

Review

The journal of
Blind Veterans UK

June 2022



The Falklands War: 40 years on

Our Members share their experiences

Inside:

The Queen's Platinum Jubilee
A day in the life of a carer
Memories of WWII



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss

A time to reflect

Welcome to your June Review. This month, we mark not one, but two significant events across the country. Firstly, the Queen's Platinum Jubilee from the 2nd and, secondly, the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the Falkland Islands on the 14th.

While the war in the Falklands was mercifully short (relatively speaking), the Queen holds the record as the longest reigning monarch in British history. Amazingly, in the past 70 years, she's been served by no fewer than 14 Prime Ministers, met as many US Presidents, and appeared on coins in 35 countries around the globe.

Sadly, in her time, she's also seen several major conflicts, including the Falklands, of course, in which her son, Andrew, served. Perhaps for this reason she has always shown great interest in the welfare of those affected by war - as many of you will know, she was Patron of this charity for more than 60 years.

In fact, her very first radio broadcast in 1940, when she was just 14, was a message of support for young people caught up in the war. Years later, in 2009, she introduced the

Elizabeth Cross, an award giving special recognition to the families of those who've died on military operations.

During the Falklands War, she famously broke her usual code of neutrality, stating: "The conflict... was thrust on us by naked aggression and we are naturally proud of the way our fighting men are serving the country."

In this issue, we share the experiences of two of those men. Former Royal Marine, Alan Holderness, was only 17 when he landed in the Falklands, while Terry Bullingham tragically lost his sight during an attack on HMS Antrim. Their recollections are vivid and harrowing and, as Alan says, "There are elements of it you want to close your brain off to, but they're important."

So, as we sit out in the sunshine enjoying the celebrations this month, let's take a moment to appreciate all that these veterans, and so many others, sacrificed back in 1982. 🇬🇧

Liz Millar
Editor



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1. Queen Victoria 2. Princess Mary 3. (b) Emperor of India
4. 25 5. Corfu 6. Countess of Snowdon 7. Admiral, since 2012
8. Prince Andrew – he was a helicopter pilot 9. Royal Marines
10. Princess Elizabeth who was in the ATS

On the cover

As we mark the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the Falklands, Members, Terry Bullingham and Alan Holderness, share their experiences.



REAR COVER: HRH PRINCESS ELIZABETH, 1945 / WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

Remembering the Falklands conflict

Your message from your Chief Executive, Major General (rtd) **Nick Caplin** CB

As we head into summer, it's a joy to find a new normality emerging. Much has changed since the lockdown began, not least our ability to do so much more online rather than in person.

Yet much hasn't changed, and I would include in that the sheer inspiration



Caption: Nick Caplin

gained from seeing people in '3D'. It's been fabulous to meet Members and staff again in person, and I look forward to more of this as the year unfolds.

Life is predictably busy for the charity. Our Brighton Centre Manager, Lesley Garven, and her team, are now well into the business of designing our new Rustington Centre. Some of our Members are playing a vital role in this and we are seriously benefiting from their advice, insight and support.

Our community services are picking up as we take advantage of the chance to bring Members together. We are also in the process of moving our London Headquarters from Harcourt Street to rented offices at 3 Queen Square in Bloomsbury. This will be a much smaller HQ, and we will be sharing with the Thomas Pocklington Trust, which is very exciting.

Already the new HQ is developing as a natural hub for vision business in the

capital, and this will build as we discover new opportunities. The thought strikes me that it seems appropriate for us to be moving to Queen Square in time for Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee – a touch of 'back to our roots' perhaps.

Our friendship with Thomas Pocklington Trust reflects our developing relationships with a number of charities in the vision sector. Collectively, we have recently marked the end of the first year of the national Vision Impairment Charity Partnership. Prompted by the imperative of Covid-19, eight charity partners formed the partnership out of a spirit of collaboration. We are looking forward to contributing further to this work, especially in relation to the national eye care pathway and the system for vision rehabilitation.

This period also marks the 40th anniversary of the Falklands conflict. When the ships sailed south in 1982, I was still learning my trade as an Army pilot at Middle Wallop. Many of the pilots who graduated on the courses ahead of me deployed to the South Atlantic. Most returned, but not all.

We have Members who deployed in their ships and units, and this is a particularly important period for them as they remember and reflect. Among the many commemorative events being

“We have Members who deployed in their ships and units, and this is a particularly important period for them”

held to mark this anniversary, our very own Alan Lock ran a 40-mile ultra-marathon, finishing at HMS Victory in Portsmouth. Alan devotes his life to the good of others and this fundraising event is yet another example of his extraordinary efforts to benefit his fellow blind veterans.

Conflict remains a feature of our lives, sadly. As I mentioned last month, we are keen to find ways in which we can help Ukrainians who have suffered sight loss as a result of the war. Our trustees have agreed to a general change in our Articles that we are processing with the Charity Commission to make this possible, and we have signed an MOU (memorandum of understanding) with the Government of Ukraine to provide support, both from Blind Veterans UK and BRAVO VICTOR.

Our work is now focused on how best to do this in a way that is meaningful and without detriment to our core business. I am very grateful to all who are helping to make this a reality. It says so much about the spirit and positivity of Blind Veterans UK. 🇺🇰

Your sacrifice is not forgotten

Your message from your Chairman, **Barry Coupe**

It's already six months since I took on my role as Chairman of this wonderful charity and, I have to say, I'm loving it. I feel very passionate about the work we do and gain so much from being involved in an organisation that makes a real difference.



Caption: Barry Coupe

I also feel fortunate to be working with such an impressive group of people. One of those whom I'm sure will be very much missed is our former trustee and vice president, Paul Palmer, who tragically passed away in March. I met Paul when I joined Council a few years ago and was deeply saddened by the news. I sent his family a personal letter, on behalf of us all, as soon as I could with my sincere condolences.

As we mark the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the Falklands this month, the main topic on my mind is how we might be able to help the war-blinded servicemen and women in Ukraine. We were told in a recent meeting that a large number of those wounded on the battlefield there have been left with extreme facial injuries, which, of course, for some will mean sight loss. It's just horrendous.

Of course, the logistics are extremely complicated but, together with the

LIAM QUINN / WIKIPEDIA COMMONS



Caption: 1982 Liberation Memorial in Stanley, Falkland Islands

seven sight charities we are working in partnership with, we are trying to come up with a feasible plan.

The Falklands War entered our lives very quickly, just like Ukraine. When I think back to 1982, I remember the phrase former BBC foreign correspondent, Brian Hanrahan, would use to let us know our Harrier jets had completed their mission, without giving away their number: "I counted them all out and I counted them all back." So simple, yet so poignant.

I'm aware that some of you sustained life-changing injuries in the Falklands. I want you to know that your sacrifice is not forgotten. When I see the atrocities

being committed in Ukraine, I feel ever more grateful for our Armed Forces and all you achieved. I understand that, for some of you, a major anniversary like this may well bring back difficult memories. If this is the case, I hope you feel able to reach out for support.

We want to make this charity the best it can possibly be for you, and all our Members. For this reason, we have agreed a more generous budget than initially planned for the building work on our new centre at Rustington. One of the decisions I've personally pushed for is for improvements to the outside of the building, to restore it to its former glory. Originally an art deco building, it's been somewhat neglected over the years.

I'm aware that some might think the look of the building's exterior shouldn't really matter, considering our Membership. But I remember so vividly how important it was for my father to imagine how things looked from a description given to him by a sighted person. A great building brings energy which can be felt by everyone, whether you're able to see it or not.

And the more I reflect on this anniversary, the more I feel our new centre should serve as a reminder of the towering spirit of our veterans, and be a source of pride for us all. 🇺🇰

We salute you, your Majesty!

By the time you read this, Platinum Jubilee fever will have taken hold across the country and many of you will have the bunting out for local events and street parties to celebrate Her Majesty's historic 70-year reign.

As Patron of this charity from 1952 to 2016, the Queen will always hold a special place in our hearts. It's no surprise, then, that, as we go to press,



Caption: The Queen in 1952

Blind Veterans UK staff, volunteers and Members at our centres are busy preparing all kinds of exciting events in her honour, from Jubilee lunches, to singing and dancing, to games and competitions. We look forward to sharing the photos next month.

In the meantime, many of our Members have been working with our National Creative Project team on their amazing 'Jubilee bunting on a bag' activity – joined by a very special guest...

Turn to page 18 to find out who, and to marvel at their colourful creations. Wishing you a jubilant Jubilee month! 🇬🇧



Caption: Her Majesty in 2015

JOEL ROUSE / WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

News

Alan's run for Falklands veterans

A Member from Shropshire ran 40 miles to mark the 40th anniversary of the Falklands War, and raise money for Blind Veterans UK.

