


Review

The journal of
Blind Veterans UK

July 2022



A jubilant Jubilee

How we celebrated
Her Majesty's 70-year reign

Inside:

Lesley is awarded an MBE
Our support for Ukraine



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss

Bunting and battle

Welcome to your July Review. I hope you enjoyed the Platinum Jubilee celebrations last month, and all the pomp and ceremony that went with it.

As you can imagine, our centres did us proud - which is not surprising as our staff have been feverishly preparing for weeks. There were all kinds of quintessentially British activities on offer, from toy corgi racing at Brighton, to a right royal 1940s knees up at Llandudno. You can read all about it on pages 14 and 16.

Meanwhile, after some amazingly rapid work behind the scenes, the charity has now had the go-ahead to extend its support to war-blinded servicemen and women in Ukraine. As this terrible war rages on, it's heartening to think we could soon be reaching at least some of the injured with our first-class rehabilitation and support. You can find out the latest developments on page 9.

If ever anyone needed reminding of the damaging long-term effects of war, last month's 40th anniversary of the Falklands War will have set them straight. While the media coverage featured stories of incredible courage

and comradeship, it also showed just how hard it can be for those on the frontline to come to terms with their experiences, even after all these years.

This is the overarching point made by Second World War veteran, John McOwan, in the third and final extract of his Desert Rats memoir on page 47. In describing the gruesome aftermath of battle, the 101-year-old says, "We should always strive to demonstrate to future generations the sheer horror of battle and the misery that follows."

And John's message is spreading. The story of his lockdown memoir-writing project has been picked up by the national press and been hugely popular on social media. You should be able to find him on the BBC website by searching for 'McOwan'.

This is wonderful news because these wartime stories matter. It might even inspire you to start writing your own. 🇬🇧

Liz Millar
Editor



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Quiz answers - from page 54

1. Paul McCartney
2. (c) Plus
3. (a) Frank Ifield
4. Edelweiss
5. (b) cockles and mussels
6. Elvis Presley
7. I want to hold your hand
8. (a) Mary
9. Tina Turner
10. Bob Dylan

On the cover

Members Lorna Cockayne and Margaret Wilson join the celebrations at our Brighton Centre to mark HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee.



A festival of achievements

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

Let me start by congratulating our Brighton Centre Manager, Lesley Garven, for her award of an MBE in the Queen's Birthday honours list. This is a fabulous achievement (an MBE!) and real testament to the devotion of Lesley to our Members and staff.



Caption: Nick Caplin

The last couple of years have been challenging for all at the Brighton Centre, yet together they have negotiated the obstacles with great style and determination. Lesley has been at the forefront throughout, providing strong leadership with her irrepressible good humour and broad smile. I'm delighted that her work has been recognised in this way. Not surprisingly, she is very quick to say that it is the Members and staff who deserve the recognition. Thank you all!

Along with news of Lesley's award, the charity was able to celebrate a wide variety of achievements over the Jubilee weekend. Our Essex Choir goes from strength to strength and took centre stage at a garden party for the Jubilee. The National Creative Project produced their 'Bunting on a Bag' project, an inspirational idea that involved Members incorporating their own designs on our Jubilee bunting bag.

Not wanting to be left out, our Patron, HRH The Countess of Wessex GCVO, provided a design of her own which features prominently on the bag. It was a wonderful way to mark the 70th anniversary for our former Patron, Her Majesty The Queen.

Numerous other Jubilee projects were completed across the charity, including a portrait of Her Majesty made entirely out of buttons (see the back cover). And it was a particular delight to see photographs of Queen Elizabeth with the charity from many years ago, courtesy of our archive team, which appear throughout this issue.

In other news, we are working on a plan to host the Ukraine Warrior Games team at Brighton for a few weeks of training before they participate in the US Warrior Games in August. Each one will return to active duty at the end of the Games, so this is an opportunity for us to be able to provide support and encouragement in a small way to a very special group of people. The Brighton residents and staff are engaged in preparation for this visit and applying their typical style and energy to the challenge. Fingers crossed it goes ahead as planned.

Finally, I am following the story of Bird Box Bert with great interest. Bert is a Member from Chipping Norton and



Caption: Her Majesty visiting our Brighton centre in July 1985

has made his name in making bird boxes that end up in many varied and special places. His latest challenge is to track down another famous resident of Chipping Norton, Jeremy Clarkson, to place a bird box on the wonderful farm known as Diddly Squat. If I know Bert, he will succeed in his quest. I'm sure you'll be able to read about it in the *Review* when it happens.

He might want to deploy the services of another Member who knows Jeremy well – none other than Billy Baxter. Once Jeremy recalls his Top Gear ride with Billy, I am sure he'll want to do whatever he can to please Bert. The spirit among our blind veterans is alive and kicking. 🇬🇧

A life of service

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

I hope you enjoyed the Jubilee celebrations last month. I was delighted to hear the news that our Brighton Centre Manager, Lesley Garven, has been awarded an MBE in The Queen's birthday honours. I've had the privilege of working with Lesley on the design of our new Rustington Centre and I'm over the moon to see her passion and hard work being recognised in this way.

It's been fascinating to look back over the past 70 years of our Queen's reign during this period. This Jubilee has



Caption: Barry Coupe

felt like a glorious celebration of all she embodies: a life of service. And still, at the age of 96, she is dedicated, more than anything else, to serving the people. It's no wonder she garners such respect from around the world.

I was reflecting on this the other day while idly listening to a discussion on the radio about the current problem of all the flight cancellation chaos. I know this has been very challenging for holidaymakers desperate for their post-lockdown break, but I found it interesting that the show's host was arguing that all those affected should receive compensation for the emotional stress it may have caused.

To me, the idea of payouts for stress caused by travel disruption seems remarkably generous considering what the people in Ukraine are going through. I'm sure that being stuck in Majorca when you're due back at work in the UK is difficult for all concerned, but victims of this cruel war have lost homes, limbs, family, friends... everything they have.

I wouldn't be surprised if our Queen's



Caption: The late Captain Leslie Maxwell Almond, who was a Member, with HM The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh during their visit to Australia in 1954

generation - and all those with experience of war and the utter deprivation it brings - think we've become a rather self-centred and spoilt nation. Perhaps we have. But in this age of digital media and constant online distractions, it's all too easy to lose perspective and just become engrossed in the latest headlines.

For me personally, being involved in this wonderful charity serves as a constant reminder of what's most important in life: helping other people. And with this in mind, I'm pleased to let you know that we are making great strides in our ambition to help the war-blinded in Ukraine, having now amended our Charity Articles of Association to support this intent.

Although I wish with all my heart that our help wasn't needed there, I'm very proud that we are working rapidly and purposely towards this goal, together with our partner sight-loss charities and our research arm, BRAVO VICTOR. The efforts of some to have made this happen so quickly has been nothing short of extraordinary.

