

The GTC is proud that the makeup of our membership continues to evolve. As part of this, we are increasingly seeing members working in broader roles and involved across wider sectors. **Agy Rudel** has been a member for a few years now, often posting on the GTC Forum both to request and to offer advice, and in 2020 was delighted to be on the judging panel for the Bill Vinten GTC University Awards. But when Zerb spotted that Agy – well, Corporal Agy – has an email signature that is rather different from everyone else, we were intrigued to know more!

Top (run 'n') Gun:

Agy at RAF Brize Norton in November 2020, on assignment to cover the arrival of the first new Apache Attack Helicopters (AH-64E variant) to be delivered to the British Army
SAC ANNA LYTHGOE (614 SQN RAUXAF PHOTOGRAPHER) WWW.ANNALYTHGOE.COM

In 2014, three years after my graduation in Film, Photography and Video Production from De Montfort University, Leicester, I was working as a freelancer, on promotional films, shorts, Asian weddings and as a contractor video editor for various creative agencies. It was also the year of my attestation for No 7644 Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force (RAuxAF), as part of the RAF Media Reserves. I had seen and responded to an advert for a vacancy for a part-time photographer with video production skills in the RAF Media Reserves.

I think I've always had an adventurous and brave spirit, which no doubt played a large part in my decision, when I was 23, to leave my native Poland and move to Vienna, Austria, where I lived for two and a half years before relocating here, the UK, in 2006. That sense of adventure and enjoying a challenge also led to my interest being piqued by the job advert for the reservist role. I had no previous military background, nor was there anyone in my family with any connection to the Royal Air Force. The only possible association with the RAF I could refer to in the interview was a heritage of Polish aircrew, who had joined up and fought bravely and tenaciously with the RAF during the Second World War – but, nevertheless, here I am, six years later and very happy to still be a part of the superb RAF community.

Who are the RAF Media Reserves?

No 7644 Squadron RAuxAF is deployed around the world, planning and delivering media operations as part of national and coalition operations, as well as being tasked with providing media and campaign support in the UK and overseas to the RAF and wider UK Defence forces. Roles include media operations officers, media escorts, social media specialists,

event planners and media trainers, as well as mobile news teams, which comprise journalists, reporters, photographers and videographers. Personnel are recruited nationally and either join 7644 Squadron at RAF Halton, or are based in detached flights with RAuxAF squadrons across the UK.

Earning your stripes

Once you've been selected, there is still a long way to go before you actually start working on any tasks. Each reservist needs to pass a medical test, complete security clearance and undergo basic recruitment training – one of the hardest things I personally have ever done, but necessary to make me more resilient and improve my stamina for the jobs I would come to do. It took me a year and a half to get to the point of being 'fit for service' – with a great deal of grit and determination required to get through the whole recruitment process.

Kit, crew and training

For our video work, due to an existing contract, we used Canon AV broadcast equipment up until 2016 when the squadron introduced Sony FS7 and FS5 cameras, which since then have become our run-and-gun kit along with the Sony α7 Mk III, FUJINON MK Cine Zoom lenses, Sony prime lenses, and much more. The squadron is well equipped to deliver news rush packages, short- and long-form video content, as well as premium-quality programming in a studio production setup.

Our 'customers' include the Media and Communications team at Headquarters Air Command, national and international newsrooms, the Ministry of Defence (MOD), NATO and TV stations such as the BBC, Forces TV, ITV, and so on. Our unit is diverse, a mix of well-established media professionals whose full-time work is in television, radio and

the Pole who vaults into action with the RAF Media Reserves



Agy filming interviews with participants of 'Wintermarch' 2017, an Extreme Cold Weather Training exercise for RAF Reservists, which takes place in the Norwegian mountains

news agencies, in both public and private sectors, as well as freelancers and media professionals at the mid or entry level. All of us (who also span a range of military ranks) have different skill sets to bring to the party, such as: camera operation, photography, journalism or project management skills.

A commitment involves a minimum of 27 and maximum of 180 days a year, including monthly RAF media training weekends, tasks and annual continuity training (ACT). To be fit for service, we need to pass annual fitness, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), weapon handling and respirator testing facility assessments. This last element involves going into a chamber where we test our respirators and undertake drills for biological, nuclear and gas attacks. Each year, we have to go through 'initial exposure' for CS gas – a truly awful experience. Also once a year, we need to dedicate 5 days in a row to accomplishing our ACT. This involves a combination of military and media skills, providing preparation for operational scenarios.

