosperous New Year to you all.

Huan Davies

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Meet the new Chief Executive

Highland RFCA has welcomed Lieutenant Colonel Huan Davies RM as its new Chief Executive

Lieutenant Colonel Davies (pictured) commissioned into the Royal Marines in 1992. He specialised as a Royal Marines Mountain Leader, completing the Chilean Army Winter Warfare Course and the Royal Marines Course.

His Regimental Duty started at Comacchio Group conducting nuclear security duties. His career then took him south of the border again to 42 Commando where he was both Officer Commanding Recce and Officer Commanding K Company; deploying on operations to South Armagh and Iraq respectively in those roles. He was a Unit Second in Command twice; first at Major with 30 Commando Information Exploitation Group in Plymouth and at Lieutenant Colonel with 43 Commando Fleet Protection Group in Faslane. He went on to command Royal Marines Reserve Scotland.

A graduate of French Staff College he has held a series of varied roles at single Service, joint and departmental level. His first staff role was as SO2 Commitments in Headquarters Royal Marines and the Naval Staff in 2000 responsible for the Royal Marines operational and exercise programme. His second significant staff role was as Permanent Joint Headquarters SO2 J5 Plans Africa in 2005 working closely with NATO allies – deploying frequently to plan for contingency options. He then served as the SO2 Ops/Plans in the Joint Media Operations Team overseeing and deploying with embedded media into Iraq and Afghanistan. This led to his first staff role at Lieutenant Colonel as SO1 Plans in the Directorate of Media and Communications in the Ministry of Defence responsible for Afghanistan and Pakistan working with No.10, across Government and with close allies.

He has subsequently worked as the Military Adviser on Africa, Europe and Multilateral Organisations in the Cabinet Offices Stabilisation Unit, working in multi-disciplinary teams across a broad range of areas from West Africa to Russia; including leading annual reviews on multi-departmental overseas programmes and a review of the Stabilisation Unit's offer to Defence. In his final staff appointment he led the Ministry of Defence's Global Counter Terrorism programme. A role that followed on logically from two years as the Defence Attaché in Somalia. His stint in Counter-Terrorism finished with an

operational deployment as the Ministry of Defence's Counter-Terrorism Regional Coordinator in the Middle East.

Lieutenant Colonel Davies has also held significant training roles. He took a troop of Royal Marines Young Officers through training in 1999. More recently between 2014 and 2017 he served in the British Peace Support Team South Africa as the embedded UK officer in the South African War College. This role saw him teach and transfer the Operational Level Planning Process into the War College curriculum, run the Combined Joint Africa Exercise in Botswana, South Africa and Zambia, support the Defence College – Royal College of Defence Studies equivalent – with academic modules and as a lecturer on Crisis Communications and, act as the UK lead in support of the African Conference of Commandants – a pan-African cohort of Staff Colleges amplifying best practice.

He is a keen telemark skier and has Captained the Royal Navy (RN) at inter-Service level as well as representing Great Britain at an international level. He has held administrative roles as Chair Telemark both for the RN and the Armed Forces Winter Sports Association. He is in the process of taking over a voluntary position as Chair Telemark for Great Britain Snowsports.

Lieutenant Colonel Davies is a long-term resident of Scotland. His wife, Liz, is an actor, and their two children are following their studies in Scotland. In any free time he gets between work and family he enjoys being active in the Scottish outdoors – at least while the knees and shoulders hold out! After a career of globe-trotting he's very much looking forward to focussing his energies closer to home to enable opportunities for our extraordinary cohort of Highland Reserves and Cadets.



Fun farewell for Brigadier Dodson

Highland RFCA staff gathered at the Barry Buddon Training Area to say farewell to outgoing Chief Executive Brigadier Mark Dodson.

Brigadier Mark retired on 10 October after 10 years at the helm of the Association.

His send-off took the form of a team-building day at the home of Angus and Dundee Battalion Army Cadet Force (ACF) on 9 October. Staff from Highland RFCA HQ and its district offices, Permanent Support Staff from all of the ACF Battalions, along with Angus and Dundee Battalion ACF Commandant Colonel Scott Dunn were put into teams and enjoyed several rounds of laser clay pigeon shooting, darts football and target archery.

Scoring duties were handled by Head of Engagement Michelle McKearnon and former Deputy Chief Executive Andrew Macnaughton. Once the scores were added up, the winners were announced and – purely coincidentally – the team containing Brigadier Mark came out on top!

