

Real Stories

Our Armed Forces families today



Real Stories 2021

Real Stories is collection of images and stories submitted by Armed Forces families that reflect their lives as families in the UK today. Sometimes, the military community is presented negatively in the media and wider society. Stories such as veteran suicides, post-traumatic stress disorder in the military and negative portrayals of veterans in custody frequently feature in the media and can affect public perception of the Armed Forces community. **Real Stories** provides an opportunity for us to consider the Armed Forces community differently, presented in their own way and filtered through their own lens.

We hope this collection of images will be educational, informative and serve to facilitate debate and discussion around the ways the Armed Forces community can be represented and understood.

In the following pages, you will see the array of images that were submitted by our contributors, to whom we are extremely grateful. These pictures provide a sense of the rich array of emotions and relationships that families in the Armed Forces experience today, interpreted by families themselves. We hope you enjoy this collection.





Community spirit

2020 was a particularly difficult for many people; for us as a family it was particularly challenging with a diagnosis of breast cancer in March 2020. This meant diagnosis, surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy during the lockdown with no family or childcare support available. The military community and ethos of individuals coming together to support one another in difficult times is what got us through this tough year. Constant offers of help with shopping, dog walking, making meals, anything anyone could do to help alleviate our situation. This photo is from May 10th 2020. My birthday and I had undergone a mastectomy and had just started chemotherapy. My neighbours came together to make me an afternoon tea and to stand outside and sing happy birthday. It was unexpected, emotional and just what we needed. The military community comes into its own in times of crisis and difficulty. I am humbled and privileged to be a part of it.

Charlotte McNelis





We will always be a part of the Armed Forces community – Army/Navy rugby

Even once a parent leaves the Armed Forces, it is still very much a part of our lives.

Sian





Starting over again

It can be challenging all the change that comes each time Bill's job moves him on. However, as a family we really enjoy exploring new areas, meeting new people, and the time together is precious, outside of deployment.

Jenni Gates





Where it all started

Back in Dartmouth with my wonderful daughters, and wife who took the picture, which is where my career as an officer in the Royal Navy began in earnest back in 1994 at Britannia Royal Navy College.

A military family





Saying goodbye

The day my husband deployed on his second tour of Afghanistan.

Kate Salem





A first birthday

Typical for many service children, spending their birthdays away from either mum or dad. We were lucky that daddy managed a video call on our daughter's first birthday.

Marie





Daddy deploys on my 1st birthday

Her daddy deployed for seven months to Afghanistan on her first birthday, just as the UK entered its first Covid lockdown. She became a pro at video calls at the age of one!

Sophie Cattermole

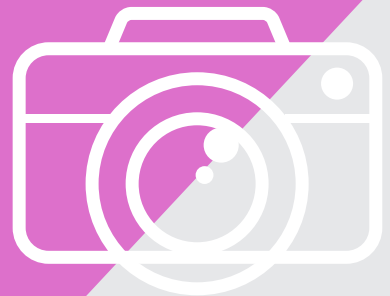




Daddy's boots

This photograph was taken when my daughter was around five months. We lived in Catterick at the time. The photo just reminds me of how little she was and how seeing those boots just reminds us always of our life in the Forces. She is now 12 years old.

Kate





Ava joy

This is 26 day old Ava nestled sweetly on her mummy and daddy's military cap and beret.

Claire Dunn





Virtual home baptism

As our two children have complex medical needs, we are trying to shield as far as is possible. This picture was taken during our daughter's 'virtual' home baptism. Just us, her brother Harry, the visiting (socially distant) priest and many of her cuddly toys in the congregation. A very special experience and one hell of a story to tell when she grows older!

Sean Taylor-Beirne





Walking in step

We are an SEND military family and both my young children have complex medical needs. This is a picture of my son walking in to one of his many hospital procedures holding the hand of his father who is a serving officer in the British Army. Being a military family, it is not always guaranteed that my husband can be there in person. However, this photo of them both walking calmly together, in step, holding hands is a reminder of how crucial his physical presence can be.

Jess Taylor-Beirne





Welcome home

This image represents a huge proportion of our son's life, and also my life before we had him. The waiting for our soldier to return from deployments or exercises, putting life on hold until they return. And also the excitement of having our soldier home again, the planning of what we will do when Daddy comes home, and the joy of on our son's face when he picks Daddy out of the sea of green uniforms, priceless.

