

[News story: The Veterans' Gateway records over 10,000 enquiries as it celebrates its first year in service](#)

Designed to offer a one stop shop through which veterans can access advice on a vast range of areas, from housing to health concerns, the Veterans' Gateway has seen over 37,000 click throughs to external sites, with the majority of users requesting advice on finance.

With requests coming from as far afield as Thailand, South Africa and St Maarten in the Caribbean, the service caters to veterans of all ages and backgrounds. 81% of users are under 65 years old, and 56% of web visitors access the site via mobile phones.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We are committed to delivering for our veterans, and the Veterans' Gateway is making sure those who served our country are getting the support they and their families need.

This £2m project has helped 10,000 ex-service men and women in its first year, making the transition between service and civilian life as smooth as possible.

Every day our troops and veterans inspire our nation and it is right we deliver for them in return for the sacrifices they have made.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood today visited the Veterans' Gateway service centre near Cardiff in South Wales. He met with veterans who now work as call handlers, using their experiences in the Armed Forces to benefit others, and giving back to the service community.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:

The vast majority of veterans go on to live healthy and fulfilling lives, and most find employment within six months of leaving the military. But we need to offer support to those who find the transition more challenging.

I'm proud to see the great work that goes on behind the scenes of the Veterans' Gateway, and I've been inspired by the community spirit of all who dedicate their time and knowledge to supporting those in need.

The 24-hour service is delivered by a Royal British Legion-led consortium with Poppyscotland, Combat Stress, Connect Assist, the Ministry of Defence and SSAFA, the Armed Forces Charity.

Charles Byrne, Director General of The Royal British Legion, on behalf of the Veterans' Gateway consortium, said:

The number of people contacting the Veterans' Gateway continues to grow and we are reaching new groups of people including young veterans who need our support in finding the right information, advice and help.

We have also seen increasing numbers of users being able to self-refer and gain better access to the services available to them. The Veterans' Gateway can become a key resource for veterans and their families seeking support. With over 30 referral partners, it is truly a team of teams.

[News story: New equipment helps crack down on illegal activity on Salisbury Plain](#)

The marked 4x4 vehicles will be used later this month during Operation Aston, a joint operation run by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), Wiltshire Police and the Royal Military Police to help educate people about the impact their actions have on the Plain and to deter them from taking part in illegal, dangerous and damaging activity.

The vehicles form part of an ongoing project to reduce the number of illegal incursions taking place on the Plain, and to ensure that it remains a safe place for the military to train and for those wanting to use it for legal leisure and recreational activities.



Lt Col Stewart Andrews, DIO's Senior Training Officer hopes that the vehicles will act as a deterrent. Crown Copyright, MOD 2018.

The newly branded vehicles have also been introduced to make staff more visible and prominent and to standardise vehicle livery across the MOD estate.



The new 4x4 vehicles are easy to spot. Crown Copyright, MOD 2018

The fleet, which includes both new vehicles and rebranded older vehicles, will rationalise vehicles and as a result will save the MOD thousands of pounds.

Lt Col Stewart Andrews, the DIO's Senior Training Safety Officer for Salisbury Plain Training Area (SPTA), said:

The impact that illegal incursions have on the training estate is huge. Not only does it cause environmental damage, but it can disrupt planned military training activities which can impact on the MOD's operational capability and readiness.

We take our responsibility for public safety seriously and we want people to enjoy the Plain, but it can be a dangerous place if you don't follow the rules.

We're hoping that the newly branded vehicles will stand out on the Plain and act as a deterrent, helping us in our attempts to better monitor activity on the Plain and educate people about what they can and can't do.



New hi-vis vest and body camera aimed at identifying repeat offenders. Crown Copyright, MOD 2018.

In addition to the new vehicles, DIO staff on Salisbury Plain have also been issued with new hi-vis vests and body cameras. The cameras have been issued to deter aggression against staff and to record illegal activity, making it easier to identify repeat offenders and provide evidence for prosecutions.

[Press release: New hurricane preparedness plans for British Overseas Territories in Caribbean](#)

The Government has today (Wednesday 4 July) announced new measures to make sure British Overseas Territories in the Caribbean have the support they need in the event of a repeat of the devastating hurricanes which hit the region last year.

Government departments have been putting plans in place to bring together humanitarian, military support and diplomatic work under a joint unit coordinated by the Foreign Office.

These include:

