

December 2015

# Review

Blind Veterans UK | St Dunstan's since 1915



**On the cover:** Chief Executive Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB leads a Service of Remembrance at the Bastion Memorial Wall at the NMA. Pictured Paul Jacobs GM, Major General Caplin, Rob Long and Chris Nowell.

**Back page:** At the Bastion Memorial Wall Anthony Cooper, Colin Williamson, Andy Allen, Steve Richards and Billy Drinkwater.



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**Contact:** Review Editor, Catherine Goodier 020 7616 8367  
Email: [revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk](mailto:revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk)

**Patron: Her Majesty the Queen.**

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**Contact telephone numbers.**

**The Brighton centre** 01273 307811.

**The Llandudno centre** 01492 868700.

**The Sheffield centre** 0114 2672550.

**The Booking Office:** To book accommodation please contact the Booking Office on 01273 391500. If you have care needs please first contact your Welfare Officer.

**ROVI on Duty:** If you need to speak with the ROVI on Duty please telephone: 01273 391447.

**IT Training Support:** If you need to speak with the IT Instructor on support please telephone: 01273 391432.

**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.

## Season's Greetings

All the staff and volunteers at Brighton, Llandudno, London and Sheffield, and working around the country, wish you, the members of the Blind Veterans UK family, a very Happy Christmas.

We trust you will enjoy good health and happiness during the coming year. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all.



# From the Chairman.

## Your message from Tim Davis.

The recent terrorist events in Paris and Mali, not to forget the weekly occurrence of similar tragedies across the Middle East and northern half of the African continent is unfortunately a sad reminder of the hatred that has risen up, and the inhuman lines individuals are prepared to cross in the name of their so called cause.

When I hear of these events through our media and learn about the perpetrators who have carried them out, I'm even more shocked to hear of the typical ages; men and women in their teens or early twenties. In some cases they may have grown up through a youth of hardship and personal struggles. Some also appear to have grown up through their school years, doing well and being perceived by others as caring and normal. I'm sure they were. But for some reason they have been influenced in such an extreme way, that they feel compelled to commit some of the most vile and evil acts I could imagine. Acts so horrific, I can only compare them to those I learned from history that took place in the medieval period and before. As a youth I understood the difference of ignorance and enlightenment between now and then, and contented myself that such acts would not be replicated in this modern age. How wrong could I have been?

It challenges us all to think about what role, and perhaps more important, what example we can set to positively influence others, irrespective of religion, background, or circumstance. Since becoming a Trustee eight years ago, I've seen the tremendous power of extended families (relatives, friends, volunteers, supporters and staff) across Blind Veterans UK. In many cases individuals helping others for no other reason other than they want to is a very positive human characteristic. Involvement I'm sure brings greater consciousness to think and help others, and fosters a stronger community amongst those we know.

Despite the average age of our members now increasing, our extended family is involving more and more youth and young adults. We are also using social media, digital technology and the internet to communicate and share experiences. It seems to me, engagement with youth and young adults,

adoption of new ways to interact, share and engage, and setting positive examples in every corner of our community is just one way that we can all contribute to building a stronger, more cohesive society.

I'm pleased to see very many examples of this pervade Blind Veterans UK, and it is this organisational model that I'm sure will only grow and characterise what we do in the future. Engaging across age groups, fostering a family ethos, and doing things to help others; I hope we can all think about and decide how we can take this further in the New Year.

Now as we approach Christmas, a time when most are with their families; Lyn, I and our family wish all of you a peaceful, restful and enjoyable holiday period.

Our very best wishes to you all.



**Picture:** From left to right Anthony Cooper, G Webb, President Ray Hazan OBE, Chairman Tim Davis, Chief Executive Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB, Rob Long, Simon Brown, Ron Freer, D Freer, Shaun Stocker and our great friend Brigadier Johnny Walker who marched with Shaun.

# From the President.

## Your message from Ray Hazan OBE.

What a very special year this has been. We look back on 100 years of restoring pride, confidence, self esteem and, above all, hope and the knowledge that there is life beyond sight loss to thousands of blind and vision impaired ex-Service men and women.

In our memories will be stored that unforgettable afternoon in the garden of Buckingham Palace; the sun shone down generously and a smiling Countess of Wessex cheered all with whom she talked. With dignity and pride we expressed our thanks in Westminster Abbey. Around the country, blue plaques will bear witness to our presence. These are just part of our celebrations.

Many people worked hard to make the year a success — and they succeeded, for which we give them our heartfelt thanks.

Roberta joins me in wishing everyone a very Happy Christmas and a healthy and fruitful New Year.



**Picture:** President Ray Hazan OBE addresses the group of blind veterans and their families at Sir Arthur Pearson's memorial. Jacqui Whiteley is featured.

# From the Chief Executive.

## Your message from Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB.

As I wrote my December message last year I did so with just two months under my belt with the charity. I have now been in post for some 14 months and have a much better feel for the charity, for its people and for the wonderful achievements of members, supporters, staff and volunteers alike.

This Centenary year has whistled past, and what a year it has been. There are obvious highlights including the Garden Party at Buckingham Palace and the Service of Thanksgiving at Westminster Abbey, and I am delighted that we have DVDs of each occasion available on the website to remind us of the very special nature of these events. I am also pleased that so many of our members and your spouses, family and friends have been able to partake in the Reunion lunches, each of which had an added centenary flavour. There are many fine memories of this most significant of years.

At the Service of Thanksgiving we were given a powerful reminder of the origins of the Charity by the extraordinary 'Gassed' sculpture placed at the Great West Door, which was loaned to us by the remarkable artist Joanna Domke-Guyot. The sculpture is based on photographs that John Singer-Sargent used as inspiration for his Gassed painting that hangs in the Imperial War Museum. The painting depicts blinded soldiers leading each other away from the trenches at the start of their new and challenging journey. To me this represents a powerful image of the tragedy of warfare, in this case gas warfare, and the important journey that lay ahead for each and every blinded man's journey. Supporting that journey is the defining purpose of this wonderful charity. Earlier in the summer I accompanied a few of our blind veterans to the battlefields at Ypres, and in particular to the memorial to the victims of the first gas attacks on 22nd April 1915. Joined by blind school children from St Vincent's School, Liverpool, this was a most moving occasion.

On another occasion I was very privileged to accompany some of our younger members to the National Memorial Arboretum. These were members who had served in Afghanistan, many of whom feature in interviews recorded in this Review, and this was their first opportunity to visit the Camp Bastion Memorial Wall and, most importantly, to see or feel the names of fallen comrades recorded there. In a quiet, solemn and reflective ceremony, we paid our respects collectively and each member spent time with their own thoughts

and prayers. The moment was featured by the BBC for the introduction to the Festival of Remembrance last month and provided the prelude to Paul Jacobs as he entered the Royal Albert Hall to give the Festival Citation. That was a hugely proud moment for Paul and for the Charity, and a fitting way to pay tribute to the work of the Charity over the last 100 years.

As Regiments have their Colours and Guidons, so we have our Standards and are indebted to our Standard Bearers who support our public acts of remembrance and commemoration. This month we mark the outstanding contribution and commitment of Nigel Whiteley in his role as a volunteer and National Standard Bearer for St Dunstan's and now Blind Veterans UK. With the tireless support of his wife Jacqui and his Standard Escort Eric Brotherton, Nigel has been a first class ambassador for the charity and has provided outstanding service for 14 years. As he hands over his responsibility, following the important events of the Cenotaph weekend, I offer him our heartfelt thanks for his unfailing support.

With Christmas approaching, Isobel and I would like send our very best wishes to you all, and to thank you for your friendship, good humour and spirit throughout the year. We will be returning with our children to our home on the Isle of Lewis for the Christmas break, and look forward to getting out and about again in the New Year. One hundred years down, and the next century begins. There is much to be done.



**Picture:** In Ypres memory of the Fallen Welfare Officer Jason Scott, Llandudno Centre Manager Steve Boswell, Chief Executive Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB, blind veteran Mike Johnson, Lee Evans Sports & Rec, Llandudno who organised the trip for Blind Veterans UK.



**Pictures:** Top Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB with Gassed sculptress Johanna Domke-Guyot. **Photo:** Keith Harness. Bottom: St. Julien Canadian Memorial in Ypres with blind veterans and St Vincent's School.

## Blind Veterans UK, The Rifles and Paul Jacobs GM take centre stage at The Royal British Legion's Festival of Remembrance.

This has been an important year as we celebrated our centenary and on Saturday 7th November Blind Veterans UK played a key role at The Royal British Legion's Festival of Remembrance.

Broadcaster Huw Edwards introduced Blind Veterans UK, mentioning that it was our centenary year, and linking it to John McCrae's In Flanders Fields, a poem that was written after the first gas attacks in Ypres in 1915. The Royal Albert Hall descended into darkness as a film showed Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB, Andy Allen, Anthony Cooper, Billy Drinkwater, Paul Jacobs GM, Rob Long, Colin Williamson and Steve Richards at the Bastion War Memorial.

This led into an interview with Paul Jacobs before he descended the stairs with his former Commanding Officer from The Rifles, Brigadier Rob Thomson CBE DSO, to march to the stage.

