

News story: Prince Harry meets Invictus Games hopefuls at UK trials

His Royal Highness Prince Harry attended the UK team trials at the University of Bath Sports Training Village today, ahead of the third Invictus Games being held in Toronto, Canada this September.

More people than ever before have applied to take part in the Games, which is a multi-sport event showcasing wounded, injured and sick serving personnel and veterans. Of the 306 trying out, 212 have never taken part in the Games before but are using sport as part of their recovery and hope to be selected to represent the 90-strong UK team that will head out to Toronto.

The Invictus Games, first held in London in 2014, set out to harness the power of sport to inspire recovery, support rehabilitation and generate a wider understanding and respect for our servicemen and women who have suffered mental or physical injury.

The UK team is selected based on the benefit the Games will give an individual as part of their recovery, combined with performance and commitment to training. Getting involved in sport helps with self-confidence and feeling psychologically empowered. These significant health benefits can be translated outside of sport and into everyday life.

The UK delegation to the 2017 Invictus Games is once again being delivered by a partnership comprising the Ministry of Defence, Help for Heroes and The Royal British Legion.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

The Invictus Games promote the importance of sport in the recovery process, and provide inspiration and opportunity to our injured Servicemen and women. I saw first-hand the strength and determination of competitors at the previous Games and I wish all those taking part in this year's trials the best of luck as they take on this challenge.

Between Thursday 6 April and Sunday 9 April, competitors are taking part in 11 sports at the trials: athletics, archery, wheelchair basketball, road cycling, golf, powerlifting, indoor rowing, wheelchair rugby, swimming, sitting volleyball and wheelchair tennis.

The MOD is a partner in the [Defence Recovery Capability](#), a programme which helps wounded, injured and sick Service personnel either return to duty from injury or provides a mechanism to help them back into civilian life – link. A key activity of the Defence Recovery Capability is the Battle Back programme, an MOD initiative that delivers an adaptive sport and adventurous training programme.

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

[RAF Media Reserves stay safe in the air](#)

Chinook and Puma helicopter crews from RAF Benson have been teaching RAF media reservists how to operate safely around rotary aircraft.



Loadmasters, engineers and pilots from 28 (AC) Squadron and 230 Squadron briefed Media Reserves personnel on the principles of air safety, allowing them to carry out their media jobs on helicopters while keeping themselves and the crew safe.

Putting their new knowledge into practice, the team got airborne in a Puma helicopter from 230 Squadron, photographing and filming its crew at work.



“Air safety is absolutely critical in everything we do, not just in my role as aircrew but also for everyone else we work with here at RAF Benson. It’s always our number one priority to keep us and everyone we work with safe,” explained a pilot from 28 (AC) Squadron.



Media Reserves personnel from 7644 Squadron and 614 (County of Glamorgan) Squadron have been on a week of air safety training, visiting aircrew at RAF Coningsby, RAF Benson and RAF Brize Norton to learn about operating safely in and around various aircraft.

Words: SAC Hickinson

Images: Sqn Ldr Wasley and SAC Sharples

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[News story: Armed Forces Minister underlines UK commitment to Africa](#)

From engineering support to the UN in South Sudan, to helping counter the threat from terror in Somalia, the Minister was able to see the breadth of the UK's role in Africa.

In Mogadishu, Mr Penning met British troops working with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which is building stability, and tackling the threat posed by Al-Shabaab.

Following travel to Bentiu and Malakal, the Minister was greeted by UK military personnel providing support to the UN Mission in South Sudan, which is working to achieve stability in the East African nation. Up to 400 personnel will deploy this year – making it one of the UK's largest operational deployments in the world – enabling the building of a field hospital to support UN peacekeepers.

As the visit moved to Uganda and Kenya, Mr Penning watched pre-deployment training of their military personnel, many of who go on to serve in AMISOM.

Minister of State for the Armed Forces Mike Penning said:

It has been a privilege to see our Armed Forces operating across multiple countries, in different environments, in support of our African partners. The training and support provided by our dedicated men and women clearly demonstrates that Britain has genuinely global reach. This is no less so in South Sudan where we are playing a major role in the international peacekeeping effort, meeting the commitment made by the Prime Minister last year to double our support to the United Nations.



In Uganda, Armed Forces Minister Mike Penning met UK troops supporting pre-deployment training for the African Union Mission in Somalia. Crown Copyright.

Throughout the visit the Armed Forces Minister met with Government ministers and UN representatives to help deepen Defence relationships, and discuss shared interests and regional challenges.

In Somalia, The Minister met President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo, Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre, National Security Minister Mohamed Abukar Islow, and Mr Penning became the first international Minister to meet Somalia's new Defence Minister Abdirashid Abdullahi Mohamed. He also spoke with UN Special Representative Michael Keating.