Presentation of medals and an inflatable cup followed, before Deputy Chief Executive Tom Kerrigan delivered a speech

thanking Brigadier Mark for his decade of hard work for the Association. Brigadier Mark responded in typically modest fashion, largely crediting the success of the past 10 years to the staff.



Brigadier Dodson with his winning team.

Brigadier Mark was presented with gifts, including a commemorative bottle of whisky, and souvenir *High-Light* front cover.

Everyone then enjoyed lunch before Highland RFCA Chair Wing Commander Dr David Caddick spoke, thanking Brigadier Mark for his hard work and dedication.



Southern Area Chair Colonel (Retired) Jim Kinloch welcomes guests to the meeting in Dunfermline.



Left – A question at the Southern Area Meeting. Centre – Cadet Colour Sergeant Erin Marie addresses the Northern Area Meeting, and (right) Leading Cadet Daniel Coll of the Sea Cadets speaks about his life as a cadet.

Area Committees gather

Highland RFCA's Northern and Southern Area Committees gathered for annual updates at the Area Meetings in October.

The HRFCA Membership is geographically divided into two Area Committees. The members include Armed Forces and Veteran Champions as well as the Heads of the Service Cadets and the Armed Forces units in the Highlands and Islands. They typically meet annually for updates on challenges, developments, achievements and future plans.

Both Area Meetings began with the Area Chair's introduction, welcome, and report. HRFCA's update on key changes since the Annual Association Meeting held at Discovery Point in Dundee in April followed. Members also heard unit updates from the unit representatives.

The hybrid Northern Area Meeting took place at Aberdeenshire Council headquarters at Woodhill House on 15 October. The Northern Area Chair, Major (Retired) Alec Rose, led the meeting. Northern Area Vice Chair and HRFCA's Employer Representative Member as Aberdeenshire Council's HR Manager, Ms Glenda Gray, then informed the members about the Council and the Reservists and Cadet Force Adult Volunteers they employ as a Forces-friendly employer. HRFCA's Deputy Chief Executive and Interim Chief Executive, Major (Retired) Tom Kerrigan, followed with the HRFCA update. HRFCA's Defence Relationship Manager, Major Ray Watt, also gave an Employer Engagement-focused update. A selection of unit updates were delivered in person.

In the afternoon, Major Rose welcomed guest speakers dialling

in virtually. Northern Area Members had the pleasure of hearing from keynote speaker, Professor Simon Denny, an independent researcher and consultant, who spoke about the impact of cadet organisations on young people, Adult Volunteers, and wider society. The Commandant of the National Air & Space Camp, Squadron Leader Tom Hunt, then spoke about the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics opportunities in the cadet syllabus. SaxaVord UK Spaceport's Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Ms Debbie Strang, and Wood PLC's Transformation Director, Major Niall MacRae, followed by giving insight into the transferability of skills and behaviours from a military career to a civilian workplace. Wood PLC is an Armed Forces Covenant signatory and Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award holder. After the virtual speakers, a cadet from Grampian District Sea Cadet Corps, Leading Cadet Daniel Coll, and the Lord-Lieutenant's Cadet for Aberdeen City, Colour Sergeant Erin Marie from 2nd Battalion The Highlanders Army Cadet Force, shared their positive experiences and opportunities.

The Southern Area Meeting took place at 154 (Scottish) Regiment Royal Logistic Corps's new Army Reserve Centre in Dunfermline on 21 October. The Southern Area Chair, Colonel (Retired) Jim Kinloch, led the meeting. HRFCA's Chair, Wing Commander Dr David Caddick, delivered the HRFCA update.

Unit representatives had the opportunity to raise key issues, messages, activities, achievements, and plans for the future. Major Watt, who is also a Southern Area Member as Second-in-Command of 154 Regiment and Officer Commanding of 239 (Transport) Squadron of the Regiment, delivered an update on behalf the Regiment's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Chloe O'Brien.

ERS Gold success celebrated



The Gold Award winners with General Officer Scotland, Major General Robin Lindsay, and (back, left) and (back, right) Highland RFCA Defence Relationship Managers Hayley Munro and Ray Watt.

Fourteen employer organisations had their outstanding commitment to the Armed Forces recognised at the 2025 Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Gold Awards.