They marched to rapturous applause and a standing ovation. In the Royal Box HRH The Duke of Cambridge stood and applauded. Paul was to recite the Citation, one that he wrote himself, and Brigadier Thomson was the Torch Bearer. It was only the second time in our 100 year history that a representative of our charity had been honoured with a central role at The Royal British Legion's Festival of Remembrance. The first was in 1937 when Lord Fraser of Lonsdale recited Laurence Binyon's poem The Fallen.

As Brigadier Thomson raised the Torch of Remembrance Paul recited his Citation, as he finished he bowed his head, and, not realising that his microphone was live he said a quiet thank you that could be heard by all present, and by the millions who watched the Festival of Remembrance at home.

### The 2015 Royal British Legion's Festival of Remembrance Citation by Paul Jacobs GM.

At this Festival we raise the Torch of Remembrance for our brothers and sisters, who mortally wounded, laid aside their dying flame to pass into the great unknown.

It is a time to remember, and a time to mourn, as we stand here in recognition of their sacrifice and in support of today's veterans who survived war and conflict, their lives forever changed.

We stand in respect as a nation united in Remembrance for those who have Served our great country,  
And for our brothers and sisters who Serve today as they work for peace.

So shall the flaming Torch of Remembrance rise even higher  
Igniting a beacon that shall never be extinguished.



**Picture:** Citation reader Paul Jacobs GM and Torch Bearer Brigadier Rob Thomson CBE DSO The Rifles march towards the stage where Paul will recite the Citation at The Royal British Legion's Festival of Remembrance. **Credit:** The Royal British Legion/Alison Baskerville 2015.

## Thank you Nigel Whiteley, Blind Veterans UK Standard Bearer.

In his role as Standard Bearer Nigel Whiteley has been an Ambassador for Blind Veterans UK for the past 14 years as he has stood in silent dignity or marched on parade at Armed Forces events. Speaking of his role, Nigel said: "It has been a great honour to carry the Standard for Blind Veterans UK. It is a way to promote the work of Blind Veterans UK among the general populous and to show them what a blind man can achieve.

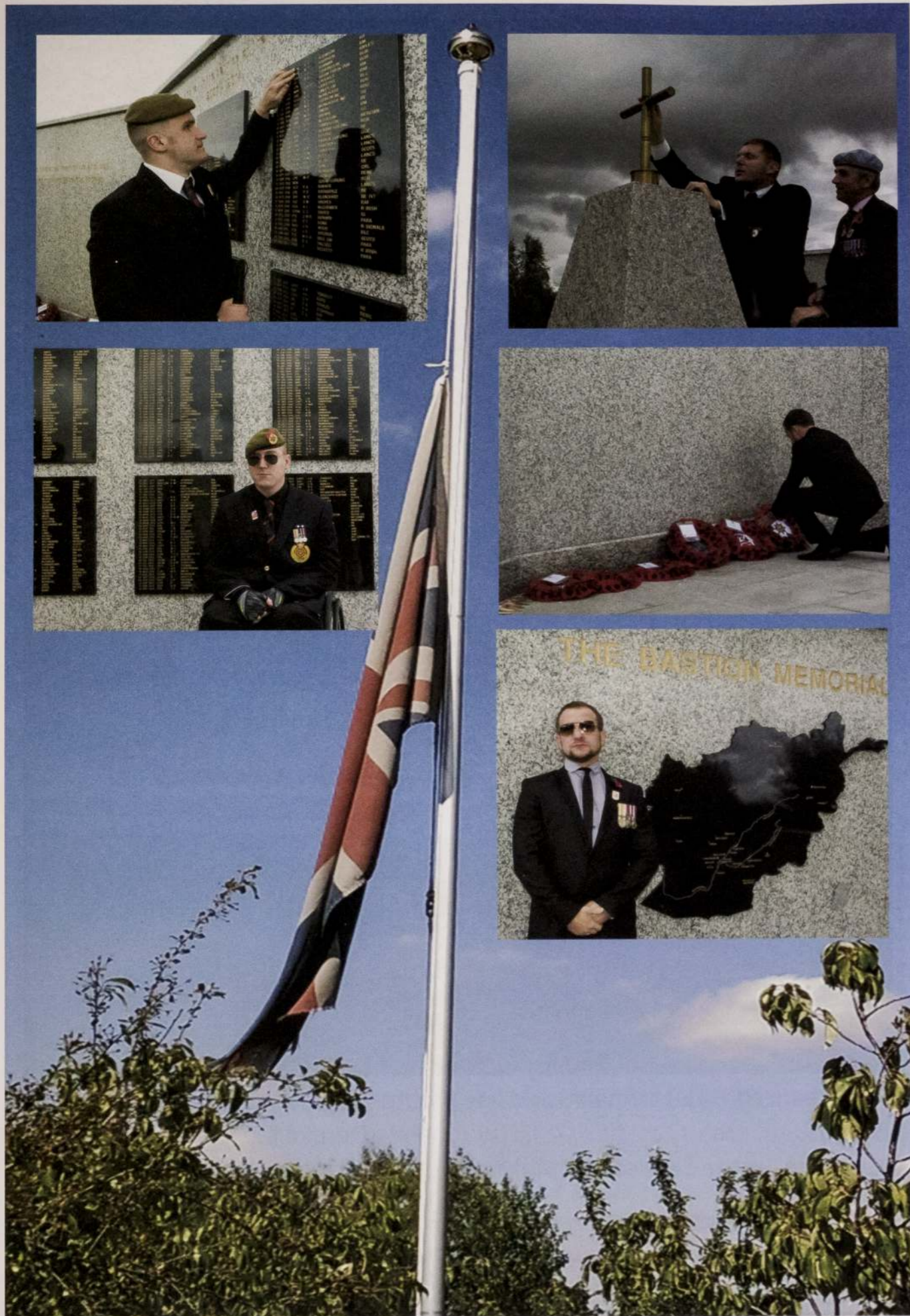
"It was at the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing at Ypres where I carried the Standard for the first time and Ray Hazan laid the wreath. It was a very emotional day and one I shall never forget. Through the work of the charity I have visited different WWI and WWII Commonwealth War Grave Cemeteries that included Thiepval, Tynecot, Dunkirk and Bayeux. The highlight was to act as Standard Bearer at our founder's Ceremony of Remembrance at Hampstead Cemetery. This year that was my final duty as Standard Bearer. Other highlights were the Plymouth, Chatham, Cardiff and Portsmouth Armed Forces Parades and at the Imperial War Museum.

"I would like to thank Eric Brotherton, as has been my escort for at least eight years and before Eric was Hank Norris, another ex-Fleet Air Arm Field Gunner. The person I would most like to thank is my wife Jacqui as I couldn't have done it without her."



**Pictures:** Left Nigel Whiteley and Eric Brotherton with fellow Standard Bearers and escorts as they stand by Johanna Domke-Guyot's Gassed sculptures at the Service of Thanksgiving at Westminster Abbey.

**Above:** Eric Brotherton and Nigel Whiteley stand beside Sir Arthur Pearson's Memorial in Hampstead Cemetery at the annual Ceremony of Remembrance.



## We Remember the Fallen. Afghanistan 2001 — 2015. By Paul Jacobs GM.

In this Remembrance edition of Review we focus on the withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan and on the Bastion Memorial Wall that holds the names of the 453 Service personnel who lost their lives during 14 years of combat operations in Afghanistan.

The Bastion Memorial Wall is more than names etched into granite. Each name represents a person who was special to those who knew them. They are not shadows standing at the memorial, they are flesh and blood, people who will never be forgotten, stories of their deeds to be recounted for many years, birthdays and anniversaries to be marked, their death to be mourned, and strength to be taken from their memory.

On 28th July 2015 I attended the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire with Andy Allen, Anthony Cooper, Billy Drinkwater, Rob Long and Chris Nowell where we conducted our own deeply personal Service of Remembrance. For each of us it was a time to remember and a time to mourn friends and comrades whose names are on the Memorial Wall.

We each placed our Regimental wreath in memory of the Fallen and afterwards spoke to one another of feeling the names of our friends and comrades, and how, in our mind's eye, we once again saw their smiles as we were transported back to Afghanistan.

The Service of Remembrance was led by Blind Veterans UK Chief Executive Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB and attended by Colin Williamson and Steve Richards who placed the wreaths for Blind Veterans UK.

In silence we stood under a bruised sky before the Memorial Wall as sunlight touched the Cross behind us. A Cross fashioned by hand from shell casings in the heat of Afghanistan. A field tribute made in memory and in respect for the Fallen. The soldier who created it aware that in the midst of life we are in death. After each person had placed their wreath, and held silent communion with their friends the skies opened and wept with force, as for some rain entwined with their tears.

On the following pages I speak with my fellow blind veterans, my brothers who were also blinded in Afghanistan. Full conversations are in the Talking Review.



## The Tattered Flag. By Wendy Darr.

People walking along Grange Road in the summer of 2009 may have noticed that the flag flying at my home at Pomeraye had become more and more tattered and ragged, the edges frayed and strips torn off in the wind. "Disgraceful!" they may have thought, but at the time they did not understand the story behind it.

