

Review

The journal of
Blind Veterans UK

April 2021

Recalling the past

How to get your
memories on the page

Inside:

iPad art
Photographing
outer space
Our Brighton
Centre - important
information



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss

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On the cover

Member Harry Garthwaite uses his Synaptic tablet to record his memories



Stepping out... sometimes

I will have a few abiding thoughts of this wretched lockdown period when it's complete. Things such as my surprise at how much coffee one person can consume in a day, how despite the persistence of a two year old it is possible to send a magazine to print, and more lastingly just how much weight I've managed to put on without even trying. How this has happened is a mystery to me. I've been good – even by my lax standards – which involves no snacking, a minimum of 5,000 steps a day and even abstaining from red wine during the week, but alas – my metabolism refuses to accept this wholesome behaviour and is still hibernating.

Luckily, the weather is on my side. You may have noticed that recently the days are not only longer, but warmer and despite this being Britain, even sunnier. So, I'm increasing my 5,000 steps a day to a minimum of 9,000 and trying to get into the fresh air as much as possible. Inside, our Well-Connected team has done the same, and urges you to sample the delights of the great outdoors. I cannot recommend this enough... in a few short weeks I've discovered approximately half of my town that I didn't even know existed and have even observed several

unusual birds in the neighbourhood that I wouldn't have noticed before – including a magnificent Green Woodpecker, which seems to inhabit nearby woodlands.

In short, I can't recommend this walking malarkey enough – it's been the perfect antidote for those winter blues and continuing pandemic misery - even if it's just a short wander a day, or a few circuits around a nearby street, try for a change of scenery. If it can make a dyed in the wool curmudgeon like me feel better, anything is possible. I even have a sneaking suspicion it may catch on.

Please also note there is an important bulletin about our Brighton Centre and an invitation to take part in several important national surveys. The full details are inside, but if you have any queries then please don't hesitate to get in touch with your community support worker, who can assist you further. Until next time, enjoy your magazine and stay safe. 🍷

Chris Gilson
Editor



All change

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

If you have read our Chairman's column I suspect, like me, you will have mixed feelings: appreciation of the humour and candour; deep respect for his intent and ambition on raising more money for Blind Veterans UK through personal pain and endeavour; and more than a tinge of sadness that he will be stepping down from his role at the end of the year.

I have known Paul for many years, having worked for him in the military



Caption: Nick Caplin

helicopter world and now at the charity, and I think that you will understand how much of a privilege this has been for me. There are not so many people like Paul, a man who was equally enjoyed and appreciated in the Army as well as the Royal Air Force.

Typical of Paul, he has given us good warning and we have plenty of time to arrange an orderly transition at the top. In addition, there will be time for us to prepare and say our farewells, and his news gives me the happy challenge of ensuring that we provide plenty of opportunity for Members, staff and volunteers to say goodbye and thank you.

A return to normality

Spring has sprung, and with it the hope of at least the start of a return to normality. Our national vaccination programme seems to have made remarkable progress and this will do much for confidence. Personally, I think the cautious approach being taken by all four nations in emerging from lockdown is sensible – we want to get

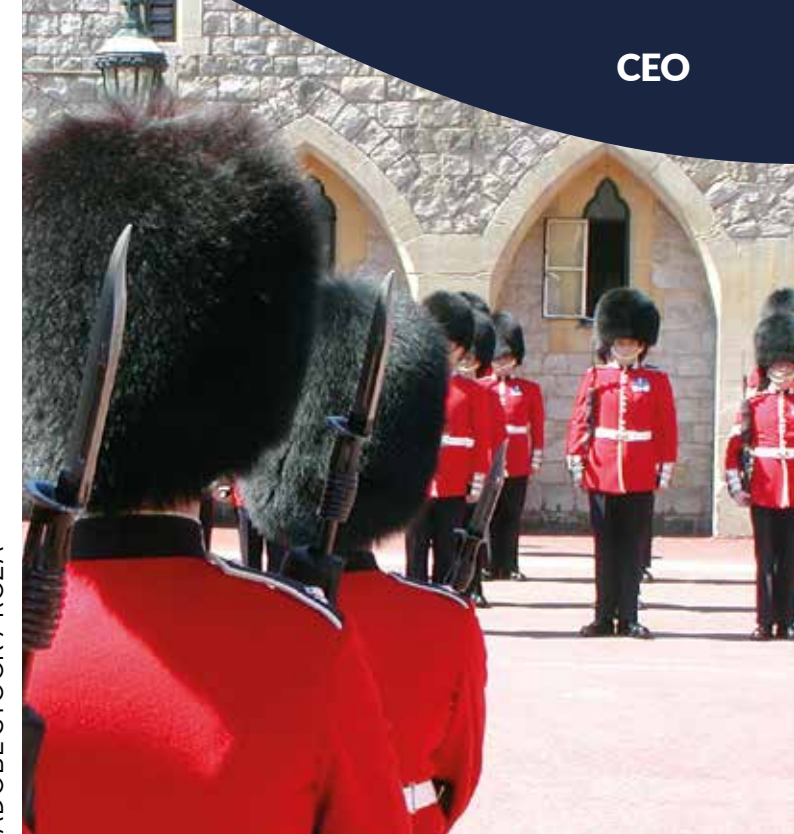
this right – and therefore patience will still be required for a while. This applies to our charity response as well. As you will see in this edition, we are pleased to announce that from 29 March we are providing more community-based services to our Members.

Our Centres are also working together to establish a time frame for opening safely for our veterans and more information on this will be shared in due course. It's worth noting that our Centre services are regulated, and we are required to follow national guidance, therefore we can only move as fast as they will allow. Also, and I hope understandably, when we begin to open the Centres, we will want to prioritise those Members who are in greatest need – the last year has taken a serious toll on many of our blind veterans who now have critical needs.

Intent on providing care

After that note of caution, let me reassure you that we are intent on providing Centre services to as many of you as we possibly can and have been thinking carefully about what more we can do to achieve this. Recently, the Trustees took the decision to cease offering permanent residential care at our Brighton Centre. This will not affect our current 25 permanent residents who have been informed together with their families. They have been reassured

ADOBE STOCK / ROZA



Caption: It's all change here at our Charity

that they remain in safe hands and will have the very best support from us for as long as they need it.

We are only able to provide this service to a fraction of those Members who are in our care (under a tenth of those veterans currently in residential care); and believe that this Centre capacity (rooms, staff support and so forth) could be used for much broader Member benefit. As a result of this decision, we will not be accepting any new permanent residents at Brighton. In my article later in this magazine, I talk about what this means for us in practice. We are all looking forward to the day when there is less talking and more doing. Fingers crossed that is not too far away. 🍀



Caption: Some of us are slower on our feet than others as Paul found out the hard way

Ever decreasing circles

Your message from your Chairman, Air Vice-Marshal **Paul Luker** CB OBE AFC DL (rtd)

Those who know me well will know that I am prone to the odd rush of blood to the head. This is not always a bad thing. Passion and enthusiasm have their place. At times, it can be the only

thing that makes the impossible seem possible – especially when progress isn't being made quickly enough or those things which you feared might become problems emerge as very real

“We were on a very, very, very big airfield. It had a frankly enormous perimeter track”

impediments to progress. Within our charity I think we demonstrate this sort of sustained energy and commitment in abundance, and I have written frequently about how much I admire it in all our people: staff, volunteers, Members and supporters.

However, the times when my personal enthusiasms cause problems are when they fly in the face of entirely predictable and convincing evidence against the prospect. Before anyone registers alarm bells that I might be referencing anything related to my role as a trustee, rest easy. This is entirely to do with something beyond that. I make this confession now because I am on the threshold of committing personally to something which my oldest friends would categorise as another rush of blood to the head. Before I explain what I am considering, I ought to provide an example of why they are almost certainly right.

Misplaced enthusiasm

Last month I wrote about how the many funny moments of the operation sustained me and my team through the first Gulf War. I neglected to mention

one incident, which characterises my misplaced enthusiasms. In the immediate aftermath of hostilities, we had a period when our services were not required for a couple of days. One of my chaps, a fit sort of cove, suggested that we might organise a competition with some of the other disparate units by now based with us on our isolated Saudi desert airfield. His idea was a team run around the perimeter. I was concerned that we still needed to be fully occupied and so I threw my support behind it. His concern was that to get buy-in from the other units, the competition needed a bit of needle and leadership; I would need to be part of the running team.

No worries. Or so I thought. In my mind's eye I had an image of the perimeter of RAF Odiham, a modestly sized airfield in Hampshire. Despite having been in the Gulf for a couple of months, I had failed to notice that the Saudis have a flamboyant disregard for the constraints of space. In the desert you can, in every sense, build very big airfields. We were on a very, very, very big airfield. It had a frankly enormous perimeter track. We were just emerging from an uncharacteristically cold winter into a typically sappingly-hot spring. And, despite being denied alcohol for the past few months, my weight had been sustained by →

overindulgence in a surfeit of compo ration steak and kidney suet pies.

I should perhaps mention that being at the end of the supply line (or as my disaffected subordinates called it, the food chain) we were denied a varied diet. Our temporary chefs - lightly-employed safety equipment workers who had stepped up to the plate when the real chef had been casualty evacuated - tried their best. "Baby heads al a Italiano", "Boeuf et Roignons au Granby" and "Kidney Khorma" went a long way to improve the mood but not the actual menu. As it happens, I like compo steak and kidney suet pie. In short, I was not in the best shape or at all well prepared.



Caption: Paul Luker

Let us just say that despite my enthusiasm, I did not cover myself in glory. My measured tread on the outward stretch of the peri-track was, according to a visiting USAF brigadier, judged to indicate a very prudent and mature approach to the challenge ahead. He had, of course, left the airfield when the base commander thought it necessary to ask why, a day later, I had still not crossed the finish line - so my dignity was not left wholly intact. It was then that I vowed never again to take part in anything approaching a marathon challenge.

Much to inspire

Fast forward to 2020 or as it will become known, Lockdown Year. Despite the restrictions, there has been much to inspire us. At a national level, who cannot admire the example set us by Captain Sir Tom Moore? Within my own family, our middle daughter used the restriction of lockdown to devise her own challenge to raise money for charities by doing a Covid-compliant local endurance walk/run. I must say that, against this sort of example, I felt that I wasn't pulling my weight.