Learning the ropes

The best ACT I've participated in so far covered camera operation in military aircraft such as the C-17 Globemaster III and Chinook (with open ramp). The first exercise included familiarisation of filming in a cockpit environment, where it is vital not to catch any sensitive information/aircraft parts on camera so as to maintain operational security. It also required us to film a short piece of content about the load master, whose face couldn't be revealed (again for personal security reasons), using a variety of closeups to tell the story

of the load master's duties before take-off. The importance of personal and operational security at all times is a crucial aspect to being military media personnel, but mistakes around capturing something that should not be seen or heard on camera can be avoided due to the help and guidance of project officers.

In the second exercise, my colleague and I were to produce a handheld news report using a Sony FS7 and external Rode mic, dealing with the aircraft's rapid height change and the noise of its engines. We often have to deal with high levels of noise exposure during 'real' tasks, especially when interviewing the pilots standing next to their aircraft with the engines running. Getting the sound right in that environment regularly takes the majority of the camera setup time. There are various hazards you get used to being mindful of in airfield environments too, including the significant danger posed by foreign object debris (FOD), which can get ingested into aircraft parts and engines. So, keeping all our AV kit bags closed is crucial to both the security of military camera personnel and also the safe operation and take-off of aircraft.

On top of this, during the rank progression stages, all reservists need to accomplish various courses that are accredited by the Chartered Management Institute and are an example of transferable professional development skills respected in civilian life.

A steady shot

In 2016, I decided to take part in the RAF Group Operational Shooting Competition (GpOSC) at Bisley, along with members of the Army Marksmanship Training Centre, in order to learn how to shoot with a Glock pistol. I achieved the top score in the competition with the first five rounds I'd ever fired!

The other participants were surprised but interested in how this was possible and I explained that I thought it must be because I do so much handheld camera, requiring constant good balance and concentration to keep the camera steady. Working long hours on shoots with multiple locations, looking after and carrying your own equipment whilst having to frequently pass through security checks, you want to be as 'compact' as possible to make life easier for yourself. Even if you're part of a mobile news team (MNT) working with a photographer and journalist, you still need to be self-sufficient in handling your own kit. Inside an aircraft I tend to work handheld – actually, for any tasks in the field I frequently work that way, often leaving the tripod or monopod behind as this is just another weight to carry and it takes too much time to set up when the situation is changing very quickly. This could also include sequences of jet aircraft taking off and landing filmed from the airfield (a frequent subject); in this situation being flexible gives me better control when following the fast-moving jets.

A variety of tasks

Each year, the RAF Reserve members can volunteer for certain annual tasks, such as the Altcar Challenge (an international NATO military competition, which takes place in Liverpool), the Royal International Air Tattoo (RIAT), Armed Forces Day, Remembrance Day, the Battle of Britain commemorations, and so on. Again, being in the field, I like to keep myself as mobile and flexible as possible as regards kit. During the Altcar Challenge, for example, I've found the combination of a Zhiyun Crane 2 with a7 Mk III works well for fast-paced scenarios, delivering premium-quality footage for social media outputs.

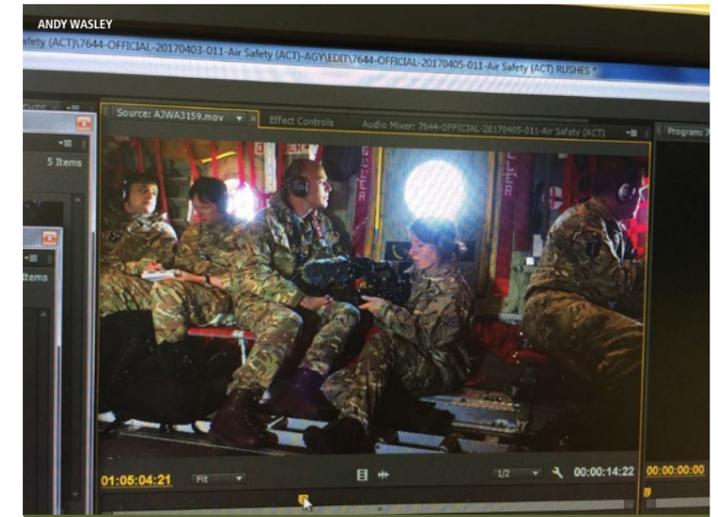
Working on RIAT 2016, I got the chance to jump into the role of interviewer. One of the officers suggested it might be a nice idea for me, as a Polish camerawoman in the RAF, to conduct the interview with a Polish pilot. This allowed me to stretch my skills a little further by performing in front of camera while conducting a chat with Captain Robert 'Bluto' Galazka, a Flight Evaluator and Flying Instructor (who it has to be said was quite confused at seeing me in a British uniform!).

