

News story: UK team sets off to compete at the Invictus Games Toronto 2017

A 90-strong team of wounded, injured and sick (WIS) military personnel have departed from London Heathrow for Toronto, Canada to represent the UK in the third Invictus Games.

The eight-day sporting event will see 550 individuals from 17 nations compete across 12 sports including athletics, wheelchair basketball, swimming and a new sport for 2017, golf. The event will begin with an opening ceremony on 23 September at the Air Canada Centre, featuring Canadian singers Sarah McLachlan and Alessia Cara, and will finish with a closing ceremony on 30 September with performances from Bruce Springsteen and Bryan Adams.

The Invictus Games, the only international multi-sport event for WIS military personnel and veterans, harness the power of sport to inspire recovery. Getting involved in sport provides significant physical and mental health benefits including increasing self-confidence.

More hopefuls than ever before applied for a place in this year's UK team, which was unveiled by Prince Harry, the patron of the Invictus Foundation, in May. Team selection was based on the benefit of the games to an individual's recovery as well as their performance and commitment to training.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans, Tobias Ellwood MP, was at Heathrow. He said:

I was proud to meet our UK competitors who are overcoming injury or illness to achieve incredible things and truly embodying the meaning of Invictus; unconquered. I am extremely excited to attend the Games next week to cheer them on and I'm sure we will see some remarkable achievements.

Of this year's UK team, 62% are new to the Invictus Games including the 2017 Captain, former Army Major Bernie Broad. Bernie served in the Grenadier Guards for around 30 years and due to injuries sustained in Afghanistan lost both his legs below the knee.

Team Captain Bernie will represent the UK in golf, sitting volleyball, swimming, wheelchair basketball and wheelchair rugby. He said:

I feel extremely proud to lead the UK Team to Toronto for what promises to be an outstanding third Invictus Games. Our success will not be measured by how many medals we bring home, but by our personal successes, how many challenges we overcome and how many

international friends we make.

On 22 September, 260 family and friends will travel to Toronto to join team members and show their support.

The Ministry of Defence has worked in partnership with Help for Heroes and The Royal British Legion to deliver the UK Delegation for Toronto 2017. The Ministry of Defence is a partner in the [Defence Recovery Capability](#), a programme which helps WIS Service personnel either return to duty from injury or helps them back into civilian life.

The [Invictus Games Toronto 2017](#) will take place from 23 – 30 September.

News story: UK sets up joint Caribbean Coordination Cell with French and Dutch allies

The MNCCC will share, coordinate and optimise the use of ships and aircraft delivering emergency aid to affected islands. By working together as well as alongside close allies and partners, including the US and Canada, the military cell will improve the efficiency of humanitarian relief operations in the region.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

The UK has led the way in providing expert disaster relief to those suffering in the wake of Hurricane Irma and now Maria moving a significant amount of troops, aid and equipment into the region. The creation of this co-ordination center will see the UK work with our European allies as we share our expertise and assets to coordinate the delivery of emergency relief across the region.

In the face of such devastation, it is more important than ever to work side by side with our international allies to maximize our response to this crisis, making sure that aid reaches those who need it most.

The MNCCC is intended to act as a liaison and coordination body which will align international military activity and work as a point of contact for participating nations and regional authorities.

The military cell will be established on the island of Curacao at the Dutch Naval Base Parera, and will be active for between one and two months in order

to support the longer term reconstruction and recovery effort in the region. The cell will be staffed by around 30 military personnel from the three nations, where the UK contingent will provide specific expertise in tactical and operational air lifts.

The creation of the cell is the latest example of joint crisis response work in the region, which so far has included a British C17 aircraft transporting 30 tons of French equipment and vehicles to Guadeloupe to support French helicopter operations, and the Dutch vessel HNLMS KAREL DOORMAN picking up additional UK aid from Portsmouth today on her way to the Caribbean. Moreover, a UK specialist in humanitarian and disaster relief was amongst the first French military deployment to the region, and all three nations have liaison officers embedded in each others' military headquarters.

The MNCCC builds on a history of the UK's close defence collaboration with France and the Netherlands. Our Armed Forces work side by side across the globe, for example in the Counter-Daesh Global Coalition and also in NATO, through which France contributes to the UK-led enhanced Forward Presence deployment in Estonia and the Dutch have committed a company of Marines to the UK-led NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (Land) this year. The UK also works alongside the Netherlands as partners in the [UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force](#), a nine-nation-strong high-readiness task force, whilst the UK and France will train, operate and fight alongside each other through the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force, successfully tested through [Exercise Griffin Strike](#) last year.

[News story: Defence Minister welcomes London Stock Exchange's commitment to Armed Forces](#)

After opening the day's trading in Central London, Mr Ellwood co-signed the agreement which sees the London Stock Exchange Group join a number of FSTE 100 companies who are already signatories to the Covenant, including BAE Systems, Marks & Spencer and Vodafone.

By signing, the London Stock Exchange Group commits to upholding the key principles of the Armed Forces Covenant, pledging to support reservists and create career pathways through the MOD's Career Transition Partnership (CTP).

As part of the agreement, the London Stock Exchange Group will promote that they are an armed forces-friendly organisation, advocating the armed forces to their business networks and encouraging support for the military community.

Defence Minister Tobias Ellwood said:

This signing is a significant step for the London Stock Exchange Group, which is set to be a strong advocate for the benefits of employing our talented Defence people in businesses across the UK.

