

Press release: UK gifts historic shipwrecks to Canada

Ownership of the two shipwrecks, HMS Erebus and HMS Terror, two of the most archaeologically important shipwrecks in the world, was formally transferred to the Canadian government with the signing of a Deed of Gift at a ceremony today. With this historic transfer, Inuit of Nunavut, who played a key role in their discovery, will also become joint owners of the wrecks and artefacts.

The ceremony at the Canadian Museum of History saw the Canadian Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Catherine McKenna, accept ownership of the wrecks on behalf of Canada from the UK government, represented by the British High Commissioner Susan le Jeune d'Allegeershecque CMG. Mr Torsten Diesel, from the Inuit Heritage Trust spoke of the importance of this transfer to Inuit.

The gifting is an historic milestone in the long-standing cooperation between the UK and Canada on the issue.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We have deep historic links with Canada and this gift is testament to our prospering relationship.

The story behind these vessels is both fascinating and incredibly important to the history of both our nations. The UK joined forces with the Canadian government and Inuit population to search for these ships for 172 years and I'm delighted they will now be protected for future generations.

The two ships, under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir John Franklin, set sail from England in 1845 on an ill-fated voyage through the Canadian Arctic to find the Northwest Passage. During the treacherous journey, the ships became trapped in thick sea ice. The crews abandoned the ships to trek overland to safety, but tragically none survived.

Despite many attempts to locate the wrecks, they proved elusive for over 172 years. In 1997, the UK and Canadian governments signed an agreement giving custody and control of the wrecks and their contents to Canada, while still remaining property of the UK.

Thanks to Inuit knowledge of the area, along with state of the art technology, Erebus was finally located in 2014 and Terror two years later in 2016 in shallow Arctic Waters.

In recognition of this momentous discovery, the British and Canadian governments jointly settled a new agreement. As of 26 April 2018, ownership of the vessels has been formally transferred to the government of Canada, and by extension, the Inuit Heritage Trust.

Artefacts from the wrecks will be available for display at museums in both countries. Currently there are examples on display at the Canadian Museum of History as part of the "Death in the Ice" exhibit.

Canadian Minister of Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna said:

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the United Kingdom for this exceptional gift of the wrecks of HMS Erebus and HMS Terror and all yet-to-be discovered artifacts. Moving forward, we will work with the Inuit Heritage Trust to ensure these historic treasures are protected, and that the intriguing and expanding story of the Franklin Expedition continues to be shared with Canada and the world.

Press release: Defence Secretary launches first ever Veterans Strategy and new cross-Government Veterans Unit

The ground-breaking strategy has been commissioned by the Defence Secretary and today it will be confirmed that a new Veterans Unit with input from across Whitehall will be created.

The Veterans Unit will champion the changing needs of the ex-service community and ensure action is taken to meet these.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We have a golden opportunity to ensure our veterans get a fair deal for their service and sacrifice to our country.

The vast majority of those leaving the Armed Forces go on to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives, which is a testament to their professionalism and resilience. However, for those who need help it is right that we step forward, create new opportunities, and remind them that they are not alone.

Everybody across our society has a responsibility to make sure we protect those who protected us.

Mr Williamson today urged other departments and the devolved administrations to meet the evolving needs of former service personnel from across the UK.

The Defence Secretary announced his new initiatives during a meeting of the Ministerial Covenant and Veterans Board, which was established last year to get the whole of Government behind the Armed Forces Covenant.

Over the next decade, the veterans population will experience a dramatic generational shift from the Second World War and conscripted generation to the younger, all professional cohort both with vastly differing needs. A dedicated team will now begin engaging with stakeholders and the veterans' community ahead of releasing the strategy in the autumn.

The Defence Secretary has identified several key pinch-points that affect a small but significant number of veterans and asked the new team and Ministerial Board to prioritise these issues:

- Debt – How we can best help veterans meet the financial demands of civilian life. This issue represents the highest percentage of calls to the Veterans Gateway.
- Housing- How to offer the best advice for those leaving the Armed Forces. Whilst the Covenant already puts an obligation on local authorities to ensure they provide fair access to housing for veterans there are still a small number of individuals that require further support.
- Social Isolation – Supporting community integration for those who feel a loss of camaraderie upon leaving the Armed Forces. Younger veterans can struggle with a disassociation from civilian life so the new strategy will focus on connecting with the Loneliness Strategy to help address this.
- Mental and Physical Wellbeing – Ensuring this is maximised, especially for those with lasting physical or mental health issues as a result of their service.
- Public Perception – Improving how veterans are viewed, perceptions are often inaccurate, outdated or clichéd and do not recognise that most veterans are proud members of our society with a huge amount to offer.