Alan Lock, 42, from Shrewsbury, completed 160 laps of a Royal Navy athletics track in Portsmouth on 11 May, before running his final mile to HMS Victory in the city's historic dockyard to finish his ultra-run.

Alan said: "One of the first Members to support me when I first lost my sight had been blinded in the Falklands conflict.



Caption: CEO Nick Caplin and Alan

"It seemed fitting, therefore, to take on this ultra-run to help the charity support Falklands veterans who've lost their sight, either during or after the conflict. I was joined by a serving member of the Royal Navy to act as my guide."

Alan joined the Navy in 2002 but just three years later, when he was 24, a rare genetic condition similar to macular degeneration took his sight and forced him to retire from the Armed Forces. "I felt so lonely and was full of worry and uncertainty for my future. I'd committed to a career with the Royal Navy, but that was snatched away, along with my eyesight.

"I became a Member of this charity in 2005. I've been able to continue to run as staff provided me with a running machine. If I run outside of my home I need a guide, but the running machine gives me the independence to run alone and unaided.

"This special charity has been by my side throughout my journey, giving me the confidence to see beyond the limits of sight loss and achieve things I thought would be impossible."

Penny releases global cookbook

One of our Members has released a new cookbook, entitled 'A Cook's Tour: Baking Blind goes Global'.

Penny Melville-Brown's new book is a series of recipes and stories from her recent world tour, which was funded by prize money from the international Holman Prize for Blind Ambition Award, which she won in 2017.

The tour took Penny across the globe to collaborate with a number of amazing blind and sighted chefs. The resulting book not only features over 100 varied recipes, but also chronicles the hardships Penny encountered on the tour, including a car accident.

Penny says: "From the start, my goal was to showcase the achievements of



Caption: With fellow blind cooks in Lilongwe, Malawi

blind and disabled people worldwide. I hadn't anticipated that, by the end, I'd be coping with more disabilities myself. But my naval training helped and I'm still alive and kicking.

"Many of the chefs and cooks were nervous about a blind cook, but having a little knowledge, basic skills and bags of enthusiasm broke through their fears. We became colleagues doing a job together. If only we could do the same in every walk of life and work."

Penny served in the WRNS and Royal Navy for nearly 22 years, including roles in NATO Intelligence, plus Home Defence and War Planning. After studying as the Navy's first female barrister, she held legal roles until her eyesight deteriorated and she was medically discharged in 1999.

She then launched her own business, helping other disabled people. She

says, "I want to show the world that disabled people can do nearly anything they want to. We may do things differently, but we can be as successful as anyone else."

■ **You can pick up a copy of Penny's book on Amazon.**

Betty contributes to war film research

Last month, after five years in the making, a new film about the Second World War was launched in cinemas across the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

The feature documentary, 'Lancaster', is an in-depth and intimate telling of the story of the Lancaster bomber and the crews that served with Bomber Command. During its making, 38



Caption: The feature documentary launched in cinemas on 27 May

veterans were interviewed to help build a realistic picture of that time, including our very own Betty Tring.

Long-term Member, Betty, 95, joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in Edgware in June 1944 and served as an Aircraftswoman during the war. In her interview for the film, Betty described the magic of going to wartime dances and being with the Bomber Crew.

The film was launched on 27 May in cinemas. DVD, streaming and online releases will follow.

RNIB launches survey

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) wants to know more about the experiences of people living with a vision impairment in the UK today, and how those experiences affect their quality of life. They want to understand what's most important to people – what's difficult, easy, what's missing from everyday life and what brings people joy.

They are particularly keen for our Members to take part by completing a short telephone survey.

■ **To register your interest, call 0800 009 6066 for free. All surveys are kept anonymous and confidential.**



Caption: Penny, right, in Virginia with a cook she met on her tour

The Falklands War: 40 years on

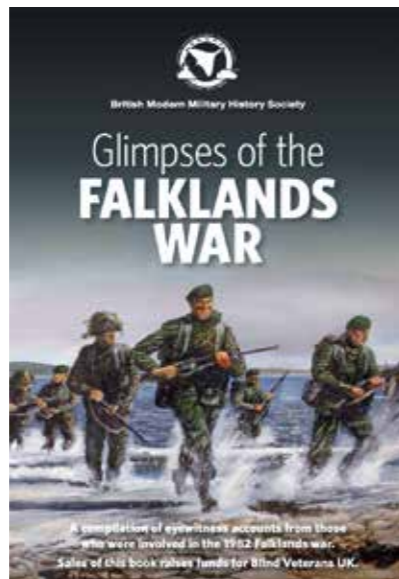
On 2 April 1982, Argentina invaded the British-held Falkland islands, which lie in the far south Atlantic.

The war lasted for 74 days, until the Argentines surrendered on 14 June. It led to the deaths of 255 British military personnel, three islanders and 649 Argentine soldiers.

In honour of the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the Falklands, the British Modern Military History Society has added a special edition to their 'Glimpses of War' series.

This latest book shares first-hand accounts of the experiences of those involved in the conflict, along with their reflections 40 years on.

When receiving submissions for the book, editors Andy and Gerry Cockeram were struck by how young many of those within the British Forces



were – men such as Member and trustee Alan Holderness, who wrote the forward for the book.

Alan was just 17 when he went to face the Argentines with his fellow Royal Marines. He says, “Forty years have gone by in what seems a blink of an eye, and memories fade even faster. Books such as this that encapsulate memories are vital for our future generations.”

'Glimpses of the Falklands War' is available on Amazon from 14 June, with 50% of royalties donated to Blind Veterans UK. To access a link to purchase the publication, visit blindveterans.org.uk/glimpsesofwar.

■ **To mark this special anniversary, we share experiences from Falklands veterans Alan Holderness and Terry Bullingham over the following pages...**

“I found myself on the deck, unable to see”

Chief Petty Officer, Terry Bullingham, 77, was serving on board HMS Antrim when it was hit by Argentine fighter-bombers. He lost his sight in the blast.

I was on one of six warships protecting the SS Canberra in San Carlos Water, when a flight of four Argentine Skyhawk fighter-bombers passed over, dropping a pattern of eight 1,000lb bombs. One of the bombs got onboard through the Seaslug missile launcher, coming to rest unexploded in the after heads.



Caption: Terry in his Naval uniform standing in front of a vessel

Immediately above, on the flight deck, we were preoccupied deploying the ship's fire hoses and failed to notice the follow-up attack by a pair of 'Dagger' aircraft (Argentine Mirage-3s), which strafed the upper deck with their 30mm cannon.

I suddenly saw the splashes in the water coming towards me, followed by a sickening impact and found myself on the deck, unable to see anything.

The ship's Medical Officer reached me fairly quickly and, after a spell lying on the wardroom floor with the other casualties, we were transferred to the Canberra in an RN Sea King helicopter. This was a bit hairy as the aircraft only had room to perch one wheel on our somewhat precarious flight deck.

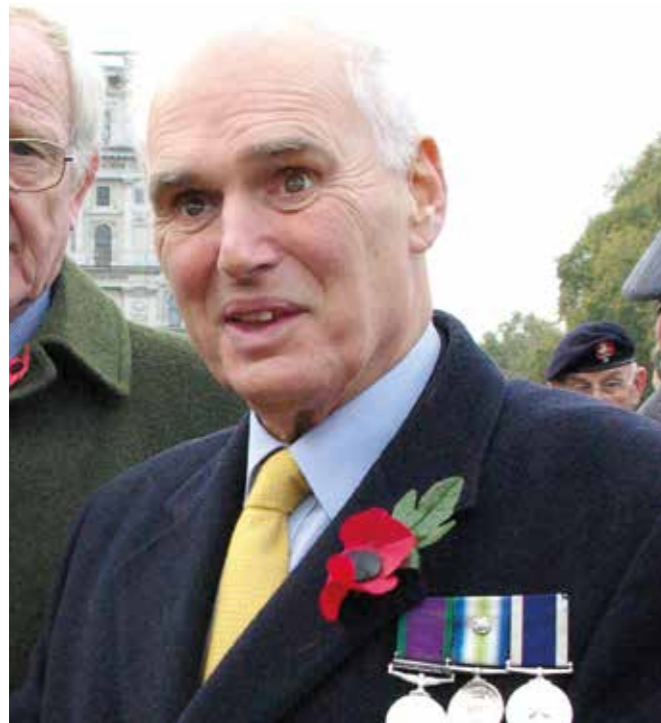
After stops on several hospital ships, I eventually arrived in a ward in RAF Hospital Wroughton on Surrender Day. I was later informed at Moorfields Hospital in London that what was left of the retina of my right eye was not worth putting back – at least I knew my bottom line.