Even so, as I know Nick has also emphasised previously, our priority will always be our veterans at home and, to finish, I'd like to tell you about another UK charity I'll be meeting with soon which may be able to offer many of you an exciting opportunity. Based on the south coast, Turn to Starboard provides serving and retired Armed Forces personnel fantastic sailing and tall ship experiences. I know some of you have participated in their activities and say they are amazing, so I hope more of you can benefit from their support in the future, alongside the continued support of Blind Veterans UK.

When all said and done, I just want to do what I can to help you live the kind of lives you wish for. To borrow the words of our Queen, released at the end of her Jubilee weekend, "I remain committed to serving you to the best of my ability."

Wishing you a wonderful month. 🍷

News

Lesley is awarded MBE

Our Brighton Centre Manager has been awarded an MBE in the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Honours list.

Lesley Garven MBE, who has been Manager of the centre since 2012, received the honour for 'Services to Veterans'. The award was given particularly for her work leading the centre throughout the pandemic.



Caption: Our Centre Manager at Brighton, Lesley Garven MBE

Our Chief Executive Nick Caplin said: "Lesley's award is wholly deserved and all of us at Blind Veterans UK are delighted for her.

"As Covid-19 struck, she focused on creating a safe environment for our elderly vision-impaired residents.

"She used social media to secure PPE support when supplies were stretched, and set up Covid-19 testing arrangements with a leading university to provide assurance before the national testing systems were established.

"Lesley continues to lead on the planning around our move to Rustington, and always puts the needs of our blind veterans first."

On hearing of her award, Lesley said: "I'm absolutely overwhelmed and want to take this opportunity to thank all the staff at our centre who have worked so tirelessly, particularly throughout the pandemic.

"We will soon be moving to our new home in Rustington, but I know we will be just as committed to providing the very best care and support there."



CANDY1812 / ADOBE STOCK

Caption: We've all been deeply moved by the situation in Ukraine

Member Tony Harbour, who's 86, supported Lesley's nomination, saying: "Lesley is a constant source of sunshine and inspiration to all of us. She lifts our spirits, makes us laugh and gives us hope.

"Although my vision is seriously impaired, I can easily see the impact she has on the staff and the ease with which they follow her clear and natural lead.

"Through her personal example and devotion, she leads a very happy team of staff and volunteers who help us to enjoy life beyond sight loss."

Many congratulations to Lesley!

Adapting to support Ukraine and others

The latest developments

All of us at Blind Veterans UK have been deeply moved by what we have seen and heard in Ukraine over the last few months, and many Members have been in touch to ask what we can do.

Building on our long history of providing specialist vision rehabilitation to those who have been blinded through war, the Blind Veterans UK Council is also determined to provide support to the people of Ukraine.

Rapid action has been taken to amend our Charity Articles of



Association to support this intent. The changes mean we can now provide our specialist vision rehabilitation support to those affected by war-like activity, including terrorism.

Therefore, we are now able to support the people of Ukraine, and others, by offering our expertise in both design and delivery of VI rehabilitation to those who have sustained sight loss through war-like activity.

This group of people will not be Members of Blind Veterans UK in the traditional sense. Rather they will



ALONAPHOTO / ADOBESTOCK

Caption: A Ukrainian defender says a sad goodbye to his family

benefit from particular support over a period of time as part of a focused programme.

The Government of Ukraine has made a written request to Blind Veterans UK, as well as to our sister research charity, BRAVO VICTOR, to provide specific support to their people. This has been enshrined within a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by each of the three parties.

We will work in partnership with VI and veteran organisations to compliment and sustain our long term offer of support to Ukraine.

We are seeking separate funding to help make this intent a reality for the people of Ukraine and will ensure our fundraising for vision-impaired ex-service men and women of the British Armed Forces is not compromised through any new activities.

We are Blind Veterans UK first and our priority will always be supporting those British ex-servicemen and women, regardless of when they served or how they lost their sight.

Frequently asked questions

Over the next couple of pages, we answer any questions you may have, but please do contact your local team if you have any further questions.

How will we support Ukrainian civilians affected by the war there?

Our intent is to provide support in the following areas:

- Rehabilitation of veterans and individuals living with sight loss from war-like activity to take place in the UK, where appropriate, to enable them to start the process of rebuilding their lives after sight loss.
- Building the Ukrainian rehabilitation capability by training, supporting and facilitating the supply of equipment for vision rehabilitation in Ukraine.
- Provision of education materials and practices to support vision rehabilitation in Ukraine.
- Through research and collaboration, understand the past, present and future needs of Ukrainian veterans living with sight loss and other comorbid impairments. This has already started and is led by BRAVO VICTOR who have been working with Ukrainian colleagues since before the invasion.

How will this extra support be funded?

We are seeking separate funding to help make this intent a reality for the people of Ukraine and will ensure our fundraising for blind veterans in the UK is not compromised through any new activities.

Does this change in the charity's Articles of Association mean we are now taking new beneficiaries who did not serve in the British Armed Forces? Can anyone who has been affected by war-like activities become a beneficiary now?

The changes to our Articles of Association mean we can now provide our specialist vision rehabilitation support to those affected by war-like activity, including terrorism. This can include those who lose their sight as a result of what is happening in Ukraine.

Before these changes were made, we were only allowed to support veterans who had served in the British Armed Forces, with the exception of Emergency Service personnel who lost their sight on duty.

Therefore, we are now able to support the people of Ukraine, as well as past and future conflicts, by offering our expertise in both design and delivery of VI rehabilitation to those who have sustained sight loss through war-like activity.

Will this new group of beneficiaries become official Members?

Anyone in this new group will not be Members of Blind Veterans UK in →

the traditional sense. Rather they will benefit from particular support over a period of time as part of a focused programme.

Do we know how much our Membership will change as a result of this?

Because anyone in this new group will not be Members of Blind Veterans UK in the traditional sense, our membership will not increase as a result of this change. Blind Veterans UK Members will remain those UK servicemen and women who have served and have a visual impairment.

Will the same support be offered if there are other future conflicts in other countries?

As well as now being able to support the people of Ukraine, we also have the ability to support those who have sustained sight loss through war-like activity in past and future conflicts. We would consider cases on merit.

Individual cases can also be considered, starting with Trustee consideration and agreement. We will be looking forward in the main, but haven't closed off the opportunity to help those injured in past action.

As a charity, we are looking to fundraise specifically for any new

support or services that we may provide. Future decisions would have to be made depending on our ability to fundraise to support the specific activity.

