

Armed Forces Week in Edinburgh – city centre events 24-26 June 2011

✘ Lorraine Kelly became a military action woman to officially kick off the build-up to 2011 UK Armed Forces Day which takes place this weekend on 25 June.

She was winched down to Calton Hill last week from an RAF helicopter and ordered across an assault course by the Army's fittest soldiers. She then fired a second Edinburgh One O'Clock Gun, and raised the Armed Forces Day flag.

Lorraine was joined by Edinburgh's Lord Provost, military commanders, service personnel, veterans and sponsors to reveal the highlights of 2011 UK Armed Forces Day.

This year, Edinburgh is hosting the major Armed Forces Day national event, in partnership with sponsors BAE Systems and Finmeccanica, which promises to be the biggest and best since the annual celebrations began in 2009. Up to 100,000 people are expected to flock to Scotland's capital to enjoy a full weekend of activities on 24, 25 and 26 June, including air displays, a ship visit, and parade of 2500 people down the Royal Mile.

There'll also be events, street parties and parades in towns and cities throughout the UK.

FRIDAY 24 JUNE

On Friday, Armed Forces Day rolls into Leith with tours of Type 23 frigate HMS Portland, various water-based displays in the docks, the Flying Gunners motorcycle display team, and Royal Marine Band. The day culminates in a spectacular 30 minute air display (sponsored by SELEX Galileo) by the world

famous Red Arrows over the Firth of Forth – their first full display in Edinburgh for 23 years. Some of the best views will be from Calton Hill, The Braids, Corstorphine Hill, Arthur's Seat, Cramond and the Promenade. Visitors will also have the opportunity to try out Tornado jet simulators at the Ocean Terminal shopping centre.

SATURDAY 25 JUNE

The highlight of Armed forces Day itself on Saturday will see a parade of an incredible 2500 military personnel, veterans and cadets marching down the Royal Mile from the Castle Esplanade to Holyrood Park, past Their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Duchess of Rothesay. The parade will end with a short ceremony and a flypast from the Red Arrows.

World famous bagpipe rockers the Red Hot Chilli Pipers will top the bill on the main stage in the Park on Saturday afternoon. Joining them in the arena will be military musical acts such as the Royal British Legion Pipe Band and other military bands as part of a packed afternoon of events and entertainment for all the family. There'll be a parachute display, a Veterans Village , and a Royal Marine combat demo. For kids there'll be an exhibition of armoured vehicles from Afghanistan , flight simulators, inflatable assault course, climbing wall, crazy golf and demolition fun zone. The day will draw to a close at 6.00pm with a classic military Beating Retreat with Typhoon and Tornado flypast from RAF Leuchars and RAF Lossiemouth.

As well as The Duke and Duchess of Rothesay, the First Minister, Defence Secretary, Scottish Secretary, Presiding Officer, Chief of the Defence Staff, President of Royal British Legion Scotland and the indomitable Lorraine Kelly will all be attending.

Edinburgh Academy school choir will perform during the Drumhead ceremony at 12.55pm, fresh from their success winning

the BBC Songs of Praise 'choir of the year' competition.

SUNDAY 26 JUNE

Sunday's events are being organised by DecAid to raise money for those affected by the war in Afghanistan . The day starts with a public military fitness session in Holyrood Park (anyone can join in), followed by a massed Pipes and Drums parade from the Castle Esplanade to Holyrood Park past the DecAid patron HRH The Duchess of Rothesay. The afternoon will include live acts on the big stage, headlined by Carrie Mac, a military style assault course, and Veterans Village .

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

On Saturday and Sunday night the Edinburgh International Film Festival will link up with Armed Forces Day to screen the premiere of award winning Hell and Back again, a war film the like of which has never seen before. The film is a gritty account of the conflict in Afghanistan , seen through the eyes of a US marine severely injured on the frontline, and his recovery at home. The film is free to military personnel, veterans and their families and will be followed by panel discussion with experts such as the film maker himself and former Major General Andrew Mackay who commanded Task Force Helmand in 2007/8.