I then had another operation to remove some shrapnel from my left knee that was causing a problem, and I was subsequently discharged from the Royal Naval medical system. →

When you first lose your sight it's like being taken back into infancy; you can't get around. You literally have to go back to basics. However, I was inspired by the blind WWI and WWII veterans I met at Blind Veterans UK.

I thought, if you can crack it, I'm certainly going to. They'd overcome such challenges in their lives and yet not one of them felt any self-pity. The camaraderie, together with the support, kept me positive and I found I was able to achieve more each day.

The patience and understanding of staff and Members restored my confidence and independence. Amongst so many other things, I was taught how to regain independent



Caption: Terry Bullingham

mobility using the long cane technique. I also learnt to type, which in addition gave me back my literacy through use of the Braille system.

I returned to the Royal Navy as an Information Officer at the Fleet Air Arm Museum in Somerset. The museum environment was extremely useful as it allowed me to get used to dealing with the public in my new role, within the social life and support of shipmates I had known for many years.

After that, I left the Navy and trained as a social worker and technical officer for the blind. By Autumn 1990, I was a social work lecturer at an RNIB college in Birmingham. In summer 1993, I took up my final position as a public speaker for this charity, finally retiring in 2005.

My main hobby is model engineering using Meccano and I am pleased to be a member of several guilds. I am also the proud possessor of a Myford 'Super-7' lathe, used for shaping metal or wood, that I have adapted. I used to assist my wife, Maria, on our allotment, by digging using a 6ft x 4ft wooden frame.

I now look back to my time on the hospital ships with nostalgia. I feel it surrounded such life-changing events and exemplified the very best of comradeship and mutual support that is so much part of naval life.

“The ships were hammered by bombs”

Blind Veterans UK trustee, Alan Holderness, was just 17 when he landed in the Falklands as a Royal Marine. The Argentines surrendered on his 18th birthday.

My grandfather was a Marine during the Second World War, but I joined up almost by accident when I attended an Armed Forces recruitment day to support a friend. I then joined the Marines straight after leaving school at 16, trained as a chef and joined 40 Commando.

When I was sent to the Falklands, I was 17 and the biggest wake-up call was writing my Will out about a week prior to landing. That was sobering. I put my grandad's wedding ring in the letter to give to my family.

From the moment we landed, the ships were hammered by bombs. And then HMS Antelope was hit and it was like the world's most expensive firework show. The ship was burning all night until it sunk. That made you feel sick to the pit of your stomach because it all started to get real.

On 27 May, the Argentinians got in underneath the ships' radar and came straight at us. We'd just been out on



Caption: Alan at a recent Remembrance Commemoration

patrol and were sat there, cleaning our equipment, when I looked up and saw their aircraft. Normally you've got everyone running around shouting, "Air raid!" but there was nothing. And then the whole ground erupted around me with canon fire and explosions.

I rolled over into what was a hydro pit, so basically straight into all this fire burning away. I quickly got out of that, picked up my rifle and went running toward my trench, which was over a peak. As I was running, the second wave came. More bombs exploded and I was lifted into the air. I landed in a heap and couldn't feel my left leg.

During that attack, one of our guys was killed. Marine Steve McAndrews →



Caption: Alan joined the Marines after he left school at 16

was an equipment repairer from Manchester. His workshop was down by the Officers' Mess, so I knew him pretty well. He used to come over for coffee and the odd egg butty when we were at the barracks at Plymouth.

The hardest thing is that Steve's wife, Dawn, was pregnant at the time with their first child, so their daughter, Sarah, was born after he died. I've met her many times since at our reunions.

The day the Argentines surrendered is a day I'll never forget, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it was a surrender and, secondly, it was my 18th birthday. The locals flew a can of stout from one of the ships and managed to cobble



Caption: He was just 17 when he landed in the Falklands

together a bit of cake. One of the islanders give me a Falklands pound note, which I still have. Another gave me a half bottle of aftershave. Old Spice, which I used.

But it was totally surreal because my support company got on board the only Chinook on the islands and went across to the other island, Fox Bay, to take the unconditional surrender. There were probably 30 or 40 of us and hundreds of Argentinian troops, all loaded to the gills with weapons which they just handed over to us.

It was while I was on the Falklands that I started having problems with my eyesight. If there was a cliff to



Caption: Alan, centre, with family and friends at his homecoming party

fall down, or a trench to fall in, that was me. They gave me the nickname, Torchy, because I lost my night vision and couldn't see in the dark. Not good for a Royal Marine Commando.

My father had an eye condition called retinitis pigmentosa, which is genetic. One of the first things that happens with it is you lose your night vision. My company commander turned to me and said, "If you get back alive, get your eyes checked."

After the war, I was medically discharged and came home to Blackburn to work for my dad in his factory. I wasn't a nice person to know. Being in the Marines, it's a

brotherhood. It's the best boys club in the world. So when you leave, you lose your dreams, your livelihood and your family that you've lived, slept, wept, done everything with, side-by-side 24/7. You're no longer part of the club.

It's so easy to think that your problems are the only problems in the world and you're the only one who can't do the things you want to do. Joining this charity showed me that there are a lot of people far, far worse off. You see what they achieve and there's this military family element too.

I have four kids now and, since 2000, I've been Managing Director of the family manufacturing business, taking an active participation in running all aspects of the company. I've also held various senior jobs at the Royal British Legion, and I've served as President for the East Lancashire Royal Marine Association for 25 years.

I can't believe it's 40 years since the Falklands. I didn't really want to stir the memories up. There are elements of it you want to close your brain off to, but they're important.

Being part of Blind Veterans UK gives me the confidence of knowing that, as I get older and my sight totally goes, this organisation will be there for me. It's a candle in the dark, it seriously is. 🕯️



Caption: Brighton residents, Ken Hobbs and Win Amos, with their bunting



Caption: Wilf Lindley and Betty Tring model their Jubilee bags

Bunting fit for a queen

Our National Creative Project ‘Jubilee bunting on a bag’ challenge was finished just in time for the Queen’s celebrations – with a surprise contribution from a very special guest... **By Lou Kirk-Partridge**

In preparation for Platinum Jubilee fever, we launched a special Jubilee project in January, inviting Members to design bunting for Her Majesty’s big weekend.

More than 50 Members took part in the project, each producing bunting designs fit for a queen.

We sent everyone a project pack with all the materials they needed, plus a stamped addressed envelope so they could return their finished artwork to decorate our centres.

What’s more, we invited our patron, HRH The Countess of Wessex GCVO, to join in the fun and were delighted when she sent us a design. To have a bunting triangle created by a royal hand is something very special! Her exquisite design is a yellow crown pattern complimented by purple stripes.

As we wanted to help encourage a sense of community in these still-not-so-together Covid times, the designs were joined up to create the print for a spectacular Jubilee cotton shopping bag. This lovely souvenir not only →



Caption: The colourful bunting now adorns our centres

showcases the work of our veterans, but is also unique and eco-friendly.

The Countess' design features in the centre of the bag and, along with every participant, she received her finished printed bag in time for the celebrations.

Many of our Members have told us how much they enjoyed taking part in the project. Betty Tring, who's a resident at our Brighton Centre, said, "Before I came to the centre I'd never done any arts and crafts, but now I take part in all the projects on offer and enjoy them all. I will carry my Jubilee bag with pride and I thank the arts and crafts staff for their care and patience."

Meanwhile, another resident, Ken Hobbs, was also delighted with his bag.



Caption: The Countess's design is placed at the centre of the bags

Ken said, "The bags are very, very nice. The design I did was based on the cross of St George, so the colours are red and white. I'm looking forward to showing it to my sons."

As the bunting brightens up our centres this month, the designs have also featured on cards for our volunteers in celebration of Volunteers' Week, which runs from 1-7 June. We're sure they will love them as much as we do.