Policy for the use of mobility aids at our centres

By our Health and Safety Manager, Rachel Jones

We want your visits to our Brighton and Llandudno Centres to be as enjoyable as possible. We know that, for many of you, mobility aids are crucial in helping maintain your independence and we encourage their use wherever possible.

Earlier this year, we received a query about our policy with regards to the use of mobility aids at our centres. This prompted a wider review to see how best we can meet the needs of our Members and ensure our centres are safe for everyone.

Based on this review, we've finalised a new policy, the key points of which are as follows:

- When booking visits, please let us know if you use mobility aids and how often. For example, if you own a wheeled walker, do you use

it all the time, including around the home, or just when you go out? This information will not only ensure our transport team can accommodate your equipment in their vehicle, but also means our staff can provide you with the right support on trips and activities.

- In addition to this, when you arrive at one of our centres, our welcome team will be able to observe your equipment in use and identify whether they feel any extra support will be required during your stay.
- Unfortunately, we are not able to allow electric scooters at our centres. During our review, their size and potential speed were found to be problematic and potentially unsafe. If you normally use an electric scooter, you will be provided with a wheelchair during your stay, along with the dedicated

support of a member of staff or Blind Veterans UK volunteer.

- **If you have any queries, just email rachel.jones@blindveterans.org.uk or call me on 07387 019485.**

A song for Her Majesty

Our amazing Blind Veterans UK Essex Choir, Vision in Song, took centre stage at a garden party in June to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee. The event was supported by Everything Community, which donated gifts and funding; local contractor, Optimum Construction Ltd, which also donated funding; and pupils from two local schools, Montgomery Infant School and Nursery and Thomas Lord Audley, who made the bunting to decorate the venue. Now that's what we call community spirit! 🇬🇧



Caption: Vision in Song at the event



Caption: Staff at our Llandudno Centre enjoying the celebrations

A right royal bash

Our Operations Lead, **Nicola Clough**, reports on the Platinum Jubilee weekend fun at our Llandudno Centre

We were delighted to be able to welcome Members who'd booked their holiday to a very royal themed long weekend of celebrations over the Platinum Jubilee.

In the lead up to the events, our staff and Members threw themselves into creating royal bunting to adorn the halls of the centre, as well as Jubilee-themed fascinators, ahead of a parade

which Queen Elizabeth herself would have been proud to attend.

We kicked off the Jubilee celebrations with a trip back in time to view vehicles and memorabilia from the 1920s onwards at Tacla Taid Transport and Agriculture Museum, which reminded us all of some of the changes the Queen has seen during her 70-year reign. This was followed by a fascinator



Caption: Mary's fascinator **Caption: The special cake made by chef Joe**



parade and a royal quiz back at the centre, which was won by the very knowledgeable Platinum Six team.

On Friday, our Members not only celebrated the Platinum Jubilee, but also marked Volunteers Week, with 20 of our wonderful centre volunteers in attendance. Everyone enjoyed a scrumptious afternoon tea and a 1940s singalong, while our very own chef, Joe, and his colleagues at Thomas Franks created a spectacular and delicious Platinum Jubilee cake.

On Saturday, the Members were guests of honour at our 'Big Lunch', where they had the opportunity to

enjoy a glass of fruit punch and bubbly, and dip into Joe's very special Royal Trifle. Just like the celebrations at Buckingham Palace, our Members were serenaded by singers and entertained by our joyful staff.

And, finally, on the Sunday, some of our Members joined a party at Llandudno Junction Memorial Hall. Welcomed with open arms, their very presence helped raise awareness of our charity. In fact, one young boy was so taken with them, and what the charity means to them, that he donated £5 of his own hard-earned pocket money to assist in our fundraising efforts. Her Majesty would be so proud! 🇬🇧

Corgi racing and a Jubilee pudding

Our Member Experience Coordinator, **Stacey Barham**, describes a jubilant Jubilee at our Brighton Centre

At our Brighton Centre we've been so excited about the Queen's Platinum Jubilee that we've been preparing for months!

Running up to the Bank Holiday weekend, decorations had been ordered, activities organised and guests were invited to a truly fun

packed programme that was, I dare say, fit for a queen.

At the end of May, we covered the centre with patriotic red, white and blue, along with the silver and purple that's been adopted as the Platinum Jubilee colour scheme. The lounge was also adorned with metres and metres



Caption: On your marks... Corgi racing was a must at Brighton

of bunting from our National Creative Project team.

Each bunting triangle was designed by a Member in honour of the Platinum Jubilee, and we even received a special design created by HRH The Countess of Wessex GCVO. We also stocked up on flags, balloons and even had a cardboard cut-out of Her Majesty for some great photo opportunities!

The activities kicked off on the first day of June with bunting biscuit decorating, a royal themed quiz and a corgi card-making session to get Members in the Jubilee mood.

We all loved watching the highlights of the 1952 Trooping the Colour, a curated documentary of video clips from the event 70 years ago. It prompted some lovely reminiscing from our Members who all shared their memories from that time.

Over the Jubilee weekend we organised military celebrations, a service and thanksgiving, Derby Day and a street party to finish off.

It was wonderful to see our Members proudly adorned with their military medals and attire for the special military lunch. We also unveiled a beautiful collaborative Jubilee mosaic piece, to which many Members



Caption: Bunting in the lounge and, inset, bunting biscuits

contributed, spending weeks gluing buttons to create a striking portrait of HRH The Queen (see back cover).

Perhaps one of the most memorable activities was our Derby Day race where Members lined up a range of battery powered dogs and set them off. I think the Queen's corgi was my favourite.

But the absolute highlight for me was the indoor Jubilee street party, which took place in the centre's dining room. Family and friends of our residents came along for a truly jubilant lunch followed by a special Platinum Jubilee pudding. Delicious! 🍮

Jubilee haiku challenge

Our Art and Craft Instructor from our NCP Creative Writing Group, **Kathryn Jones-Romain**, encourages you to have a go at penning a Japanese poem

As a way of recording your experience of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, we thought we might try a haiku challenge.

A haiku is traditionally a Japanese poem consisting of three short lines that do not rhyme. It is a poem of 17 syllables, in three lines of five, seven, and five, traditionally evoking images of the natural world.

Haiku follow a set structure, which is:

- First line – 5 syllables
- Second line – 7 syllables
- Final line – 5 syllables

For example:

Whitecaps on the bay: (5)

A broken signboard banging (7)

In the April wind. (5)

By Richard Wright (from *Haiku: This Other World*, Arcade Publishing, 1998)

How the structure works

American or English haiku are divided into three lines, which not only acts as punctuation but is also supposed to give the reader time to form the image before their eyes go back to the left to read the next line.