After leaving Bentiu and Malakal, the Minister travelled to Juba and met Defence Minister Kuol Manyang Juuk, UN Special Representative David Shearer, and Commanding Officer of the UK engineers in South Sudan Lt Col Jason Ainley.

Uganda and Kenya provide important contributions to AMISOM, and in both countries Mr Penning saw UK delivered pre-deployment training.

In Uganda, the Minister saw Ugandan troops receiving training at the Peace Operations Training Centre, Singo, before meeting Defence Minister Adolf Mwesige in Kampala.

Finally, in Nairobi, the Minister met personnel from the British Army Training Unit Kenya, which trains thousands of UK troops every year.

Mr Penning also visited the Humanitarian Peace Support School and British Peace Support Team Eastern Africa, which deliver AMISOM pre-deployment and other training to international military personnel, before meeting Kenyan Defence Minister Raychelle Omamo.



Armed Forces Minister Mike Penning's visit included Kenya, where he met Kenyan Defence Minister Raychelle Omamo. Crown Copyright.

[News story: Defence Secretary boosts Welsh jobs on visit to Aston Martin and GDUK](#)

The Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, today announced a £330 million contract to design the next-generation of battlefield communications on a visit to Wales. Sir Michael also formally handed over the St Athan 'Super Hangar' to Aston Martin.

Both the Morpheus battlefield communications contract with General Dynamics UK (GDUK), and Aston Martin's investment in St Athan will create and support a thousand jobs across south Wales.

Visiting the General Dynamics UK (GDUK) site at Oakdale, the Defence

Secretary spoke of the MOD's new Morpheus programme, a £330 million investment in innovative new tactical communications systems for our Armed Forces, which will support 250 high-tech jobs in South Wales.

While in Wales, the Defence Secretary handed over the former MOD Super Hangar to Aston Martin at a special ceremony at St Athan. The redevelopment of the site into a state of the art manufacturing facility for the British luxury carmaker will directly create 750 new jobs in South Wales, and support thousands more as production starts in 2019.



Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon speaking at St Athan to handover the former RAF site to Aston Martin. Crown Copyright.

Speaking at General Dynamics UK's Oakdale site in South Wales, Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

This £330 million contract for the next generation of battlefield communications, supporting 250 high skilled jobs, underlines the importance of Wales to our Armed Forces.

Backed by a rising defence budget, last year MOD spent £870 million with Welsh businesses helping to build a stronger economy and keep Britain safe.

As well as investing in new equipment we are also investing in a Better Defence Estate for our Armed Forces. Aston Martin's decision to build a new facility on land we no longer need will bring more high skilled jobs to Wales.

This state of the art communications system will be integrated on to the Army's new Ajax vehicles, currently under construction by GDUK, and allow British troops to rapidly deploy new radios and applications to connect with commanders and allies. The system will also be used by the RAF and Royal Navy on a range of platforms, and provide our personnel with modernised command and control networks they need to keep Britain safe.

Secretary of State for Wales, Alun Cairns said:

Wales is quickly establishing a strong reputation as an important hub of high skilled manufacturing. General Dynamics UK has long been instrumental in putting Wales on the front line when it comes to supporting our country's defence and security needs.

And thanks to the close partnerships between the UK Government and the prestigious Aston Martin brand, the St Athan site is springing back to life as a significant centre of employment, bringing with it valuable skills and a lasting legacy for the entire region.

Today's announcements are testament to this Government's determination to strengthen every part of the United Kingdom, and are a strong indicator that Wales is open for business, open for trade, and open for investment.

The MOD is investing £3.5 billion in Ajax, which will be in service with the Army from 2020. With new innovative equipment like Ajax and Morpheus, and new ways of working the Army of the future will be able to successfully tackle a wider range of threats and keep the UK safe.

Army Chief Information Officer, Major General Richard Semple, said:

Becoming the owner of architecture for MOD's tactical command and control systems is critical to getting up-to-date, ever evolving, battle-winning technology into the hands of our soldiers, sailors and airmen on operations; this is a critical component of digital transformation in the Army and Land Environment.

The Defence Secretary also met with some of GDUK's apprentices, who play an important role in the Defence Industry. The MOD is the largest provider of apprentices in the UK, enrolling 14,200 new apprentices across the Armed Services and in the civil service over the last year, and is committed to encouraging defence suppliers to support apprenticeships across their business.

First nine-ship for 2017 Red Arrows team

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THE 2017 Red Arrows team have flown their first “nine-ship” ahead of this year’s display season.

Carrying out their winter training at RAF Scampton, the Lincolnshire home of the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team, the Squadron is renowned for displaying with nine, British-built fast-jets and bringing the whole formation together is a key moment in the six-month winter training programme.