SUPPORT FROM BUSINESSES

Many businesses have been keen to show their support, with First Bus offering free travel to troops and veterans, and Virgin Trains offering free first class upgrades to troops. Hundreds of taxis across Edinburgh will display the Armed Forces Day sticker and other businesses around Edinburgh and the UK will offer discounts to military personnel and veterans.

Lorraine Kelly said:- "I'm proud to be supporting Armed Forces Day again. These brave men and women who serve our country

thoroughly deserve to have a special day in their honour. They do a great job, often in difficult conditions, and I'm always honoured to meet some of these amazing people, young and old.

"For the past few years I've taken part in the launch event. It's given me a glimpse into military life, and allowed me to be an action woman for the day, jumping out of helicopters, driving a tank, and leaping over an assault course. I may not be in the Forces myself but I feel really proud to be able to do my bit to support them. I'm looking forward to chatting to people at Holyrood Park on the big day, and also urge people to go along to their local Armed Forces Day events across Scotland and the UK , to enjoy the activities and meet our troops and veterans – we can all learn a lot from their courage and determination."

✘ The Rt Hon George Grubb, Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh , said: "There really is something for everyone on the Saturday whether it's the spectacular sight of 2500 veterans and Armed Forces personnel marching down the Royal Mile, the Red Arrows fly past or all the family fun and military activities in Holyrood Park .

"Edinburgh has a long and proud tradition of honouring its Armed Forces and I urge everyone to come along and enjoy a fantastic weekend in support of our service personnel."

Council Leader Jenny Dawe said:- "It's a tremendous privilege for Edinburgh to be the host city for this year's Armed Forces Day national celebrations, and we and our partners and sponsors are working very hard to ensure this year's events are a great success."

Defence Secretary, Dr Liam Fox, said: "Armed Forces Day provides a unique opportunity for us all to pay thanks to the men and women who serve this country with such distinction. As Defence Secretary, I have the privilege of witnessing the work they do at first hand: defending our nation and its interests

both at home and abroad. They represent the very best of Britain .

“I would especially like to thank the City of Edinburgh for hosting this national event. The city has a long and proud military history and provides the perfect setting for us all to say thank you to our Armed Forces.”

First Minister Alex Salmond said:- “Armed Forces Day is a time to celebrate the professionalism, dedication and commitment of our Armed Forces. As a nation, Scotland owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to those who serve to defend our values and way of life.

“I am delighted that Edinburgh is hosting the national celebration of Armed Forces Day. It is a city with a long tradition of military connections and history. The Edinburgh skyline, dominated by the castle, will be a fantastic backdrop to the parades, events and exhibitions marking Armed Forces Day and I know the people of Scotland will welcome and applaud our outstanding Service men and women past and present as they proudly parade through the heart of this wonderful city.”

Brigadier George Lowder, Commander of 51 (Scottish) Brigade said: “The Armed Forces enjoy huge support from the people of of Scotland but we absolutely do not take this for granted. Our people and their families are very grateful for the incredible support that they receive from the people of Scotland . It gives them strength at home and abroad.

“I would urge people to come out and engage with us throughout the Armed Forces Day celebrations across Scotland and especially on Saturday 25 June in Edinburgh .

Squadron Leader David Webster said:- “The RAF Search and Rescue Force was delighted to do some training with Lorraine Kelly, who is clearly far better looking than our usual winchman! This year we celebrate 70 years of the RAF SAR Force so Armed Forces Day is an ideal opportunity to pay tribute to

the men and women of the RAF and Royal Navy who work 24/7, often in very challenging conditions, to rescue people at home in the UK and from our surrounding seas.”

Rupert Laing, one of the founders of DecAid said: “It’s a great honour for DecAid to be part of the celebration of the Armed Forces in Edinburgh . There is no better platform for us to launch our appeal to mark the tenth anniversary of the Afghan conflict. We hope that the young people of Scotland will join us on Sunday 26 June to show their support for the service men and women who do so much for us.”

The Armed Forces Day national event is being staged thanks to funding from the Scottish Government, the City of Edinburgh Council and the Ministry of Defence. The Council has also been successful in securing sponsorship from Finmeccanica, BAE Systems, Force Protection, Royal British Legion, Compass Group, and SELEX Galileo.