Top haiku writing tips

- Many haiku focus on nature or have a seasonal reference.
- Try to focus on a single thought or image in each haiku.
- Haiku are based on the five senses – instead of saying 'it's winter', you would focus on the 'frosty air' or the 'crunch of snow'.
- Haiku shouldn't rhyme.
- The haiku doesn't have to be serious; it can be funny (although traditionalists might call that a 'senryu').



Caption: HM The Queen at our 50th anniversary celebrations in March 1965

Ready to give it a go? We'd love to display your haiku at our Brighton Centre if you are.

Please email it to kathryn.jones-romain@blindveterans.org.uk or post to Kath Jones Romain, The Art and Craft Department, Blind Veterans UK, Greenways, Ovingdean, Brighton, BN2 7BS. 🇬🇧

- **Our monthly creative writing telephone chat group is open to all Members. For more information, call 01273 391455.**

Jubilee-inspired haiku by our Members

*You've been strong for us
QE2 we're here for you
Jubilee Summer*
By Peter O'Malley

*Our Queen's life journey
Alone yet never alone
The world walks with you*
By Mickie Robinson



Caption: Cameron with a selection of his colourful mosaics

Mad for mosaics

Member **Cameron Kennedy**, 76, tells our Marketing and Communications Assistant, Romy Benshabat, all about his new-found passion for art

I was brought up in Northern Ireland; it was a different way of life back then. We had nothing - money was scarce, work was scarce, the schooling was different. All our teachers were ex-military and most were very strict. We

didn't have many materials, like arts and crafts and things like that. We had to make do with what we could.

I was in the scouts for a long time, with the Boys' Brigade, so I learned a lot

Caption: His beautiful creations fill the garage where he works

of skills there. I left school at 15 and did a bricklaying apprenticeship, until the dark clouds over Northern Ireland started to form and I joined the military in Carrickfergus.

My whole family were in the military: my great grandad, my grandad, my father, my brothers... I transferred to Belfast where the action was and served all over Northern Ireland with the Ulster Defence Regiment until 1974.

People used to ask me, "What's your

ambition?" and I used to say, "Just the next day." When you went out during the day or the night, you just didn't know what was going to happen. In the morning, you'd get up and just be grateful for another day.

And then an opportunity came for me to go overseas, and I went off to Africa. I transferred into the Air Force in a place called Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. I travelled all over, from the Zambian border, Mozambique, right across into Angola. →



Caption: The colourful watering cans in Cameron's garden

Then in 1980, I came back to England with only two suitcases, and that's how I had to start life again. We moved to Devon and settled.

I lost my sight later in life. It started off as a slow process. Whenever I was driving my wife used to say, "You're driving all over the road," and I used to say, "Who's driving this car, you or me?" And so it went on for quite some time.

Then I went to the hospital and visited an eye specialist, and they said I had dry



Caption: A keen amateur gardener, Cameron has around 300 roses

eyes and told me I had to give up my driving license. They told me I could join Blind Veterans UK, so that's what I did.

I didn't know anything about the charity at first. During my introduction week at the Brighton Centre, they taught me how to make a small map as a mosaic, and I said, "My goodness me, I've done something here." I met lots of good people and progressed from there.

The staff taught me how to make the mosaics through touch and feel. They

"During my introduction week at the Brighton Centre, they taught me how to make a small map as a mosaic"

had plenty of patience and would show me how to do it properly if I didn't do it right the first time. They've been really good, especially through the pandemic. I have to praise them.

I like to go out and talk about Blind Veterans UK, and spread the good news about the work this charity does. I'm so grateful, and to pass on my experience to others is an honour really. I want others to have the same positive experience I've had.

My wife bought me lots of different tiles and colours, and I'll sit in my garage and make my mosaics. I've done lots of different patterns now. My wife does a wee bit of arts and crafts too – she does diamond painting. She keeps an eye on me, and helps me out with the colours because I can't tell what's what, so really it's a team effort. Sometimes I come in a big mess of glue, but it doesn't matter.

The National Creative Project has really helped me reshape my life again. It's done wonders for me over

the last couple of years. The staff have suggested I do all these different projects, which I thoroughly enjoy, like the wooden clock or the jubilee bunting bag. I never liked painting much, but when I can use touch and feel, I can do things.

I'm also a very keen amateur gardener and have about 300 roses in my garden, all different colours. I use watering cans instead of hanging baskets, and I usually spray paint them, red, white and blue, but this year I did them silver for the Platinum Jubilee celebrations. When I accidentally put my plants in upside down, my wife is the one that comes and puts them right.

I'm still doing my mosaics now. My most recent was a table-top of a fish. Yes, I can't see, but the idea is in your head, and from your head to your hands. I sent my granddaughter a load of photos of my work recently, and she just said, "How do you do this?"

Wherever you go, there's always a picture; you can always create something. You have to think to yourself, "Can I do it? Yes, yes I can!"

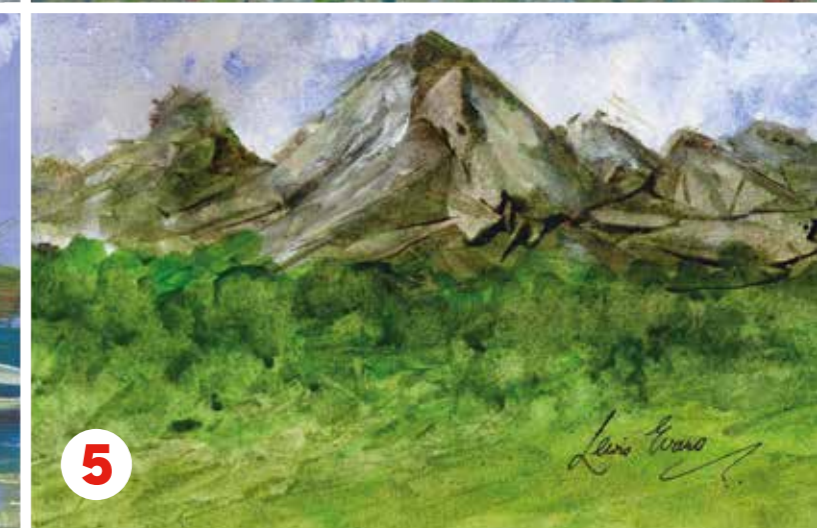
So, whenever it's raining or something, I just head to the garage and get on with my next project.

That's what I do. 🌈

Artistic Flair

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

Captions: 1. Bill Ridgewell - Still Life Reflections 2. Mickie Robinson - Backyard 3. David Beresford - Landscape 4. Michael Kaye - Field of Flowers 5. Lewis Evans - Mountain Scene 6. Rita Scarratt - Let's have a party



The history of Harcourt Street

Review Volunteer, **Lynette Denzey**, gives our Marylebone HQ a fitting farewell

Having spent the last few months packing up, the charity has moved out of its office at 12-14 Harcourt Street and into a new space in Bloomsbury, which we will share with fellow sight charity, Thomas Pocklington Trust.