The Highland RFCA-organised event saw around 50 guests and hosts gather at The Black Watch Castle and Museum in Perth on 20 November for the ceremony.

The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award recognises the positive role employers play in supporting Defence and inspiring others to do the same. Nationally, more than 200 organisations were recognised in 2025 by the UK Government with the highest badge of honour for supporting the Armed Forces community.

The winners have all been powerful advocates for the Armed Forces Covenant by actively engaging with their peers, encouraging them to employ Armed Forces personnel, Veterans, and their families, and providing robust and sustained support for Reservists.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation that

those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly.

There are now more than 1,000 organisations that hold Gold Awards. The Scheme is delivered by Defence Relationship Management. Organisations must reapply every five years to retain their Gold Award status.

Andron Facilities Management, Glenhead Engineering Ltd and O'Neill Ross Ltd were unable to attend the ceremony. Glenhead has subsequently received its Award, with the other two to follow at a later date.

Principal guest at The Black Watch Castle and Museum was General Officer Scotland, Major General Robin Lindsay.

General Lindsay presented the Awards and delivered a speech on the Employer Recognition Scheme and the value of members of the Defence community to society.

He said: "What a great privilege it is to be with you here tonight to congratulate you on your fantastic Gold Awards. It's a remarkable achievement and shows an extraordinary investment in our people, whether that be cadets, Cadet Force Adult Volunteers, or members of the Reserve or Regular Forces.

"By engaging with Defence and with the people in Defence, you are engaging really in our pursuit of both the security of the United Kingdom and also social value. So, for that, thank you very much indeed. It's great to be with you here and to celebrate your success and support for the Armed Forces, for Defence and for the people in Defence."

A meal followed with informative speeches delivered by an Armed Forces Reservist, a Cadet Force Adult Volunteer, and a cadet. They were Lieutenant Matt McPherson, a Royal Naval Reservist at HMS Scotia where he is an Information Operations Officer; Captain Abigail Robertson, a Cadet Force Adult Volunteer with The Black Watch Battalion Army Cadet Force; and Cadet Sergeant Magnus Porter of the Pipes and Drums Detachment of The Black Watch Battalion Army Cadet Force. Magnus is also the Lord-Lieutenant's Cadet for Fife.

Music was provided by Pipe Major William Peters and Piper Lochy Murray from Glenalmond College Combined Cadet Force.

And the recipients are...

20/20 Business Insight Limited
 Andron Facilities Management
 Argyll and Bute Council
 Crieff Hydro Family of Hotels
 DLR Media Limited
 Falkirk Football Community Foundation
 Fife Sports and Leisure Trust
 G.H.Q. Spirits
 Glenhead Engineering Ltd
 Gogar Services Limited
 NHS Fife
 Offshore Energies UK (OEUK)
 O'Neill Ross Ltd
 Wings For Warriors





Insight was delivered during dinner from (left to right) a Reservist, a Cadet Force Adult Volunteer, and a cadet.



From left: Guests listen to speeches; pictures of the winners being taken; and (right) General Lindsay chats to G.H.Q. Spirits.



From left: General Lindsay makes a speech; the Loyal Toast after dinner; and HRFCA Defence Relationship Manager Ray Watt with the Award recipients from 20/20 Business Insight Limited.



Pipers from Glensalmond College Combined Cadet Force provided music.



Guests arriving (above) and sitting down for dinner (below).



Dunfermline ARC opened



The Princess Royal with members of the Regiment and dignitaries outside the new centre. Ministry of Defence © Crown Copyright 2025

Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal opened the new £10 million Regimental Headquarters of 154 (Scottish) Regiment Royal Logistic Corps (RLC) in Dunfermline on 26 September.

The Princess Royal – who is Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Logistic Corps – met members of the Regiment as well as the building contractors and Highland RFCA staff during her visit to the Elgin Street site.

The project consolidates the Regimental Headquarters of 154 (Scottish) Regiment RLC, 239 (Fife) Transport Squadron and the Dunfermline Detachment of The Black Watch Battalion Army Cadet Force into a single Army Reserve Centre (ARC) location.

The move streamlines operations, allowing for the disposal of a redundant

site. This consolidation brings greater efficiency to the Volunteer Estate, providing the necessary space and facilities to enhance training and operational effectiveness.