Together with HRH The Countess of Wessex GCVO, we hope all those who took part in the project will carry their Jubilee bag with pride! 🇬🇧

■ **You can find out about our National Creative Project activities for this month and beyond on page 34.**

You said, we did

Our President and Member Engagement Lead, **Colin Williamson**, shares your recent feedback and suggestions

We've had some really useful input from some of our Members about our work in the past few weeks. Here's a summary:

- A Member from Community 19 asked if we have a wheelchair user involved in the consultation for our new Rustington Centre design. Glynis Gillam, the Member Design Group Lead, fed back that we do and they are in regular correspondence with regards to accessibility and wheelchair access at the new centre.
- Meanwhile, Members from Community 8 have asked about our policies regarding wheelchairs and electric scooters at our centres, and also guide and assistance dogs. Our centre reps have reported that official policies are currently being finalised and will be shared soon.
- A Member from Community 10 asked if the charity is able to assist those servicemen and women in Ukraine who've suffered sight loss as a result of the war. Our Chief Executive, Nick Caplin, penned an

article in the May edition of *Review* confirming that we have approached the Charity Commission with a request to change our Articles of Association to make this a possibility. We will keep you updated via the *Review*.

- A resident at our Brighton Centre asked if we have received an invitation from the Royal British Legion to participate in this year's Remembrance Commemorations in London on 13 November, as we have in previous years. I'm delighted to let you know that we have indeed received an invitation and we are asking Members who would like to go to put their names forward via their community teams. Please bear in mind that travel and accommodation costs will be your own responsibility, unless your financial circumstances dictate otherwise. We are also hoping to have a presence at local Remembrance commemorations around the country, so encourage you to also think about attending your local parade. 🇬🇧



Caption: Tea and buns being supplied by local ARP workers to fellow workers and civilians in a basement shelter in south east London, 1940

The big sleep

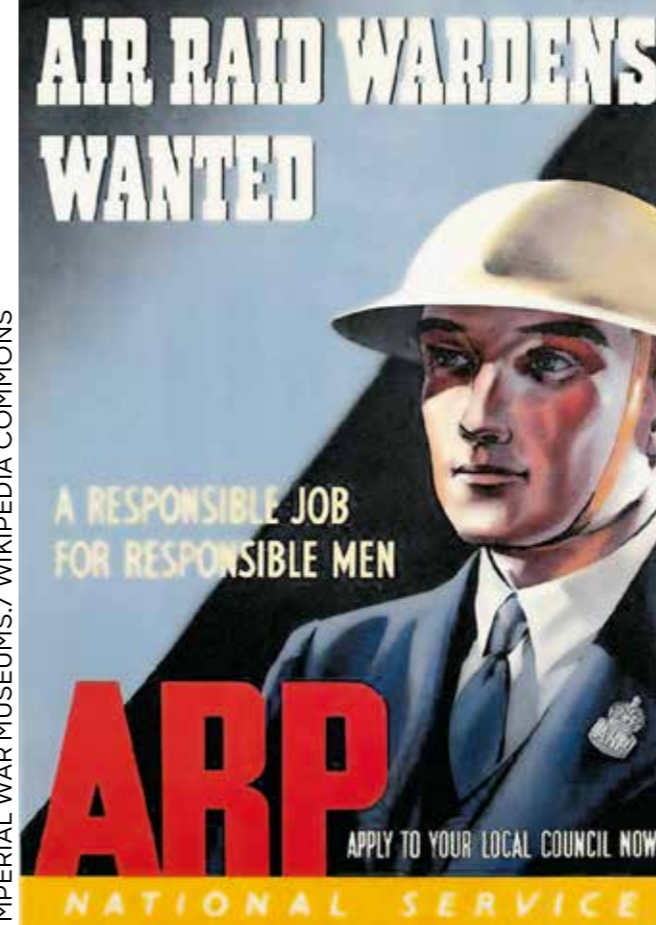
Member **Wilson Taylor**, 97, remembers his time during the war as a struggling Air Raid Precaution Messenger, at the tender age of 16

When I was 16 years of age, before I was called up by the RAF, I did my bit for the war by becoming an Air Raid Precaution Messenger.

I wore a black battledress and a helmet with the letter 'M' on it for the job, and I carried messages around Sunderland where I lived, on a motorbike when

telephone lines were down. The job meant that whenever the sirens sounded, day or night, I had to get to the Headquarters as quickly as possible to take up my duties. This was an absolute necessity.

The trouble was, at that age, when I went to bed, I was such a heavy



Caption: A war-time recruitment poster for Air Raid Wardens

sleeper that I didn't simply sleep – I practically died! When the sirens sounded, which was only a couple of hundred yards from our house, I didn't wake up. My father became fed up with shouting up the stairs, "Get up, Wilson!", before finally having to come up and shake me awake to go on duty.

I felt guilty about this, so one day I went to a junk shop in Sunderland and bought one of those old-fashioned shop doorbells - a brass bell on a coiled steel spring. There was a beam across my bedroom, about two feet above my head, and I screwed the bell to the beam. I then attached a length of cord

to it and fed it through an air-brick, across the landing and down to the bottom of the stairs.

Now, when the sirens went off, all my father had to do was to pull the cord which activated the bell, just above my head. At least that was the idea.

One night in 1941, there was a particularly heavy air raid. Of course, as usual I was in such a deep sleep the siren didn't bring me to life. My father pulled the string and the bell rang above my head – to no avail.

By then, Heinkels 111 and Junkers 88 were droning overhead, ack-ack guns were blazing, shells were bursting, shrapnel was raining down onto the house roofs, and bombs were dropping. Indeed, a small bomb landed just two streets from our house, and then a landmine exploded just half a mile away.

Still, I slept on.

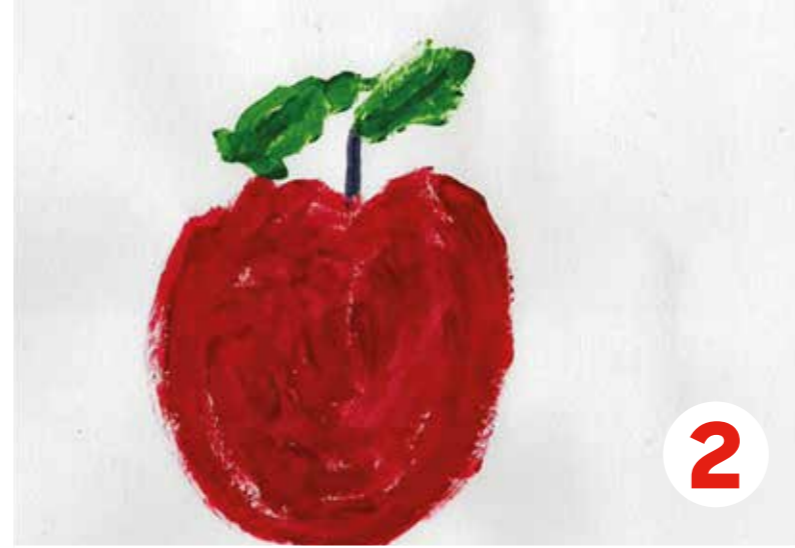
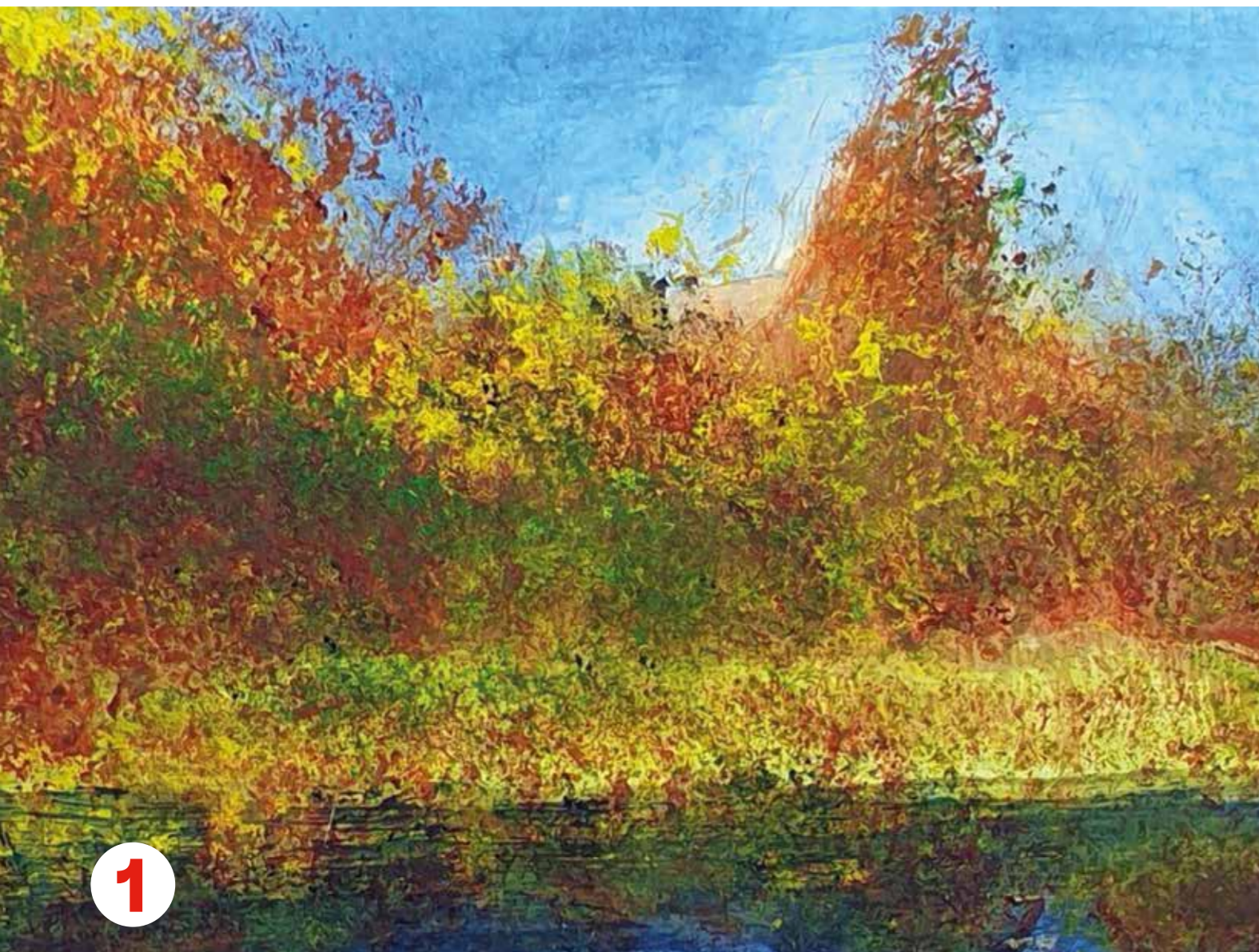
Finally, in sheer desperation, my father marched upstairs, pulled the bedclothes off the bed and physically shook me to life, shouting, "Wilson, you're on duty! There's a raid on!"