Caption: 12-14 Harcourt Street

As one of the volunteers who has been based at Harcourt Street for many years, I decided to take a closer look at the area as it seems it's been the nerve centre of the charity's administrative function since 1948.

This was prompted, in particular, by a recent planning application for a new Premier Inn Hotel in the area. The land was referred to as "formerly the site of St Dunstan's HQ", which caught my interest.

Our history in Mayfair

When our Regent's Park operation closed, with our Members' training already having been transferred to our Brighton Centre, the decision was made to keep a London presence, mainly for fundraising purposes.

Initially, we rented a beautiful red brick and terracotta building at 1 South Audley Street, Mayfair. This office was

taken by the charity on a long lease at a nominal rent.

A move to Marylebone

In 1948, we relocated to what is now the new hotel site on the corner of Harcourt Street and Old Marylebone Road (then called 191 Marylebone Road). This impressive building had previously been Queen Charlotte's Maternity Hospital, designed by the architect Charles Hawkins for the hospital in 1856.

When the hospital moved out in 1948,



Caption: 1 South Audley Street



Caption: 119 Marylebone Road designed by Charles Hawkins

St Dunstan's bought 191 Marylebone Road as its headquarters and stayed there for 36 years. The post office helpfully allocated us the post code W1H 2BS - easily remembered as 'two blind servicemen'.

The launch of 12-14 Harcourt Street

Eventually, it was decided that the reduction in numbers of staff left a lot of unused space in the building. Adjacent to 191 were three cottages, mainly used by us for stores. It was decided to redevelop that site as the new headquarters, funding it from the sale of 191. So, our new headquarters was built at 12-14 Harcourt Street.

Meanwhile, 191, the former hospital, was redeveloped as an office block, and that is the site being redeveloped again now as a Premier Inn hotel. →



Caption: Site of Frank James's boot repair shop on Harcourt Street

Private James's boot shop

Another lovely link with Harcourt Street predates the charity's office there. Private Frank James was wounded in Northern France in 1916 and arrived at St Dunstan's the following month. After James passed typewriting and Braille reading tests, and achieved first class certificates in boot repairing and mat-making, he opened a boot repair shop in Harcourt Street. The *Review* of November 1917 reported that "it seems to be a very good business".

Despite walking down Harcourt Street many hundreds of times, I had failed to notice the red triangular street sign warning of blind people ahead just

outside the shop. James subsequently left London for the sea air of Hove.

Ansell House

Our last discovery was that two flats immediately opposite our headquarters entrance, known as Charter Court, was also owned by the charity.

It turns out that a husband-and-wife team, Ian and Nancy Dickson, managed the premises. Slightly confusingly, these flats were called Ansell House then, the same name as another London property originally used by the charity and managed by the Dicksons. It seems that the Dicksons brought the name with them, honouring Colonel Sir Michael Picton Ansell - a former President of the charity from 1977 to 1986.

So, as we say a sad farewell to our old HQ, who would have guessed at the history our charity has in this one street in London? 🇬🇧



Caption: Advertisement for Queen Charlotte's Maternity Hospital

A life well lived

One of our oldest Members, **Rosemary Lang**, who's 103, looks back on her wartime experience

I worked as a primary school teacher at the beginning of the war, but the school closed in 1940 so I joined The Women's Land Army and Timber Corps. I was put in charge of the dairy at Knightshayes Home Farm in Devon, until a fall in an icy farmyard meant I could no longer continue such a strenuous job.

I then joined the Wrens in late 1942. I was an MT driver and stationed at HMS Raven in Eastleigh, Hampshire. I thoroughly enjoyed my work. On D-Day I was flown to an airport near Bournemouth to drive a tractor pulling

aircraft out of the hangars. I was demobbed in March 1946.

During my time at Eastleigh, I met my future husband, CPO Lawrence Lang, and we married in May 1946. Larry was later posted to HMS Daedalus, Lee-on-the-Solent, and so, in 1950, we moved to Gosport and brought up our three daughters in a naval environment, enjoying life beside the sea.

After Larry died in 2008, and as my eyesight began to fail, I joined Blind Veterans UK. I attended an induction course at Ovingdean in August 2016 and returned home after a wonderful week of group activities filled with personalised advice on strategies and gadgets that could make life safer, easier and fuller. It was a marvellous experience, the highlight of which was being able to swim again – the first time for several years.

Six years on and now aged 103, I recently moved to a care home in Swansea. I'm grateful to be still living a full and happy life beside the beautiful Gower beaches. 🇬🇧



Caption: Rosemary and CSW Ffion

We're the 'blind veterans' Google'!

Has your computer got it in for you? Before you chuck it out the window, you might want to call our brilliant tech team at MeSH...

Did you know that our Member Support Hub (MeSH) is a live support service where you can call in and receive a resolution to any technical problem straight away?

Launched in 2016, the service can support you with general IT queries as well as the recycling, installation and technical support of our low vision aid equipment.

We have a huge range of expertise in the team and, over time, they've gained a good understanding of how best to help you remotely.

These are the top five issues MeSH can help you with:

- Talking watch problems
- Talking book players
- CCTV magnifiers and scanners
- Tablets and computer problems



Caption: Aaron, Danny and Scott



Caption: Lauren

■ Passing messages on to other staff in the charity.

Just a phone call away

We know you appreciate the value of a friendly, familiar voice when you reach out for help, so our staff Lucy Bradshaw, Lauren Layzelle and Catherine Paterson are ready to answer the phone when you call the MeSH number. All three have an overview of the whole charity, so if MeSH can't resolve your problem they will know where to direct your query.

Lauren says: "I've worked for Blind Veterans UK for eight years now. I started in the Sheffield centre supporting training programmes and, even though my work is now phone based, I still feel well connected to the needs of our Members. I've had a close



Caption: Lucy

insight both into the journey of our new Members and the fondness our more long-standing Members have for the charity."

Lucy says: "I started working for Blind Veterans UK seven years ago, also helping with introduction and training weeks in Sheffield. I then helped develop the old 'ROVI on duty' helpline, which is now MeSH as we know it. I love getting to know our Members over time – it's lovely seeing someone's confidence grow as they get their independence back."

Catherine says: "I started working for Blind Veterans UK in 2021. In my time here, I've seen how important companionship between Members is, particularly during the pandemic. I'm based in Glasgow, which sparks →



Caption: Catherine

some great conversations with those who have memories of the city. My role allows me to support Members from all over the UK and it's incredible to hear each person's story."

Help with your IT queries

Our IT technician, Craig Vaughton, is always on hand to offer advice and support for any technical issues you may have with your laptop, PC or tablet.