This flag was raised in honour of Paul Jacobs, once a pupil of mine, who has, since leaving school, become a friend and unofficial son/grandson. In his short life he has overcome many hardships, a problematic childhood in foster care, and many difficulties during his school career which he survived by strength of character and personality. At eighteen he entered the Army and completed his training with honours, before being sent to Northern Ireland and then Afghanistan with 2nd Battalion The Rifles. I swore that our flag would not be lowered until Paul returned. It was a symbol of our love and faith to keep him safe.

The 2nd Rifles suffered many losses over those months, but Paul rang regularly to say he was still safe, though suffering in many other ways, mentally and emotionally. He said "You come out here a boy but soon become a man. This is a terrible place and changes all of us." He was just twenty years old and his job was to lead his group sweeping for IEDs, while the man behind him watched for snipers. They were both in constant danger. I looked at the flag every day and sent my love and prayers.

On August 20th the flag ripped and a large strip tore but remained attached, just, in spite of strong winds. A few days later I received the dreaded phone call to say he had been blown up by an IED. The man behind him was killed, as were another four of his men. What the papers did not say was that another five had been seriously wounded, including Paul on August 20th 2009.

Paul had turned to see what had happened and went to try to help his comrades but quickly realised there was nothing he could do. His Sergeant had been blown to pieces and as he turned he had taken shrapnel to the whole right side of his body, to his face, head and eyes. Paul was rushed to the military hospital at Camp Bastion where they did what they could, but his eyes were badly damaged, shrapnel having gone into his head and brain through

his right eye. He was taken to Selly Oak hospital in Birmingham where his right eye was removed and they waited to see what could be done for his left eye.

At this point the shred tore off the flag and another tore but remained attached and became twisted around the ropes and pole. The tattered flag kept flying as we prayed for him, until Paul had recovered enough to come and replace the old flag for a new one, which I had purchased as a sign of our faith in him.

On January 2nd 2010 Paul came and took down the old flag and raised the new one, for which we all said our grateful thanks. He was unable to see it as he has no sight in either eye, but he kept us laughing with his usual antics and spirit.

He has learnt to cope with life as a blind man as independently as he can. His sense of humour is an inspiration to us all. In the meantime the new flag flies proudly over Pomeraye sending him our love and hope for his future — a life changed at 20 years of age beyond belief, but at least a life. As he says, so many of his mates and brothers as he calls them, were not so lucky. We are the lucky ones to know and love this special young man.

Paul was awarded the George Cross for his bravery in the incident where he was so severely injured. Having been blown into a daisy chain of IEDs, he insisted on crawling to an area he knew he had cleared, before allowing medics to rescue him and deal with his injuries. For putting the lives of his comrades before his own safety he was awarded this medal, making him the lowest ranking, and only, member of the Rifles to be given it. He was pictured in all national newspapers, where he was quoted as saying he would have given it all up if he could have saved the other five members of his platoon who were killed that day. They were his mates and all volunteers on that patrol. Today the flag still flies above Pomeraye.

**Picture on page 14:** The Tattered Flag pictured is not the flag that flies above Pomeraye. It is the flag at the Bastion Memorial Wall at the National Memorial Arboretum in Lichfield. The photograph was taken by Margaret Mervis at the dedication of the Bastion Memorial Wall. The name of her son, Lieutenant Paul Mervis 2nd Battalion The Rifles, is engraved onto the Memorial as he was killed on the morning of 12th June 2009 near Sangin, northern Helmand Province. He was Paul Jacobs's Commanding Officer.

# Rob Long.

**Rob Long:** Visiting the Bastion Memorial Wall was a really interesting experience. Being able to feel that was quite a moment for me. Feeling Bombardier Sam Robinson's name there, my friend who died in the same IED incident that I was injured in was humbling and I was reminded that it could easily have been my name etched into that same spot.

**Paul Jacobs:** Totally got that same feeling. Totally.

**RL:** That was a moment for me where I didn't realise how it would affect me but it took my breath away. I don't know what it was like for you but seeing so many names and feeling them etched into the memorial wall was intensely emotional.

**PJ:** It's like you say with Bombardier Sam Robinson, it was the same for me with Sergeant Paul McAleese, Private Jonathan Young and Joe and William as soon as I touched their names it was all real again. I think when you're blind you have a mind's eye, so us blind people we see things without actually seeing them. I touched their names, a shock went through me and I was transported there for that split second and I could see their smiles in my head.

**RL:** Yes I agree. We're both totally blind and that does happen. I suppose for anyone who was there between 2007 and 2011 the whole campaign was awful at that time. We were getting reports every week of casualties and people being killed and then going through the names and seeing the dates it was an emotional experience.

**PJ:** As much as it was tactile I don't know what it was like for you as I wanted to cry but I couldn't cry. And I know that a couple of our brothers did cry.

**RL:** For me it was just that I could be up on that wall, and secondary to that was look at what this has cost, young British guys and women who have lost their lives and what a waste, what a waste of lives, what a waste of talent and what a waste of dreams. Obviously personally I believe in the war in Afghanistan and it is the whole thing about war, someone has to go over there, someone had to do it and people are injured and killed.

**PJ:** But then it comes down to was it war or was it a campaign? What we were on was a campaign.

**RL:** Yes it was unconventional warfare. At the end of the day it wasn't war, but it's what the modern world has to deal with and we were the guys who signed on the line to take the risk and go over there, and we took the risk of being up on that wall when we pledged our Oath to the Queen.

**PJ:** This is why we can never ever forget how much they gave: They gave their today for our tomorrow. I think there has been a shift with the British public and in the charity sector with people becoming a lot kinder over the last decade in regards to wounded personnel, be it physical or mental. They're coming to realise that once these soldiers get out perhaps 10, 20 even 30 years afterwards, perhaps even people who fought in the Falklands campaign that they are still experiencing trauma, perhaps they are still having nightmares and they can't sleep. They might not have wounds like we have but they might be mentally scarred, which I believe you are, I know that I definitely am. I do think the British charity sector is doing a heck of a lot. We're blessed that we've got this fantastic charity, Blind Veterans UK that has stood over time for 100 years.

**RL:** I'm really happy with the support sector for British troops who are physically and mentally injured, people who have been willing to sacrifice themselves and have ended up in an unfortunate situation.

**PJ:** I think it brings communities closer if you have a wounded bloke at the bottom of your street. What's your local community like?

**RL:** I can get around my local community and people are friendly. They always say hi in the street and the dogs a bit of an attention magnet, he's a big old dog and you do get a lot of attention if people know you're a veteran.

**PJ:** But in one way you have to be careful, which I think we all learnt in Britain the hard way with, may his soul rest in peace, Lee Rigby and his murder in Woolwich.

**RL:** That happened two roads from me as I was on the bus in front when he was murdered.

One of the things about meeting up with guys who were injured the same as you and have been through a very similar thing to you, is the great camaraderie we share. It's great amongst blind veterans, it's the same as in the Army where you're stuck with these people and we're all very, very different, but we all bring

something to the table and there's a great link between us. I always feel that bond whenever we meet up with blind veterans.

**PJ:** It's like walking back into the Barracks again isn't it, but this time without, sight and it's just like 'Hello Robbie, hello Bill, hello Kenny'. It's like time has stood still.

**RL:** I remember when I first walked through the doors of the Brighton centre. I'd been injured for a few months then and I couldn't go to the Barracks as I was living in London and my Regiment was up North. So I was still contracted to the Army, but I'd been in Civvie Street since being injured where I'd spent six months in limbo. My civvie mates couldn't relate to me and my Army mates, they're still serving, the Afghan campaign's still going on, they're still going out there on tours. I didn't want to see them because they're living my life, they're still doing the life that I wanted to be living.

It was tough living in this limbo and I remember walking through the doors of the Brighton centre and Martin Shail came up to me, shook my hand, and he'd obviously done his research as he knew exactly who I was. He took me round, showed me the building and then we went into the training flat that I would live in and it was that feeling of Phase I training again where you're round a bunch of Army lads. You're there to learn something, you're there to do something and you're blind but people aren't going to feel sorry for you there, or take pity on you, their role is to give you something and you can take it, or you can choose not to. And his warmth and his ability if you bumped into or fell over anything, his ability to take the mickey out of you was awesome, as he didn't hesitate to do that good Army banter. Anyway he showed me round the building and at the end I sat down and the partner I was with at the time she had moved the coffee table. Martin went to walk out of the room, tripped over the coffee table and that's when I realised that he was blind as well.

And at that point, that's the point for me when I thought — wow he's done all this, he's walked round so naturally. I didn't know that he was blind, the partner I was with she didn't know he was blind. There's hope — I can become a ninja — you can get round. It's not the fact I want to hide that I'm blind. It's more that you can become non-disabled, you can't let this disability consume who you are. I think over these last five years I have achieved that, where I don't feel when I walk into a room that I'm the blind guy anymore, I'm just a guy.

## Chris Nowell.

**Paul Jacobs:** Good to see you. I'm just going to touch on your military career mate. When did you join and who did you join?

**Chris Nowell:** I joined the Army in 2001, the King's Royal Hussars. My first day in the Army was the day before 9/11. Not to sound too corny it was then I had to get to Afghan one day. I went to Northern Ireland first and did six months there. Then went and played around Iraq for five months and then Afghan where I lasted three weeks.

