

AIR COMMODORE R W LA FORTE CBE MA BA RAF

Commander British Forces South Atlantic Islands

Honorary President of the Falkland Islands Branch of the Royal British Legion



Air Commodore Russell (Russ) La Forte joined the RAF Regiment as a gunner in 1978, serving in Germany and Northern Ireland before being commissioned in 1982. Flight commander tours followed with the RAF Regiment and the 303rd Tactical Missile Wing USAF, as well as an operations officer tour in Northern Ireland. Promoted to squadron leader in 1990, he was posted to the Ministry of Defence.

In 1993/94, La Forte served for 6 months in Northern Iraq, for which he was appointed subsequently an MBE for distinguished operational service. La Forte assumed command of 1 Squadron RAF Regiment in 1994, with whom he deployed on operations to Croatia/Bosnia in 1995, and twice to Northern Ireland. Following this, he served in 1997 with the UN Observer Mission in Georgia. Thereafter, he served in the Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ), dealing with the Balkans, until moving to Headquarters Strike Command (HQSTC) in 1998 upon promotion to wing commander. After completion of the Advanced Command and Staff Course in 2000, La Forte returned to the PJHQ, which included an operational tour in Sierra Leone with HQ

1 (Mechanised) Brigade. Assuming command of No 2 RAF Tactical Survive to Operate HQ in January 2002, he deployed immediately to Afghanistan with the International Security Assistance Force. In the 2003 Iraq War, he deployed on a nomadic tour, initially to Qatar, then to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and finally Basra. Upon his return from Iraq, La Forte was promoted to group captain and posted for a third PJHQ tour, this time as Head of Media Operations. In 2005, La Forte rejoined HQSTC, responsible for operational planning. Between 2007 and 2008, he commanded RAF Honington, as well as being appointed an Honorary ADC to HM The Queen. His command appointment was recognised subsequently by being appointed a CBE in 2009. After graduating from both the Higher Command and Staff Course and the Royal College of Defence Studies in 2009, he was appointed Commandant General of the RAF Regiment and Air Officer RAF Police in 2010. After 12 months in Headquarters 22 (Training) Group, he was appointed Commander British Forces South Atlantic Islands in March 2013.

He is accompanied in the Falkland Islands by his wife Gillian, a nurse, who currently works in the King Edward Memorial Hospital in Stanley. They have 4 adult children (including a son who is also a serving RAF Regiment officer). La Forte graduated with a First Class Honours history degree with the Open University in 1994, and a Master of Arts in Defence Studies from King's College London in 2001. His other interests include playing the guitar, running, most sports, history, shooting and mountaineering. La Forte plays cricket for the RAF Adastrians, is an accomplished marksman and is President of the RAF Mountaineering Association. He has climbed in the Himalayas and the Andes, and was decorated by the Royal Humane Society in 2002 for leading the night-time rescue of 3 civilian climbers from the 23000-foot summit of Aconcagua in Argentina.