

Press release: Welsh troops send their loved ones messages for Christmas

Servicemen and women deployed abroad have sent Christmas messages to their families and friends. Thousands of UK Armed Forces personnel, many of them Welsh, are working across the globe this Christmas to help keep Britain safe at home and abroad.

Hundreds of soldiers from 1st Battalion The Royal Welsh will be spending Christmas in Estonia where they're currently renewing the UK's commitment to our NATO allies in Europe and standing ready to defend in the face of any potential aggression.

The Royal Welsh currently lead the 800 strong multinational Enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup, supported by other British Army units.

For them Christmas will involve a physical training session, a religious service and a Christmas lunch which will provide the opportunity to share a familiar tradition with NATO partners and Estonian guests.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

Christmas can be a difficult time for our Armed Forces personnel working on important operations around the globe, when separation from their families, loved ones and friends is felt most acutely.

Wales' military footprint can be seen all over the world, and for them duty never stops. I want to extend my very best wishes to you all this Christmas and New Year and say that we in Wales are ever-thankful for the sacrifices you make – not just during the festive season but every day of the year.

Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Owain Luke said:

While Christmas is normally a time to spend with family, the soldiers of the eFP Battlegroup understand that they have a crucial role to play in helping to defend Estonia. I am very proud of how well they have performed so far and we will make a special effort to ensure that as many as possible of the usual Christmas traditions are enjoyed over the next few days. The Estonians have already helped here, with the staff in the Ministry of Defence buying two Christmas trees for the Battlegroup, for which we are immensely grateful.

In total UK troops are involved in 25 operations in more than 30 countries. Currently around 1,000 people are working to fight Daesh and train the local

security forces from locations in Iraq and the wider Middle East as well as from RAF Akrotiri, Cyprus. In the Caribbean, RFA Mounts Bay joins other Royal Navy vessels also deployed over the festive period.

Since 1969 the UK has had a submarine on patrol for every minute of every day, providing the UK's nuclear deterrent and this Christmas is no different. In the South Atlantic, around 1,000 personnel are stationed in the Falkland Islands. In Afghanistan, troops from the Army and other Services are training Afghan National Security Forces.

In total over 5,000 sailors, marines, soldiers, airmen and airwomen are serving on operations across the globe in locations ranging from South Sudan and Somalia where they're undertaking vital engineering work, to places like Poland and Estonia where they're providing reassurance to NATO allies.

Fusilier Ryan Jenkins, 26, Lincolnshire, Royal Welsh,

Although it has been hard work over here in Estonia, especially when working out how to cope with a new environment, it has been an enjoyable challenge. Whilst it is never nice being away from my family (especially at Christmas), there are a good bunch of people here and I'm making the most of being in a new country.

Fusilier David Hagart, 18, Abergavenny, Royal Welsh,

Being in Estonia is my first deployment whilst serving in the army, it is a new experience and my first Christmas away from my home and family. I miss them loads, and I look forward to seeing them in February when I get back.

Lance Corporal Sheldon, Royal Welsh added (Welsh language):

Nadolig lawen a Blwyddyn Newydd da i chi gyd – tadcu, teulu a ffrindiau. Dw i'n edrych ymlaen at weld chi dros cyfnod y Nadolig – yn yfed ac yn bwyta pethau melys!

Dw i wedi mwynhau fy amser allan yn Estonia, yn dysgu a'n cymysgu gyda pobol lleuol. Dw i'n dod nol am dair mis i wneud cwrs ond byddai nol yn Estonia ym mis Ebrill i ddal lan gyda gwaith. Hwyl am y tro.

ENDS