**PJ:** Can you touch a bit on the incident and where you were in Afghanistan.

**CN:** To be honest it was a bit of a lame one. We had a few incidents that were much more lively, but on that morning it was a normal day, woke up, did a bit of exercise, waited for something to kick off but it didn't. Ended up waiting for a heli to arrive with some mail and any food supplies. The helicopter landed and we got our letters and stuff. I got a letter, went into the tent and as one of the other lads hadn't received any mail for three weeks I gave him one of my letters and we were having a laugh about that. The last thing I remember was that we were chatting and someone fired an RPG, or as Billy Drinkwater thinks, a Chinese rocket as he was there as well in FOB Inkerman, although we didn't know each other at the time. The rocket hit the wall behind me, fractured my skull and that was the end of that and now I'm here with Blind Veterans UK.

**PJ:** What year were you hit?

**CN:** 2007.

**PJ:** So you ended up in Selly Oak.

**CN:** I did, I went there first for a week I believe.

**PJ:** I expect you were more neuro.

**CN:** Yes I was in the Queen Elizabeth for the rest of the time. I think it was at Selly Oak that they opened my head and took all of the rubbish out and left me with half of my head open for the year and I was in Queen Elizabeth after that. It was pretty awkward. My memory was so ridiculous, forgetting every day, I didn't really know where I was.

**PJ:** Very frustrating.

**CN:** Not really as I didn't have a clue what was going on. If you imagine that you don't know who you are you can't really get frustrated as you don't know what's going on.

**PJ:** I think you're amazing for all you've achieved in the eight years since you were injured.

**CN:** It happened on 28th September so I've just marked the anniversary.

**PJ:** I think you're an inspiration I really do mate. You've got Claire, your beautiful wife and three beautiful kids and you're doing your photography. Just out of interest did you have a death bed or wounded bed objective?

**CN:** There was nothing in hospital as I was so out of it that it didn't happen until later on. I remember Julie Shales from Blind Veterans UK coming to the house and she said that the charity could help me. I went to the Sheffield centre a few times and I remember talking to Dave Hickey who was an IT Instructor there.

It was Dave who gave me a camera as he was into photography. He told me to take the camera home, have a play around with it and that helped me a lot. Firstly it was something to do. I was shocking at the beginning the photos were really bad as a simple task of taking a photo was hard work.

**PJ:** How much sight have you got Chris?

**CN:** I lost my right eye and the peripheral vision in my left so right in the middle of my left eye is very good. I'm quite lucky.

**PJ:** What is it that you want to achieve now?

**CN:** There are a few corny achievements that I want. There's a famous photographer called Stephen McCurry, you might not know his name but you'll know the photo of the little Afghan girl. It's a photo that he took in Afghan over 20 years ago of a little girl with really green eyes and her face just looks evil, she doesn't want him there. It was when Russia were in Afghanistan. He was walking around, he saw this little girl who was wearing her scarf over her head, she looked round at him, she gave him a horrible evil look and he captured it perfectly. And that's his most famous photo. He found her again, he tracked her down and he photographed her and found out her name and what her life had

been like. I don't want to be famous as such but I'd like to be known for a photo.

**PJ:** You and I were both there at the Bastion Memorial Wall. What was it like being there?

**CN:** You'll laugh but I felt that I shouldn't be there. Colin [Williamson] asked me what I meant by that and I told him that I just woke up, I was only in Afghan for three weeks, admittedly to civvies my injury sounds bad but it wasn't anything. The days before when RPGs were bouncing off the Mastiffs and I I got four mine strikes in three weeks that was much worse, the injury itself was just weak, it was nothing. Well not weak it was just a rubbish event. I was at the Bastion Memorial Wall and there's Coops with his injuries and he's saying 'We lost a lot of guys here' and then you obviously did too, but we didn't lose anyone in Afghan. At the time we were the only Regiment to bring everyone back alive. I didn't say anything on the day and I think people thought it was affecting me psychologically, but it wasn't, I just felt that I shouldn't be there.

**PJ:** I felt you were a bit off key.

**CN:** You can tell. I didn't know what to say. I just felt that I shouldn't be there. That I didn't have any right to be there.

**PJ:** You paid your dues mate, you were there [Afghan] and everything you'd done before, it doesn't matter. But we all have our own opinions and how we feel about the situation. I still don't believe that I should be here at all. How is it that with the injuries I sustained I'm still here? Two blokes were killed outright and shrapnel smashed me in the brain and all the blood I lost, I just don't understand how I'm here.

**CN:** It's stubbornness. That's what Claire says about me. She told me about an actress who was skiing and she hit her head and died — that was the same time I was injured and there were people saying to me in hospital that they didn't know how I'd survived. It's probably just stubbornness.

**PJ:** What are your happier memories of Afghan? I'll tell you a nice image that stays in my head more than any other. We did a patrol out of Kajaki and we got to the outer borders where it goes into the desert and we took a knee to have a cigarette as it was mid-morning so there's no point trying to hide as the enemy can still see you. The next thing we felt this rumbling in the floor and these tanks came past and it was absolutely beautiful, it was a proper convoy with the Union Flag fluttering. We hadn't seen anyone for weeks and we

were waving like crazy, we could see them and they could see us, horns were tooting away and it was just a surreal moment, it was brilliant. Even the Serg was waving. It was a nice moment that I can still picture. There were mountains in one corner in the left and then the desert dunes and behind you was FOB Gibraltar and it was just perfect. This might sound crazy but I thought of the Second World War guys and how it must have felt like that as they watched a convoy come by. I still remember that today it was a convoy of about 20 plus vehicles.

**CN:** I actually don't think it's a bad country. If there weren't the bad there guy it would be a nice place for backpackers and photographers because there's some amazing mountains.

**PJ:** It's stunning and I'll you what is stunning as well are the firefights at night because you get the different tracers and you've got the stars glittering, it's pitch black and then you just get these red and green tracers glowing like light savers, they just glow and it's brilliant to watch. I don't know about you Chris but when you're lying on the bunk outside in the evening smoking a fag or having a cup of tea after a long stag you look up and it just captures you doesn't it.

**CN:** We had a nice moment when we were making our way from Bastion up north on the Mastiffs. On the first night we stayed in the Mastiffs and made a harbour routine and stayed in the desert. I saw the stars that night and in the morning, you obviously can't walk far because of mines and stuff and I was talking to one of the EOD guys, a mine specialist, and it was his last week in Afghan and in the Army. When we got to FOB Inkerman someone was going to pick him up and take him, and that was it he was out of the Army, he'd done 22 years. He was really worried, he was like 'You know if I die this week'. We were sitting chatting and I told him he'd be alright and as we were talking a little desert rat came up and he wasn't bothered about us at all. Me and Claire have spoken about this, and I don't necessarily believe in fate, but I'll explain.

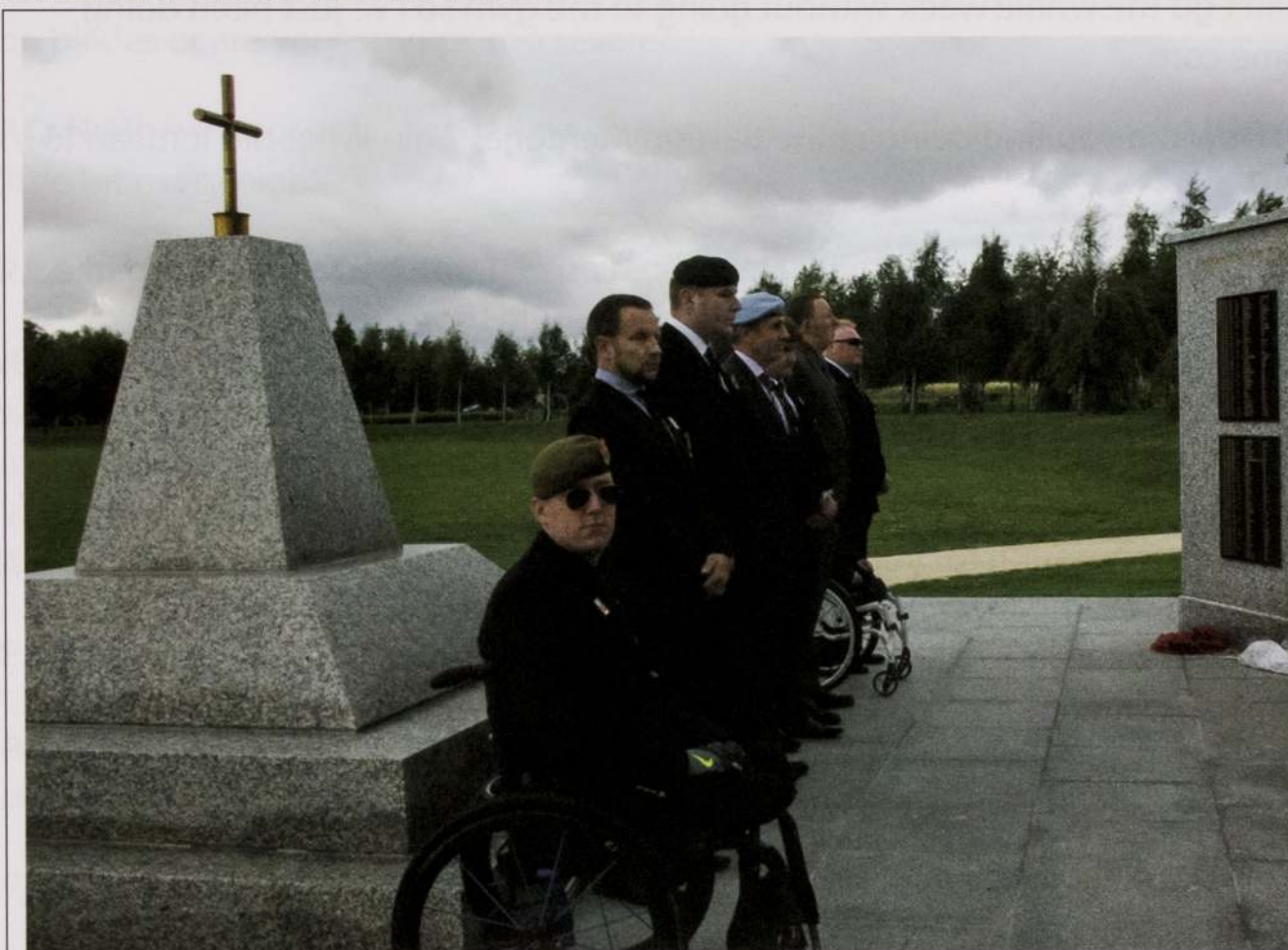
So this little desert rat's bouncing around and he's right in front of us and he's like, this is nice. We're both watching and he said 'Watch this desert rat. This is the sign that I'm going to die. This is it.' And I said no, you'll be alright. The desert rat wasn't going anywhere it was just bouncing around. And he ended up trying to kick this rat, but the rat wasn't having any of it and he kept avoiding him. And I said he should take it as a sign that he wasn't going to die because