I'm told I opened my eyes, looked at him quizzically and asked: "Is there? How do you know?" 🤔

Artistic Flair

We are pleased to present more artwork by our Members for the National Creative Project

Captions: **1.** Michael King - Autumn Landscape **2.** Brian Heather - Fruit Still Life **3.** Anthony Wedge - Seascape with Yachts **4.** Kathleen Hall - Summer Flowers **5.** Peter King - Angel Lorikeet **6.** Vince Hill - Freezing on the Moor



1

Surviving in the Western Desert

During the lockdown, 101-year-old Member **John McOwan**, wrote his memoir about his time in the revered 7th Armoured Division, Desert Rats, during the war. In the second extract, he describes the reality of desert life

The desert had a certain element of mystique and many of us who had spent years under its influence felt it. At times, there were vistas of beauty, when the cool of the night gave way to the heavy dawn mist and the red ball of the rising sun promised oven temperatures to follow.

In the shimmering heat of daytime, looking towards the distant horizon there was no symmetry, just a rippling indistinct broken line.

The desert played many a trick on one's eyes. A piece of desert scrub scurrying in the searing wind suddenly took the shape of a panzer tank on the move; a wandering tribe of Bedouin herding a flock of goats, took on the guise of an enemy infantry patrol. Yes, mirages really do play tricks on the mind.

Further inland lay the soft sand of the Sahara Desert where hot winds from the equator blew shifting sands into beautiful undulating sandscapes. The surface of sand was blown into a series of ripples. The same wind would blow spindrifts of fine sand from the crests of the desert dunes, like the action of the wind on waves on the sea.

There existed a certain camaraderie between us and the German soldiers. We were at war with each other, but we shared a common enemy: the elements of the desert. We both suffered from the torment of desert sores that could eat into one's bones. We both tasted the grit of sand in our food.

For all of us, rice pudding was no longer white, and water was warm

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUMS / WIKIPEDIA COMMONS



Caption: A British soldier watches an approaching sandstorm across the desert from beside his jeep during the war in 1942

and brackish. We all had to contend with scorpions as bedfellows. The persistence of clouds of flies could drive one to distraction and were responsible for what we called Gippy Tummy, which was endemic.

The Western Desert has been described by historians as having the most hostile, inhospitable terrain in the world.

Throughout the numerous campaigns, most of the fighting was confined to the coastal plain and inland to a distance of about 60 miles. The terrain consisted of thousands of square miles

of featureless, rocky ground covered with sand of varying depth. The further south and inland we travelled, the deeper the sand became, with the only plants surviving there being thin scrub.

Such an alien landscape seemed a long way from the lush, rolling hills of my home back in the Scottish Borders.

The only indigenous inhabitants were nomadic wandering tribesmen, known as Bedouin, who lived in tented encampments. They survived on goats and hens, and used camels for transport and haulage of all their worldly goods. →

Often days would start with a welcoming, cooling mist, but the temperature would quickly rise to a searing, debilitating heat that made even breathing difficult. The little water we could drink would just go through our system and come out as sweat, which in turn attracted the flies. The desert flies are smaller than our house flies back home, but are so numerous and aggressive that it was a continuous battle to keep them at bay.

This meant it was a case of first come, first served where food was concerned,



Caption: In the Western Desert

“Stumbling around outside is very uncomfortable as the sand and hot wind stings any exposed skin”

which is possibly why, even to this day, I tend to gobble down my food. On a more macabre note, after a battle it was disgusting to see corpses crawling with flies, and we made every attempt to bury the dead.

Looking towards the horizon revealed a shimmering haze that reminded me of the sea rippling along a sandy beach. I sympathised with the workshop fitters working on tanks when the metal became almost too hot to touch. Although I never tried it, some said you could fry an egg on a tank's hull.

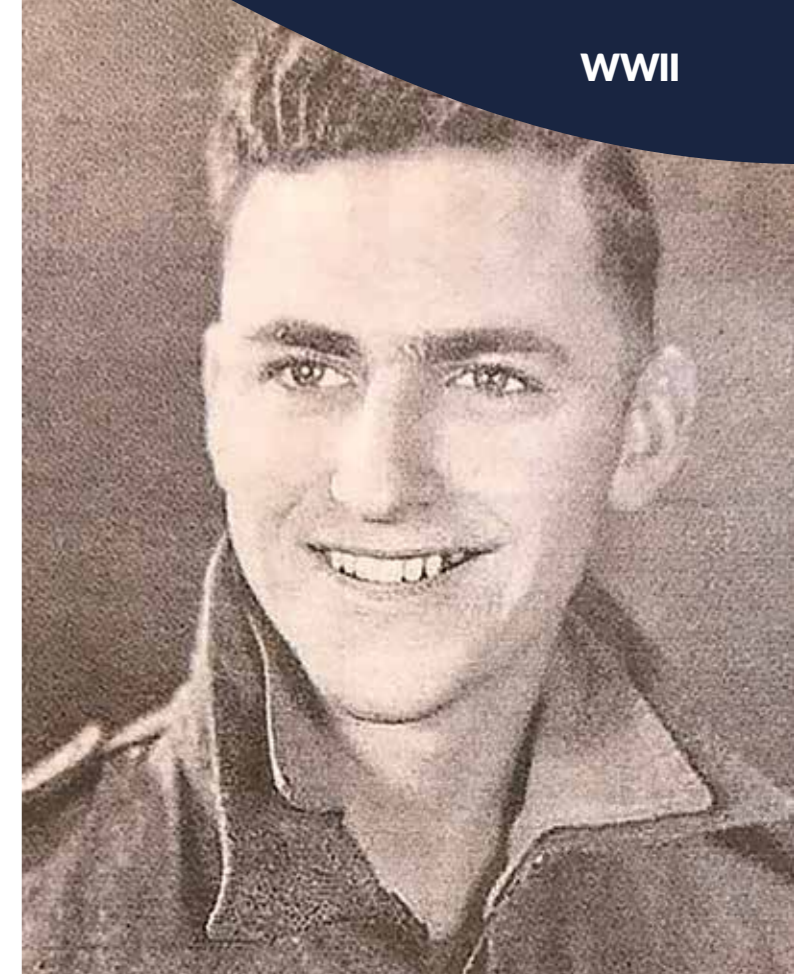
Storms known as Khamsin, or Khamseen, blow directly from the equator northwards and can last for hours at a time. On passing, they leave a legacy of sand which finds its way everywhere, like a snow blizzard back home drifts over vehicles. The sand finds its way into every orifice, both human and material, into all your kit and throughout your vehicle and through your hair. Stumbling around outside is very uncomfortable as the sand and hot wind stings any exposed skin.