These pledges will seek to open the door to new career pathways for veterans and provide flexibility for reservists – ensuring the Armed Forces community is not disadvantaged by their service and sacrifice for our country.

To celebrate the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant, the London Stock Exchange Group hosted a special market opening ceremony in London this morning. The event was attended by existing and prospective signatories of the Armed Forces Covenant at a networking breakfast for small and medium enterprises.

London Stock Exchange Group's pledges include:

- Being an armed forces-friendly organisation which values the skills that military training and experience can bring to their diverse talent base.
- Seeking to support the employment of veterans, of all ages, by linking the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) to their careers website.
- Endeavouring to offer a degree of flexibility in granting leave for Service spouses and partners before, during and after a partner's deployment, subject to operational requirements.

To date the Covenant has been signed by more than 1,800 organisations, including businesses and charities, all of which have set out their support for members of the armed forces community employed by them or accessing their products and services.

[Press release: Hurricanes Irma and Maria: Sir Alan Duncan on BBC Today programme, 20 September 2017](#)

Asked what we are doing now, Minister for the Americas Sir Alan Duncan said:

Good morning. Well, as you say, bracing ourselves. I mean, this has been a fortnight of just relentless catastrophe, but I think you are right to say that although the fear is that these islands are going to get another hit it looks at the moment that the British Virgin Islands will not get hit as hard as it did before.

And we had a report at 1 o'clock this morning from Montserrat where the storm has passed over. There's been a lot of torrential rain and you've got blocked gullies and things like that. But the government there are doing an initial assessment and we'll get a better report at daylight. But it's not quite as bad as it was before but I'm afraid anything on top of what happened before is quite bad enough and just adds to the misery.

Asked if we should have done more last time, and more quickly, the Minister said:

No, I think this is an utterly unfounded accusation. And for instance, if you read the French papers they were criticising the French government for not doing as much as the British. What we actually did, I think, was professional and quick.

First of all, let me just say again, this is unprecedented. No-one in living memory has ever known 4 hurricanes in a row, and 2 of such ferocity over these Caribbean islands. So what we did was we had a ship in situ, 2 months ahead of this with all the necessary stores. And what that does, in well-tested practices, is to be flexible to go to where the storm hits. It's all very well to say "a storm has hit – why weren't you there?" – by the way if you had pre-positioned supplies on the places that were hit they might have got obliterated, too – but also you've got the flexibility to get there very quickly. Which is exactly what Mounts Bay did.

We got stores, supplies, I mean Mounts Bay very quickly got the hospital and the airport going on Anguilla, it went to the British Virgin Islands and it's done a fantastic job. And HMS Ocean is due in the area on Friday with many, many more stores, fortunately just at about the right time to respond to anything that might now happen.

Find out more about the [government response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria](#)

News story: Defence Secretary recognises UK efforts in the fight against Daesh with service medal

Sir Michael met with personnel from the Mercian Regiment, Engineer Regiment, Intelligence Corps, and Medical Regiments at Erbil and Taji where they have been involved in training Iraqi Security Forces, Kurdish Forces and Ninewah police.

Speaking to the troops, he announced the Op Shader medal, recognising the valuable contributions made by many serving military personnel who have been tirelessly undertaking the UK effort as part of the Coalition fight against Daesh for the last three years.

Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, said:

It is only right that those who've performed above and beyond in this fight against the evil of our time get the recognition they deserve. This medal will do just that.

Our troops have made huge contributions to the fight against Daesh, helping end its tyranny in large parts of Iraq and Syria.

They have conducted over 1,500 strikes against Daesh terrorist targets and helped train nearly 60,000 Iraqi Security Forces. The campaign is not over but for those that have served we rightly honour the critical role they have played in helping keep us safe.

Taking a leading role in the Counter-Daesh Global Coalition, the UK has provided over 1,400 military personnel from all three Services as part of its three year involvement.

Following the recent uplift of 44 additional Royal Engineers who deployed to Al Asad Airbase in August, there are around 600 British soldiers on the ground in Iraq. They are primarily involved in training Iraqi security forces in battle winning infantry, engineering and combat medical techniques as well as providing courses on countering IEDs and other critical skills.

Current UK Operational Medals policy requires consideration of risk and rigour to qualify for award of a campaign medal. To date, risk has been defined in terms of requiring an individual to be physically exposed to danger to qualify for medallic recognition and currently there are approximately 3,600 personnel who will receive the medal from May 2018.

The Defence Secretary has directed that this approach be examined to consider how best to recognise the rigour and operational contribution of those outside the immediate theatre of operations.

He said:

The changing character of warfare provides new challenges – not just about how we fight but also how we recognise and support those who serve.

As fighting has evolved we have adapted, ensuring our troops have cutting edge equipment including unmanned systems operated from outside the battle space. Our recognition of service, the risks taken, and the long-term effects must therefore adapt too.

That is why we need to examine how to provide medallion recognition for those making a vital contribution to Op Shader outside the battlespace, from Reaper pilots taking life and death decisions to those who ensure our planes can strike Daesh targets.

On his trip to the Middle East, the Defence Secretary also visited the Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, where the UK is working closely with US as the two largest contributors to the Coalition's military campaign. As the command centre for the entire coalition's operations in Iraq and Syria, UK personnel, working alongside allies, are coordinating over 70 nations' activity including over 1500 air strikes and surveillance conducted by the RAF in the UK's three year campaign.