At the inaugural meeting of the Ministerial Board last autumn each Department represented was asked to nominate a Minister to lead on veterans issues and the Armed Forces Covenant. These were announced at today's meeting and will help to ensure the new Veterans Strategy is implemented across Government.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans, Tobias Ellwood said:

I am pleased to have seen real progress made since the last meeting of the Ministerial Board, including a significant cross-government effort to ensure our veterans are in no way disadvantaged by their previous career.

Recent initiatives, such as the troops to teachers bursary, the new veterans ID cards and the growing popularity of the Veterans Gateway are all making a practical difference and I look forward to seeing how this new strategy can help build on the Armed Forces Covenant to show that our commitment to our brave men and women lasts long after they have left service.

News story: Defence Secretary honours allies Australian and New Zealand on Anzac Day

Veterans from both countries gathered to mark Anzac Day, which honours the anniversary of the first major military action fought by Australian and New Zealand forces during the First World War.

ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. The soldiers in those forces quickly became known as Anzacs, taking pride in the name.

After laying a wreath at the Cenotaph the Defence Secretary attended a service of commemoration and thanksgiving alongside military personnel at Westminster Abbey.



Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson at Anzac Day memorial

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

On Anzac Day, we remember the sacrifice and courage of troops from Australia and New Zealand. Almost a century has passed since the end of the First World War and Britain is proud to have served side-by-side with them in many conflicts over the last 100 years. Our alliance is one of the most constant and enduring military partnerships in history, one which will continue to protect our shared values and commit to make the world a safer, more secure place.

Gavin Williamson has met with his counterparts from Australia and New Zealand earlier this year to examine how allies can continue to work together against evolving threats.

Currently the UK partners with both Australia and New Zealand in a number of ways, including the UN peacekeeping mission to South Sudan, uniting in the Global Coalition to defeat Daesh, committing to establish stability in Syria and Afghanistan, and combining on humanitarian missions such as Ebola in Sierra Leone.

To provide security to the seas, the UK works side-by-side with Australia and New Zealand as part of the Combined Maritime Force, to tackle drug and weapon smugglers. Additionally, as part of our strengthening relationship the Royal Navy ship HMS Sutherland visited Australia in February and March, allowing

further opportunities for our naval forces to collaborate.



Alongside the Foreign Secretary, Gavin Williamson laid a wreath to mark the wartime service of Britain's closest allies Australia and New Zealand.

Our shared values with Australia and New Zealand have facilitated more than one hundred people from all three services enrolling on exchanges programmes between countries, to encourage joint learning. Alongside this participation we continue to work together on science, technology and defence equipment.

[News story: Defence Secretary marks major step forward for UK's nuclear submarine capability](#)

In a move that signals the UK's commitment to a continuous-at-sea deterrent, the Submarine Delivery Agency (SDA) was today officially launched.

The announcement comes after an extra £800 million was secured by the Ministry of Defence – £600 million of which will ensure the UK is protected by the new Dreadnought submarine fleet into the 2030s and beyond.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Our nuclear deterrent is our ultimate defence from the most extreme threats while our attack submarines are busier than ever providing unprecedented levels of protection across the world.

A Royal Navy submarine is on patrol 24 hours a day, every day of the year, protecting our way of life. These advanced and complex vessels are more important than ever as the world becomes an increasingly dangerous place and establishing this new Agency sends a clear signal of our commitment to continue deterring conflict and protecting the nation.

The stand-up of the SDA marks the delivery of a milestone set out in the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review that strengthens arrangements to support the UK's submarine capability.

The Executive Agency will lead on the procurement, in-service support and decommissioning of all UK nuclear submarines.

The SDA will procure and project manage the construction of future Royal Navy submarines, and support those in-service, working with Navy Command and the newly established Defence Nuclear Organisation.

The vision of the SDA is to lead a high-performing industrial enterprise to deliver and support the UK's submarine capability safely, securely and more effectively and cost efficiently.