The new-build project includes a large, open-plan office space, drill hall, mess areas, industrial kitchen, bathrooms and shower rooms, transit accommodation, server and plant rooms. Sustainability has been a central consideration in the design. The facility features entirely electric infrastructure, including energy-efficient air source heat pumps, solar panels and electric vehicle charging points.

In 2022 Henry Brothers won the contract to design and build the new ARC and demolish the existing Bruce House with Mott MacDonald acting as the technical service provider, supporting the Highland RFCA Estates team.

Mott MacDonald Defence portfolio delivery lead, Susannah Gregory said: “Working closely with Highland RFCA and Henry Brothers, we delivered a design that meets operational needs while supporting wider sustainability goals. The result is a step change in infrastructure quality, one that will significantly enhance how the team works day to day, enabling more efficient, confident and resilient service delivery.”

As part of the project Henry Brothers undertook a number of social value initiatives. These included donating picnic tables for use in parks close to the ARC; welcoming construction students from Fife College for a tour of the site; and taking part in outreach initiatives at local primary and secondary schools.

The project was Army-funded and demonstrates its ongoing commitment to its Reserve Forces and their important role in the UK’s defence capabilities.



The Princess Royal meets Gerry Boyd (left) from the project’s technical service provider Mott MacDonald and Gavin Fry of contractor Henry Brothers. Ministry of Defence © Crown Copyright 2025



The Princess Royal declares the building open. Ministry of Defence © Crown Copyright 2025



Councillor David Cameron, the Lord Provost of Aberdeen, delivers the opening address and (right) Colonel Sean Fraser talks to the audience on the value of the volunteer experience within the Army Cadet Force.

Aberdeen update delivered

Highland RFCA's Defence Relationship Management team hosted an update for Armed Forces-friendly employers from the North East.

The November event was held at the Town and County Hall, Town House, Aberdeen. Guests from a range of organisations were greeted with refreshments and welcomed to the venue with an opening address from Councillor David Cameron, the Lord Provost of Aberdeen. Mr Cameron is also the Lord-Lieutenant of the City of Aberdeen.

Many of those organisations have signed the Armed Forces Covenant and hold Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Awards at Gold, Silver or Bronze levels. The organisations represented included: Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce, Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen Laundry Services, ASCO UK Ltd, Bilfinger UK, Flotation Energy Ltd, Fugro GB (North) Marine Limited, Helix Robotics Solutions, Hydrasun Limited, Networks of Wellbeing Ltd, Offshore Helicopter Services UK Limited, Port of Aberdeen, Reach Subsea UK Limited, Serica Energy, Stena Drilling Ltd, and Trident IES.

The keynote speech was delivered by Highland RFCA Defence Relationship Manager Ray Watt on the Armed Forces Covenant and Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. Ray also updated the employers on Army activity in the area and the importance and value of the Armed Forces Covenant to local units.

The audience also heard from Iain Lee of Hydrasun Limited on his transition from the Armed Forces to civilian life. Hydrasun is an Armed Forces Covenant signatory and ERS Bronze Award holder.

Iain was followed by Colonel Sean Fraser, the Commandant of 2nd Battalion The Highlanders Army Cadet Force (ACF). Colonel Fraser explained the value of the volunteer experience within the context of being a Cadet Force Adult Volunteer with the Battalion, as well as the importance of supporting the Armed Forces community. He also explained why a person should join the ACF as a volunteer, and the challenges of achieving a good work-life balance.

Colonel Fraser is also a member of Highland RFCA's Northern Area Committee.

An opportunity for networking followed along with a buffet.

This event was open to all supportive employers and those

simply wishing to find out more about the Armed Forces Covenant and ERS and the benefits those schemes can bring to business.

The overall aim was to foster greater understanding and encourage more organisations to pledge their support to the Armed Forces in their communities and beyond.



Iain Lee of Hydrasun Limited.



Highland RFCA's Ray Watt delivers the keynote speech.

Behind the wire at RAF base



Employers and RFCA staff outside the Atlantic Building at RAF Lossiemouth. Ministry of Defence © Crown Copyright 2025

Scotland's only Royal Air Force (RAF) base, RAF Lossiemouth, hosted an Employer Engagement visit from 25 to 26 November.

Highland RFCA's Defence Relationship Managers, Hayley Munro and Ray Watt, attended with Armed Forces-friendly employers from the HRFCA-area.