he couldn't kick the rat. I said if he kicked the rat he'd die. He goes 'Alright I'll try one more time.' He didn't kick it and the rat went off and he said 'Well maybe I'm not going to die.'

So anyway we get back in the Mastiffs, go on this drive and then that's when we had our first minestrike. Twenty minutes later he's sat on the back of our Mastiff and I was on top with a 50 cal and he started to laugh and said 'I've got to sort this out now.' He had a new guy who was on his first tour and it was his last so he was teaching him. Thankfully we had only lost one of our wheels and I remember he said 'I've survived because I didn't kick that rat.'

**PJ:** Thank you for today Chris it's been great to catchup with you.

**CN:** To not sound too corny this is quite nice for me. I'm not going to say that Blind Veterans UK has saved my life but it's helped a lot, there's endless amounts of help and without them I would be a different person, but it's the conversations like this that I miss.



**Picture:** Anthony 'Coops' Cooper, Billy Drinkwater, Paul Jacobs GM, Major General Nick Caplin CB, Rob Long, Andy Allen, Chris Nowell and Colin Williamson at the Bastion memorial Wall with the Cross behind them.

# Anthony Cooper.

**Paul Jacobs:** Good to see you Coops. How long have you been here at the Llandudno centre?

**Anthony Cooper:** Just a week.

**PJ:** What have you been doing?

**AC:** It's my induction course.

**PJ:** How have you found it?

**AC:** It's awesome. I get on with all the staff and I've learnt a lot.

**PJ:** So what have they had you doing?

**AC:** I've done Arts & Crafts, ROVI training and I've just come out of the gym. I can't go the whole week without going to the gym so I've just been doing some core.

**PJ:** How did you find being at the Bastion Memorial Wall? What did it mean to you?

**AC:** It meant a lot because my mates who died — I watched a lot of them die, their names were on the wall. If I could cry I would have cried.

**PJ:** Sometimes it's hard to cry though.

**AC:** It is.

**PJ:** Here's a question for you Coops. Did you have a sickbed wish for your future? For example when Craig Lundberg visited me he said there was a lot I could achieve and not to worry about blindness. He said he'd climbed Kilimanjaro and run the London Marathon and I thought I want to do that, and I did, within 10 months of coming out of hospital I'd climbed Kilimanjaro. When you were lying in your sickbed what did you think?

**AC:** It was in Headley Court. I just woke up one morning and I just went mental. A nurse had to come in to try to calm me down. She was like what's up? I said well my life's ruined. She asked me why. I told her I've got no legs, I'm missing fingers, missing an eye, I've got such a severe head injury and I'm blind. And she said oh are you actually blind and I said yeah. She said what do you mean? Well

my vision has deteriorated massively. I knew that people were getting blown up. I'd heard of missing limbs, but I'd never heard of sight loss. Ever.

The Blind Veterans UK person kept coming to see me in Headley Court and I thought that was brilliant. I think I saw the Blind Veterans UK person as much as I saw my mother.

**PJ:** That's good. And did that help you decide what you wanted to achieve?

**AC:** Well before injury I wanted to run the London Marathon because I was massive on my running. But then I woke up and thought — I'm never, ever going to be able to do that. I didn't know about blades and stuff. But then I started my own business, which is property management. I'm now power lifting and have been told that I've got perfect form, so if I keep at it for a good few years I could be in at Paralympic level.

**PJ:** Brilliant. That would be brilliant to see you in the Paralympics. Can you get on blades or are your stumps too severe?

**AC:** No they're not actually too bad. I've been doing a little bit of walking here, a little bit every night.

**PJ:** Can you touch a bit on your career in the military?

**AC:** I joined the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment in 2003 and I was asked if I wanted to go in the 1st or 2nd Battalion. They said the 1st Battalion was going to Iraq so I joined the 1st Battalion. We were based in Germany. Then went to Iraq, came back, the whole Battalion then moved to Catterick and then went to Afghanistan and that's where my injuries happened.

**PJ:** You had a good career though. What year were you hit?

**AC:** 2010. I was actually on patrol moving from Nadi Ali to Lashkar Gah. I was blown up en route.

**PJ:** But you're here to tell the tale now.

**AC:** Exactly. I can now put two fingers up at 'em. Well, I can't really I've not got two fingers, but, hypothetically.



## The Great Silence. Blind Veterans UK's Centenary Parade to the Cenotaph.

'Stick to your guns; hang on to your defences, repulse this spiritual foe when he attacks you with gloom and misgivings; attack him with persistent courage and cheerful determination, and 'down him' as you and those who fought with you 'downed' the physical foe whom you have vanquished. Remember that we St Dunstaners are setting a great example to the whole world of the blind. Carry our banner high, and show the people who can see that a blind man can be a normal citizen in practically every sense of the term.'

Those words were written by our founder Sir Arthur Pearson, Bt, GBE in the November 1918 Review and this year, in our centenary year, the Blind Veterans UK contingent at the Cenotaph showed the world that those words ring true as once again blind veterans and their guides set a great example to the world.

Old friends met up again during the Remembrance weekend and conversations were continued as though 12 months had not elapsed. Kelly Ganfield (née Hart) attended the Cenotaph for the first time, and as she stood on Whitehall during the great silence she thought of the late Colwyn Lloyd, one of the first blind veterans she met when she became a member of our charity in 2005.



**Picture:** Kelly Ganfield with N Russel Stevens and Terence Kettle.



**Picture:** Ken Godfrey with our great friend and Vice Patron General Sir Peter de la Billière KCB, KBE, DSO, MC & Bar. **Right:** Simon Brown and Steve Ferries.



**Picture above left:** Mark Lucitt, Dave Weimarck and Bill Goddon. **Picture above right:** Derek Stead.



**Pictures:** Above Luke Harris, Billy Drinkwater, Craig Webb and Ken Facal. **Above right:** Bill Braund, Kevin Rixon, I Sheriff and Pauline Cole



**Pictures:** Left Martin Bailey with Joseph Wilson. **Centre:** Charles Miller with Ed De La Billière. **Right:** Joe Richardson.



**Picture:** Israel Singer, Dave Kempson and Tony Harbour. **Picture:** Above right Derek Everall, Georgina Hardy and Donald Hurst.



**Picture:** Above left Dave Stretton, Steve Nixon, Roger Hammond, Keith Harness and Louise Collins. **Right:** Maria Pikulski, Charles Hanaway Richard Hughes.





**Picture:** For the first time guide dogs were allowed on parade. Trustee and blind veteran Kerry Levins is shown far right with guide dog Pedro.



**Picture:** Former WREN Pamela Woodford.



**Picture:** Left Niki Kokonas and Janet Heyes. **Right:** Brigadier Johnny Walker, D Rreer and Ron Freer.



**Pictures:** Left Joy Folkard and above Mark Sutton.



**Picture:** Eyes right as the Blind Veterans UK contingent march past the saluting base and return to Horse Guards Parade. **Photos:** Phil Meech.

## **A Special Toast to a Special Lady. By Bobby Dalby.**

She is a lady who deserves the very best.  
She works so hard, she rarely gets a rest.

It is her 90th year, as we are all aware,  
Long may she be among us, so say a prayer.  
We thank God for her duty, long may she reign;  
And in our eyes her star will never wane.