Headed by Chief Executive Officer Ian Booth – who has a wealth of experience in delivering complex private and public sector procurement programmes – the SDA employs around 1,300 people and already has a talented and extremely knowledgeable workforce, including some of the nation's most experienced nuclear experts.

The Agency will have the authority and freedom to recruit and retain the best people to manage the Submarine Enterprise. The majority of SDA staff will be based in Bristol, with other colleagues located at sites such as Barrow, Derby, Devonport, Rosyth and Faslane.

Chief Executive Officer of the Submarine Delivery Agency, Ian Booth said:

The SDA is to lead a high-performing industrial enterprise that is committed to strengthening the safety, availability, reliability and security of UK submarines, including our Continuous At Sea Deterrent. The Agency will draw on best practice from both the public and private sectors with a focus on cost effective and timely delivery to achieve the best possible outcomes for Defence.

The SDA has learnt from other successful programmes of a similar scale and

complexity such as the 2012 Olympics and Crossrail. It will maintain vital links with industry and public sector partners to preserve the UK's technology advantage and skills-base and to ensure submarine manufacturing and maintenance capability is sufficient to support the UK's submarine requirements.

A key facet of the SDA is to manage the Dreadnought and Astute nuclear submarine programmes to time and budget, alongside providing day-to-day support to the in-service fleet of Trafalgar, Astute and Vanguard Class submarines. As a responsible nuclear operator, the organisation will also manage the decommissioning and disposal of submarines in a safe and environmentally sound way.

[News story: Defence Secretary announces £80m Guardian to protect the skies](#)

Known as Project Guardian, the new Air Command and Control System will support the continued early detection and rapid response to potential hostile or suspect aircraft that pose a threat to UK sovereignty, be that terrorists or state-based actors.

This project will see the current systems at RAF bases in the UK and Falkland Islands replaced with the new technology. It will allow the RAF to exercise command and control of UK and NATO fighters to intercept aggressive or suspect aircraft that are a threat. The RAF routinely intercept, identify and escort aircraft that transit international airspace within the UK's area of interest and continue to be on call 365 days a year.

Since 2013 RAF jets have launched 68 times to intercept or monitor suspect aircraft in the skies around Britain – half of these in response to Russian planes.

IBM Services in the UK is leading the way to develop and install the replacement system, with work being carried out by a dedicated team of specialists at IBM locations across the country.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

With hostile regimes such as President Putin's Kremlin ripping up the international rulebook and terrorists still targeting our way of life, this cutting-edge technology gives our RAF the upper hand in the face of rapidly changing and intensifying global threats.

This investment will play a vital role in making sure our fighter pilots are primed and ready to keep Britain safe and to counter aggression from those who seek to cause us harm.

The Air Command and Control System is the computer system that takes in data to generate the Recognised Air Picture – a dynamic, real time depiction of aircraft in the airspace the UK control or patrol, with each being identified as friendly or hostile. The upgrades will continue improving the rapid exchange of real time command and control information and speed and accuracy of decision making.

The announcement comes as the RAF celebrates 100 years since its formation and demonstrates how the service is continuously looking at ways to design and innovate to meet the full spectrum of threats that the UK is currently facing.

The contract, which IBM UK won in competition, is for approximately £60 million with costed options that the MOD can exercise which would take the total value towards £80 million. It represents a continuation of IBM UK supplying the equipment to UK armed forces and includes five years of support services following the installations.

Director Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance, Dr Simon Dakin, of the MOD's procurement organisation, Defence Equipment and Support, said:

Guardian will provide a new Air Command and Control system connecting the UK's defence network of radars and radio and delivering several new capabilities to improve communication and interoperability between UK, NATO and coalition aircraft, vital to the protection of the UK's skies.

Group Captain Steven Blockley, director of the RAF's Director, National Air Defence and Space Operations, said:

The new system provides a quantum leap in technology and information exchange for the personnel charged with the Defence of the Homeland and will ensure that future homeland operations are conducted with equipment befitting the RAF as it reaches its 100th year. The equipment will ensure that new digital technologies, along with new requirements for future capabilities, will also allow us to seamlessly exchange data and threat information across the new RAF platforms, such as the P-8 maritime patrol aircraft and F-35 Lightning II, as well as continue to integrate with our NATO colleagues to ensure the UK National mission to protect our skies and the NATO Air Policing task are met fully.