The employers included Armed Forces Covenant signatories and Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Award holders: Aberdeen Laundry Services, Bilfinger UK, Birlinn Tech, BRAVEHOUND, CLH Physio and Sports Therapy, Copernicus Technology Ltd, Dundee City Council, G.H.Q. Spirits, Here's How To, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Lossiemouth Community Development Trust, Perth & Kinross Council, Royal Dornoch Golf Club, Serica Energy, Scottish Ambulance Service, and Wakeley Tree Surgeons Ltd. G.H.Q. Spirits is a 2025 ERS Gold Award recipient, and Copernicus Technology is a 2025 ERS Silver Award recipient.

Day one began with lunch at the Officers' Mess, followed by visits to the Typhoon Squadrons and other key air assets. In the evening, guests enjoyed a networking dinner at the Officers' Mess, alongside Regular and Reserve personnel.

The day also saw Stuart Mason, owner of Here's How To, presented with the Armed Forces Covenant by Air Officer Scotland, Air Commodore Mark Northover. Here's How To offers practical business growth programmes, and Stuart has written a book called *How To Wreck Your Business*.

The company first achieved the Armed Forces Covenant in September. By signing the Covenant, it has become one of more than 13,000 organisations to pledge support to the Armed Forces community.



Stuart Mason receives the Armed Forces Covenant from Air Officer Scotland.

Its commitment to honouring the Covenant includes pledges to:

- Promote the Armed Forces at all times both locally and nationally.
- Provide employment support to members of the Armed Forces community by actively supporting those looking for employment or self-employment.
- Provide business education and development to ex-Service personnel, offering such services through Station Education Centres such as RAF Lossiemouth.
- Commit to at least one annual event to raise funds for a military charitable cause.

Provide mentoring and guidance without an expectation of financial reward for those embarking on a self-employment career path.

Stuart said: "As a business owner and having served in the Royal Air Force, I recognise the immense contribution made by those who have served in the Armed Forces. We are proud to demonstrate our commitment through the Armed Forces Covenant. We value the skills, dedication, and resilience that ex-Service personnel bring to civilian life, and we believe these qualities should be celebrated, nurtured, and supported in their next chapter. Signing this pledge is more than a formality for us, it is a promise to ensure that Veterans and Reservists are given the respect, opportunities, and practical support they deserve."

Here's How To is now eligible to receive the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Bronze Award. The ERS Awards encourage employers to support Defence and inspire others to do the same. The prestigious Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards are for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to Defence and the Armed Forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant.

Day two consisted of a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics briefing at the Officers' Mess, an RAF Astra briefing in the Astra Hub, and a visit to the Atlantic Building for a tour of the Boeing P-8A Poseidon, part of the RAF's Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Reconnaissance fleet. Events concluded with lunch before departure.

The visit gave employers a chance to meet RAF personnel and gain a greater understanding of the work of the RAF, RAF Lossiemouth, and Defence as a whole as well as the transferable skills Service leavers and RAF Reservists can offer.

AES Solar, Glenfiddich, SSEN Transmission, and The Macallan were invited on behalf of Moray Chamber of Commerce, an ERS Gold Award holder. Organisations from Greater London and Lowland RFCAs were also in attendance.



The visitors in front of an RAF Typhoon.



Having a look inside the Typhoon cockpit.



Inside the Boeing P-8A Poseidon. Ministry of Defence © Crown Copyright 2025



Having a look at the Poseidon cockpit. Ministry of Defence © Crown Copyright 2025



HRFCA's Air Regional Engagement Officer, Wing Commander Paul Carrier, addressing the guests.



Air Officer Scotland, Air Commodore Mark Northover, at dinner.



The RAF Mountain Rescue Service presentation.



The RAF Astra briefing.



Main image: The ship's company of HMS Scotia and civilian permanent staff following the supersession ceremony. Picture credit: Sub-Lieutenant Girdwood, RNR.

New commander at Scotia

HMS Scotia carried out a supersession ceremony on 4 September as, after two years in command, Surgeon Commander Rob O'Donnell handed over to Commander Kirk Macrae.

The supersession, a traditional military ceremony during which command is transferred, was carried out on the HMS Scotia parade square in front of the ship's company and members of Commander Macrae's family.

Surgeon Commander O'Donnell took command of HMS Scotia in September 2023, having previously served as Executive Officer. In his civilian career, he is an NHS consultant anaesthetist. His support to all Scotians during his time in command was recognised at the supersession.

