



Riding high: Army surfing is targeting the upper echelons of Service sport thanks to a new outlook that includes professional coaching in Newquay

Crest of a wave

Report: Richard Long
Pictures: Graeme Main

HAVING seen sports such as rugby union, football and boxing receive top billing in Service circles the Army's surfers are now plotting their path to the big time.

For years the activity has been dismissed as nothing more than a laid back pastime but with a new management structure in place the military's wave riders have adopted a distinctly professional outlook.

Capt Rich Griffiths (RE) and Capt Tom Harrison (R Signals) are the men charged with revolutionising Army surfing and the duo have set clear goals to strive for in the coming years.

"Our aim is to drive the club forward and in a new direction, taking it from a group of mates living in the same area to a nationwide outfit with meets at different locations," Harrison told *SoldierSport* during the organisation's recent training

week in Newquay.

"We had just over 30 guys competing at the Army Championships and we have 150 on our mailing list. But we know there are so many more out there.

"This week gives them time off work; they can come and do the sport they enjoy and take it to the next level.



"The bodyboarders do their own thing while the more experienced surfers can go off and practise. There is something for everyone."

The training camp falls between the Army and tri-Service competitions and offers a challenging schedule that covers every aspect of the discipline.

Soldiers spend morning and afternoon sessions in the water and use video analysis to assess their technique.

The Newquay Activity Centre offers free professional coaching and the charity Surf Action lends its support to beginners and novices.

A number of the sport's leading lights are also on hand to deliver instructor talks to those taking part.

"If you play football this is the equivalent of having Premiership stars coming in; these guys are at the top of their game," Griffiths said.

"We are also providing training for instructors and beach lifeguards and have funding in place for six people to do



that this year.

"It means a junior NCO can set up a unit surf club and send 12 guys out on the water. That will help the sport grow."

A beginners' week is staged every September to encourage newcomers to the fold. They can then train throughout the season with a view to competing in the military competitions held at the end of the campaign.

"Surf culture is rapidly emerging in the UK," Harrison explained. "The Army lads are physically fit, dedicated and mentally robust."

"We want to merge new surfers with our existing talent so we can reach tri-Service level."

"The initial focus will be on expanding the senior set-up but from there we hope to increase our base with developmental and corps teams."

"Our aspiration is to see the Army compete as a club side."

"I am sure there are guys out there who surf every weekend and it would be great to see them doing that under the Service banner."

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The Army Championships proved to be the perfect showcase for the talent within the ranks but there is still work to be done if the soldiers are to eclipse the achievements of the military's dominant team – the Royal Air Force.

Harrison said: "It was a good competition this year. The guys are able to pull off some pretty decent manoeuvres and the standard out on the water is

quite high, which is encouraging to see.

"There are those that have been surfing a lot longer than others but the training week is about helping them improve."

"Everyone can get something from it so they can reach the next step in the sport."

"The RAF are so much more established than us but we want to produce a tri-Service winner."

The change in focus has been welcomed by surfing stalwart Sgt Dave Holden (RAPTC, pictured above), who has been part of the set-up for 14 years.

"It is very much needed," he explained. "We want to drive the sport on and we now have the management structure

and organisation to take things to a new level and compete with the Army's more mainstream pursuits.

"Surfing is something we are all passionate about but it needs to reach the same stage as football or rugby."

"The Newquay Activity Centre has been fantastic and the developmental coaching they offer is a first for us at this level."

"You would have to pay through the nose to have opportunities like this in the civilian world."

Army champion Lt Clyde Bundy (RAMC) grew up in the resort town and was surprised to see the sport included on the Service roster.

"I didn't think there would be any surfing when I joined," the officer said.

"It is getting better and the younger guys coming through are telling their friends about it."

"It is probably the best time to be involved. As long as I'm in the Army I will stay on the team."

"We are looking at overseas trips to Hawaii and Indonesia so there are exciting times ahead."

For more information on the sport and how to get involved search "Army Surfing" on the defence intranet or visit the group's website, www.armysurfing.org ■