The Red Arrows begin training for the forthcoming season almost as soon as the previous year has ended.



For the latest season, full preparations got underway after the team returned from a nine-week, 20,000-mile, tour of the Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions supporting UK interests at the end of 2016.

Typically, this winter training starts with small groups of three or four aircraft formations.

Each pilot flies three sorties a day, five days a week, and the formations grow in aircraft number as training progresses.

The occasion saw the team’s trademark Diamond Nine formation flown, among other manoeuvres that will feature in this year’s show.

Squadron Leader David Montenegro, Red 1 and Team Leader, said: “We have flown 13 weeks of intensive training and the result is being able to get 9 aircraft airborne today which is a testament to the perseverance and dedication of the team pilots; tireless and enduring effort of our engineering team; brilliant work from our PR and administrative teams on the squadron and indeed, support from the Station services at RAF Scampton.

“On a personal note, this is the third and final year that I will achieve this milestone and I can say in all honesty that the adrenaline build-up and sense of achievement is as strong as it was in 2015.

“In the pursuit of professional excellence, we now transition to the next phase of training during which we will perfect the display and ensure we maintain the RAF Red Arrows’ benchmark of being a world-leading team, able to represent our Service and our Nations’ interests in all corners of the globe”.



Three of the Red Arrows’ nine pilots are new to the team for 2017.

Flight Lieutenant Dan Lowes, who is Red 3 and a former Typhoon pilot, said: “That was a truly memorable experience. It was an honour and a privilege to have flown in my first Red Arrows 9 ship.

“The training has been tough, and there’s still a long way to go, but it’s great to have achieved our first 9.

“I’m now looking forward to deploying on our spring training camp and working towards PDA.”

These flights involve a thorough brief, debrief and discussion to ensure safety is paramount and the formations are precise.



Winter training in the UK lasts until mid-spring, when the team usually moves overseas to a location with more predictable, settled weather to maximise flying hours and perfect the display. This is known as Exercise Springhawk.

Flight Lieutenant Si Taylor, Red 7, who also previously flew operationally in the Tornado and Typhoon and joins Red 6 to form the 2017 Synchro pair, said: “This feels like it’s happened so fast since we got back from the tour in December.

“It’s a great

feeling to have achieved a significant milestone through some hard graft and dedication throughout the winter months. Hopefully now we can kick on and make the show look incredible for all the crowds in the 2017 Season. I'm really looking forward to it".

The first nine-ship is an important occasion for the whole Squadron – including the ground team, who number more than 100 and comprise technicians, suppliers, drivers, photographers, administrators, operations staff and a public relations department.

Each has a crucial part to play in ensuring the Red Arrows can fly and perform precision displays around the world.

Among those people with a role in today's nine-ship were the technicians on the flightline – responsible for checking the aircraft are safe for flight, assisting the crewing-in of the pilots into the cockpits and marshalling the jets from their parking stands.



Flight Lieutenant Alicia Mason, the team's Junior Engineering Officer responsible for day-to-day engineering issues on the Squadron, and who is also new to the Red Arrows this season, said: "Today has been a superb achievement for all concerned. It's another milestone in our calendar that the groundcrew have been preparing for behind the scenes for the past few weeks.

"Luck was not on our side this week though and we've had a tricky few days with the jets not behaving themselves but I'm proud to say that the team have put in a tremendous performance over the past 2 days working together day and night to ensure that we had 9 serviceable aircraft for the programme this morning. It was great to see the fruits of our labour when all 9 took off and landed safely and the aircrew were able to practice some of their 9-ship manoeuvres. Even some of the groundcrew were able to take a break for a few minutes this morning to come outside and watch part of the first 9-ship practice to show their support and enjoy this moment as a team.

"We can't rest on our

laurels though, there is still much to be done ahead of our deployment to Greece for Exercise SPRINGHAWK. The groundcrew will be busy over the next 4 weeks ensuring that we have 11 serviceable aircraft and equipment prepared and ready to take with us for the duration of the Exercise”.



During Springhawk the team is assessed by senior Royal Air Force officers, with the aim of gaining Public Display Authority.

If this is awarded, the Squadron’s pilots change from green coveralls into their famous red flying suits and the ground crew are allowed to wear their royal blue display coveralls.

The season then officially begins and public performances by the Red Arrows are permitted.

It is hoped the first display to the public in the UK will be on 3 June this year, for the Torbay Airshow, Torbay.

More information about the 2017 season will be release on the Red Arrows website shortly.

For more information about the team, follow @rafredarrows on Twitter, like RAF Red Arrows on Facebook or visit www.raf.mod.uk/reds

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