Commander Macrae joined the Royal Navy in 2005. He progressed through a number of postings, including completing the principal warfare officers' course, and opportunities to serve aboard not only Royal Navy vessels, but also those of our NATO Allies: The Netherlands and Spain. Commander Macrae then transferred to the Royal Naval Reserve through Project Firefly on leaving full-time service. Alongside a civilian career as a member of the Nautical and STEM Faculty at City of Glasgow College, he takes up command of HMS Scotia following two years as Executive Officer at HMS Dalriada – the Royal Naval Reserve Unit in Glasgow.

His new role as Commanding Officer of HMS Scotia marks a significant milestone in Kirk's military journey, one he has aspired to since joining the Royal Navy two decades ago.

He said: "I am delighted to take command of HMS Scotia. It is a tremendous privilege. It is especially meaningful to return to Rosyth, where I began my seagoing career with HMS Grimsby."

As the Royal Naval Reserve continues to train to adapt to an evolving world, Commander Macrae's experience in his regular career will no doubt prove invaluable to all at HMS Scotia.



Surgeon Commander O'Donnell (left) passes command of HMS Scotia to Commander Macrae, with the time honoured phrase "You have the ship". Picture credit: Sub-Lieutenant Girdwood, RNR.

Gold employer visits Exercise

An Armed Forces-friendly employer from the Highland RFCA area visited Exercise Rhino Heart in Germany to see Reservists in action.

The Exercise saw 800 UK Army Reservists from 19 Light Brigade deployed to Sennelager for 16 days in the largest deployment of Army Reservists en masse into mainland Europe in over four decades. The UK contingent was complemented by soldiers from Canada, Estonia and France.

19 Brigade is the only Reserve Brigade in the British Army and is one of seven Brigades that make up 1st (United Kingdom) Division, the British Army's Global Response Force. Commanded by Brigadier Lisa Brooks, it can respond to a wide spectrum of operations from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to warfighting. 1st (UK) Division is also the current Land Component Command of NATO's Allied Reaction Force.

The exercise tested the Brigade's ability to conduct multi-national operations overseas, in a NATO Force model



Stuart Banks (right) with General Officer Scotland, Major General Robin Lindsay, at the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Awards in 2025.

context. Exercise Rhino Heart is a combined arms exercise, meaning there are a number of different force elements supporting two infantry battlegroups, such as logisticians, mechanics, engineers, military intelligence, artillery and medical specialists.

Army Reservists volunteered to take time away from their

civilian jobs to take part. Those within 19 Brigade come from a variety of civilian industries including NHS professionals, haulage, self-employed trades, solicitors, police, the fire service and more.

Stuart Banks is the General Manager of Gogar Services Limited. Gogar signed the Armed Forces Covenant in 2023. It became a Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Silver Award holder in 2024, and was awarded Gold-level status in 2025. He visited Sennelager from 8 to 9 October.

On his return from Germany, Stuart said: "Firstly, let me extend my gratitude to Highland RFCA for selecting me to attend this very unique opportunity and for the level of hospitality I received from not only my fellow civilian employers, but the Armed Forces personnel I had the awesome pleasure of meeting and talking to.

"Secondly, the way in which this trip was conducted has brought out a newfound respect and admiration for our Armed Forces as the level of honesty and transparency they demonstrated was truly inspirational. They communicated how important these engagement trips are and they were very honest about the current position the Armed Forces are in and the help they need.

"Brigadier Lisa Brooks and her officers were very attentive during the entire visit and are truly inspirational in their approach to their duties. Watching their interaction with staff and subordinates was fascinating as they were all very warm and at ease with the interaction, which shows the management of the soldiers is very hands-on and mutually respectful.

"Open conversations across the entire day with officers and with Army Reservists highlighted their enthusiasm, capability and ability to bring a different perspective. We were encouraged to ask as many questions as we could, and nothing was considered off-limits. However, on a few occasions, the Reservists had more questions for us, which brought to the attention of the Army staff that this is very much a two-way process, and this was discussed further in the feedback session.

"The main thing that became abundantly clear however was the transferability of skills from the workplace to the exercise and vice versa."

Stuart added: "I have come back with a renewed vigour and have become more determined to help, support, guide and push as much as I can to support our Armed Forces personnel."