So it was that I set myself a quiet personal challenge, for no other reason than to mark my 70th year. Since July 2020, every day I have been plodding around the by-ways of our village, racking up miles, with the intent of

“After almost 10 years as a trustee, at the end of this year I will step down as Chairman”

being able to claim that by my seventieth birthday I will have walked the equivalent of 70 marathons in a single year. With several months left to run, I am more than confident I will do it. By the end of February I have already covered the equivalent of 59, with four months left to manage the final 11. And, when you analyse it, that all looks a little lame.

So, then I had my proverbial rush of blood to the head. After almost 10 years as a trustee, at the end of this year I will step down as Chairman and I feel passionately that I should do more before I go. What more? I know just how deep we have been digging into our reserves to keep afloat in recent years and I need to do what so many of you do to support the charity financially. I plan to walk at least 70kms in a single 24-hour period before I hit 70 (an extra "70 by 70" goal). But rather than do that as a 'quiet personal challenge' I intend to do it in order to raise money for us. My plan is to emulate my daughter - who may well come and support me, pandemic permitting - by making 24 forays of about three km each, one each hour,

around our village over the weekend nearest the summer solstice (19/20 June). Unless it rains; I don't want to appear foolish. No, I will do it come what may. For some of you I know that this would be easy - not just because of your military backgrounds but because of the fortitude with which you confront your current circumstances. But for me, this my mountain. As a pilot I never expected to walk anywhere. And as a senior officer I always had a somebody to do the hard work for me.

Pitiful traipsing

Actually, the really hard part of this isn't my pitiful traipsing around the beautiful countryside of North East Hampshire. It is far more about finding enough people who would like to support Blind Veterans UK by watching me struggle. If you know anyone who might enjoy my suffering, then please refer them to my Just Giving page - the details are below. In the meantime, I need to source some embrocation. 🍷

Editor's note

If you'd like to support Paul in his labours, then you can donate by using his JustGiving page. It can be found at [justgiving.com/fundraising/paulluker](https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/paulluker). I'm sure you'll all join in with me in wishing Paul the best of luck.

In Your Community

New audio play commemorates former Member

Last year brought the very sad news of the sudden death of member Leslie Gay. Leslie, who had served in the Royal Air Force, had been with



Caption: Former Member Leslie Gay

us since 2007 and was enthusiastic about theatre. He had been a founding member of the Elders Company Southwark Playhouse and had visited our archives together with Playhouse director Toby Clarke.

When the first lockdown happened Toby and Southwark Playhouse were in the process of developing some new plays for the Elders Company, one of which, 'They Also Serve', written by Wendy Buckley and John McRae, was based upon Blind Veterans UK and our history, drawing upon our archives. It has now been adapted to become an audio play and is available free of charge on the theatre's website at bit.ly/3rCIXVz. The play has been dedicated to Leslie's memory. It features fictionalised characters and incidents many of which are however based on real people and their lives; for example the story of the character Bronwyn, blinded in a munitions accident and who becomes a singer, bears a marked resemblance to our real-life member Gwen Obern.

The Elders Company started in 2015 and has put on several productions at Southwark Playhouse and in the community. They have collaborated

with other organisations including Shakespeare's Globe and London South Bank University.

With thanks to David Workman of Southwark Playhouse for information about the Elders Company and to Leslie's friend Mike Jubb for kind permission to use his photo of Leslie.

Her Majesty's Armed Forces Veterans Badge

As a veteran, the Her Majesty's Armed Forces Veterans Badge is very important as it identifies you to other veterans when worn.

All of our Members are eligible and just need to apply at bit.ly/3rCJ1EN. At the moment, the Medals Office is running on minimum manning so the process may take longer than normal due to Covid-19 restrictions, which is normally two weeks. The badge comes at no cost to the veteran and will arrive through the post in a presentation box.

A positive aspect of this application form is that a Member's service is alternatively verified on receipt of the badge, as a military service number, national insurance number and reckonable service dates are required for the award.



WIKIMEDIA / ALLAN HOUSE/MOD

Caption: You can get your badge online

A lot of veterans will already have this badge, but equally a lot of Members won't or may have lost it. Replacements can also be ordered using the same application form.

HMS Sultan summer camp, 2021 - an update

It is hoped that this short article finds you all keeping well, abiding by the rules and looking forward to when →

we can relax some of our pandemic precautions and start to resume a 'normal' life. The vaccine programme certainly seems to be having a very positive impact, keeping people safer and reducing the numbers in hospital requiring ventilator treatment.

The steps the Government are taking to bring us safely out of the pandemic rely on the number of new cases continuing to reduce so that in June people can start to meet again in groups. Bearing the constraints, uncertainties and restrictions in mind it is with regret that the decision has been made not to hold the summer camp at HMS Sultan this August.

I fully understand that many will be disappointed with this decision, however considering everything we feel it is the only safe and sensible action to take.



Caption: HMS Sultan summer camp 2018

Please rest assured, I do not want this cancellation to signal the demise of the summer camp, and I look forward to planning an event in 2022. To all "established campers" please feel free to get in touch if you have any queries. To any Member who would like to know more, look out for the calling notice in the Review early next year or contact me now!

Best wishes and kind regards to all,
Andy Salter
Organising Secretary
HMS Sultan Summer Camp

■ **For more information email me at a.salter639@virginmedia.com**

Calling all widows

Northumbria University is looking for individuals whose partners have

died in the UK Armed Forces or after their service, to take part in new research into loneliness and social isolation. The project, developed by Northumbria University in collaboration with the War Widows' Association, aims to understand military widows' experiences of social isolation and loneliness, identify the services available to military widows, and examine their unmet needs.

There are almost 15,000 military widows and widowers in the UK today. This study will inform national debate and lead to the development of policy recommendations and guidance for improved service provision. The research team is seeking up to 400 people to participate. The survey will run from 1 March–14 May 2021 and you can take part here, bit.ly/3cxIEbw

■ **For more information please contact Dr Gemma Wilson on gemma.wilson@northumbria.ac.uk.**

BRAVO VICTOR

You will recall we informed you of our plans to set up a sister research charity. As we said at the time, we will keep you updated as this develops. For now, we thought we'd just let you know that the new Charity is called BRAVO VICTOR – among other reasons it picks up on

the phonetic alphabet for 'BV', Blind Veterans, as well as celebrating victory over blindness.

We will continue to have a very close relationship with BRAVO VICTOR and will be using them as our research arm, just as we currently use the research department. We have common aims and because of that we want to make sure that the benefits of research continue and that you have the opportunity to participate in research when you want to.

To that end, we will share some basic personal information, such as Member's names and contact details, with BRAVO VICTOR to allow them to contact our veterans directly to see if you'd like to take part in specific research. We are confident that you will be happy to support BRAVO VICTOR as they work with us to continue research into matters related to visual impairment.

■ **If you do not want to hear from BRAVO VICTOR and would like us to withhold your contact details, please do let us know either through your Community Support Worker or by emailing the research team directly at research@blindveterans.org.uk or the Group's Data Protection Officer at dpo@blindveterans.org.uk. or by phone on 020 4534 1127**

Meeting the King

After Nick Caplin wrote about his meeting with his opposite number in the Scouts, Member **Ron Frost** was moved to recall a very special meeting of his own

I joined the scouts in 1947 at age 13 years. I was brought up in poverty wearing 'hand me down' clothes and living in a two-bedroom council house.

My parents gave me chores to do from five years old, and I was taken to do paid work from age seven for one and half pence per hour from 7am-5pm four days per week working with German prisoners of war. I only tell you this to show how it toughened me up.

I had never had a holiday, and so in 1947 having passed the "tender foot" (the test that every boy had to take before being able to make his Scout Promise and be invested) I went with the troop to Hayling Island week-long camp. I loved the Scouts and entered into all that they did, working hard to pass the badges. By 1949 I had passed all I needed to be a King Scout.

Scout rules that existed in 1949 were very severe and for my Ambulance badge I joined the St John's Ambulance and attended the doctor's lectures for an hour every Thursday evening. I joined the Fire Brigade training drills on Wednesday evenings for the Fireman's badge, and walked across Dartmoor one side to the other for the venturer badge. This involved camping overnight and other physical skills such as rope climbing, gate vaulting and tracking. There were also other tasks – messenger, handyman and so forth. I enjoyed doing them all.

In April 1950, I went to our regular

"I loved the Scouts and entered into all that they did, working hard to pass the badges"



Caption: Windsor Castle - scene of Ron's meeting with King George VI

Friday evening meeting. We were warned to be on our best behaviour, as we were to have a visit of the County Commissioner. We lined up and said prayers. The Commissioner called my name, and called me to him.

"Do you think you could get to Windsor Castle?", he asked. I said that I could get there on my bike. "Well, will you go there on Saturday?" he replied, and gave me a time and date. I honestly did not know why.

I cycled there and parked my bike. I walked toward a man in Scout uniform. It was Lord Rowallan, the chief scout.

There were a few other scouts there and he called us together. He had a treat for us as King George VI was in residence, and had agreed to present us with our award to make us King Scouts.

We lined up in a big hall at the foot of some stairs. The King came onto the stage where Lord Rowallan was waiting for him. He called us one at a time and we went to the King. He said a few words, we thanked him, stepped back, gave the scout salute and moved to the other side of the stage. I was one of 22 presented that day - we were so proud. 🇬🇧

Its Art Jim, but not as we know it

If you own an iPad or any other kind of tablet, then you can easily create artworks. Art and Crafts Instructor **David Bryant** shows you what to do.

During the Coronavirus pandemic, setting aside time to pursue creative projects has become a life saver for many of us to manage free time and stress. I typically enjoy working with physical media like acrylic and watercolour paints or simple sketching with pen or pencil, so the idea of going digital was at first a little intimidating. But fear not, it's not as hard as it sounds and with a little practice you



Caption: A simple drop-down interface lets you into the program's library of brushes. .

will soon be drawing with confidence.

What do I need?

An iPad or other tablet computer and a touch sensitive pencil, the pencil is not essential, but you get a better level of detail than you would using just your fingers.

Next, you will need a digital illustration app, there are many available but one of the best is an app for iPad called Procreate, and this is my favourite. Procreate offers an accessible experience whether you're a design professional, a seasoned digital artist or a beginner to the world of digital drawing. And the added attraction that it costs under £20 and its suite of art tools and features make it well worth the money.

One of the many perks of Procreate is its massive library of 150 brushes. No more cleaning paint encrusted brushes and paint jars, you can stick to basic



Caption: Young Jedi Warrior by Matthew Rhodes. For this artwork Matthew was able to paint a portrait of his young son over the top of a landscape photo, which was a relatively easy process

painting or drawing, or you can explore airbrushing and spray paints.

