

RAF personnel become first ever drone 'aces' during operations in the Middle East

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- RAF Regiment gunners in the Middle East become 'aces' for the first time in the unit's history.
- The "Ace" term is traditionally used for a pilot who shoots down at least five enemy aircraft in combat.
- Gunners in the RAF Regiment have won the term for the first time through shooting down five or more Iranian drones.

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The four personnel achieved "ace" status by taking out five or more drones during operations in the Middle East.

The 'ace' title is based on the same definition used in the Second World War, when a pilot was named an 'ace' if they shot down five or more enemy aircraft.

The evolution of the much-acclaimed mark of respect and recognition demonstrates how no matter the era, the RAF still protects the skies.

The new 'aces' operate a complex system of defences to protect personnel and equipment on the ground. To defeat the enemy, they combine early-warning sensors, electronic warfare, and the state-of-the-art Rapid Sentry air defence system armed with Lightweight Multirole Missiles (LMM).

RAF Regiment gunners in the Middle East face a range of threats, including from uncrewed systems, hostile drones, and complex swarming technologies designed to disrupt operations and endanger personnel on the ground.

An RAF Regiment gunner 'ace' said:

We are all RAF Gunners—some as young as 18, many of us with over five confirmed engagements, and some just eight months out of training. We are proud to represent the next generation of the Corps.

Under constant threat, we are responsible for detecting, tracking and engaging targets, often while coming under fire but we continue to load and operate equipment even as missiles land around us.

We take immense pride in our role. Working long, demanding shifts in high-pressure conditions, we remain focused, determined, and resilient.

Minister for the Armed Forces Al Carns MP said:

Our teams across the Middle East are operating in some of the most demanding conditions imaginable, and they are delivering with professionalism, courage and real combat skill.

I am hugely proud of our RAF Regiment. Night after night, under threat, they are protecting British lives and British interests, and doing so in the finest traditions of the RAF Regiment.

Several of these heroes have achieved 'ace' status neutralising Iranian drones. The first of its kind, it isn't just impressive, it is exceptional.

We don't say it enough in the UK, but thank you for your Service.

Wing Commander Richard Maughan, Officer Commanding No. 2 Counter-Uncrewed Aerial Systems Wing said:

Since the outset of the conflict in late February 2026, RAF Regiment personnel—supported by Royal Air Force engineers and air surveillance officers—have been at the forefront of countering persistent one-way attack drones targeting UK and Allied personnel, infrastructure, and assets in the Middle East.

During the 23rd and 24th of March, RAF Regiment gunners operating within a ground-based counter-drone unit delivered the most effective defensive outcome achieved in a single night to date, underscoring the Regiment's central role in force protection within a high-threat environment.

Air Cdre Paul Hamilton, Commander Global Enablement:

Our deployed gunners are showing outstanding courage to defend deployed UK personnel, allies, and partners every day.

They are genuinely putting their own lives at risk in the defence of others; as their Commandant General, I am extremely proud of the professionalism and self-sacrifice being displayed by these amazing people.

This defensive action is in line with the UK's policy to defend British people, interests, and partners in the region while avoiding being drawn into the wider conflict.

It comes as the Defence Secretary this week announced that the UK will deploy Rapid Sentry to Kuwait to support the country's air defence against Iranian attacks.

The MOD also confirmed last week that the UK intends to buy further Lightweight Multirole Missiles

(LMM) to supply to British forces and support partners in the region, including with training in the UK where needed.

As RAF Regiment gunners have shown, Lightweight Multirole Missiles, manufactured by Thales UK in Belfast, have proven highly capable for air defence in the Middle East.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/raf-personnel-become-first-ever-drone-aces-during-operations-in-the-middle-east>