Stuart with other employers and Reservists during Exercise Rhino Heart in Sennelager, Germany.



Cadets during drill and (right) taking part in a simulated first aid task.

Visitors see cadets in action

Highland RFCA took a group of employers to Garelochhead Training Camp on 14 October to see 240 Royal Air Force (RAF) Air Cadets and 60 Cadet Force Adult Volunteers at a Regional Activity Camp.

The organisations that joined Defence Relationship Manager Ray Watt for the informative visit were: Argyll and Bute Council, Argyll Community Housing Association, Professional Diving Academy, and TSL Contractors.

Each of those organisations has shown support to Defence by signing the Armed

Forces Covenant. In addition, three hold Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Awards at the levels shown below.

- Argyll and Bute Council: Gold Award.
- Argyll Community Housing Association: Bronze Award.
- TSL Contractors: Bronze Award.

The employers had the opportunity to meet cadets and Adult Volunteers during an afternoon tour of their activities. They also enjoyed an evening meal with the group before listening to an excellent choir performance. There was also a chance to network.

The visit was a fantastic opportunity to see the very best of cadets and volunteers

— their skills, teamwork, and dedication were on full display throughout an action-packed programme of training and activities.

Employers looked on as the cadets took part in various activities, developing their skills in areas including first aid, cyber, fieldcraft, drill, and leadership.

Also in attendance was Group Captain Sohail Khan, Regional Commandant of Scotland & Northern Ireland Region RAF Air Cadets.

Many thanks to Scotland & Northern Ireland Region RAF Air Cadets for inviting us along to meet these inspirational cadets and adults.

Military skills Gold for Highlanders

A team of Army Cadets from the Highlands have earned Gold in a Military Skills Competition.

The cadets (pictured) from 1st Battalion The Highlanders Army Cadet Force (ACF) took part in the annual Scottish Cadet Military Skills Competition, held from 26 to 28 September, at the Barry Buddon Training area near Dundee.

The competition saw the Highland team compete against eleven other cadet teams from the Army Cadet Force and Combined Cadet Force, from across Scotland. The teams were put through their paces in a series of stands, ranging from first aid scenarios to patrol skills. At the end of the competition the Battalion team was named as the Top Third Army Cadet Force team, also receiving an overall grading of Gold for patrol skills.

The team was led by Cadet Corporal Angus Harrison (17), from Inverness Detachment, and included Cadet Colour Sergeant Ronnie Brzoskowski (16), from Wick Detachment, Colour Sergeant Iona Young (17), from Halkirk Detachment, Cadet Sergeant Jakub Stasiak (16), from Elgin Detachment, Cadet Sergeant Emily Grant (16), Cadet Corporal Cooper Greig (14), Cadet Corporal Keiran O'Regan (17), from Alness Detachment, Cadet Corporal Bronagh McNeilly (15), from Dingwall



Detachment, Cadet Corporal Ellis MacDonald (16) and Cadet Corporal Euan Young (15), from Thurso Detachment.

Colonel Tim Martin, Battalion Commandant, said: "Congratulations to our cadets and to the many Cadet Force Adult Volunteers who helped to make this happen over the past few weeks."

Lt Col Alexander Cram TD

Lieutenant Colonel Alexander (Sandy) Cram died on 12 September 2025. He stood out because of the number and variety of roles he filled over a lifetime of service, whether in a voluntary capacity or in his long and distinguished professional career.

In military circles Sandy was known as a senior figure with an exemplary record. With his unbounded optimism and highly infectious enthusiasm, Sandy was a great spokesman for young people and for what they have to contribute to society. He was a highly respected ambassador for the services, promoting and stressing the personal qualities, skills and knowledge of the individual.

In the words of a previous Lord-Lieutenant for the City of Aberdeen: "Sandy has, for many years, played a major part in promoting the military message to the community in his most gentlemanly-like and modest persona. My overall impression of Sandy Cram is that of a cultured gentleman with an overwhelming interest in all things military and having the interests of young Service personnel at heart."