Moving over

Member Matthew Rhodes made the move over to digital painting when he found that ordinary physical methods of painting became difficult. Using an iPad and the 'Paper 53' program, Matthew was able to continue painting.

To create this iPad painting of the seafront café at Rottingdean, Matthew painted the whole background first,

then added the people and details over the top. As he explains,

"Because I cannot see the whole of the iPad, I had to enlarge the screen and was almost painting pixel by pixel, I'm very pleased with the way it turned out". One of the tricks with digital painting is you can include photos in your work, you can even trace a picture from a photograph.

The tablet computer has become the new canvas, the level that you can reach is now limitless and your art will never be the same because now you can push detail to new levels.

Digital art means you can pick up your work and put it down when you like, there is no more mess, no brush washing and no wasted paint. 🍷



Caption: Seafront Café Rottingdean, by Matthew Rhodes

Preparing for invasion

Our third part of Member **Harry Garthwaite**'s wartime memories in the period leading up to the Allied invasion of Europe

[We pick up from where we left off, joining Harry on his new posting to an Army Co-operation Unit]

"I arrived at Gosport [in Hampshire] – and I had a very interesting time there, as they had a variety of aircraft. I did a lot of co-operation work with the Army and the Navy, including the naval gunnery school at Eastney [near Portsmouth]. We practiced low level strafing attacks in [Gloster] Gladiators or [Hawker] Hurricanes, and dive bombing attacks in Blackburn Rocs, Skuas and Fairey Barracudas.

We worked with the radar unit at Whale Island too, flying up and down the hills in an [Airspeed] Oxford, and target towing in a [Boulton-Paul] Defiant. That was done for the Gunnery School and they always wanted us at dawn – God knows why – but we always went to Thorney

Island the night before as there were no night flying facilities at Gosport.

"Then we did target towing for the tanks at Lulworth and Bovington, and the Defensively Equipped Merchant Ship rocket batteries, which were also at Lulworth, and for the Motorised Torpedo Boats at Portland. We also towed a great big red flag in a [Fairey] Swordfish, 12ft wide by 20ft long, for the destroyer flotilla at Portsmouth who were using bofors guns, and the more powerful ack-ack guns and pom-poms – it was such a varied job."

Rising through the ranks

Life was about to take a different turn for Harry one morning at Gosport, when he reported to his commanding officer.

"When I was at RAF Bircham Newton I became Flight Sergeant and then



Caption: An Avro Anson as flown by Harry

Warrant Officer and then, at Gosport the CO said 'Have you ever thought of applying for a commission?' and I said, 'No, I'm quite happy as a warrant officer, thank you.'

He said, 'Well, rank does have its advantages you know,' And I replied, 'I'm the king pin of the mess at the moment, I'm the most experienced pilot here and I've as much pay as a pilot officer would get, and I've no mess bills.'

He thought about what I'd said, and

then came back, 'Well, there's an invasion coming, and you'll be much better off when you go overseas. For a start, there'll only be two of you to a tent and you'll likely be under canvas very shortly. Apply for a commission and I'll put you forward for it.'

"So, I did, and went to Farnborough to see the Air Officer Commanding for an interview, and was eventually promoted to Pilot Officer. Shortly after that I was posted to 84 Group Communications Squadron, 2nd Tactical Air Force.



“I’m the most experienced pilot here and I’ve as much pay as a pilot officer would get, and I’ve no mess bills”

“We were stationed at Cowley, and they said have you got overseas kit – camp beds – and I said ‘no’, they said, ‘go to the stores and draw them’, so I did but I was told there were no camp beds. Back I went to the CO, and he said ‘you’ll have to go into Oxford and buy them.’”

A quick sortie into Oxford saw Harry ready for what was to come, “So Dave (another pilot) and I, bought our camp beds, and we were there a week before we moved to Redhill, and we had [Avro] Ansons, Austers, [Percival] Proctors and one Vultee Vigilant, which was the personal aircraft of the Canadian General Crerar, and had a very short take off.”

Looking down

“From Redhill we flew on many flights up and down the south coast in the Austers [an observation aircraft], visiting all kinds of landing strips – and even farmer’s fields at times with various Army officers – normally Majors and above – who wanted to see the outlying units. We also went

into Headley Court in Surrey – the headquarters of 84 Group. It was a nasty little field with big trees all around it, and you had to sort of come down like a helicopter to get in.

“The Ansons we used on longer trips, and I took General Crerar up to his reserve forces several times.”

The flights gave Harry an opportunity to know his distinguished passenger, “On the first trip he said, ‘will it be bumpy?’ and I said ‘yes’, and he replied, ‘can you get above it – I’m not a very good flier and tend to be airsick’. So, I did, and he thanked me when we got there. After two or three flights he said to me, “I’ve been thinking. Dave flies my Vigilant and you fly me in the Anson. But what happens if either of you are missing when I need to go somewhere. I think it would be a good idea if you learned to fly the Vigilant too.”

From that day on, Harry joined Dave as General Crerar’s pilot of choice when he wanted to be flown around – Harry was chosen if an Anson was needed, and Dave remained the first choice for the Vigilant. 🇬🇧

Next issue
Invasion! Part four of Harry’s story



Photo caption: Nick Barber’s ‘Evading the Storm’.

Our Creative Book - open for contributions

Stacey Barham looks at a different way of contributing to the National Creative Project’s Creative Book

The Blind Veterans UK Creative Book is a collection of creative contributions from Members, staff and volunteers to capture living through Covid-19 and will form part of the charity’s archives for the future.

Member Nick Barber has contributed an image of a Lockheed F-104 Starfighter called Evading the Storm. Nick has attended and volunteered at photography weeks at our Brighton, Sheffield and Llandudno →



Photo 1

Centres and has also been to framing, soapstone and basketry weeks.

Marvellous creations

When asked about finding inspiration to submit a contribution, he said, "Seeing all the marvellous creations by our Members gave me the inspiration to think outside the box. I have a project called 'It's a Small World' and my creations sprang from there."

The theme of this month's micro-challenge is 'spot the difference', and Nick said he has started thinking of his response: "My contribution would be a photo of part of my 'oo' scale railway. I have already had a play and an idea is there."

Nick also has some advice for Members interested in photography - "My advice for any members starting



Photo 2

out on their journey is you don't need expensive kit, phones and tablets. Compact cameras, bridge cameras are all great starting points, shoot, shoot and shoot, and above all, enjoy yourself."

Each month we will be putting out a micro challenge to help you create a submission for our Creative Book. You are welcome to submit more than one piece per challenge and to submit pieces in response to as many challenges throughout the year as you like.

"Each month we will be putting out a micro challenge to help you create a submission for our Creative Book"



Photo 2

A new challenge

The micro challenge for April is 'spot the difference'.

We thought the lockdowns could be a source of inspiration for your contribution, but you are always welcome to use your own ideas to inspire you. For spot the difference you could think about the difference between the three national lockdowns. Did you panic the first time? Did you even notice the second in November? What about the third? How did your feelings present themselves?

These thoughts could be the starting point for a poem, photograph or picture, or whatever takes your fancy.

Feel free to respond to our previous challenges too. If you missed them, here they are:

Nick uses technology to create some of his contributions in just three steps -

Photo 1 is taken on a plain background - no pun intended

Photo 2 The stand is removed, and the background tidied using the Pixelmator Pro app, which he has downloaded.

Photo 3 is the finished product with a sky added for effect using the photo editing app Lightleap.

All of Nick's creations are done completely on Apple iPad Pro. A truly creative way of using technology.

February - What has kept you going

March- Hopes and dreams

Please apply for a submission form or email your contributions to creativebook@blindveterans.org.uk or send by post to **Blind Veterans UK, Unit 1 The Courtyard, Woodlands, Bradley Stoke, Bristol BS32 4NQ.**

You can also telephone **01454 617 920** or contact your Community Support Worker if you would like to submit a spoken word piece. 🗣️

Getting more from Alexa

Our Alexa team brings you new skills and tips on how to get the best from your Alexa device

Hello and welcome to the latest edition of our feature on helping you to get the most out of your Amazon Alexa smart speaker.

As always, we are keen to hear from

our Members, about their experiences and the many ways of using your Alexa, in our “Alexa Backchat” section. So please do contact the team if you have any questions or suggestions for future articles.



ADOBE STOCK / MATTHEW_100

Caption: Don't forget to tell us how you're getting on with your Alexa

This is the first feature on Alexa since the New Year, giving us a chance to investigate and bring you new skills for your device. With the inevitable general gloom that the beginning of the year tends to bring in normal years, let alone one where we were all subject to lockdown, this month we thought we would focus on a few skills that are designed to be beneficial to our health and wellbeing.

Please note that Blind Veterans UK has no responsibility for the content of any of the skills mentioned. Please seek medical advice before engaging in physical exercise.

We have given you the phrase to enable and open each skill, you then just need to follow the prompts.

Five skills for the mind

1. Question of the day

This has been mentioned before under game and trivia skills, but is still a great little brain starter for the morning.

You are given the question of the day which will be on a particular subject such as geography or entertainment. The question is worth a number of points depending on its difficulty. You are read the question and given four multiple choice answers - simply answer A, B, C or D. If you get it right, you are offered a bonus question which

you can choose to answer now or later.

You also build a “playing streak” that encourages you to play it every day.

“Alexa, play question of the day”

If you didn't hear or understand the question, “Alexa, repeat the question”

2. Relaxing sounds

Relaxing sounds: Spa Music – this simple Alexa skill will play soothing music from your speakers. Sit back and relax and let the soothing sounds wash away any stress or anxiety.

Just say, ‘Alexa, play spa music’

3. Guided meditation

Meditation of the Day for Calm – this app serves up a new meditation each day that lasts up to eight minutes. It's made up of a mixture of breathing exercises said to help you eliminate stress and improve focus.

Just say, “Alexa, open Guided Meditation

4. Meditation timer

If you just need calm without talking, try the meditation timer, you'll be asked how long you want to meditate for. The sound of a gong signals the start of your experience, accompanied by a calming soundscape. →

Just say, 'Alexa, open meditation timer'

5. Age smart

Age smart can both assess and help improve memory with fun games and tests. Studies have shown that practising your memory, can help in keeping you on your toes.

The app both provides memory tests and memory games to keep those grey cells in tip top shape!

