

Sources close to the stables suggest that the extension of the tenure of Jock Stirrup as CDS (Chief of Defence Staff, UK MoD for our overseas readers) was, as the Duke of Wellington said, "a damn close run thing".

Perhaps surprisingly, Glen Torpy was the principal also-ran, much to the chagrin of Jonathan Band. Richard Dannatt was unsurprised, as he'd laid down promotion for his men (and women) – a sacrifice that bestows more merit than the future peerage the modern CDS might expect.

For the next running, next-year's VCDS Nick Houghton has been installed as the bookies' favourite, with David Richards potentially running him close. Certainly senior combat command has become a significant factor in advancement to the very highest peaks - which is currently more of a handicap for those traditionally wearing blue uniforms.

Stirrup in the meantime no doubt had an "interview without coffee" when he explained to Lady S how the wheel had come off his retirement plans (although the said Lady S may be relieved he wasn't "retired to stud"!)