

I am delighted to have this opportunity to wish you all a very happy Christmas, wherever you are serving.

I know it has been an extremely busy year on operations, overseas and here at home.

In Iraq and Afghanistan you continue to make an enormous contribution in helping to rebuild those countries, and in other operational theatres you undertake essential duties with a professionalism which is so highly regarded the world over.

Members of my own family have had the opportunity this year to visit you on operations and see at first hand the scope of your work.

They have been hugely impressed by the spirit in which you go about your business in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances.

Your courage and loyalty are not lightly taken.

It is a pledge which calls for sacrifice and devotion to duty.



I know that yours is a job which often calls for great personal risk.

This year men and women from across the armed forces have lost their lives in action in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

My thoughts and prayers are with their families and friends especially at this Christmas season.

For those servicemen and women who have been injured in the course of their service, I wish each and every one of you a speedy recovery.

For those of your families spending this Christmas without you, I want to express my appreciation for the understanding they show and the sacrifices they make on our behalf.

Our country asks a lot of you and your families.

I have much appreciated the opportunities I have had to meet so many of you during my various visits over the past 12 months and I always draw strength from your dedication, resolve and good humour.

On a personal note, I would like to thank you for helping me celebrate my 80th birthday.

Throughout my life my relationship with the armed forces has been marked by my admiration and deep respect for everything you strive to achieve on behalf of all of us.

My father King George VI said that 'the highest of distinctions is service to others'.

There is no higher goal. Your service to our country is - I believe - an outstanding example of that ideal. I am grateful to you all.

I wish you, and your families, a happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year