Just say, "Alexa, open age smart"

Four skills for the body

Nutrition Tips

With many of us resorting to comfort food over the dark winter, why not give your body and immune system a boost by asking, "Alexa, give me a nutrition tip."

You may not follow all the tips, but it may just stop you from putting your hand in the chocolate biscuit tin quite so often (and that can't be a bad thing).

Just say, "Alexa, give me a nutrition tip."

Recipes

Now that you've reminded yourself what is and is not good for you, it is sometimes hard to think of different recipes for the ingredients you have in, or possible new foods to try. How

do you prepare your Quinoa or Puy Lentils for example?

You can just ask for a recipe for something, "Alexa, give me a recipe for fish pie" or a recipe for a specific ingredient, "Alexa, give me a recipe for Quinoa". You can even ask for simple recipes, "Alexa, give me a simple recipe for chicken breasts".

Reminders

You may wonder what "Reminders" has to do with your body, but many of us take medication everyday, sometimes different types at different times and it is important to your body to take them as prescribed.



Caption: Alexa can help with body skills

The below is an imaginary example of how you can set-up Alexa to remind you to take your medication at the right time and possibly the number of tablets. If you can't remember the name of the medication or Alexa is not understanding the medical name, try simplifying it – for example,

"Alexa, remind me to take my blood pressure tablet at 9am everyday"

"Alexa, remind me to take two cholesterol tablets everyday at 12pm"

"Alexa, remind me to check my sugar levels at 8am"

If you need to check your sugar levels more than once a day, set-up another reminder at another time of the day.

To check what reminders you have set, just say, "Alexa, what reminders do I have"

Answers to simple medical questions with the NHS

You can now get Alexa to answer simple medical questions with help from the NHS. So, if you are just curious or feel that you have a number of symptoms, ask away - it may prompt you to seek medical advice sooner, rather than later.

This should not be considered as a

diagnosis tool, as always, if symptoms persist, call your doctor or dial **111**, to be put through to the NHS helpline, and a trained representative will ask you about your symptoms and advise you as to what steps to take.

You can say -

"Alexa, what are the symptoms of a migraine"

"Alexa, what are the symptoms of high blood pressure"

"Alexa, what are the symptoms of angina"

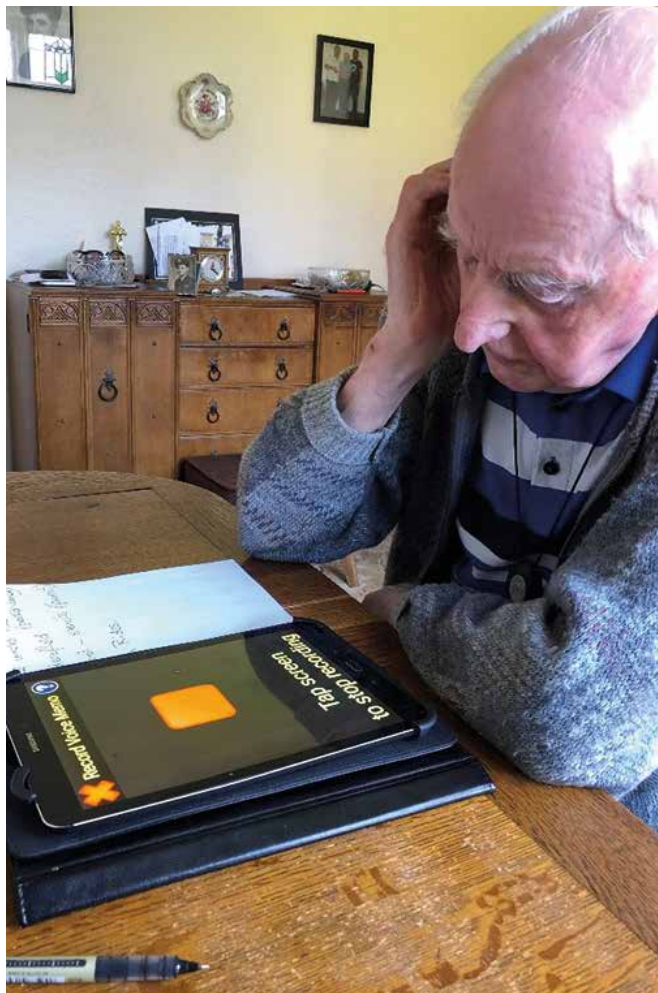
"Alexa, what are the symptoms of diabetes"

We hope that you find some of the above skills both useful and enjoyable. Health is something not to be taken for granted and sometimes we all just need to focus and do the things that are good for our body and mind. As always, if you have any questions or suggestions yourself or would like to know more about them, please call the Members Support Helpline on **01273 391 447**, who will be happy to help with any questions you may have.

We hope you enjoy exploring the world of Alexa and we'll look forward to bringing you more ideas, tips and tricks, in our next issue. 🍷

Write here, write now

We all have tales to tell, and **Carol Johnston** explains how to use technology to tell your story.



Caption: 100 years young Harry Garthwaite of Newcastle - learning to record his memoirs on his Synapptic Tablet.

As a Region 3 Community IT Instructor for Blind Veterans UK, I come across many Members who somehow feel they could get much more out of their technology. I also meet many of our veterans who want to write their memoirs but feel the task is too big and complex, or even that the process of writing creatively is beyond them - and yet, they are all wonderful oral story tellers.

It seems to be a logical solution, to assist Members with the technology they already have, to enable them to record their stories, anecdotes and even biographies. This provides purposeful and meaningful activity, and the technology simply becomes the tool to do it. Like a 21st century pen...

For example, do you have a Synapptic Tablet sitting around at home not being used? Have you given up trying to use it because you have forgotten the steps

involved that you covered in training?

“Yes - but I can’t type” I hear you say.

The best stories are often told, and it is very easy to voice record your own story using your Synapptic tablet (or phone), although it may feel a little strange at first. Before you start, there are a few things to think about.

Step 1 - Start with a short anecdote

You need to decide:

What your anecdote will be about. Make it something short, that is very familiar to you, where you can recall many details. A bit like using a magnifier to examine something close up. The more details the more interesting your anecdote will be to your listeners and readers.

Ask yourself **who** would you like your anecdote to be for? With modern technology, you have the opportunity to record for yourself or your family or your friends. Perhaps other Blind Veterans UK members and even the world.

How do you want to record your anecdote?

Again, you have a few options:

You can type it (if you are able to), or

you can voice record it.

The following explains how to voice record a story on your tablet or phone. Your voice recording on your tablet acts like an old-fashioned ‘tape recording’. You can go on to do many things with it, just like you used to be able to do with a tape recording.

You could:

- Save the voice recording to play back and listen to another time.
- Email the voice recording to a family member or a friend. (A Blind Veterans UK IT Instructor can help you with this).
- Email the voice recording to us at Blind Veterans UK and we can request a volunteer type up the voice recording for you. This means that you will be able to have a paper copy of your anecdote sent to you as well as your typed words (along with your voice recording too) stored on a memory stick. While paper copies are nice to have and perhaps store away in files or booklets, it is quite important to have a digital copy of your work. This means, should you decide to, you could share your stories with many more people. (Your Community Support Worker will be able to help you with this.)



Step 2 - How to do it

How to make a voice recording using a Synapptic tablet.

Step 1. Turn on the tablet and wait for Synapptic to open up the main menu.

Step 2. From the main menu, find the function called Voice Memos. It will be labelled with a capital M. Tap the M and open the Voice Memo menu.

Step 3. There are two options in the voice memo menu:



Caption: A Blind Veterans UK member shares items from his memory box with a local group in Northumberland.

Option 1: + (Record a memo)

Option 2: ? (Search memos)

To record a memo, tap the plus sign +

To record a memo, you tap the screen to start recording. When you have finished your story, you simply tap the screen to stop recording.

The memo will be saved automatically. While you can't go back and edit the voice memo, you can start again if you make a mistake, by tapping the screen to stop, then tap again to start again.

The saved voice memos can be found by tapping the red cross (top left-hand corner) to take you back to the Voice Memo menu. You will find your latest recorded memo under the Search box.

If you tap on 'Today' your options are:
P = Play memo. Simply play back your voice memo to listen to it.

E = Email memo. The voice memo attaches automatically to an email. You then simply choose the address of the person you wish to send it to.

D = Delete memo. You can delete the memo if you aren't happy with it.

R = Rename memo. Your memos can be renamed if you wish, with the title of your anecdote. You will need to use the keyboard to do this, by tapping the red microphone (top right corner).

Step 3 - Listen to it

Listening to yourself talking can feel very strange. You may not like the sound of your voice or you may think your accent is too broad. Please understand, that if the recording is for yourself – it doesn't matter. You can delete it at any time. If the recording is to be given to family or friends – they will love hearing your voice re-telling a story. (I would love to listen to tape recordings of my grandparents telling me stories – but sadly they have all passed on now...)

Memory Boxes

We all accumulate items that are precious to us. Some of these items are

particularly valuable, and sometimes they simply have sentimental value.

But whatever they are, they all have a story to tell behind them. While working with a local Member on memoir writing, he shared with me a box full of such items. He called it his 'Memory Box' Each item was carefully stored in a plastic 'zip lock' bag and numbered. While recording his memoirs, he often cross referenced his treasures by number and wrote about why they were so special to him. The organisation was simply amazing. And he had produced such a wonderful artefact to be passed on to his family in years to come. 🍷

Using technology with memory boxes

A useful device that many members will have been issued with is a 'PENfriend'

This is an easy to use, labelling device that scans a sticker. You can then make your own voice recording to describe what the sticker is attached to.

It is normally used to label household items such as canned foods.

But it could easily be used to label treasured items in your memory box. This would save handling delicate items too many times (e.g. old newspapers, birthday cards, official documents), or even larger items which could be stored in plastic boxes etc. and labelled the same way with the PENfriend stickers.

National Creative Project programme for April

Creative Activities. Creative Book. Creative Hobby Circles.

Welcome to the April programme of VI-friendly activities to get involved with from home.

Call our Bookings team on **01273 391 500** for more information, or to request an activity pack for the **CREATIVE ACTIVITIES** below – kits and instructions will be posted out to you with the opportunity to take part in telephone or video chat with other Members if you would like. For more information about the projects and groups please visit our web page, blindveterans.org.uk/ncp

Gardening:

Tumbling tomatoes

Spring is here and it's time for planting vegetables to enjoy over the summer. This quarter's project is tiny tumbling tomatoes. Enjoy watching your plant grow, the smell of the leaves and finally, delicious and colourful fruits, all on your windowsill.