Caption: Now aged 101, John started his memoir in lockdown

A major source of irritation was when the sand would cover my desert sores - any cut or abrasion on the skin would quickly develop into a sore which ate into the flesh, sometimes reaching the bone. Sand would find its way anywhere and, as an added discomfort, the sores attracted the ever-present flies.

Remember, this was in the days before Elastoplast dressings - back then, the bandages we had were difficult to keep in place. If your fingers were affected, this made it difficult to carry out the repairs waiting on your workbench.



Caption: John joined the army in 1939 at the age of 18

I take pride in having served with the 7th Armoured Division since its inception in 1940 in the Western Desert; the elite Desert Rats who defeated the Italian Legions and subsequently saw off the Africa Korps and Rommel from North Africa.

On 8 May 1943, the Axis forces surrendered to the 8th Army at Cape Bon in Tunisia. We had traversed 3,000 miles through the Western Desert in eight months from El Alamein. Our division had never looked back, hence the jerboa (desert rat) flashes on our shoulders were stitched on facing forward. 🐭

A day in the life of a carer

Jacque Whiteley has been a carer for her husband, Nigel, since he lost his sight in 1999. To mark National Carers Week this month, we share her typical day



Caption: Jacquie and Nigel Whiteley

One of the funniest things I've ever heard was when a lady declined to participate in a carers' event saying she wasn't a carer; she was a wife. Guess what? Most of us are both!

In fact, you are even classed as a carer if you only need to help your spouse with their clothes or their medication.

And there's no such thing as an average day for a carer. My day might involve making sure my husband doesn't use hair shampoo instead of bodywash in the shower, finding that 'special' T-shirt he absolutely has to wear today, or changing the sheets because he has spilled his coffee (again).

I didn't sign up to be a manicurist or a valet, but after 22 years I'm getting better. And a classic is spotting - just as you leave the house - that he has odd shoes on. Never mind the socks!

The most challenging bits

One thing I find tough about being a carer is that everything has become my responsibility, from shopping to booking trips, to organising family get-togethers - including my own birthday party.

And this also goes for the regular things too, like meal planning, food shopping or just unblocking the Hoover or the bathroom sink, all of which we used to share responsibility for.

I also hate having to argue with officious ward clerks in hospitals who say that it's "against his human rights" to have a notice over his bed that says: 'Blind'. Surely not nearly as much as having food or drink left on a table and expecting him to know it's there?

And I hate having to remind doctors and physios about the military covenant again and again.

Also, although, luckily I no longer have to prick his fingers for blood samples, I still have to draw up four or five insulin syringes every day, which isn't great.

The best bits

But life as a carer isn't all doom and gloom. We've shared some amazing experiences since he lost his sight, from Buckingham Palace garden parties to reunion lunches with friends and peers through Blind Veterans UK.

And my proudest moments are when he is on parade, suited and booted with medals glinting on his chest, especially during the 14 years he carried the St Dunstan's Standard at military events across the UK.

My top tip

When you go to a medical appointment make sure that you take a notebook and pen, or a voice recorder, so you can check back to see what exactly was said. I've found that this saves a lot of confusion.

Our Member Experience Coordinator, Stacey, says:

"I'm so pleased to feature Jacquie's piece this month to show just how much goes into being a carer. As we mark National Carers Week, I'd like to say a huge thank you on behalf of Blind Veterans UK to all our Members' carers for everything you do.

"This month also marks a year since we started this dedicated carers' page in the *Review*. Since then we've covered all kinds of relevant stories and information. If you are a carer and you'd like to share your experience, please do let us know." 🍷

■ **What would you like to see on this carers page? Contact Stacey on 01273 391483 or email stacey.barham@blindveterans.org.uk**

Centre news

The latest information and prices for Members who'd like to book a stay at our Llandudno and Brighton Centres

Llandudno Centre

Until the end of September, our Llandudno Centre is offering holiday and respite stays for fully independent Members and escorts only.

Bookings for one to two weeks are available and there is no limit on the number of bookings you make,

although we do recommend a gap of three months in between stays. Extra bookings may be made at the centre's discretion.

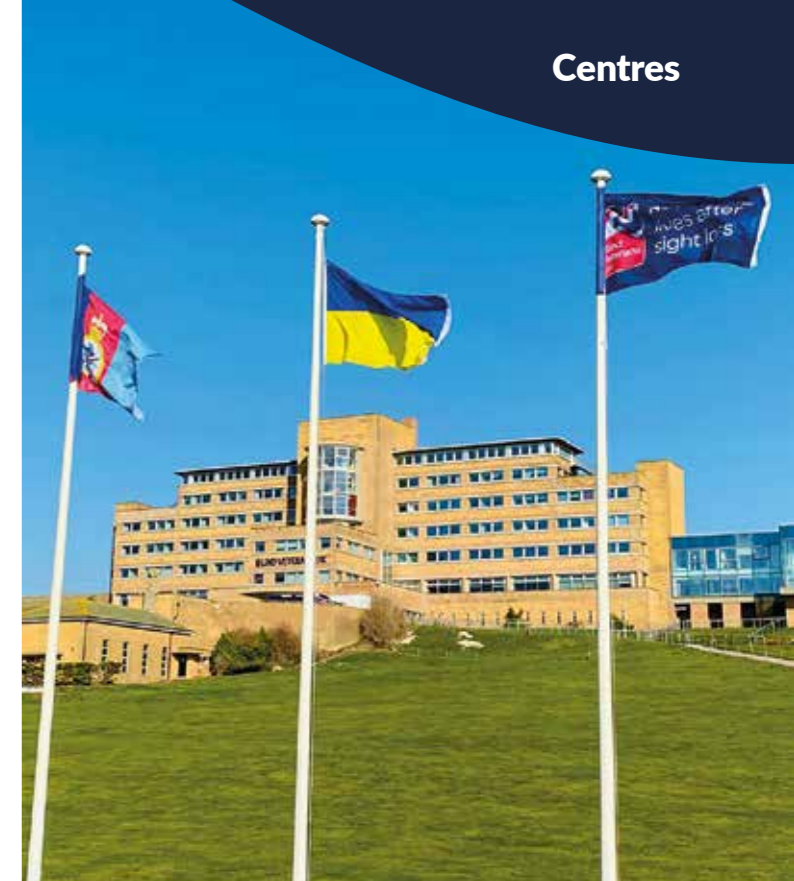
We continue to monitor changes to guidelines with regards to bookings for Residential and Nursing Members and will keep you updated via the *Review*.

■ To make a booking, please call us on 01492 868700, Monday-Friday, 8.30am-4.30pm.

Brighton Centre

Our holiday bookings at Brighton are dependent on the latest guidelines for care homes. We are hopeful that the easing of some of the Covid restrictions will mean we can offer holidays soon and will let you know. 🇬🇧

■ As always, we'll keep you updated in *Review*. You can also call the Brighton booking office for up-to-date information on 01273 391500.



Caption: Our Brighton Centre

Centre accommodation charges

Care stay				
	Weekly nursing (7 nights)	Daily nursing	Weekly residential (7 nights)	Daily residential
War blinded Members	£392	£56	£322	£46
Non war blinded Member	£644	£92	£476	£68

Independent stay Main Building		
	Weekly (7 nights)	Daily
War blinded Member	£266	£38
Non war blinded Member	£343	£49
Children aged 3-16	£133	£19

Port Hall, Brighton Centre (holiday only)		
	Weekly (7 nights)	Daily
Port Hall	£231	£33
Children aged 5-16	£133	£19

Leader Buildings, Llandudno Centre (self catering, no transport)		
	Weekly (7 nights)	Daily
Leader Building	£273	£39
Children aged 5-16	£112	£16

Centre Club Weeks (no transport)		
	Weekly (7 nights)	Daily
War blinded Member	£245	£35
Non war blinded Member	£322	£46

This information was correct at the time of going to press. →



Caption: Summer succulents

National Creative Project Programme

This month's creative activities and hobby circles you can take part in - all from the comfort of your own home

GARDENING

Summer Succulents

If you'd like to start your own small indoor succulent garden, we'll send you everything you need. These beautiful small plants are easy to care for and very popular in the gardening world right now. There will also be the opportunity to join one of our

monthly gardening hobby circles to chat with other Members and receive support with this project.

CRAFT

A Card for Every Occasion

This activity gives you the chance to make 10 unique handmade greetings cards with our selection of materials

and ideas. Once you've created them, we hope you will enjoy posting them out as an extra special way to keep in touch with friends and family. There will be an opportunity to join a group call by phone or video where you can chat to other Members about the project and share ideas.