2015 was our special year, this she may recall;  
As our brave blind veteran Paul Jacobs spoke so well for us at the Albert Hall.  
Gassed and blinded soldiers, 1915 was our start,  
Our work goes on, the memories;  
And for today, we give our heart.

Our Patron, a very great lady, she has always been.  
So raise your glasses now for Elizabeth our Queen.

We would like to thank Bobby Dalby, a volunteer at the Brighton centre for this poem that was inspired by The Royal British Legion's Festival of Remembrance.

## **Lest We Forget. By Catherine Goodier.**

We have seen the haunting images of soldiers blinded by gas attack in the First World War. Exhausted, they walk in single file, their eyes bandaged, their heads lowered, their outstretched arm placed on the shoulder of the blinded man in front. It is believed that those men, immortalised by the artist John Singer Sargent in *Gassed*, were walking to the Essex Farm Advanced Dressing Station in the Ypres Salient of the Western Front in Belgium. Some of them never recovered their sight and they of course became the early members of Blind Veterans UK.

From 6th October, I was fortunate to be included in a group to tour the former Ypres Salient, to visit what was described as the most terrible and glorious of the great battlefields of the First World War. The setting for the first gas attacks. Blind Veterans UK were represented by members Bill Turner, Billy Aspinall, Don Mulryan, George Connelly and Mike Johnson. Staff were represented by Chief Executive Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB who was joined by Isobel Caplin who read inscriptions to blind veterans at each memorial site we stopped at. Llandudno Centre Manager Steve Boswell and Llandudno Sports & Rec Instructor Lee Evans organised Blind Veterans UK attendance and Zarina Casey, Group Manager PR & Marketing, sent reports via Twitter.

Today's veterans walked in the footsteps of their First World War blinded veterans. It was hard to imagine that an area of such peace could once have been the scene of so much death and destruction. The grass we walked upon was once the poisoned ground of Flanders, where thousands drowned in its pools of mud, their bodies never found. Those who fought there would not have seen grass, only the blackened stumps of trees in a ground littered with the debris of war.

We joined students and teachers from St Vincent's, a school for blind children in Liverpool. For Principle Dr John Patterson the tour was important for two reasons. The first was for the students to visit the Memorials and the sites of former battles to pay respect and learn of the history of the First World War. The second was as part of Prevent, a strategy aimed at stop more people becoming drawn towards violent extremism.

The tour of the former Salient inspired blind veteran Billy Aspinall to write the poem on the following page.

## Inspired by the Battlefield tour of Ypres.

Where do I lay mam, where do I lay  
In a muddy field in some foreign land  
Never to go home again  
Where do I lay mam, where do I lay.

Over by Christmas they said  
When we cried and got no reply  
Where do I lay mam, where do I lay.

Another year has begun  
And I pray it's not my last  
Where do I lay mam, where do I lay.

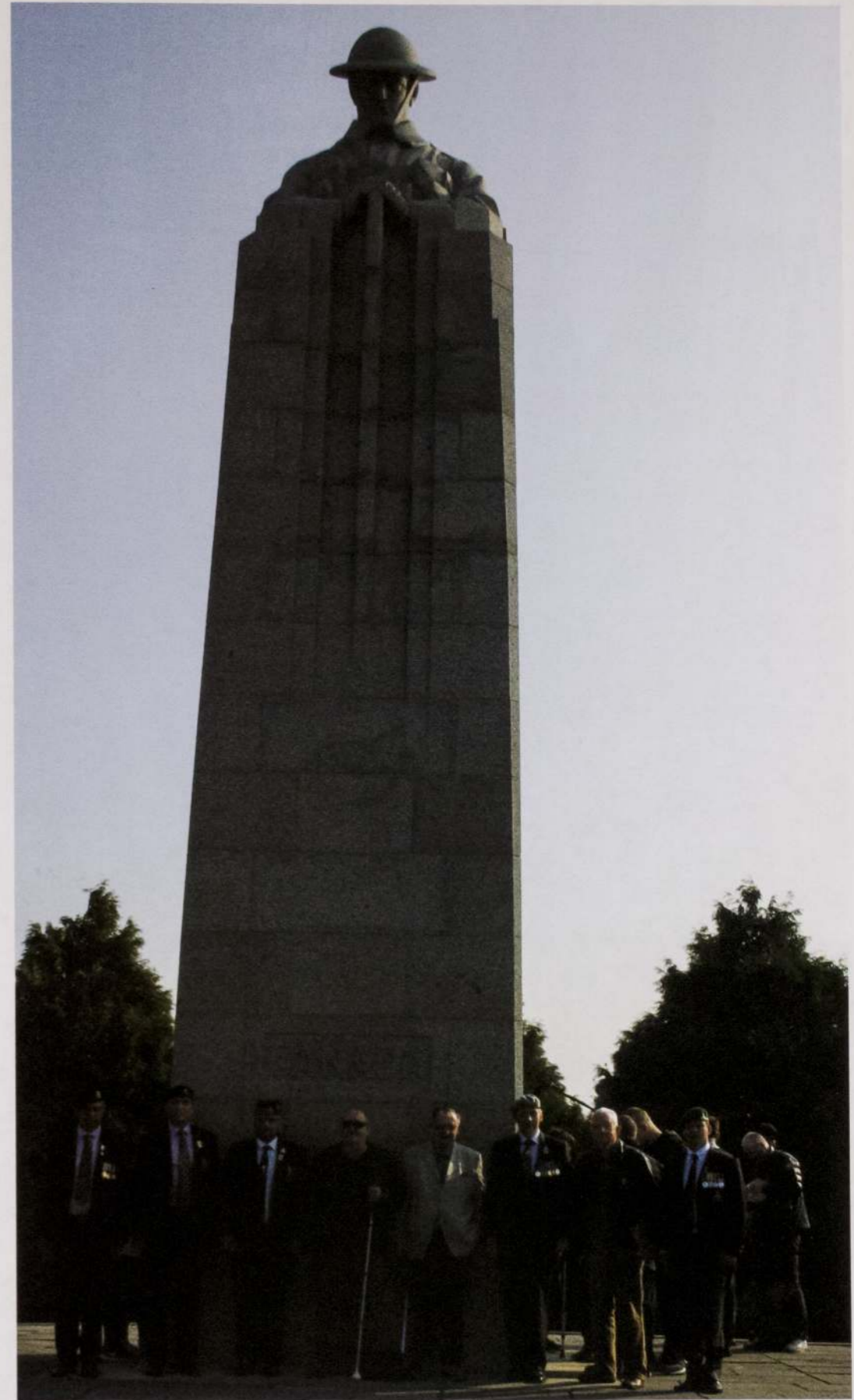
I died today mam  
Breathing in gas and as I lay dying in No Man's Land  
I remembered my pals who came with me from home  
Where do I lay mam, where do I lay.

In 100 years when young and old come to see where we fell  
Remember me in this muddy field in a foreign land  
Where the red poppies dance  
Where do I lay mam, where do I lay

Written by Billy Aspinall, Ex Kings Regiment. A blind veteran.



**Picture:** A pupil from St Vincent's School, Liverpool reads John McCrae's In Flanders Fields from Braille as Headmaster Dr John Patterson looks on.



**Picture:** At St Julien Canadian Memorial, Ypres, Belgium.



## Our Centenary Service of Thanksgiving at Westminster Abbey.

As they stopped to touch the life size sculptures of soldiers blinded in the first gas attacks in Ypres, today's blind veterans merged with their predecessors, the First World War blinded veterans who set the example that they follow today.



**Picture:** The Gassed sculptures created by Johanna Domke-Guyot.

It was 6th October 2015, the day of our Centenary Service of Thanksgiving at Westminster Abbey.



Passing through the Great West Door to find their seat in this ancient place of worship they walked as the organist played, among other works, Lamento Op 7 no 2 by Augustin Barié who was himself blind.



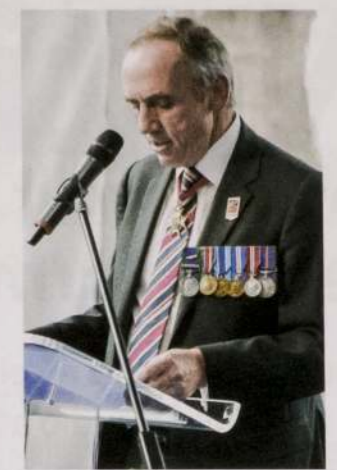
**Picture:** The Choir singing in the Nave.



The Very Reverend Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster, said The Bidding before the haunting strains of a violin permeated through every part of the Abbey. Broadcaster David Dimbleby spoke before a collage of audio recordings of blind veterans speaking were played. They included recordings of Lord Fraser of Lonsdale and Gwen Obern who was blinded during the Second World War, Ray Hazan OBE, Jamie Cuthbertson and Billy Baxter, Rehabilitation Training Liaison Officer at the Llandudno centre delivered a faultless recital of Psalm 145: 1–16.



Ahead of the Service Actor Barbara Windsor MBE, who read Romans 8: 31, thrilled everyone as she spent time chatting in The Nave with as many people as possible. She recited Romans 8: 31 before everyone stood to sing I Vow To Thee My Country and then the Address by The Dean.