Your kit will include everything you need. During the project there will be the opportunity to join a phone chat group to discuss how your tomatoes are growing and all other things garden related.

Arts and crafts:

Flags of Hope

Get involved with this simple craft project creating designs on fabric

flags for display in the grounds of our Centres during the summer months. Inspired by bunting and Tibetan prayer flags our **Flags of Hope** will fly in the wind, sending positivity into the air as your hopes and wishes are blown by the breeze out into the world.

Your pack contains all you need to create your flags and a pre-paid envelope to return some to us. With the opportunity to take part in a group telephone chat with other Members to exchange ideas, support and encouragement, if you would like.

Creative writing

Wordsmiths

Have fun trying out some poetry using our suggested words as a starting point for each line. This sort of poetry

is called 'acrostics' and if you enjoy writing or word puzzles, this is the project for you.

We will send you a project pack with suggested words as a starting point and some examples of an acrostic from the Creative Writing team. You are also encouraged to use photos at home as a starting point for your acrostics alongside the words given.

You'll be invited to join a Creative Circle during the project to chat with other Members about ideas and our project will be on hand with guidance and support.

Art:

Painting for beginners and improvers March and April project.

Painting challenges with support, for you to learn to paint or improve your skills. Recent subjects include sunflowers, lighthouses, landscape, fruit and more and one of our participant's lighthouse paintings even made it to the Review cover last month.

We will send a painting project kit and you may use your own materials too. With a new project every two months, sign up for just one or sign up each time. There will be the chance to meet other Members and our Art →



ADOBE STOCK / SUNNY_SMILE

Caption: You can grow your own tomatoes

& Craft Instructors for chat and tips by phone or video call if you would like.

Craft:

Woodwork project – ‘Sandbox’

We have two versions of this versatile woodwork project.

A small ready-made box for you to finish. Ideal for casual woodworkers with no need for tools or too much mess. The finish is as fine or as decorative as you would like to make it. We will send you two boxes, sandpaper, and suggestions for creative finishes you can try.

For the accomplished woodworker, we offer a constructive project to assemble and finish a small box from components. This is perfect if you are comfortable using the supplied wood glue and tape and enjoy more of a technical challenge and with the option to use your own hand tools.

Sign up and we will get in touch to determine which kit would be the best fit. You'll also have the opportunity, should you wish, to join a group telephone chat to exchange support and ideas with fellow participants.

Art & Craft:

Collaboration in colour – ‘Yellow and Green’

Take part in a collaborative multimedia art piece inspired by patchwork quilt panels.

A project from now until midsummer to create a large art piece made by the Blind Veterans UK family. Decorate 15x15cm squares with the choice of a wide variety of materials. Celebrating new beginnings, spring and summer and our colourful Blind Veterans UK community. Once completed we plan to take this piece ‘on tour’ to a variety of locations.

Your pack includes three wooden squares as bases for your work, collage materials and glue. We encourage you

to use recycled materials and/or art materials from home too. With the opportunity to take part in a group telephone chat with other Members to exchange ideas and for support and encouragement, if you would like.

Bird tea towel project update

Thank you to everyone who took part in this project celebrating the joy of birdsong. Many stunning birds returned to the nest and now look amazing on our collaborative tea towel designs. If you took part a tea towel including your bird in the design will be with you soon.

We plan to announce our next collaborative tea towel project in the summer.

Please call our Bookings team on **01273 391 500** for more information or to request an activity pack for the creative activities above.

■ **For more information about the projects and groups please visit our web page: blindveterans.org.uk/ncp**

Creative hobby circles

We would love to hear from you on **01273 391 500** if you are interested in joining a monthly telephone or video call chat group in one of the subjects

“For the accomplished woodworker, we offer a constructive project to assemble and finish a small box from components”

below. Expertise is not required, just an interest in the subject.

Basketry, Creative writing, Gardening, Knitting, Model-making, Woodturning, Mosaic, Painting, Woodwork.

For our photographers we have a Facebook page (Blind Veterans UK Photography) and a Photography chat group. Everyone with an interest in taking photos is welcome, from pros with all the kit to mobile phone photographers.

■ **For more information on the photography group please contact: Mark Pile on either 07584 056 459 or at mark.pile@blindveterans.org.uk**

You can see more information about all of the projects above, stories and quotes from Members participating, and see galleries of work from some of the projects at blindveterans.org.uk/ncp



Caption: Knitting – one of our creative hobby circles subjects

Permanent Residency at our Brighton Centre

An important update from our Chief Executive, **Nick Caplin**

Dear Members,

As you will all know, over the course of the last 12 months, our frontline staff and Members at the Brighton Centre have faced the challenge of Covid-19 with overwhelming courage and I could not be more grateful or proud of them. As we hopefully begin to come out of the pandemic, it is right that we look to how we can best meet the needs of our veterans going forward, both in the short and long term.

As part of this we have very carefully considered how best to use the assets that we have to the benefit of more Members. I can now report that our Trustees have supported our recommendation not to take new permanent residents at the Brighton Centre. This means that while we will continue to provide the best possible care to our current permanent residents for as long as they need it, we will not be accepting new permanent residents.

Our thinking is simply that we want as many Members as possible to be able

to visit and use the Brighton Centre for holidays and respite. By providing permanent residential care for a few, there is significantly less opportunity for this. Therefore, we hope that you will see this as a positive step for our membership. By turning our focus increasingly to providing more holidays and respite, this gives more Members the chance to come to a Centre.

Both of our Centres will continue to provide residential and nursing care for Members who visit for holidays or respite. Furthermore, our commitment to providing support to our Members as and where they need it for as long as it's needed continues.

If you have any questions or concerns about this, please contact your Case Worker.

We surely look forward to seeing many of you before long as life slowly returns back to normal.

Best wishes,
Nick Caplin



Caption: A simple chat can improve

It's good to talk

Nadia Wazeera from our Well-Connected team explains why simply 'having a chat' is so important for our health

We all understand the benefits of connecting to others. We all have felt the optimism from a conversation, where we have listened and felt listened to. With this in mind, do we reach out and converse enough? Perhaps we have not spoken to friends and family in a while? Perhaps we feel there is not enough time in a day to spare and we are too busy for 'just a chat'?

ADOBE STOCK / Y KL

Increasingly, evidence and experience demonstrate the value of talking, to our health and wellbeing. The NHS's 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' has highlighted connections as one of their steps to achieving positive mental health and the charity Mind says that 'feeling close to, and valued by, other people is a fundamental human need and one that contributes to functioning well in the world'. A Government →

report, also in line with NHS findings, has previously reported and linked how harmful loneliness is and compared its impact to that of smoking and obesity, especially among older people. Isolation and loneliness are increasingly becoming a matter of concern across society, especially as the Covid-19 pandemic has stretched over a full year, limiting contact with others.

With this in mind, let's explore some of the barriers. Many lack confidence to make the first move or don't feel like they have anything interesting to say and fear the rejection of another. It's important to remember all these feelings are normal. Some people who are already tired or in poor health may not feel they have the energy to talk, which is understandable.

Reserving our energy is important to our daily routines. However, quality conversations need not be long ones. Positive interactions can also fulfil and energise us. For example, a random conversation can really make us smile. Can you recall a passing conversation on a bus, or to a reception clerk that really

“Random acts of kindness can ignite a spark which in turn will also help you to feel valued”

made a difference to your day? During these times, we may be restricted to telephone calls. Although this may not be ideal, it may be worth a try.

The gift that keeps giving

Like the gift that keeps giving, it's important to recognise others benefit from your conversations. It's a reciprocal relationship that benefits all involved. Without realising it, you could really make a difference to someone's day by just asking how they are.

Random acts of kindness can ignite a spark which in turn will also help you to feel valued. Like a ripple, these positive moments can transform and alter outcomes, for the better. All these behaviours are not something we can buy or tick from a list to instantly reap the benefits. Over time, we learn our own communication style and learn when conversations went well and how they made us feel. We learn to cultivate these behaviours and build confidence to make those first steps and initiate a conversation.

Across Blind Veterans UK there are many opportunities to reach out to other like-minded veterans, and staff are here to help facilitate this. If this interests you, please look out for information in *Review Magazine* or reach out to your Community Support Worker. 🇬🇧

Fresh air therapy

Lockdown has been hard, but you can put a spring in your step with some fresh air – our Well-Connected team explains why it's a great idea

Spring is finally here and that means more sunlight, brighter flowers, blossom, lambs and nesting birds. Spring usually puts an end to icy pavements, so is a great time to get some fresh air therapy and go for a walk. 'Fresh air therapy' is a term that has been used on social media to highlight the benefits of getting outdoors.

Most people know how beneficial walking is, but even if you can't walk



ADOBE STOCK / 3 EYED RAVEN

Caption: Even a short walk is beneficial

very far, just being outside is hugely important for our mental health.

The benefits of fresh air:

- Oxygen-rich fresh air helps our brains to function better, so we are able to concentrate, remember and learn things with more ease
- The higher oxygen levels help our brains release serotonin, which improves our mood and helps us feel happier
- Fresh air helps us breathe more deeply, improving lung capacity and assisting our lungs to get rid of toxins (which can build up from pollution, smoking etc)
- Feeling the fresh wind on your skin, through your hair or entering your lungs can be energising and increase alertness. It's also a great opportunity to practice Mindfulness, which can help us reconnect with the world around us, giving us some respite from our own thoughts and emotions.

Try spending a few moments sat or stood outside your door, breathing in the fresh air and see how you feel. 🇬🇧



Caption: Winter can have a detrimental effect on our joints

Out of joint

Our **Well-Connected** team helps you to get your joints back in action after winter

Over the winter months and the ongoing pandemic, you may have been a bit more sedentary than normal, which could lead to stiffer joints and weakened muscles, especially if you have osteoarthritis. Now with Spring on the way, the weather improving and restrictions looking to ease, it's time to get active again, feel the benefits and manage your aching joints.

See our top tips below.