Titanic Wooden Model

We'll send you all the materials you need to complete this spectacular model of the Titanic, including our VI-friendly instructions. This is a fun and challenging kit with pre-cut wooden pieces which you can sand, slot together and glue. The assembled ship is over 2ft long and sits on its own base for you to display.

The project comes with the opportunity to join one of our monthly woodwork hobby circles to chat with other Members and receive support from our staff if you would like to.

ART

Watercolour for Beginners and Improvers - June, July, August

Would you like to brush up your skills in watercolour painting, or simply have a go? We'll send you a set of watercolour paints and painting essentials, and four ideas to help get you started under the general theme of travel.

We know watercolour painting can be challenging so we urge you to put the notion of perfection to one side, make some strokes and just see what happens. The project pack contains good advice on how to get the most out of the medium.

If you'd like to share your results with us for inclusion in the *Review* or our online gallery, you can send your paintings using the return label and we'll take some high-quality photos of them. We would also love to see photos of you in the act of painting.

When you register, let us know if you would benefit from the audio version of our instructions on USB stick. And if you'd like to discuss this activity with instructors and fellow Members, please register for the painting creative hobby circle.

Collaboration in Colour update

The Collaboration in Colour art piece is now on display at our Llandudno Centre until the autumn. We hope some of you who took part will have the opportunity to see it there.

■ **For more information about these projects and groups, or to request an activity pack, please call our bookings team on 01273 391455 or visit our website at blindveterans.org.uk/ncp** →

CREATIVE BOOK

The Creative Book Project is now in the assembly stage and closed to further contributions. Thank you to everyone who took part. Once the book and online resource are complete, we will share them with you through your *Review* magazine.

CREATIVE HOBBY CIRCLES

We would love to hear from you on **01273 391455** if you're interested in joining a monthly telephone or video call chat group in one of the following subjects:

Gardening, knitting, woodturning, mosaic, painting, woodwork and creative writing.

Our groups are made up of around six fellow Members with a shared interest, plus two of our staff.

Photography

We also have a photography Facebook page (at Blind Veterans UK Photography) and a weekly chat group with regular guest speakers. Anyone with an interest is welcome.

■ **You can find more information about the projects at blindveterans.org.uk/ncp**

The NCP programme is open to all Members, whatever your experience.

If you'd like to try one of the projects or groups, please give us a call on **01273 391455** or speak to your CSW.

We love sharing photos of you and your projects on our social media channels and in our newsletters, so please do send a few in if you'd like the chance to feature. You can reach us on our email address at nationalcreativeproject@blindveterans.org.uk

Wishing you a lovely June. 🌞

Lou Kirk-Partridge and the National Creative Project Team



TOMASZ ZAJDA / ADOBE STOCK

Caption: Take up photography

Family news

Birthdays

Arthur Duggan who celebrates his 100th birthday on 29 June

Charles Taylor who celebrates his 102nd birthday on 12 June

Dorothy Britton who celebrates her 102nd birthday on 6 June

Evelyn Brooks who celebrates her 100th birthday on 5 June

Freda Whittaker who celebrates her 100th birthday on 16 June

Harry Garthwaite who celebrates his 102nd birthday on 4 June

John Lacey who celebrates his 100th birthday on 13 June

Raymond Gray who celebrates his 100th birthday on 20 June

William Simpson who celebrates his 100th birthday on 2 July

Elizabeth Wooldridge who celebrates her 102nd birthday on 19 June

Eve Lathom-Sharp who celebrates her 106th birthday on 15 June

Josephine Masters who celebrates her 100th birthday on 26 June

Condolences

It is with deep regret that we record the deaths of the following, and we offer our heartfelt condolences

Emily Brown who died on 13 April 2022. She was the wife of Roy Brown

Doreen Pottle who died on 1 May 2022. She was the wife of Ronald Pottle

Christine Ashbury who died on 12 April 2022. She was the wife of John Ashbury

Anne Murdo who died on 9 April 2022. She was the wife of Jim Murdo

Tibs Eileen Wright who died on 17 April 2022. She was the wife of Frank Binmore

In Memory

It is with deep regret that we record the deaths of the following Members and we offer our heartfelt condolences to their widows, widowers, families and friends

Clifford Charles Adams of Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex died on 1 May 2022 aged 100. He served as an Air Artificer in the Royal Navy.

Geoffrey Michael Allcock of Llandudno, Conwy died on 27 April 2022 aged 86. He served in the Royal Air Force.

Frank Alman of Buckingham, Buckinghamshire died on 10 March 2022 aged 89. He served as a Flying Officer in the Royal Air Force.

Ralph Baines of Chester-le-Street, County Durham died on 7 April 2022 aged 87. He served as a Baker in the Royal Army Service Corps.

William Bennett of Worthing, West Sussex died on 20 April 2022 aged 96. He served as a Private in the Army.

Elizabeth Hilda Bide of Wilmslow, Cheshire died on 1 April 2022 aged 100. She served as a Senior Voluntary Aid Detachment in the British Red Cross.

Thomas Michael Bird of Hornchurch, Essex died on 24 April 2022 aged 93. He served as a Private in the Royal Artillery.

Ernest Booker of Saltburn-by-the-Sea, Cleveland died on 21 April 2022 aged 83. He served as a Private in the Green Howards (Alexandra, Princess of Wales Own Yorkshire Regiment).

Grahame Frederick Bridges of Clevedon, North Somerset died on 27 April 2022 aged 98. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Military Police.

Dorothy Britton of Kendal, Cumbria died on 5 May 2022 aged 101. She served as a Corporal in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

Richard Simon Brooks of Bristol died on 1 May 2022 aged 91. He served as a Flying Officer in the Royal Air Force.

Charles Granville Brown of Burnley, Lancashire died on 21 April 2022 aged 99. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Signals.

Leonard Burritt of Bracknell, Berkshire died on 10 October 2021 aged 103. He served as a Regimental Sergeant Major in the Royal Signals.

Arthur David Butler of Wellingborough, Northamptonshire died on 28 April 2022 aged 88. He served in the Royal Corps of Transport.

John Coles of Cambridge died on 1 May 2022 aged 91. He served as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

Edward Charles Cruse of Basildon, Essex died on 4 May 2022 aged 85. He served in the Royal Artillery.

Anthony George Curl of Taunton, Somerset died on 24 April 2022 aged 93. He served as a Sergeant in the Royal Engineers.

Edward Davies of Cardiff died on 13 January 2022 aged 97. He served as a Warrant Officer in the Royal Air Force.

John Dibden of Oldham, Lancashire died on 23 April 2022 aged 94. He served as a Fusilier in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

Audrey Duncan of Sleaford, Lincolnshire died on 30 April 2022 aged 99. She served as a Sergeant in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

Ivor Evans of Stowmarket, Suffolk died on 13 April 2022 aged 90. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Engineers.

William Evans of Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands died on 1 May 2022 aged 92. He served as a Leading Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Michael Stephen Foreman of Purley, Surrey died on 12 April 2022 aged 72. He served as a Driver in the Royal Corps of Transport.

Leslie Giles of Sheffield died on 28 March 2022 aged 97. He served as a Bombardier in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Richard Gerald Gough of Newbury, Berkshire died on 12 April 2022 aged 88. He served in the Royal Berkshire Regiment (Princess Charlotte of Wales's).

Patrick Brian Hamilton of Plymouth died on 2 May 2022 aged 89. He served as an A.C. 1 in the Royal Air Force.

Brian Haskins of Bristol died on 1 May 2022 aged 89. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Barbara Dorothy Helen Hugill of New Milton, Hampshire died on 1 April 2022 aged 98. She served as a Private in the Army Training Reserve.

Derek Johnson of Stoke-On-Trent, Cheshire died on 30 April 2022 aged 76. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

John Kelly of Billingham, Cleveland died on 8 December 2021 aged 84. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Horse Artillery.

Gerald Kemp of Orpington, Kent died on 1 May 2022 aged 92. He served as an Acting Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

Olive Langley of St. Helens, Merseyside died on 11 April 2022 aged 86. She served as a Private in the Women's Royal Army Corps.

Leslie Leng of Reading, Berkshire died on 1 May 2022 aged 90. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

Charles William Loomes of Felixstowe, Suffolk died on 7 May 2022 aged 89. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

Eric Low of Liverpool died on 25 April 2022 aged 102. He served as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

John Francis Maguire of Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire died on 7 April 2022 aged 91. He served as a Craftsman in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Terence Mason of Christchurch, Dorset died on 1 April 2022 aged 89. He served as a Leading Hand in the Royal Navy.