Coping with all conditions

As media specialists, we travel a lot and therefore need to take into consideration the weather conditions wherever we go. For instance, in the low temperatures experienced during an exercise called 'Wintermarch' in Norway, I found the camera batteries were dying very quickly, so learned that it was important to keep them close to my body whenever out in the field. The uniqueness of this annual task is that, rather than just dip in, we actually have to fully participate in the exercise itself, alongside the military personnel, while also filming particular stories. Being in Norway, it involves cross-country skiing – so, if you haven't done this before, it's yet another skill you have to quickly master. Multi-tasking on this exercise can be quite tricky and I have found Go Pros to be the best solution along with Sony mirrorless or Canon DSLR cameras, with lavalier and external mics to record interviews. One year I was tasked with making a mini documentary about the heavy water plants in Telemark and would discover just how problematic it was to capture clean audio of the exercise's host in the strong, cold Norwegian wind – not the best choice of location to try and get good sound with just a DSLR and one tie-clip mic!

At the other extreme, in hot environments such as encountered on 'Ushtar Eagle' in Albania, I had to deal with not only very high temperatures but also extremely long hours and a lot of dust. This task required the team to deliver rushes back to the UK as well as making packages available to NATO agencies. My job was to create social media video outputs for the RAF on a daily basis over two weeks, which meant filming and editing until late into the night. On tasks such as this, good stamina, regular meals and strong morale are key to being able to keep going.

When the Albanian president visited the site, along with our usual role of providing general video highlights from the exercises conducted between the Albanian military, RAF Regiment and RAF Reserves, we also had to film the president's videoconferences as well as a big presentation of tanks, shooting, smoke and helicopters. The rushes were used nationally and internationally throughout the UK Defence, RAF and NATO channels. The outdoor setup for this comprised a Sony FS7 as A camera, with Rode mic placed close to the speakers, and additional Sony FS5s collecting background cutaways. So that I could properly monitor and control the sound quality, it was very important to wear ear defenders over my in-ear headphones, which is



Behind-the-scenes shot from an edit, showing Agy gathering in-flight B-roll footage during a cargo ACT onboard a C-130 Hercules out of RAF Brize Norton in 2017

a great solution when it comes to filming in extremely high noise environments. For me, one of the most enjoyable tasks on this two-week exercise was filming a night patrol walking through an Albanian village, when the excellent low-light capturing capability of the Canon 5D Mk III combined with a 50mm f1.2 prime helped me deliver quality output, resulting in one of my favourite social media pieces to date.

Should I join the regular RAF?

The year 2017 was very busy for me in supporting RAF exercises all round the world, including 'Trilat Ex' in South Virginia, USA, and, as already mentioned, in Norway and Albania, as well as many UK-based jobs. This had quite an effect on my freelance work and, for that reason, I started to wonder about joining the RAF as a regular photographer. However, unfortunately, the dynamic of work for the RAF regular photographer is totally different to that of a reservist. First of all, it is a full-time job at one of the RAF military bases, where you work as station photographer, the majority



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FLT LT TONY DURRANT (7644 RAUXAF JOURNALIST)

Using a Canon XC10 to film Typhoons on exercise 'Atlantic Trident' 2017 in Virginia, USA, to provide short-form video output for the RAF's social media channels

of the time focusing on PR, engineering, police and ID photography. Secondly, it's a photographer post which gives some opportunities to film but this is not the primary role. So, instead, because I wanted the financial stability, I took a job as a multimedia manager within the marketing team of a company in the manufacturing sector. I was very pleased when, in 2019, this job brought me the opportunity to co-direct a social reality drama, *Amputee*, a short film that is currently going through the film submission circuit.