Keep warm – Even with the weather

heating up, it's important to wear warm clothing or apply a hot water bottle or blanket that will ease your painful joints and help to reduce stiffness. You could also consider a nice warm bath to help soothe those aches and pains

Drink more fluids – there has been links that even mild dehydration can increase your sensitivity to pain. So, if you start to feel a bit of discomfort in your joints, try having a drop to drink

Get moving – Try to move one minute for every 10 you're sitting. Too much rest can increase your joint stiffness and over time, weaken the muscles and this will ultimately make getting active a lot harder

Exercises – the more you move, the better your overall physical function. Your muscles can support your joints and absorb more of the load when you're doing everyday movements – whether this be your knees, hips, hands, shoulders, back etc. Try adding strengthening exercises into your daily routine to maintain or improve your muscle mass and joint stability

Weight – did you know for every pound you are overweight equals four pounds of force through your knees. Think of it the other way around, for every pound you lose of extra weight,

your knees will be thankful four times over

Vitamin D – With the increase in sunlight hours, it's time to get outside, as a lack of vitamin D has been shown to increase pain sensitivity. Vitamin D can also help reduce your risk of osteoporosis, so make the most of the longer days to ensure you're getting enough and maybe consider taking a supplement over the winter months

Massage – sometimes the aggravation you experience from your joints can arise from the muscles, so relaxing them with some massage can help in relieving some pain or stiffness

Creams – A popular one is capsaicin which is taken from chilli peppers. It works by reducing a pain transmitter and is a popular alternative remedy with positive effects shown

With all of the above, some may work, some might not. It's always advisable to talk to a GP before trying alternative or new methods. Our health and wellbeing team are also on hand to help with any exercises and discuss alternative methods with you to see if you think they might be appropriate.

■ Please email sportsandwellbeing@blindveterans.org.uk or speak to your **Community Support Worker**.



ADOBE STOCK / KOLDUNOV

Caption: Weight is important for joint health



The glove versus the keyboard

ADOBE STOCK / RAWPIXEL.COM

In this second part of Member Derek Leney's story as a boxing commentator, **Chris Gilson** finds out how he engineered a completely new version of the sport in the UK

One of Derek's biggest moments in his boxing commentating career was co-ordinating a 'computer fight' – a match 'played' by a computer using

the profiles of two historic boxers who never actually fought in real life. The first of these was in July 1969, when advertising executive Murry

Woroner paired up Muhammad Ali and Rocky Marciano, two of the greatest champions of all time – from different eras.

"I thought, what if we could do that here?' remembers Derek, 'it shouldn't take long to do it'. So, I put it to Bob Gunnell, and he said 'what?'. As it happened, he went to a dinner soon afterwards and jokingly said to two of his friends at the table, 'My boxing correspondent has come up with this idea of a computer fight, have you ever heard anything like it?' and they said to him, 'When is it? Let us know...'

The idea had been firmly planted in Bob Gunnell's head, and a few days later, Derek received a call.

"He came back after a few days and said, 'I think it has some merit, get all the information'. So, I went to a computer firm in London and they turned me down flat – saying it was too big a project. I went to a firm in Croydon, and they said the same, adding 'do you understand computers?' – I said 'no', and they said 'thought so'.

"However, Sussex University had just had a new computer put in and Bob approached the head programmer, but he also said no initially, it would take forever. Anyway, a few days later, the programmer called Bob back and said

"You've only just scratched the surface. You need to find out what calibre of man they fought, beat and lost to"

'I've been thinking about it, and this may go down well as a private project'. Bob called me and said, 'I want you to go to the university and speak to the programmer', so I did and off we went."

A changing team

After a considerable amount of work lasting an amazing four and a half years, Derek and the university team completed the project using the famous boxers Tommy Farr and Henry Cooper. The projected fight even made the headlines in Boxing News after Derek had been told repeatedly how important the project was.

However, there was an unexpected obstacle along the way, "I ended up getting the [fight] records [of Farr and Cooper] and said 'can we get started', and I was told 'You've only just scratched the surface. You need to find out what calibre of man they fought, beat and lost to, how they lost and so on, and then get it down on paper. Their age at their peak, how did they start and finish, their best punch, how did they stand...'



“We went through all the radio broadcasts of their fights over the years. I did this with [commentators] Reg Gutteridge and Harry Carpenter – we had to find fights that coincided with the computer read-out, it was a nightmare.”

And there were more problems on the horizon for Derek and the team,

“Henry Cooper came down to listen to it, and approved, but Tommy Farr had changed his mind and threatened to sue us, but we went ahead anyway. It was a huge success in the end. Even Bob Gunnell came up and said, ‘You

know I don’t like boxing, but that was good – it was really good’. So, we put the fight out, and it was a huge success.”

Finally, in 1993, Derek retired from his commentating job – being able to look back on decades of happy memories.

“The last fight I did was between Nicky Minter and Terry Knight. We all knew it was going to be a cracker – one of the best fights at Hove Town Hall. I met a lot of interesting people on the way – Muhammad Ali for example – and had a great time, but my greatest triumph was my computer fight.” 🌍



Caption: Henry Cooper and Muhammad Ali following their fight on June 1963

Family News

Birthdays

Kenneth Brooks, who celebrates his 100th birthday on 11 April

Douglas Forester, who celebrates his 101st birthday on 16 April

Rosemary Lang, who celebrates her 102nd birthday on 1 May

Pamela Mortimer, who celebrates her 101st birthday on 26 April

Joyce Poolman, who celebrates her 101st birthday on 30 April

Walter Roberts, who celebrates his 101st birthday on 6 April

All information was correct at the time of going to press

Condolences

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

Pamela Ayling, who died on 25 February, 2021. She was the wife of Douglas Ayling

Tracey Bottrill, who died on 15 March, 2021. She was the wife of Jack Bottrill

Freda Charman, who died on 4 November, 2020. She was the wife of Arthur Charman

Brenda Disley, who died on 12 March, 2021. She was the wife of Norman Disley

Dorothy Doughty, who died on 24 February, 2021. She was the wife of Philip Doughty

Molly Hancox, who died on 16 March, 2021. She was the wife of William Hancox

Louisa Peake, who died on 6 February, 2021. She was the wife of Edward Peake

Phyllis Rowland, who died on 1 March, 2021. She was the wife of William Rowland

Sheila Scott, who died on 1 February, 2021. She was the wife of Donald Scott

Pearl Turner, who died on 20 February, 2021. She was the wife of Donald Turner

WIKIPEDIA/ACTION IMAGES

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

Timothy Alwen of Maidstone, Kent died on 15 February 2021 aged 86. He served in the Royal Army Medical Corps as a Private

Norman Bates of Exeter, Devon died on 21 February 2021 aged 95. He served in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment as a Private

John Bowe of Thornton-Cleveleys, Lancashire died on 17 March, 2021 aged 92. He served in the Fleet Air Arm as an Air Mechanic

David Brocklehurst of Cromer, Norfolk died on 3 March, 2021 aged 85. He served in the Royal Armoured Corps as a Trooper

Joan Bunker of Eastbourne, East Sussex died on 5 December, 2020 aged 98. She served in the Royal Navy as a Senior VAD

Kenneth Burdett of Cockermouth, Cumbria died on 15 March, 2021 aged 97. He served in the Royal Navy as a Petty Officer Radio Mechanic

Marion Burrows of Manchester died on 2 March, 2021 aged 87. She served in the Women's Royal Air Force as a Leading Aircraftwoman

Derek Canham of Camborne, Cornwall died on 1 March, 2021 aged 84. He served in the Royal Navy as a Warrant Officer

Doreen Chambers of Uckfield, East Sussex died on 1 March, 2021 aged 99. She served in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force as an Aircraftwoman Second Class

Arthur Chapman of Swindon, Wiltshire died on 4 January, 2021 aged 95. He served in the Royal Navy as a Stoker First Class

Marjorie Colloby of St Helens, Merseyside died on 3 March, 2021 aged 94. She served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service as a Corporal

James Cox of Chesterfield, Derbyshire died on 7 March, 2021 aged 97. He served in the Army Catering Corps as a Private

Peter Dieterichs of Windlesham, Surrey died on 3 March 2021 aged 96. He served in the Royal Engineers as a Sergeant

Norman Disley of Taunton, Somerset died on 9 March, 2021 aged 87. He served in the Army Catering Corps as a Private

Eric Dyson of Blackpool, Lancashire died on 1 March, 2021 aged 91. He served in the General Service Corps as a Private

Albert East of Frinton on Sea, Essex died on 13 March, 2021 aged 90. He served in the Army as a Lance Corporal

Raymond Eaves of Kettering, Northamptonshire died on 1 March, 2021 aged 97. He served in the Royal Air Force as a Temporary Warrant Officer

Evan Evans of Fishguard, Dyfed died on 15 March, 2021 aged 98. He served in the Royal Air Force as a Leading Aircraftman

Graham Field of Solihull, West Midlands died on 17 March, 2021 aged 73. He served in the Royal Corps of Transport as a Driver

Ronald Freeland of Peacehaven, East Sussex died on 4 March, 2021 aged 101. He served in the Queen's Regiment

David Goddard of Colchester, Essex died on 16 March, 2021 aged 59. He served in the Royal Artillery as a Lieutenant

Cyril Green of Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset died on 24 February, 2021 aged 93. He served in the Royal Air Force as a Leading Aircraftman →

Eric Gregory of Birmingham died on 23 February 2021 aged 90. He served in the Royal Signals as an Acting Lance Corporal

Colin Hale of Sittingbourne, Kent died on 14 February 2021 aged 88. He served in the Royal Air Force as a Leading Aircraftman

John Hall of Leeds, West Yorkshire died on 10 March, 2021 aged 99. He served in the Royal Army Service Corps as a Driver

James Hands of Leeds, West Yorkshire died on 1 March, 2021 aged 86. He served in the North Staffordshire Regiment as a Private

Audrey Harries of Frome, Somerset died on 12 March, 2021 aged 95. She served in the Voluntary Aid Detachment as a Senior VAD

Leonard Harvey of Harlow, Essex died on 9 March, 2021 aged 94. He served in the King's Own Royal Border Regiment

Robert Hatfield of Leeds, West Yorkshire died on 21 February, 2021 aged 95. He served in the Fleet Air Arm as a Air Mechanic First Class

George Haylock of Haywards Heath, West Sussex died on 15 February, 2021 aged 100. He served in the Royal Air Force as a Leading Aircraftman

Alexander Henry of Luton, Bedfordshire died on 11 February, 2021 aged 86. He served in the Royal Artillery as a Private

Michael Jacques of Nuneaton, Warwickshire died on 23 February, 2021 aged 71. He served in the Royal Engineers as a Sapper

Brian Jarvis of Manchester died on 29 January, 2021 aged 86. He served in the Royal Engineers as a Sapper

Dorothy Jones of Rhyl, Clwyd died on 2 December, 2020 aged 97. She served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service as a Private