Marjorie Olive May of Brighton, East Sussex died on 10 April 2022 aged 100. She served as a Leading Aircraftwoman in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

Ronald Moseley of Sheffield died on 8 May 2022 aged 89. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

Jessie Moy of Middlesbrough, Cleveland died on 1 November 2020 aged 98. She served as a Private in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

Ronald Nutt of Bournemouth died on 29 April 2022 aged 98. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

Frederick John Pope of Bicester, Oxfordshire died on 1 April 2022 aged 98. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

Beatrice May Simpson of Doncaster, South Yorkshire died on 14 April 2022 aged 100. She served as a Private in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

Thomas Smith of Morpeth, Northumberland died on 30 April 2022 aged 92. He served as a Craftsman in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Duncan Smith of Hartlepool, Cleveland died on 1 December 2021 aged 91. He served as a Staff Sergeant in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

David Arthur Stevens of Brighton, East Sussex died on 24 April 2022 aged 94. He served as an Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Stanley Edwin Towner of Purley, Surrey died on 13 April 2022 aged 98. He served as an A.C. 2 in the Royal Air Force.

James Tribe of Hove, East Sussex died on 3 May 2022 aged 89. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Engineers.

Roland Hugh Tuson of Newton Abbot, Devon died on 4 May 2022 aged 98. He served as a Leading Air Mechanic in the Royal Navy.

Allen Varley of Edenbridge, Kent died on 8 April 2022 aged 89. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

Derek Charles Watts of Harlow, Essex died on 5 April 2022 aged 91. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.



Betty Margaret Webber of Christchurch, Dorset died on 18 April 2022 aged 97. She served in the Voluntary Aid Detachment.

John West of Skegness, Lincolnshire died on 12 April 2022 aged 94. He served as a Telegraphist in the Royal Navy.

Margaret Gwendoline Wickenden of Farnborough, Hampshire died on 19 April 2022 aged 99. She served in the Women's Royal Naval Service.

Alice May Wood of Oswestry, Shropshire died on 1 November 2021 aged 97. She served as a Private in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

Irene Wooler of Sunderland died on 1 May 2022 aged 97. She served as a Leading Cook in the Royal Navy.

Thomas Wright of Rhyl, Clwyd died on 12 April 2022 aged 90. He served as a Gunner in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

Mary Elizabeth Wright of Worthing, West Sussex died on 17 April 2022 aged 96. She served in the Women's Royal Naval Service.



MINISTRY OF INFORMATION / WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

Caption: Child evacuees from the city arriving in the country in 1940

The townie

Member **Ian Miller**, 92, looks back fondly on his childhood adventures as an evacuee

Eighty years ago, the pupils of Walkergate Junior School, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, boarded a steam train to Brampton Station.

After taking a bus to a large barn-like building in the town centre, we stood in a group while locals walked around

us, some looking for a strong lad and others maybe looking for a girl – similar to a cattle market.

As they had spare rooms, these people were obliged to take an evacuee townie or two into their home to live with them, so they had to be careful. →



ADOBESTOCK / ALICE_D

Thankfully, I was soon selected along with my classmate, Bob, and his brother and sister. The teenage brother missed his pals and the young sister missed her mother, so both went home after a week. This left Bob and I as the only evacuees with poultry farmer, Fred Jackson and his wife, in their huge bungalow, Culmore, on the Tarn Road.

As an only child, I now had a brother 24/7 and it was great! Our foster mother was a pleasant lady who fed us well with many extras to our wartime rations. The spare rooms had been used as a B&B, so Mrs Jackson was a good cook too.

Often in the evenings she would read stories to us, or we'd play Ludo, dominoes or the Parson's Cat where we had to go through the alphabet with different adjectives like "the Pearson's cat is an artful cat, a brown cat" etc.

There were woods behind our home for us to explore and sometimes we'd take a sack and collect fallen pine cones for the fire. Mr Jackson would also point out rabbit runs where he would place his snares – we never saw the trapped rabbits, but we did eat them.

Once we played with a boy called Billy Dixon at the farm and found that there was a beck there. We saw it as a challenge and large stones and clods

“We lived next door to a church but never attended until word got out that Lady Bowes-Lyon intended to go”

of turf were used to dam the stream. Sadly, we didn't notice that we nearly flooded the farmyard and were banned from playing with Billy again!

However, the Luftwaffe were in no hurry to bomb Newcastle and my mother had me brought home again, possibly to check I was wearing my vest, ending a super six month holiday.

Our neighbour was head of Carville School and had taken my grandmother on as a helper for some of their evacuees at Beltingham House near Bardon Mill in Northumberland, which was owned by Lady Mary Bowes-Lyon – the Queen Mother's sister. The Bowes-Lyon family had locked their belongings in half of the house and let evacuees have the rest while the family went to live at their other residence in nearby Ridley Hall.

Consequently, when bombing did start in Newcastle, I was sent to join my grandmother. This was even better as I now had a brother, another Billy, and sisters Joyce and Maureen!

I remember one evening we all walked to Bardon Mill for fish and chips and hurried back to hide under the kitchen table from Billy. Unfortunately, when he came in, he kicked off his wellies under the table and I got a black eye. Another time, I remember seeing a robin in the holly bush and rushing into the house to tell them a robin was there even though it wasn't Christmas. They all laughed at my ignorance, of course.

We lived next door to a church but never attended until word got out that Lady Bowes-Lyon intended to go and we were begged to join the meagre congregation. Again, in my ignorance, I couldn't understand all the fuss about her being a Lady – after all, my mother was one, using the Ladies, while Dad and I used the Gents. For my only attendance to the church, I was given an album full of religious pictures.

All good things must come to an end and the Bowes-Lyons arranged to have convalescent officers use their house, so Billy and I were transferred to Greenhead Vicarage. I can't remember ever seeing the vicar, but his wife did look after us. Our bedroom was up the back stairs with a banister on the wall, while the front stairs were grand with a banister just asking to be slid down.

There were a lot of rules, though. I'd just perfected the art of whistling but

learnt that whistling was forbidden in the vicarage. Likewise, the grounds were full of trees to climb, but we were told that young explorers must not disturb the nesting birds.

After about three weeks, the vicar's wife decided she had done enough for the war effort and I was sent back home, never to see Billy again. Somehow my parents had me evacuated yet again, but this time with my cousins, Elaine and Evelyn, to a terrace house in Ovingham.

One memory I have of this place was finding a stamp in the grass. I took it to school where there was a lad who seemed to know everything, you've met the type (nowadays we'd call him Google). He said the stamp was Russian and I asked if that meant a Russian lived nearby. He said obviously it hadn't come on a letter from Russia and was likely dropped accidentally by a stamp collector. Anyway, that started my own stamp collection.

My father asked me what I did at school and I said we worked in the school vegetable garden and sang north country folk songs, which did not impress him. He thought I should be at a 'proper' school with the 11+ scholarship due soon – so my adventures came to an end. I don't ever recall being unhappy at any time. 🍌

Quiz time

In celebration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, our quiz master, **Ron Russell**, tests your knowledge on the royals

1. **Who was the British monarch during the Boer War?**

2. **Who was the previous Princess Royal before Anne was given the title?**

3. **What title did George VI lose in August 1947?**
(a) King of Canada
(b) Emperor of India
(c) King of Australia
4. **How old was Elizabeth when she ascended to the throne?**
(a) 21 (b) 23 (c) 25

5. **On which Greek Island was Prince Philip born?**

6. **Other than 'Princess' what was Margaret's title?**

7. **What naval rank does Princess Anne hold?**
(a) Captain
(b) Admiral
(c) Commodore

8. **Which royal fought in the Falklands conflict?**

9. **What branch of the military did Prince Edward serve in?**
(a) Army
(b) RAF
(c) Royal Marines

10. **Who was the first female royal to take active service?**

Answers on page 2



Caption: HRH Queen Elizabeth II

NASA/BILL INGALLS / WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

AGENTURFOTOGRAFIN / ADOBE STOCK



Contact details

Main office: Blind Veterans UK,
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Member Support Hub (MeSH):
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New Members: Anyone who may be eligible to join Blind Veterans UK, can phone our Membership Department on freephone **0800 389 7979**.

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The Brighton Centre 01273 307 811

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Review Editor: You can telephone the editor on **020 7616 8367** or email her at revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk

We value your feedback and use it to improve and develop the services we provide. If you would like to give us feedback on the magazine or any of our services, please email us at Supporter.Services@blindveterans.org.uk or call **0300 111 22 33**.

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