

RAF RESERVISTS TRAIN WITH NORWEGIAN FORCES

Royal Air Force reservists have been in remote Norway being put through a strenuous week of extreme cold weather survival training and cross-country skiing by Norwegian forces.

Nearly 50 reservists from 17 squadrons across the UK trained as part of Exercise Wintermarch from 12 to 18 March.

The main focus of the week was learning how to travel effectively through the harsh winter landscape by cross-country skiing. Personnel are also learning skills such as avalanche survival, crevasse rescue, first aid and basic mountain safety.

Participant and RAF Regiment gunner, Lance Corporal Justin Ritchings, commented at the commencement: *‘I like being pushed outside of my comfort zone and trying new things. At some point we will be working with the other exercise participants on operations, so it is great to meet them and build that rapport on an exercise like this. Who wouldn’t want to do this? Most people would pay money to do this!’*

A wide range of personnel and trades are involved, such as regiment gunners, intelligence, logistics and medical personnel. All ranks are taking part on an equal basis, from junior ranks to senior officers.

Exercise coordinator, Squadron Leader Alex Redman, said: *‘This is my first year organising Exercise Wintermarch. I am impressed by the effort our friends and allies have put in to host us here in Norway. It is great to see the reservists show their ability to tackle new challenges in unfamiliar terrain – the level of confidence they gain is great for them to take back to their civilian employment.’*

Exercise Wintermarch is an annual exercise for the RAF Reserves that has taken place for nearly two decades in partnership with the Norwegian Reserve Officers Association.

This exercise takes place each year in Hardangervidda National Park, with instructors from Norway and Denmark who have expert knowledge of the area and the skills needed to survive the hostile winter environment.

Hardangervidda National Park is where British and Norwegian forces used cross-country skiing in the famous Telemark raid to defeat the enemy in World War Two.

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