Ronald Kettle of Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire died on 25 October 2020 aged 92. He served in the Army

Doris King of Bournemouth, Dorset died on 14 March, 2021 aged 96. She served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service as a Private

George King of Coventry, Warwickshire died on 1 March, 2021 aged 95. He served in the Royal Air Force as a Leading Aircraftman

Reginald Lee of High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire died on 16 March, 2021 aged 94. He served in the Royal Marines as a Marine

Allan Lester-Jones of Llandudno, Gwynedd died on 13 March, 2021 aged 101. He served in the Royal Navy as a Petty Officer

Terence McEwan of Bognor Regis, West Sussex died on 7 February, 2021 aged 93. He served in the Royal Army Service Corps as a Sergeant

Gilbert Mills of Felixstowe, Suffolk died on 21 February, 2021 aged 98. He served in the Royal Pioneer Corps as a Private

David Moore of Bristol, Avon died on 1 February, 2021 aged 86. He served in the Royal Corps of Transport as a Private

James Nesbitt of Bedlington, Northumbria died on 2 January, 2021 aged 93. He served in the Royal Air Force as a Flight Sergeant

Leonard Nesbitt of Peterborough, Cambridgeshire died on 12 March, 2021 aged 93. He served in the Royal Artillery as a Private

Raymond Palmer of Southend-on-Sea, Essex died on 1 March, 2021 aged 97. He served in the Royal Signals as a Private

John Patterson of Lytham St Annes, Lancashire died on 4 March, 2021 aged 98. He served in the Royal Navy as an Acting Engine Room Artificer Fourth Class

James Pittock of Clacton-on-Sea, Essex died on 10 February, 2021 aged 82. He served in the East Anglian Regiment as a Private

David Plitsch of March, Cambridgeshire died on 5 March, 2021 aged 81. He served in the East Anglian Regiment as a Private

Harvey Powell of Clacton-on-Sea, Essex died on 1 March, 2021 aged 95. He served in the Royal Navy as an Ordinary Seaman

William Pratt of Bromley, Kent died on 21 February, 2021 aged 97. He served in the Royal Navy as a Signaller

Thomas Prior of Liverpool, Merseyside died on 13 February, 2021 aged 82. He served in Royal Army Service Corps as a Private

Heulwen Riley of Colwyn Bay, Clwyd died on 16 March, 2021 aged 92. She served in the Women's Royal Air Force as an Aircraftwoman

Arthur Robinson of Worksop, Nottinghamshire died on 23 February, 2021 aged 96. He served in the Royal Navy as a Stoker First Class

Donald Rowe of Melksham, Wiltshire died on 14 February, 2021 aged 87. He served in the Royal Military Police as a Lance Corporal

John Scotton of Birmingham died on 27 February, 2021 aged 95. He served in the Royal Engineers as a Sapper

Thomas Shanks of Lanark, Lanarkshire died on 26 February, 2021 aged 90. He served in the Intelligence Corps as a Private

John Stevens of Reading, Berkshire died on 6 February 2021 aged 88. He served in the Royal Artillery as a Lance Bombardier

Michael Stone of Worcester died on 16 March, 2021 aged 98. He served in the Royal Artillery as a Captain

Trevor Stratford of Gloucester died on 1 December, 2020 aged 96. He served in the Royal Air Force as a Leading Aircraftman

John Snalwell of Henfield, West Sussex died on 6 March, 2021 aged 102. He served in the Merchant Navy as a Captain

Stanley Swansborough of Maidenhead, Berkshire died on 12 February, 2021 aged 96. He served in the Royal Signals as a Corporal

James Turner of Holmfirth, West Yorkshire died on 4 March, 2021 aged 82. He served in the 12th Royal Lancers as a Corporal

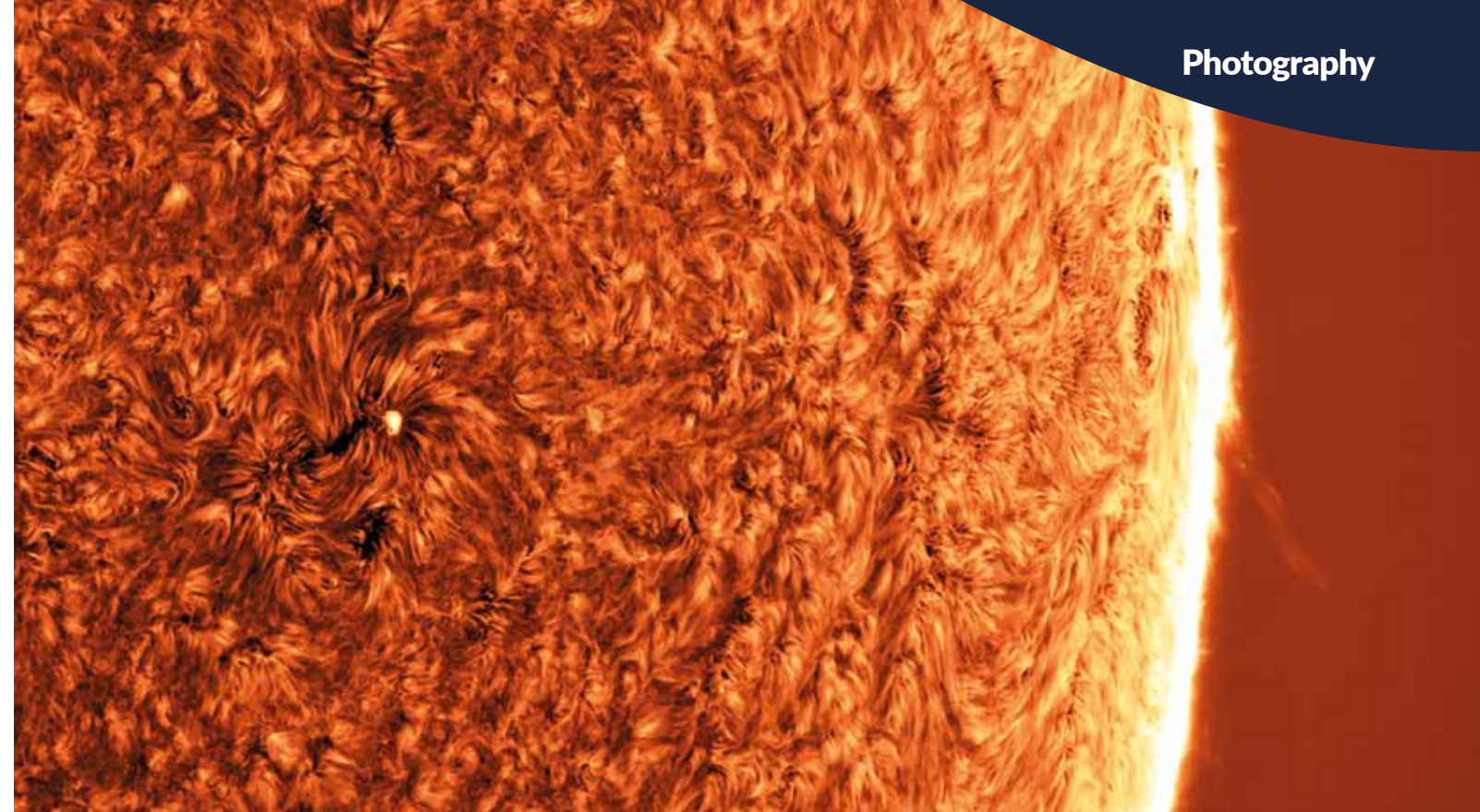
Peter Tyers of Nottingham died on 1 March, 2021 aged 87. He served in the Scots Guards as a Guardsman

Robert Webb of Penarth, South Glamorgan died on 15 March, 2021 aged 96. He served in the Royal Air Force as a Flying Officer

George Wilson of Chelmsford, Essex died on 9 March, 2021 aged 94. He served in the Royal Signals as a Lance Corporal

Raymond Wilson of Gloucester died on 22 February, 2021 aged 87. He served in the Royal Signals as a Signaller

Violet Withers of Bristol, Avon died on 22 February, 2021 aged 92. She served in the Women's Royal Naval Service as a Wren



Caption: Alastair Woodward's 'Solar Disc in Hydrogen Alpha'

Moonstruck

Photography remains popular at our charity, but **Mark Pile** tells how some of our veterans are looking further away for their inspiration

The virtual Blind Veterans UK photography chat group started back in May last year and we have covered many subjects. One thing I was asked for a lot was Astrophotography and to be honest it wasn't the easiest topic to find a photographer on, but eventually I found two. Our second speaker Alastair Woodward made a presentation to the group on 4 March, and this was very

well received, with our largest numbers attending to date. In Alistair's words,

"I was approached by Mark Pile the founder of the Blind Veterans UK photography group asking if I would be willing to give a talk about my work and astrophotography in general. I immediately welcomed the kind request to share my passion for



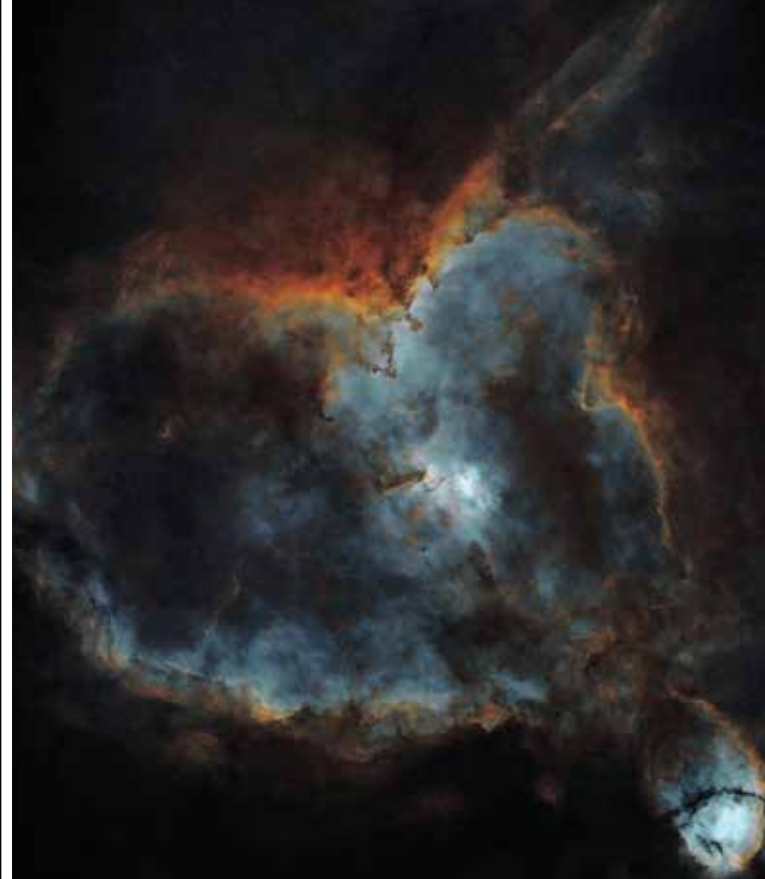


Caption: A lunar image by Sandy Sanderson

photographing the skies and having been diagnosed with glaucoma at a relatively early age, resulting in some permanent loss of vision, I could not think of a better group to support and share my experiences with.