Craig says: "My working life started as an aircraft electrician with the RAF, and I then spent over 25 years working in IT support before joining MeSH five years ago. For me, the best part of this job is solving the more weird and wonderful technical problems. All you have to remember is this: to err is human, but to really mess it up it takes a computer!"



Caption: Craig

We can help with a range of issues

Our MeSH managers, Ashley Li and Imke McClelland, are both qualified rehabilitation officers and oversee the MeSH and recycling teams.

Imke says: "I've been with Blind Veterans UK for six years now, starting out as a ROVI at the Sheffield centre. The thing I love most about managing the MeSH team is getting to speak to Members and staff up and down the whole country. Our team has often been described as 'the blind veterans' Google', which emphasises just how varied our roles can be!"

Ashley says: "I started working here as a ROVI at the Sheffield Centre seven years ago and have loved watching the Member Support Hub grow into the



Caption: Ashley and Imke

service it is today. The expertise within the team is of huge value, and the commitment and dedication shown by every team member has been key to the helpline's development and success."

Delivering and recycling your equipment

Our recycling team is based in Sheffield and provides support across the whole of the UK. If you're reading this magazine on a CCTV or scanner, it's likely you've met a member of the team already.

Team leader, Aaron Munshi, along with Scott Bannister and Daniel Lee, set up and demonstrate equipment to help you feel confident using it - low vision aids which help you to live as independently as possible at home.

The team also offers technical support with tablets and phones, and collects high value equipment that's no longer in use so it can be recycled and reissued to other Members.

All recycled equipment is tested to make sure it's working and safe. They then deep clean everything to make sure it's in the best condition possible.

Aaron says: "I oversee the day-to-day running of the recycling service and coordinate visits across the country. Our team is proud to be able to recycle high value equipment so that one piece of equipment can make a difference to many Members."

Scott says: "I visit Members across the north of the UK and it's great seeing the difference the equipment we provide makes. A CCTV can help people enjoy old photographs again; a scanner can help them read their favourite book."

Daniel says: "I visit Members across the south of the UK. It can be emotional - being able to assist in making a difference gives us the ultimate job satisfaction." 🍷

■ **If you have an IT or technical issue, contact MeSH on 01273 391 447 from Monday-Friday, 9am-4pm, or email mesh@blindveterans.org.uk**



Caption: Rosina and Peter

My life as a carer

Rosina Edden describes the ups and downs of caring for her husband, Peter, who has dementia

Peter and I were both widowed in our very early 40s. I cared for my previous husband for eight years before he died, so I really should be used to being a carer by now. We both had children from our first marriages - I have two sons and a daughter and Peter has two daughters and a son.

We've been married for 37 years and are so lucky to have such a lovely big family including 10 grandchildren

and four great grandchildren. The youngsters have all come along during our married life, so they have only ever known us as the grandparents.

Peter has no sight in one eye and limited sight in the other eye. Sadly, this year he was diagnosed with mixed dementia (Alzheimer's and vascular dementia). He's had limited vision for many years, having lost the sight in his right eye a long time ago. As the sight in

his other eye has deteriorated, he's had to adjust. The dementia is now making life much more difficult.

Peter's mobility is poor which, I understand, is a common problem with these complaints, and his short-term memory is also very poor. With the best will in the world, it can be hard having to repeat the same answers over and over. I know he can't help it though.

He still tries to do many things for himself and, as much as possible, I encourage this. I know it will get much more difficult as the illness progresses, but we have to take it one step at a time. While Peter is a quiet person and content in his own company, I'm gregarious and like to be around other people, but being his carer is just a normal part of my life now.

I sometimes find it hard when I'm unable to do the things I used to do. We have two dogs and I used to take the youngest, Cindy, on a nice long walk, for example, but can't do this now as I don't like to be away from Peter for too long. Fortunately, my neighbour takes her a couple of times a week, and with a few short walks with me and a play in the garden when the weather allows, she's fine.

I also have a 15-year-old dog, Candy and take her along when I take Peter

for his walk. As Peter now uses a walker, Cindy stays at home. It's impossible to cope with the three of them altogether.

Every month I run a coffee morning in our village hall for which I make all the cakes. I also put a quiz on the table as this is a good icebreaker if someone new comes in. I often have around 25-30 people come. I enjoy seeing everyone and having a chat and it's a nice social event for Peter too as he sits and chats to our regular friends.

The charity has recently arranged a friend for Peter who comes to visit. Tim helps Peter with his model railway and they spend quite a few hours in the garage together. Peter really enjoys this so, at some point, I'm hoping to be able to take Cindy out while Tim is here. →



Caption: Rosina's three-year-old dog, Cindy, enjoying a walk



Caption: Peter and Rosina at Llandudno

I think one of the hardest parts about being a carer is you never switch your mind off the person you are caring for. My daughter lives nearby and comes to sit with Peter once a fortnight while I go to a ladies' meeting. I was Booking Secretary for the group for 20 years, but I had to give it up this year as I'm unable to commit to things in the same way. Even on my night out I keep checking my phone to make sure there are no messages from my daughter, though I know he's in good hands.

The pandemic and lockdowns were hard as we were unable to see the family. Most of the children live an hour's drive away and are working, so

it isn't always easy to see them. Also, as I get older, I find I really don't want to do the long drives. However, this year we bought a static caravan on the coast nearby and we love it. We're able to relax and get some nice sea air, and we find that everyone wants to come and visit us there, which is really lovely.

Being widowed when we met, we spent many years travelling and doing all the things we wanted to do whilst we were able. We knew life can suddenly change. We've been to many wonderful places and have lots of lovely memories. Peter's always made films of our holidays and put them on DVDs, so at least we can keep some of the lovely memories alive. His long-term memory seems to cope with this.

Life is not particularly easy, but we are so grateful for the care and support shown to us by Blind Veterans UK. It's been amazing. Our Community Support Worker has been so supportive and does his best to help in any way he can. The breaks at the Llandudno Centre have been most welcome and it's nice to have such lovely people caring for us.

I'm grateful for the years we've had together. We'll face the future, and whatever it brings, together and be thankful for all the lovely things we've done together and for our lovely family. 🍷

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.

Centre accommodation charges ➔

Care Stay				
	Weekly nursing (7 nights)	Daily nursing	Weekly residential (7 nights)	Daily residential
War blinded Member	£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



Caption: Our Brighton Centre

■ 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.

Centre accommodation charges continued

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.

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

The following activities are available to all Members, whatever your experience or creative ability.

CRAFT

Jubilee Crown Mosaic

This is a chance to create your own decorative mosaic in the shape of a majestic crown to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee year. We'll send you everything you need to make this easy, fun and colourful design. The wooden base measures roughly 7 x 8 inches, or 18cm x 20cm, and there is no need for any tile cutting as all pieces are ready to use. The project comes with the opportunity to join one of

our monthly mosaic hobby circles to chat with other Members and receive support if you would like to.