He had an exceptionally long and distinguished military career: Chair of the North East Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Association (now RFCA), Commanding Officer of Tayforth Officers' Training Corps, Honorary Secretary of Tayforth Regimental Association, Life Member of The Black Watch Association and Chair of the North East Area Committee of the Gordon Highlanders Battalion Army Cadet Force and President of the Aberdeen Wapinschaw Association. Determined to contribute to the war effort, he was somewhat economical with the truth about his age and succeeded in joining the Home Guard aged 13. He was welcomed with open arms because of his piping ability. At the age of 80, he spoke of 67 years of continuous service and if his semi-formal association with Robert Gordon's College Combined Cadet Force (RGC CCF) can be taken into account, this totalled a quite astonishing 83 years.

Sandy's association with RGC CCF goes back to the early 1980s. He was seen as a highly inspirational figure, generous with his time and resources. He and his late wife Jeannie were devoted to the College and the CCF, visiting on numerous occasions and also hosting staff in their lovely home in Banchory. In the words of members of the Banchory community: "He excelled in offering traditional Highland hospitality, insisting that there should be no clock in the room where guests are entertained, so that they feel welcome for as long as they wished to stay."

He was indispensable to many initiatives in which RGC CCF was involved in recent years, including the planning and conduct of the annual CCF Remembrance Service, preparation of nominations

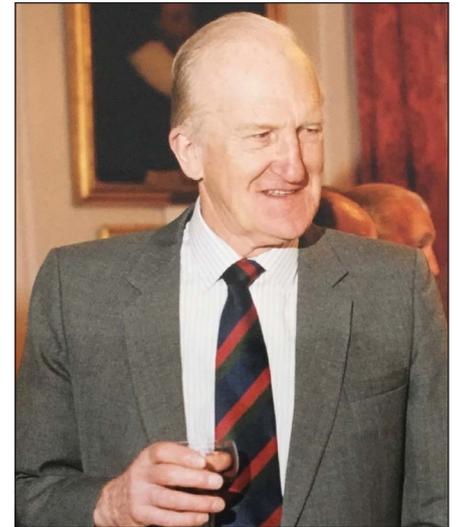
of cadets for courses and awards (including several Lord-Lieutenant's Cadets), advice on sources of finance and contact with outside individuals and organisations. He actively sought out opportunities from which cadets might benefit and took a personal interest in each and every cadet, supporting and advising individuals at key points in their CCF career and often advising them on applications as they considered future military service. Visits to annual camps on Orkney, elsewhere in Scotland and in England were frequent and keenly anticipated by staff and cadets. His "Colonel's Quaich", an extremely impressive trophy which was generously donated to the unit, is RGC CCF's principal award, allocated annually to a highly deserving individual.

Sandy enjoyed a lifetime of involvement with piping and was one of the leading exponents of military piping of his generation. His work on a historically very important record of Black Watch pipe music was said to have made a significant contribution to the piping heritage of Scotland.

His forestry career was equally impressive and took him well beyond UK borders. He was a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Foresters and a member of the Commonwealth Forestry Association, the Association of Professional Foresters and the Union of European Foresters. Later in his career, he formed the Northern Woodland Consultancy.

In February 2007, Sandy and Jeannie were hit by a car which had mounted the kerb and struck them while they were walking near their home. Although the accident cut short his active participation in many activities, through his own absolute determination, his recovery was nothing short of miraculous and his determination to lead a normal life, inspirational. He maintained a keen interest in the achievements of the adults and cadets of RGC CCF throughout the remainder of his life.

Sandy is survived by son Peter and daughters Alison and Sine.



Lieutenant Colonel Sandy Cram.

Highland RFCA visits Sea Cadets camp

HRFCA visited the Northern Area Sea Cadets Camp in August.

The one-week camp was held at 2nd Battalion The Highlanders Army Cadet Force Cadet Training Centre at Boddam.

Visitors were met at camp by Commander (Sea Cadet Corps) Gary Farmer RN, the Northern Area Officer for Sea Cadets, and Lieutenant Commander Martin Clark RNR, the Area Training Officer and Commanding Officer of the camp. Afloat activities were conducted at Peterhead's Lido Marina in conjunction

with the Bridge of Don and Peterhead Sea Cadet units and Peterhead Sailing Club. National Governed Qualifications were offered and certified under the Bridge of Don unit who, along with Peterhead, supported the camp.

The camp contingent consisted of 122 cadets and 60 Cadet Force Adult Volunteers from all over Northern Area which includes Scotland (as far up as Orkney), the North East of England (as far down as Darlington) and Northern Ireland. Visitors observed both on-shore and aquatic sessions.



Cadets head out for a row.

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