**Picture:** Billy Baxter recited Psalm 145: 1–16. **Picture:** The Chairman Tim Davis said a bidding prayer. **Picture:** Chief Executive Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB addressed everyone. **Photos:** Keith Harness.



**Picture:** The beautiful soprano voice of Gwawr Edwards reached everyone in Westminster abbey as she sang Pie Jesu Domine, by Gabriel Fauré from Requiem in D minor Op 48

Everyone stood to sing Jerusalem and remained seated as The Dean pronounced the Blessing and then sang The National Anthem.

Following the Service of Thanksgiving the bells of Westminster Abbey rang in joyous celebration as everyone headed to the College Garden to enjoy lunch. It was a fun occasion as sandwiches and cakes were eaten from very special Blind Veterans UK picnic boxes that have become something of a collector's piece.

The Service of Thanksgiving was made possible as a result of the hard work of a number of people who included Chief Executive Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB, Project Manager Hilary Fox and Abby Tarrant, Director of Finance and IS Ian Whitehead, Transport Manager Chris Kirk and the many drivers and volunteers on the day.

# Noticeboard.

**Dates for your diary and useful information.**

**Review format changes.**

If you would like to receive the Review in another format apart from print, it is also available in audio as an MP3CD or on a USB. Should you wish you can also receive the Review by email and in Braille.

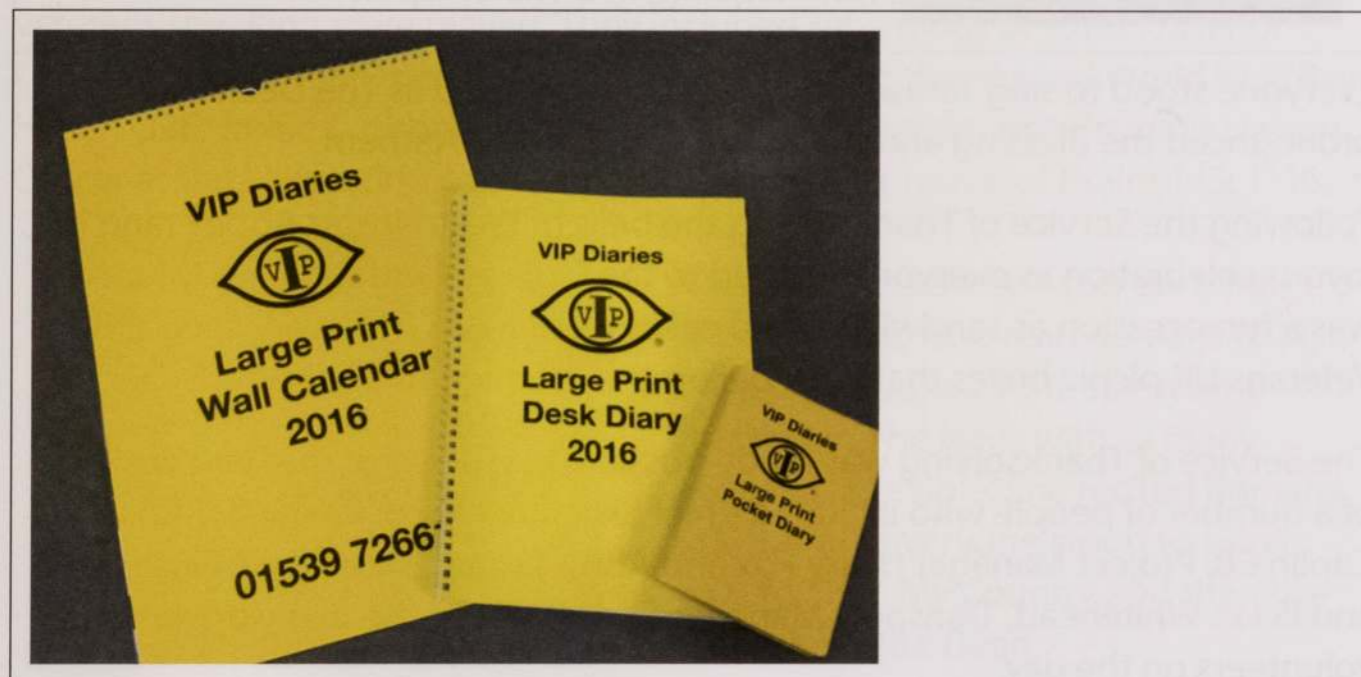
If you would like to change the format you receive the Review in please telephone Mrs Shernaz Kapadia on 020 7616 8368.

## Order your 2016 VIP large print diaries.

As we rapidly approach 2016 you can now place your orders for VIP calendars, diaries and address and telephone books.

- 2016 A3 Calendar £5.50.
- 2016 A4 Desk Diary £8.95.
- 2016 A6 Pocket Diary £5.15.
- VIP Address book £9.25.
- VIP Telephone book £9.25.

To place your order please telephone Nathan Clements in the Procurement Office at the Brighton centre on telephone: 01273 391441.



## DVD of our Westminster Abbey Service of Thanksgiving.

As we move towards the end of our centenary year there is much to reflect after on after so many wonderful celebrations. DVDs of the Centenary Garden Party at Buckingham Palace and of the Service of Thanksgiving at Westminster Abbey are available for £5 each.

Margaret Waller from Preston, who attended the Service of Thanksgiving at Westminster Abbey, was moved to write: "The Service itself was memorable. The choice of music, readings and hymns were excellent, and the specially composed violin music was so poignant. The recordings of memories of some of the members was a lovely idea, and it was so moving to hear Billy Baxter recite the Psalm.

"Following the Service as we moved through to the Cloisters it was a joy to hear the bells ring. The lunch was excellent in the marquees that fitted so well into the Cloisters, and for me the finishing touch was the display of paintings and photographs by blind veterans. I am sure everyone thought it was a truly fitting occasion. I wonder what Sir Arthur Pearson thought?" I'm sure you will each agree that Sir Arthur would have been extremely proud.

If you would like to buy the DVD of the Service of Thanksgiving at Westminster Abbey it is available for £5, which includes p&p. You can buy it at our online shop at <http://shop.blindveterans.org.uk> or telephone 0300 111 0440 for credit or debit card orders.



**Picture:** You can purchase the DVD of the Service of Thanksgiving for £5 at our online shop or telephone.

## **Major Charles R. Soltes Jr. 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Memorial Golf Tournament, Oak Creek Golf Course, Irvine, California. By Colin Williamson.**

Major Rob Soltes was serving as a Public Health Commander with the 426th Civil Affairs Battalion, U.S. Army Reserves in Mosul, Iraq when on October 13th 2004 his convoy was attacked by a vehicle-borne Improvised Explosive Device which took his life. Rob, as he was known, became the first optometrist to be killed in action while on active duty in the United States Army.

In recognition of his work serving the needs of blind and vision impaired veterans an annual golf tournament was set up to keep alive his memory and to raise funds for the Blinded Veterans Association's Operation Peer Support/ Project Gemini exchange programme. Two Blind Veterans UK beneficiaries, Billy Drinkwater and Ken Facal, both blinded in the same IED explosion in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, in 2011, were chosen to represent the charity at this prestigious event.

Once again, British Airways kindly donated the tickets for the flights to Los Angeles for which we are extremely grateful. The flight from Heathrow took eleven and a half hours and we arrived weary but excited about the week ahead. We were met at the airport by a longstanding friend of Blind Veterans UK, former Director of Government Relations for the Blinded Veterans Association Tom Zampieri. Tom ushered us all outside the terminal and we were greeted by sweltering temperatures rising over 100 degrees! Also on hand to meet us and take us to our hotel in Irvine was Paul Baskis, father of U.S. blind veteran and Project Gemini 2013 participant Steve Baskis.

We spent the rest of Saturday afternoon and early evening getting to know the layout of the hotel and the surrounding area and after dinner we were ready for a good night's rest in preparation for a busy week ahead.

On Sunday we visited the Major Charles R. Soltes Jr. Blind Rehabilitation Centre in Long Beach where we had a brief tour (the main tour would come later in the week) and in the afternoon, with the thermometer registering 104 degrees Fahrenheit, we headed to the beach for a welcome drink and to dip our toes in the Pacific Ocean. On Sunday evening we met the family and friends of Rob Soltes at the family home in Irvine and were introduced to the volunteers who were to play a major role in Monday's golf tournament.

It was another glorious day on Monday and we arrived at the golf course early to take up positions near to the registration point to welcome the golfers and to hand out commemorative coins to everyone. The organising committee, chaired by Rob's wife Dr Sally Dang and her partner Tom Clarke, had arranged a mass golf ball drop by helicopter which basically meant that whoever's marked golf ball fell into, or nearest to the hole, won the first prize of \$500. It was quite a spectacular sight.

Our group was positioned at hole ten on the course with our fellow blind veterans from the U.S. and our task was to chat with the golfers and to thank them for helping to raise funds and awareness for Project Gemini. We were joined by 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Brian 'Ski' Dornarski (Ret'd.) a former Marine injured in Gulf War 1 who, after being medically discharged from the Marine Corps went on to join the U.S. army's Special Forces after 9/11 and who is a very accomplished golfer, despite losing an eye in an explosion. 'Ski' challenged the golfers to hit a ball further, and more accurately, than him and all proceeds would go to support blinded veterans. It proved to be a very busy afternoon for us all as we were besieged by golfers wishing to try their luck and as a result Ski raised lots of money for us.