GARDENING

Summer Succulents

An 'easy to grow' gardening project, we'll send you three living plants and everything else you need to start a small indoor succulent garden. These beautiful small plants are easy to care for and very popular in the indoor gardening world right now. There's →

NEW AFRICA / ADOBE STOCK





BELAHOUCHE / ADOBE STOCK

Caption: Why not have a go at watercolour painting?

also the opportunity to join one of our monthly gardening hobby circles to chat with other Members and receive support with this project.

CRAFT

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, please register for the painting hobby circle.

■ **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 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 any of the following subjects:

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

Our groups are made up of around six Members, plus two of our staff.



MANUSAPON / ADOBE STOCK

Caption: Anyone into photography can join our weekly chat group

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 in photography is welcome, no matter what your experience.

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

The NCP programme is open to all Members, whatever your level of experience or creative ability. If you would like to try one of the projects or groups, please give us a call on **01273 391455** or speak to your Community Support Worker.

We love to share your photos and stories about your experience of our projects on our social media channels and in our newsletters, so please do send them in if you'd like the chance to feature. We especially welcome photos of you with your finished pieces. You can send them to us via our email address at nationalcreativeproject@blindveterans.org.uk

Wishing you a lovely July. 🍷

Lou Kirk-Partridge and the National Creative Project Team

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

Mabel Aitchison of Brighton, East Sussex died on 27 May 2022 aged 98. She served as a Wren in the Women's Royal Naval Service.

William Burnett Armstrong of Reading died on 2 May 2022 aged 102. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

Sidney Bond of Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire died on 11 May 2022 aged 84. He served as a Driver in the Royal Army Service Corps.

Gordon Bowland of Sheffield, South Yorkshire died on 16 April 2022 aged 84. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Selwyn Burden of Rugeley, Staffordshire died on 11 May 2022 aged 82. He served as a Warrant Officer in the Royal Air Force.

Gordon Clark of Hove, East Sussex died on 15 May 2022 aged 89. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Armoured Corps.

Maurice Cook of Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear died on 30 May 2022 aged 86. He served as an Engineer Mechanic in the Royal Navy.

Leslie Cooper of Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire died on 21 May 2022 aged 91. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Berkshire Regiment (Princess Charlotte Of Wales').

David Benjamin Cornelius of Swansea died on 12 May 2022 aged 85. He served as a Corporal in the Intelligence Corps.

Lillian Cronshaw of Scunthorpe, South Humberside died on 24 May 2022 aged 89. She served as a Private in the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps.

Dennis Curran of Plymouth died on 6 May 2022 aged 99. He served as a Flying Officer in the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

Derek Alwyn Cutforth of Gainsborough, Lincolnshire died on 4 May 2022 aged 87. He served as a Driver in the Royal Army Service Corps.

Jean Myrtle Davies of Poole, Dorset died on 30 April 2022 aged 84. She served as a Leading Wren in the Women's Royal Naval Service.

James Leslie Dawes of Seaford, East Sussex died on 19 May 2022 aged 84. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

Walter Cecil Henry Easter of Stoke-on-Trent died on 27 April 2022 aged 93. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Donald English of Jersey died on 1 May 2022 aged 102. He served as a Temporary Acting Petty Officer in the Fleet Air Arm.

Andrew Black Gallacher of Sanquhar, Dumfriesshire died on 20 May 2022 aged 91. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

Robert George Galloway of Braintree, Essex died on 26 May 2022 aged 92. He served as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

Raymond William Patrick Glading of Ipswich, Suffolk died on 29 May 2022 aged 87. He served as a Private in the Army Catering Corps.

Anthony Bernard Griffiths of Stratford-Upon-Avon, Warwickshire died on 26 April 2022 aged 96. He served as a Sergeant in the Royal Army Pay Corps.

Ronald Stuart Hall of Liphook, Hampshire died on 29 May 2022 aged 97. He served as a Sapper in the South Lancashire Regiment (The Prince Of Wales' Volunteers).

Ivan Redvers Harrison of Calne, Wiltshire died on 24 May 2022 aged 98. He served as an Electrician in the Royal Navy.



George Albert Holmes of Rye, East Sussex died on 14 April 2022 aged 92. He served as a Colour Sergeant in the Royal Marines.

Frederick Edward Jackson of Hull, East Riding Of Yorkshire died on 1 June 2022 aged 94. He served as a Private in the East Yorkshire Regiment (The Duke of York's Own).

Kenneth Jimpson of Dereham, Norfolk died on 19 May 2022 aged 98. He served as a Sergeant in the Royal Air Force.

Gordon Johnstone of Wareham, Dorset died on 17 May 2022 aged 88. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Engineers.

Peter Kingsford of Windsor, Berkshire died on 1 May 2022 aged 92. He served as a Signalman in the Royal Signals.

Herbert Edward Larter of Norwich, Norfolk died on 18 May 2022 aged 95. He served as a Cook in the Royal Navy.

John Hodgson Marrs of Cumbria died on 26 May 2022 aged 94. He served as an A.C. 1 in the Royal Air Force.

Noel Daniel McCarthy of Spalding, Lincolnshire died on 26 May 2022 aged 97. He served as a Flying Officer in the Royal Air Force.

Stanley Moon of Tonbridge, Kent died on 31 May 2022 aged 94. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

Mary Lillian Newby of Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan died on 17 April 2022 aged 94. She served as an Aircraftwoman in the Royal Air Force.

Kenneth Nelson of Liverpool died on 13 May 2022 aged 85. He served as a Warrant Officer in the Royal Air Force.

David Leslie Roddis of Cromer, Norfolk died on 16 May 2022 aged 100. He served as a Signalman in the Royal Navy.

Peter John Charles Rooke of Ipswich, Suffolk died on 22 May 2022 aged 91. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Signals.

David Rutherford of York died on 20 May 2022 aged 79. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

Hilda Gladys Smith of Thetford, Norfolk died on 29 May 2022 aged 98. She served in the Home Guard.

Ronald Bertram Smith of Altrincham, Cheshire died on 28 May 2022 aged 92. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Engineers.

Thelma Sumner of Newton-Le-Willows, Merseyside died on 20 May 2022 aged 99. She served as an Aircraftwoman in the Women's Royal Air Force.

Lewis William Trinder of Aldershot, Hampshire died on 24 May 2022 aged 97. He served as a Temporary Acting Petty Officer in the Royal Navy.

Roger John Western of Bristol died on 21 May 2022 aged 86. He served as an L.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

Anthony Michael John Creaghton White of Reading died on 31 May 2022 aged 86. He served as a Flying Officer in the Royal Air Force.