“Astrophotography is the art form of taking pictures of astronomical and celestial objects and this field of photography can be broken down into several categories,

- **Landscape** – For example, aurora, milky way, stars and star trails
- **Solar System** – For example, planetary, lunar and solar imaging
- **Deep sky** – For example nebulae and galaxies



Caption: Alastair Woodward's Heart Nebula

Each of these categories uses different photographic equipment and image production processes. “Landscape astrophotography is the most accessible option, as images can be captured using what many people have already - a digital camera or camera phone. A tripod and shutter release are recommended. A basic understanding of shooting in manual mode, exposure settings and image processing software such as Photoshop are desirable.

“For Solar System images, the preferred method uses a telescope and dedicated planetary camera, which captures many thousands of frames of the subject. These frames are then uploaded to dedicated software to produce a final



Caption: A moon image from Nick Barber

image, a technique known as “Lucky Imaging”. Even phone cameras can be used for photographing the Moon with good results.”

Shooting the Moon

While camera phones can be used for taking images of Moon, they often lack the reach and manual settings to capture details. Therefore, and for best results, a DSLR in manual mode, a 200mm-600mm lens mounted on a tripod with a shutter release is preferable.

To image the Moon, here are some settings to get started.

- Use full manual mode.



Caption: Alastair Woodward's 'Solar Prominence in Hydrogen Alpha'

- Set the ISO to 100 or 200.
- Set the aperture between f/8 and f/11.
- Set the shutter speed to 1/200 as a starting point
- Use live view on the LCD screen to achieve good focus and the switch back to manual to avoid the camera refocusing. Infinity lens settings can be used but these are not always accurate.
- You may find the moon too bright or too dark, in which case adjust the shutter speed accordingly

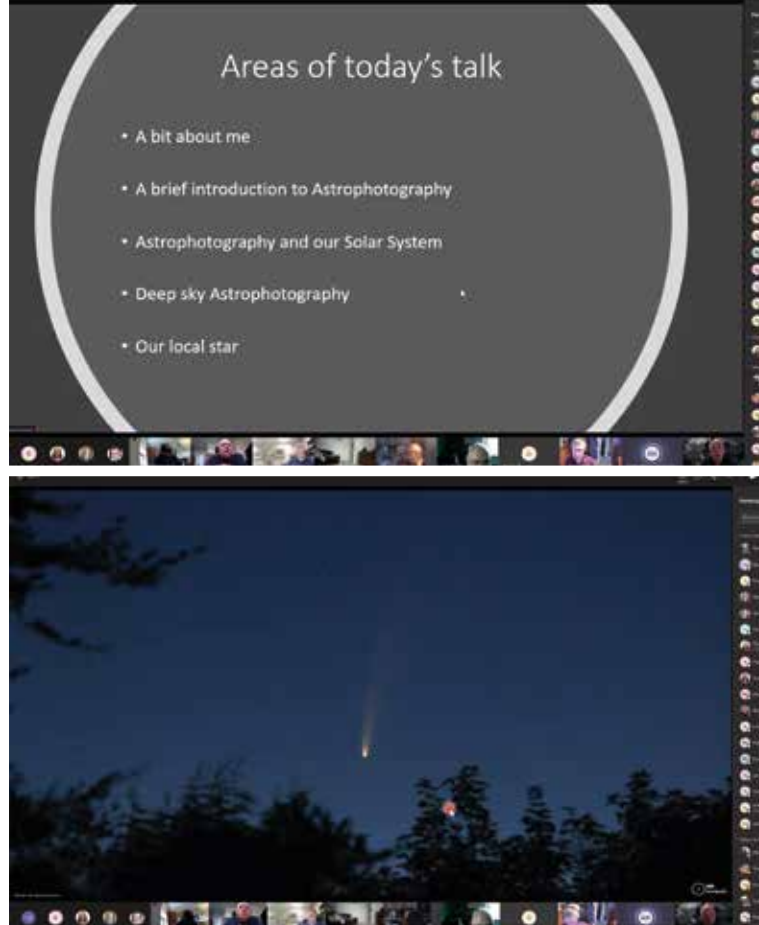
But of course, it's about what our Members thought and their interest, so Keith Harness who joins the chat from Germany says, →



Caption: Alastair Woodward's Daytime Moon

“It has always interested me how both amateur and professional photographers achieve these images. Alistair Woodward gave the group detailed explanations to his award-winning examples of near and deep space photography. His advice on cameras, their settings and the methods he'd used was a big help, confirming that even though many of his photographs looked complex and beyond most people's abilities there are also simplistic approaches to get you started and more advanced for those who develop a greater passion in astrophotography.”

Member Nick Barber added, “My



Caption: Sharing images with the group

interest in the night sky began at an early age. I have always found the Universe awe inspiring and seeing photos like the ones Alastair showed us makes me want to explore more about Astrophotography and explore further than the moon.”

Following discussions with Members that have an interest in the universe and how you can photograph it, several of our veterans and at least a couple of staff members are going to look into this in more detail. You never know, perhaps there are others out there that may have an interest in this and perhaps there could be a Blind Veterans UK Astro group in the future. 🌌

The National Disability Survey - how you can take part

The Disability Unit at the Cabinet Office is developing a National Strategy for Disabled People.

To help the government with understanding the barriers that disabled people face and what it may need to focus upon to improve the lives of disabled people, we need to hear about your views and know more about your experiences. This survey will ask about your life experiences either as a disabled person, a carer or parent or as someone who has an interest in disability issues.

Many people have had big changes in their lives as a result of the

COVID-19 pandemic and there will be an opportunity at the end of the survey to state if your life has changed notably due to COVID-19, and in what ways. However, please answer other questions thinking about yourself, your own experiences and your current situation.

The survey will be open until 23 April 2021 while the form should take you around 20 to 30 minutes to complete and can be saved as you progress. You will be directed through the questionnaire based on the answers you provide. 🌐

■ It can be found at – bit.ly/2OahH38

Important notes for those using screen readers and other assistive technology -

- An asterisk (*) indicates a required question and we suggest you check information below the question using the arrow keys
- The experience will be better on a computer rather than a mobile device
- We recommend using a grid with maps for questions with multiple radio buttons as this is the only option for the Voice Control user





Caption: Maria and Richard at the Pyramids and the Sphinx

Desert sands

Member **Maria Pikulski** talks about a memorable and very special trip to Cairo she had last year

On 10 February last year, I set off with my husband and guide Richard Hughes, to Manchester airport on our adventure to Cairo, Egypt with a change in Istanbul on the way.

We arrived in Cairo at 0400, being met by four unknown persons with two

cars. Our luggage disappeared into the night and we climbed in with two people, Phillip and our amazing host Dawod - who luckily spoke English. After a 45-minute drive, we arrived in the back streets of Cairo and on getting out of the car, my first thought was 'where are we?'. There were wild dogs



Caption: Visiting the EDU Foundation school for the blind

roaming around and the buildings were not very smart. We were taken into a block of flats with a large beautiful apartment, before being shown to our rooms and bed for a much-needed rest.

Dawod, who was to look after us, was Palestinian Greek orthodox. Our first day started when after a good sleep we awoke to eat lunch and then Dawod took us for a drive through the manic streets of Cairo, stopping on the main bridge over the River Nile then up to have a coffee at the top of the mountain overlooking Cairo's amazing views.

By the second day we felt like royalty as we visited the EDU Foundation School for the Blind - we were introduced to the two founders of the school, who were both amazing people with Retinitis Pigmentosa and

were fully blind as a result. We met all the staff, who one by one explained who they were and what job they did, and with true Egyptian hospitality we were fed and watered, even though they were celebrating Ramadan. They were so poor that this was a humbling experience. They took us on a guided tour of the school, and we met all the students. However, the building was of a very poor standard and they needed as much support as possible.

True tourists

Between days four to seven we became true British tourists with Dawod taking us all over. We visited the Pyramids and Sphinx, with a horse- →



Caption: At the EDU Foundation School

drawn ride through the desert. We saw several museums and on the sixth day we were supplied with a Uber driver to take us around more museums and give our host Dawod a rest.

One day we only wanted a coffee for lunch, so our driver took us into a large market where we sat and had coffee while he puffed on his pipe. It was amazing, you could buy anything. However, the fun started when we left the market and our driver was arrested for being with two Europeans because he did not have a licence. Then a plain clothes policeman said, "It is ok, you can both go" after which we had to say "We can't really, as he is our driver", and after a bit more Egyptian shouting, arguing and passing of money they let him go.

The next adventure

Our next adventure was to get the train to Alexandria to see another blind school which was run by the Greek Orthodox church. Waiting for the train was an experience - seeing the third-class compartments with no windows and doors. We were both presented with gifts made by the children/adults and were then given lunch, meeting people from all over the world in the process. Alexandria is a beautiful seaside city, with castles and the King's winter palace.

On a final note the food was great, but the Egyptian delicacy of stuffed dove with its head on was not my favourite. Suffice to say, we hope to visit again post-Covid. 🇪🇬



Caption: Visiting the second blind school in Alexandria

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Contact details

Contact address Blind Veterans UK,
12-14 Harcourt Street, London,
W1H 4HD, **0300 111 22 33**

Member Support Hub: 01273 391 447

New Members: If you know someone who could be eligible to join Blind Veterans UK, they can phone our Membership Department on freephone **0800 389 7979**.

The Brighton Centre 01273 307 811.

The Llandudno Centre 01492 868 700.

Review Editor: You can telephone Chris Gilson on **020 7616 8367** or email him 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 provide feedback on the magazine or any aspect of our services then please email us at feedback@blindveterans.org.uk or call **0300 111 22 33**

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