Rachael Clough





Coming home mid-pandemic

My husband Dan is a Flight Lieutenant in the RAF and was posted to Qatar for four months in January 2020. We had a very difficult time when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. I was working from home while looking after my five year old daughter and two year old twin sons, who were already missing Daddy but at least had routine, family, friends, school - plenty of things to keep them busy and a great support network to lean on. And now they had all of that taken away from them - as did I! It was a really challenging time for us all. Dan's four month tour slowly extended to five months as quarantine time for his replacement had to be factored in, and then of course the general military delays. As much as we had struggled over here, Dan had really found it tough out there. From March to July everybody on his military base out in Qatar had been practising social distancing. He rang me one evening in June and - for somebody who I have never really seen get emotional - he cried. He just wanted to see us. To give us all a hug. It was heartbreaking on both ends. The day eventually came when he arrived home and I think in this first picture I took as two of our three children jumped into his arms you can see those months of loneliness and desperation physically evaporating from his body as he finally hugs his babies again.

Jess Greenhalgh





Homecoming

The day my husband returned from his second tour of Afghanistan.

Kate Salem

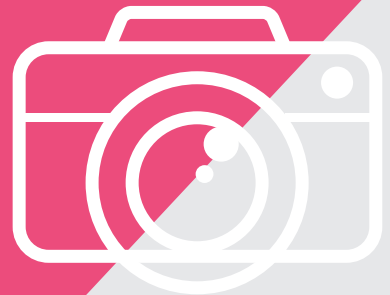




Home for Christmas

A very cold, wet day, spent on the Round Tower in Portsmouth waving Daddy home from a deployment just in time for Christmas.

Marie





Back to school

Our children heading confidently into airport departures returning to boarding school after a holiday at home.

Ruth Fry





Love of a child

Taken during my chemo regime - my daughter (RAMC) pure rock.

Tracy Seavers





Eskrett family parade together

This was my brother's graduation parade with me and my father. We were already in the service. My father has since left. However, me and my brother are still proudly service today.

A military family





Ely Cathedral, Cambridgeshire

These little boys watched both their fathers at a parade in Ely Cambridgeshire. Sgt Major & Commanding Officer of D Company (Cambridgeshire) of the 1st Battalion the Royal Anglian Regiment. They both waited so patiently to get this photo. A day they will both remember forever.

Nina Butterick

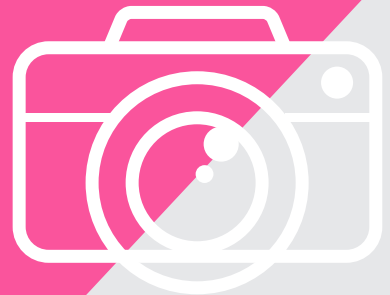




BFG Remembrance Parade 2018

Joyful times in sombre occasions; my daughter Eloise (then aged three) and I at the final British Forces Germany Remembrance Day Parade in 2018.

Andrew Woodbridge





Woodbridge siblings at a funeral

This image to me reflects some of the difficulties of Service life; this was me (the serving soldier) reunited with my siblings at our grandfather's funeral on 10 / 3 / 21. I was serving overseas in Germany and had to negotiate travelling whilst the COVID pandemic was starting to take hold as well as trying to work around a career course I was attending.

Andrew Woodbridge





Never forget

This is our granddaughter and after generations of family members who have served and who are still serving a message that no matter how long ago we must always be thankful.

Isobel Bowman





WHITTINGTON
United Kingdom

The Hines family

This is me - a serving Officer - with Ruby my daughter and Daisy the Dachshund which completes the Hines Family.

Susie Hines



Nursing Studies



DISSERTATION

Presented as part of the requirements for Bachelor of Nursing with
Honours

**An interpretative phenomenological analysis exploring the
mental health related experiences of armed forces
personnel transitioning into civilian life**

B037389

My nursing career

My life as a military child with both my mother and father having served in the UKAF has inspired my life as a staff nurse, with both undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations focussing on the Armed Forces and now I'm completing a PhD in the area.

Sian





The Bish and Mrs Bish at HMS Drake Christmas Ball

This is just one of the many happy times we enjoyed in the Wardroom at HMS Drake. We made many friends there, including the doctors and dentists and always joked about clerical /medical connections! We were always invited to the Junior Doctors' Reading Group in the Bar Below and the banter over supper. We also enjoyed leading everyone singing Auld Lang Syne at Burns Night.

Lizzie McWhirter



Thank you!

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We would also like to thank all the contributors for their submissions and for sharing key moments in their lives with the Real Stories team and with you, the reader. Thank you so much, Real Stories contributors, for taking the time to be part of this project and for opening a window into some of your reflections and memories as members of the Armed Forces community.

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- Royal Air Force Families Federation
- British Forces Broadcasting Services
- The Royal British Legion
- Military Wives Choirs
- Confederation of Service Charities
- Imperial War Museum
- Army Benevolent Fund
- National Creative Project, Blind Veterans UK

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