John Michael Wright of Grantham, Lincolnshire died on 21 May 2022 aged 90. He served as a Leading Stoker Mechanic in the Royal Navy.

Bertha Mary Wright of Saffron Walden, Essex died on 16 May 2022 aged 98. She served as a Wren in the Women's Royal Naval Service.

Family news

Birthdays

Alan Pyefinch who celebrates his 100th birthday on 24 July

Albert Wright who celebrates his 100th birthday on 27 July

Dilys Moy who celebrates her 101st birthday on 27 July

Eileen McCombe who celebrates her 100th birthday on 20 July

Frank Grosse who celebrates his 101st birthday on 27 July

Joan Lawrence who celebrates her 101st birthday on 28 July

Kenneth Farmer who celebrates his 101st birthday on 15 July

Madge Thornton who celebrates her 103rd birthday on 23 July

Norbert Marshall who celebrates his 101st birthday on 10 July

Robert Feltham who celebrates his 101st birthday on 14 July

Ruby Stubbs who celebrates her 103rd birthday on 5 July

Thomas Twort who celebrates his 102nd birthday on 10 July

William Davies who celebrates his 100th birthday on 1 August

William Morris who celebrates his 101st birthday on 19 July

Condolences

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

Margaret Strang who died on 1 May 2022. She was the wife of Malcolm Strang.

All birthday information was correct at the time of going to press



Caption: John visiting Dunkirk and Normandy to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the D-Day Landings in June 2019

The human toll

We share the third and final extract from 101-year-old Member, **John McOwan**, who wrote his memoir during the lockdown about his time in the Desert Rats, supported by his family and Blind Veterans UK volunteer, Frances Nixon

Starting with my first posting to the 7th Armoured Division in the summer of 1940 at Mersa Matruh, I was to spend the next two and a half years as a nomad travelling thousands of miles across the sandy wasteland, back and forth, advancing and retreating.

Over this time, so many brave young

soldiers from both sides fell. It never fails to bring a lump to my throat to think of how many now lie in shallow graves in that wilderness, many unmarked; some with just a helmet or a small stone to depict their passing.

There is now a graveyard in Mersa Matruh, which inspired a poignant →



Caption: John in corporal uniform

poem, author unknown, of which the first and last verses read:

*How often do you folks at home
Think of sand and graves without a stone
Where sleep our comrades brave and true
Out in the desert at Mersa Matruh...*

*Then forget them not ye folks at home
Those men who lie in the desert alone
They did for their country, Britain and you
In the western desert of Mersa Matruh.*

Our unfortunate tank crews fought bravely, but always at a disadvantage. Due to the positioning of the tank engine and ammunition, the Allied tanks were prone to exploding when hit. The “tankies” called this being “brewed up”. When the American

Sherman tanks arrived to replace the Crusader, they earned the nickname “Ronson” (a brand of cigarette lighter).

Tragically, many tank crews that survived an initial shell hit and were unable to bail out, suffered horrendous burns. It’s a sobering thought, when considering the fate of so many young lads on both sides of the conflict, how they experienced unimaginable suffering.

With the innocence of youth, I used to think being in a crew of an impenetrable tank as something “cool”. The fact is that, in battle, it was anything but. A tank crew usually had a complement of five: commander, driver, wireless operator, gunner, and loader. In the height of battle, it could literally stink of the overwhelming smell of burning diesel oil from the engine, compounded by the scorching desert heat leading to the inevitable odour of human sweat. Crammed together in this lurching monster, the loo was an empty shell case, while a steel helmet took any vomit. Not very “cool” at all!

On a brighter note, there was a real camaraderie among the crew members who had to live and sleep together in a closed bubble. Their group transcended rank as discipline and respect had to be earned and, in many cases, long-lasting friendships were formed.

I shall always carry in my mind’s eye the picture of the aftermath of a battle. The desolate wasteland strewn with the wreckage left by the carnage. Tanks, some with their metal tracks trailing in the sand; turrets blown off and often still occupied with the gruesome remains of crew members unable to bail out. Even more gruesome was the sight of body parts covered in flies and left for the sand to engulf. War is not a pretty sight.

Six days after the fall of Tunis and Bizerte, the last Axis resistances ended in North Africa with the surrender of 230,000 Germans who were taken



Caption: John with our volunteer, Frances, who typed up his notes

into captivity. By the end of the North African campaign nearly 400,000 Axis and Allied troops were lost, injured or died of disease.

I think it should be incumbent on those who have served in the forces - and on historians who have recorded their deeds - to underline the futility and horrors of wars: not to glorify them. While we should applaud courage and endurance and mourn the sacrifices of those who laid down their lives, we should always strive to demonstrate to future generations the sheer horror of battle and the misery that follows in their wake.

I shall always have a graphic memory of an empty helmet dangling by its chinstrap from the stock of the owner’s rifle. The bayonet imbedded in the rough sand-swept ground in one of the most inhospitable places on Earth. A last resting place in stark contrast to the well-tended War Graves cemetery I visited at Bayeux in Normandy on the 75th anniversary of the D-Day landings.

Those poor soldiers were probably about the same age as myself then. Soldiers in their early 20s who were denied the experience of a life, a marriage or a family. Soldiers who did not live to a ripe old age, or to celebrate their 100th birthday as was my privilege. 🇬🇧

Quiz time

Our quiz master, Member **Ron Russell**, tests your knowledge on popular music

1. **Who wrote Mull of Kintyre?**

2. **What was the name of Ed Sheeran's debut album?**
(a) Minus (b) Multiply (c) Plus

3. **Who was taught to yodel-oh-ee-dee?**
(a) Frank Ifield
(b) Amy Murray
(c) Tommy Steele

4. **According to the well-known song, which flower is "small and white, clean and bright"?**

5. **In Dublin's fair city what are the pretty girls selling?**
(a) lobsters
(b) cockles and mussels
(c) bird food

6. **Which singer has the most UK Number 1 singles ever?**

7. **What was the Beatles first Number 1 hit in the US?**

8. **Who did American singer Jim Reeves propose to before he went to war?**
(a) Mary (b) Maria (c) Marie

9. **Which global artist, born Anna Mae Bullock, is simply the best at 82?**

10. **Which music legend won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2016?**

Answers on page 2



Caption: The Beatles

HARALD KRICHEL / WIKIPEDIA CREATIVE COMMONS

AGENTURFOTOGRAFIN / ADOBE STOCK



Contact details

Correspondence address:

Blind Veterans UK, 126 Fairlie Road,
Slough SL1 4PY

Member Support Hub (MeSH):

01273 391 447

New Members: Anyone who may be eligible to join Blind Veterans UK, can phone our Membership Department on freephone **0800 389 7979**.

A different format?

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