SGT PETER J. GEORGE (RAF PHOTOGRAPHER)

Agy, centre, marching with her peers on their Passing Out Parade at RAF Halton in 2016

Holding down a full-time job plus part-time RAF reserve work demands good time management skills but, thanks to support from my civilian employer, A-SAFE UK, I have negotiated an additional two weeks a year to continue with my reservist training and tasks, and this has been working well for me so far. The only difference I've noticed is that I need to be careful which days I volunteer for, but nevertheless this hasn't stopped me working on some exciting tasks, both national and international. One recent job was a chance to participate as a camera operator on the exercise 'Joint Escape' in the Pyrenees – a very challenging task due to high temperatures and physical exertion, a result of which was awful blisters on my feet! This time, the video output, which I collected during the first 26km hiked in 35 degrees heat, was captured on the Sony a7 Mk III with external Rode mic and DJI Osmo Pocket, allowing me to produce a 15-minute documentary from the first two days, before the exercise was eventually cancelled due to the hazards of the extreme heat. In terms of particular challenges encountered on this exercise, a lack of access to ND filters for the a7's lens created strong highlights and some degree of overexposure of footage in certain situations. Also, as you can imagine, marching in tortuous heat alongside officers of the Armed Forces through the mountains determined the amount of equipment I could take with me and, even though I'd slimmed down the kit considerably, I still felt that what I had was too heavy.

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I've met amazing people from all over the world – and all of this has enhanced my skills and different capabilities. Would I be able to experience all this without the RAF? I don't think so!

Working through the pandemic

Throughout 2020, the restrictions imposed due to the global pandemic have taught us how to continue our media service by drawing more on technology and working out which of our skills can be utilised remotely. For the majority of 2020 I've been involved in video editing and project management, and the only onsite task I had the chance to cover during the national lockdown caused by COVID-19 was the Air Medical Response Vehicle in RAF Wittering, filming and producing an educational long-form piece to be used for internal training purposes by the Medical squadron. For this project I used a Sony F55 with 18-135mm zoom and 35mm prime lens, a7 Mk III (plus a Parrot drone and Go Pros proved useful) and a directional mic was crucial for recording sound due to the COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time. Up until then, my colleague and I had been using lavalier mics with extra attention paid to keeping them clean between interviews. Ensuring that the equipment was thoroughly disinfected throughout the duration of the filming, as well as maintaining proper social distancing between the demonstrators and camera operators all added to the challenge, but we managed to do it right, with everybody kept safe.

A world of opportunities

Over these six years of service for the RAF, I have been to some amazing places, such as the Falklands (after a 37-hour flight from Virginia, USA, via RAF Brize Norton!), where I was lucky enough to have the most dramatic introduction to the islands' stunning beauty from the cockpit of a Chinook when we made a low-level approach. I have participated in many wonderful events, including my own Graduation Ceremony and Pass Out Parade, which attracted national and international press attention as I was the first British Pole to graduate as a Royal Air Force Reserve from RAF Halton. I have become a BAME Ambassador, a role that has involved telling the story of the Caribbean and Asian military community through filming interviews and B-roll in Cyprus and the UK; I've met amazing people from all over the world – and all of this has enhanced my skills and different capabilities. Would I be able to experience all this without the RAF? I don't think so! That's why, as long as I am able to balance the civilian and military worlds, I will continue my adventure with the RAF as a multimedia specialist for 7644 Squadron.

If you ask me whether I would recommend joining the Media Reserves, my answer would be definitely – as long as you are ready for such a unique commitment. It will reward you with great opportunities to network with an incredible bunch of media professionals, visit geographically interesting and beautiful places, test and work on the latest broadcast equipment, sharpen your character through the demanding military and media training – and generally keep you engaged and motivated. Please feel free to join us, you'll be most welcome!

Fact File

Agy Rudel has worked as a DoP and director in film and media for 10 years, and is a CAA-approved drone pilot. Early in her career, she shot a music video for the controversial rapper and MMA fighter, Popek Monster. Her investigative documentary style highlighted some of the dark underpinnings of Polish rap culture in the UK.

As a multimedia specialist for the RAF Reserves, working in high-pressure environments around the world, Agy creates content for media output for the MOD, NATO, BBC and ITV. In her full-time job, Agy works as a multimedia manager for A-SAFE UK Ltd, a global manufacturing business, and recently directed *Amputee*, a social realism drama short, which is currently on the international film submissions circuit. Some of her other films have been selected for Directors' Corner at Cannes Film Festival and BCN Sports Film Festival.

Agy would like to thank Flt Lt Lesley Woods for her guidance and proofreading, A-SAFE HQ for its support and understanding in her commitment to the RAF Media Reserves, and her partner Peter for his patience with her dedication to both jobs!

To see more of Agy's work and to contact her, visit: website: agyrudel.com

To find out more about the RAF Media Reserves, visit: website: raf.mod.uk/our-organisation/squadrons/7644-r-squadron



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