- Royal Fleet Auxilliary (RFA) Mounts Bay, a Navy ship deployed to the region since 2017, will remain in the vicinity of the Caribbean throughout the hurricane season this year and also for 2019.
- Experts have been deployed to the region to lead negotiations on a number of commercial contracts, in advance of peak hurricane season, to deliver essential recovery needs.
- Military reconnaissance and analysis in the Overseas Territories, building links and familiarity with local and regional disaster management personnel, and conducting professional analysis of selected critical infrastructure.
- Plans for a multi-national coordination cell in the Caribbean to coordinate partner countries and organisations to make sure efforts aren't being duplicated across the region and to make immediate responses more efficient. The UK has coordinated meetings between representatives from the USA, Canada and the Netherlands and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) to ensure a joined up approach to hurricane preparedness.
- Emergency humanitarian supplies in the form of over 1000 collapsible jerry cans, 1000 hygiene kits and up to 1000 shelter kits have been pre-loaded onto RFA Mounts Bay, which will remain in the region for the hurricane season and be on hand to provide life-saving emergency assistance as required.
- DFID has also fielded a preparedness mission to the region from 5 – 17 June to coordinate UK preparations with both national and regional institutions.
- DFID has well established programmes in the poorer Commonwealth countries of the Caribbean and, in addition to humanitarian assistance, is supporting reconstruction efforts in the hurricane-affected islands of Dominica and Antigua and Barbuda.
- The UK has also helped ensure all islands affected by the hurricanes last year are now insured under the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Fund (CCRIF). DFID helped establish the CCRIF which provided over \$50m of quick payouts to hurricane affected Caribbean countries and territories in 2017. This year, the UK has supported BVI and Montserrat to join as new members. This means that all of the islands affected last year are now covered.

Foreign Office Minister for the Overseas Territories Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

Last year's hurricanes hit Caribbean British Overseas Territories and the wider region with devastating effect, uprooting lives and damaging local economies. The UK has provided critical support and help with recovery efforts and I have seen for myself the huge impact that this has had already. The UK continues to work closely with the governments of the Overseas Territories in their recovery efforts and in helping to rebuild their economies.

Moreover, we have also been working hard with key partners across

the region to ensure an even more effective and strategic response in the event we see a repeat of last year's hurricane season.

International Development Minister, Lord Bates said:

The scale of last year's hurricanes was unprecedented and the UK aid mission was huge, covering small islands stretching more than 1,000 miles apart, where buildings and roads had been destroyed.

Britain continues to stand by those people whose lives were devastated. Not only have we been working with the islands' governments to make sure they are more resilient to natural disasters but we are also well prepared to respond and provide humanitarian relief if a hurricane hits again.

Minister for Armed Forces Mark Lancaster said:

Our Armed Forces are committed to supporting our Overseas Territories, and we have worked alongside our colleagues across Government to ensure we are fully prepared in the event of a natural disaster or other crisis. RFA Mounts Bay, which played a vital role during the 2017 hurricane crisis, remains ready in the Caribbean and will be supported by specialist forces from the UK if required.

£72m was immediately committed in September to help the Overseas Territories Anguilla, BVI and the Turks and Caicos Islands. In November, the Prime Minister committed a further £70m for reconstruction efforts and £300m of UK loan guarantees.

Foreign Office Minister for the Overseas Territories Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon visited Anguilla, the Cayman Islands and Montserrat as part of a regional tour to discuss hurricane preparedness in May and will visit the region again later this month.

Hurricane preparedness was one of the key topics of discussion at the Joint Ministerial Council with the Overseas Territories in June.

Notes to editors:

A written ministerial statement on hurricane preparedness can be found [here](#).

Further information

- Follow Foreign Office Minister Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon [@tariqahmadbt](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](#) and [Facebook](#)

- Follow the Foreign Office on [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

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[News story: Graves of 2 north west soldiers killed in the great war rededicated a century later](#)

The resting place of Lieutenant (Lt) Charles Stonehouse and Private (Pte) Frederick William Birks, have both been rededicated more than a century after their deaths. The rededication services took place today, Tuesday 3 July, at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Serre Road Cemetery No. 3 on the Somme and Perth Cemetery (China Wall) near Ypres respectively.



New headstone for Lieutenant Charles Stonehouse with Regimental Wreath from the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, Crown Copyright, All rights reserved

The services, organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services, were conducted by the Reverend Andrew Earl CF, Senior Chaplain HQ NW.

Rosie Barron, JCCC said:

It is an honour to have organised both rededication services for these 2 men and to have, after more than 100 years, given them their names back. It is important that the sacrifices of men such as Lieutenant Stonehouse and Private Birks are not forgotten and their stories are told to future generations.

The Reverend Andrew Earl, said:

It is a privilege to be asked to honour these 2 men who died in the service of their country as we gather and say, 'We will remember them'. We once again recall all those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice and give thanks for the freedoms we enjoy. May they rest in peace.



Five great nephews of Lieutenant Charles Stonehouse who attended today's ceremony in France, Crown Copyright, All rights reserved

Lt Stonehouse was a member of the 11th Battalion, The East Lancashire Regiment, better known as the Accrington Pals. On 1 July 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, he led W Company into the battalion's attack on Serre, he was killed during the attack aged 34. With no known grave Lieutenant Stonehouse was commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial in the Somme region of France.

The rededication service at Serre Road Cemetery No. 3 was attended by members of Lieutenant Stonehouse's family.

Statement on behalf of those family members attending:

Twelve members of the Rowntree and Hoyle families, descendants of Charles Stonehouse's brother, Harry, and sister, Nellie, were very pleased to be able to attend the rededication service and felt a great sense of humility and pride in the sacrifice made by our great uncle.

Pte Birks was killed on 2 July 1917 whilst serving with 17th Battalion, The King's (Liverpool Regiment) near Ypres. He was aged 36.



Attendees including representatives from the British Embassy and the Regiment at Private Frederick William Birks ceremony, Crown Copyright, All rights reserved

Pte Birks was buried in a small battlefield cemetery until after the great war when he was moved to Perth Cemetery (China Wall). However, by this point the wooden cross marking his grave had been damaged and his name was lost. New research found that this grave of an unknown soldier was in fact that of Private Birks and his name has now been added to his headstone. He was previously commemorated on the Menin Gate in Ypres.



Attendees including representatives from the British Embassy and the Regiment at Private Frederick William Birks ceremony, Crown Copyright, All rights reserved

The final resting places of these two soldiers came to light after researchers submitted evidence regarding their whereabouts. Further research was undertaken by the JCCC and the National Army Museum to corroborate the submitted evidence and the identification of the 'Unknown Soldier' graves were finally confirmed by the JCCC.

Mel Donnelly, CWGC said:

Commemorated on memorials to the missing for almost a century, it is now known that Lieutenant Stonehouse had been buried in Serre Road No 3 Cemetery and Private Birks in Perth Cemetery (China Wall). Thanks to the dedicated efforts of many, they have now been identified and today the Commonwealth War Graves Commission are honoured to be able to mark their graves with headstones bearing their names.

Two new headstones bearing the names of Lieutenant Stonehouse and Private Birks have been provided by the CWGC, who will now care for their final resting places in perpetuity.

[News story: Defence Secretary cuts ribbon on Bolton-based missile factory](#)

An opening ceremony saw the Defence Secretary unveil a plaque to mark the completion of five years of work and £50 million worth of investment into the high-tech site, which has been labelled 'the jewel in the crown' of weapons firm MBDA.

It marks a major milestone for the new site, where design, engineering and manufacturing experts are producing state-of-the-art equipment and systems. Complex weapons being built there will go on to do everything from arming F-35 fighter jets to protecting British troops and Royal Navy ships, whilst the move to the site has seen 100 new jobs created.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

This £50m factory supports 700 jobs in Bolton, showing how central strong British defence industry is to our national prosperity.

MBDA's investment has created more than 100 new jobs, and this has been supported by a £400m contract from the Government helping to create a further 100 roles within the company.

You can't have prosperity without security. MBDA in Bolton is keeping Britain safe while creating highly-skilled jobs and opportunities, demonstrating our commitment to the people of Bolton and the North West.

MBDA has a history in the Lancashire region stretching back for more than 80 years when the Lostock site was first opened to build propellers for the war effort. The new facility will now replace that site and provide a truly cutting-edge solution, designed to meet the modern requirements of the MOD and worldwide export customers. It will significantly improve the company's manufacturing and test capabilities, as well as making them a more agile outfit whilst improving value-for-money for the taxpayer through contributing further cost reductions to the £1.4 billion in savings already generated by the innovative partnership approach to complex weapons between the MOD and MBDA.

Work at the site was given a boost just last April when the [Defence Secretary signed a £400 million deal](#) with MBDA to upgrade the ultra-accurate Brimstone missile to become compatible with Typhoon jets. That contract created around 130 new jobs and sustained a further 270 existing jobs at MBDA's sites in Bolton, Stevenage and across the supply chain.

The Bolton factory also works on the Sea Ceptor missile, which entered service on the Type 23 frigates in May and provides a powerful shield against airborne threats for Royal Navy ships. Land Ceptor, from the same family [completed its first successful firing trials](#) in April 2018 as the future battlefield barrier launched from a vehicle on a Swedish test fire range.

Other missiles the site works on include:

- Meteor – world-class air-to-air, radar-guided missile able to defeat fast-moving manoeuvrable targets at long range. It will enter service on Typhoon with the RAF in 2018 and the F35 from 2023
- ASRAAM – Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile enabling UK pilots to engage and defend themselves against other aircraft ranging in size from large multi-engine aircraft to small drones. In service with the Royal Air Force on the Tornado and Typhoon aircraft
- Sea Venom – primarily anti-ship missile designed to destroy small, medium and large vessels, using an imaging infrared seeker that offers full ‘fire and forget’ capabilities in all environments will equip the Royal Navy’s Wildcat Helicopters
- Spear 3 – weapon powered by an innovative miniaturised turbojet engine instead of a rocket motor being developed to meet the F-35’s ground attack requirement

Chris Allam, Managing Director of MBDA UK, said:

I am delighted that the Secretary of State for Defence has today opened our brand-new facility in Bolton. This new site builds on 80 years of illustrious company history down the road at Lostock and prepares us for the challenges of the future. The significant investment placed by MBDA into Bolton is testament to our commitment to our people, to the area, and to delivering on our order book for our customers.

The new facility will also support the Anglo-French “One Complex Weapon” Centres of Excellence initiative – a cross Government scheme which will allow MBDA to develop cutting-edge technology in both the UK and France, while driving new ways of working and increasing efficiency.

The official opening also saw MBDA re-sign the Armed Forces Covenant by which it has already shown its commitment to the military community through facilitating flexible working, support and leave schemes for reservists and participating in the MOD Employer Recognition scheme as well as directly supporting several armed forces charities.