After the tournament we were invited to attend the awards dinner where beneficiary Billy Drinkwater gave a fine speech about the help and support given to him and his fellow veterans by Blind Veterans UK, which resulted in a standing ovation.

Tuesday was the 11th anniversary of Major Soltes death and we gathered at the Veterans Memorial Wall in Irvine where all of the names of those Service men and women who had made the supreme sacrifice in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are engraved. We also spent an emotional couple of hours at Major Soltes graveside in Pacific View Memorial Park in Newport Beach, where we laid a Blind Veterans UK poppy wreath in honour of Rob's memory.

Another highlight from the visit was an afternoon spent at the Blind Rehabilitation Centre where we toured the facility and had an opportunity to chat with key personnel; we were also given the chance to practise our putting on the small putting green at the centre, under the watchful eye of keen golfer and World War Two U.S. veteran Howard Payne, who spent some time in the UK during the war, based near Birmingham. We also were given a guided tour

of RMS Queen Mary; this iconic 1936 ocean liner is now a floating hotel and attraction berthed at Long Beach, California.

We were made to feel most welcome by the Soltes family and were afforded some tremendous hospitality. We experienced some very emotional moments at times throughout the week and we all came back with memories that will stay with us for a long time to come.

We hope that this visit will become a regular feature on the Blind Veterans UK calendar and I look forward to hearing from any member of the Younger Group who has participated on Project Gemini in the past and who would be interested in being part of such a memorable occasion.



## **Blind Veterans UK Brand Film wins a 2015 PRCA Award. By David Bassom, Head of Marketing & Communications.**

Blind Veterans UK's brand film, a five-minute promotional film showcasing the charity's extraordinary work and our equally extraordinary members, has won a prestigious PRCA Award. The PRCA Broadcast Award was given in recognition of the brand film's quality and its use as part of Blind Veterans UK's overall awareness-building strategy.

The PRCA is Europe's largest association of PR and marketing bodies, and its awards are open to private, public and charity sector organisations.

The Blind Veterans UK brand film is designed to offer an introduction to our charity. It highlights the wonderful work of Blind Veterans UK and the incredible stories of our members. Members featured in the film include Ray Hazan, Simon Brown, Billy Baxter, Mark Threadgold, Maria Pikulski, Dennis Sarginson, Bryan Fountain and Pamela Robinson. The film is narrated by our high-profile supporter, award-winning BBC reporter Martin Bell, and also features Chief Executive Nick Caplin.

I would like to thank all the members who gave their time to this invaluable project for Blind Veterans UK and the production of the accompanying films promoting our centres and the No One Alone campaign. This award win is testament to the incredible courage, commitment and resourcefulness of all Blind Veterans UK members.



**Picture:** David Bassom, second from the right with Countdown presenter Rachel Riley who presented the PRCA Award.



## Computer Club, 18th to 24th October 2015. By Margaret and Robert Waller.

The computer Club members, comprising of 11 members and four wives arrived at the Llandudno centre on Sunday after travelling from all directions of the UK.

A message was read out to all members from Harry Beevers, who was unable to attend, wishing us all the best and to have a good meeting. The first session on Monday morning was the welcome and itinerary discussion presented by Matthew Lee, R&T Programme Manager. This was followed by a presentation by Dave Cawley, IT Instructor, on Windows 10. The conclusion was that some of us would like to try it and others said they would not, but generally to wait until teething problems had settled.

In the afternoon we were shown a variety of telephones by Lisa Taylor IT Instructor, and Karla Rogers, R&T Support worker. We were all amazed at the variety of the phones available now covering a wide range of needs. During this session members asked many questions and arrangements were made for a one-to-one with the staff to solve the problems we had.

On Tuesday we had an early breakfast and were taken to Manchester, to visit the Apple Store. The IT staff did an excellent job getting us there and many thanks to them for this. We had a two hour workshop operating tablets and laptops which most of us found interesting, even though we are well established with Android systems, but the workshop gave us food for thought.

On Wednesday morning we had a Question and Answer session with Matthew. He managed to answer all the questions and we could not trip him up. Items discussed were security on a PC, system restore, attaching devices to a PC, Apple systems, copyright, Supernova, Synaptic, and VPN — Virtual Private Network among others.

After an early lunch we were taken to Bangor University for a workshop at their computer lab. This was presented by Dr. William Tealan. He spoke about artificial intelligence and a UNIX programme. This was very interesting until he baffled us with music from pictures.

In the evening we had our meeting followed by a meal which was washed

down with a quantity of wine. The table layout for this meal had been cause for much discussion, measurements, and hilarity but the excellent dining room staff soon solved the problem. Everyone enjoyed themselves and we adjourned to the Battle of Britain room to continue the festivities.

Thursday was taken up with members getting their problems sorted out by the IT and ROVI staff who sorted out all our queries and problems.

Friday morning was a follow up with discussion about the programme and suggestions for the next meeting. All the Club members who attended would like to thank all members of staff, IT staff and ROVIs, at the Llandudno centre for an excellent week.

## Bowling Club Report. By Alan Gibson, Chairman of the National Bowling.

We were very pleased to welcome a new member, Brian Davies, who seemed to enjoy the bowling. We seem to have had some improved bowling and it makes a change to have new winners.

They are:

**Singles:** Winner: Peter Johns. Runner up: Pete Rolfe. Third: Jim Glendenning.

**Pairs:** Winners: Harry Murray and Paul Watson. Runners up: Ken Parker and Brian Taylor.

**Triples:** Winners: Nadia Boys, George Wrightson and Peter Johns.

**Runners up:** Connie Apletree. Norman Perry and Graham Johnson.

I would like to thank everyone who helped us — they are Iris, Daphne and Brian Martin who umpired the games, together with Cathy who assisted our members on the green and Joan would like to thank Ann for her support in the 'office'. Shirley looks after us all with tea and coffee and I would like to thank myself for doing the raffle! And I mustn't forget to thank Joan for her help and patience. I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year and look forward to meeting you again on 28th February 2016 at the Brighton centre.

# Family News.

## Congratulations to:

### Birthdays:

**Gwen Obern** who celebrated her 98th birthday on 22nd November.

**Bert Hayes** celebrated his 100th birthday on 21st November.

**Jack Calver** celebrated his 100th birthday on 29th November.

### Anniversaries:

#### Diamond Gold (75th):

**Ronald & Vera Preston** of Prestatyn, Clwyd on 2nd November.

#### Platinum (70th):

**Victor & Lilla Ellaway** of Cwmbran, Gwent on 3rd November.

**Ernie & Eileen Wheeler** of Gnosall, Stafford on 17th November.

**Ron & Hazel Smith** of Sheffield on 21st November.

#### Blue Sapphire (65th):

**Bill & Dor Williams** of Port Talbot, West Glamorgan on 21st November.

**Roy & Betty Bridges** of Neston, Cheshire on 25th November.

#### Diamond Yellow (60th):

**Keith & Mae Clegg** of Colne, Lancashire on 6th November.

**Eric & Dorothy Taylor** of Wirral, Merseyside on 8th November.

#### Golden (50th):

**Jeffrey & Pat Llewellyn** of Saltdean, Brighton on 17th November.

#### Pearl (30th):

**Malcolm & June Tucker** of Bawburgh, Norwich on 2nd November.

**Steve & Jane Jarvis** of Salisbury, Wiltshire on 30th November.



**Picture:** Dot and Doug Taylor celebrate their Diamond Wedding Anniversary on Fifth Avenue New York.

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

**Peggy Bold** who died on 3rd December 2014. She was the widow of the late Alan Bold.

**Barbara Bracey** who died on 2nd October 2015. She was the wife of Michael Bracey.

**Ruth Firth** who died on 1st June 2015. She was the wife of Laurence Firth.

**Jean Green** who died on 1st October 2015. She was the widow of the late Albert Green.

**Vanessa Gregory** who died on 13th February 2015. She was the wife of Richard Gregory.

**Jean Harris** who died on 22nd October 2015. She was the wife of Roy Harris.

**Catherine Lamb** who died on 1st October 2015. She was the wife of Kenneth Lamb.

**Barbara Morrell** who died on 21st September 2015. She was the wife of Bernard Morrell.

**Vera Preston** who died on 5th July 2015. She was the wife of Ronald Preston.

**Vera Tanner** who died on 20th October 2015. She was the wife of Albert Tanner.

**Phyllis Webberley** who died on 20th October 2015. She was the widow of the late Philip Webberley.

# Welcome to Blind Veterans UK.

**Peter Alford** of St. Columb, Cornwall served in the Fleet Air Arm from 1952 to 1972.

**Joseph Allaway** of Bradninch, Exeter served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers from 1947 to 1949.

**Alan Balenger** of Enfield, London served in the Royal Air Force from 1948 to 1950.

**Ronald Barber** of Wigan, Lancashire served in the Royal Marines from 1946 to 1959.

**Philip Barrett** of Felixstowe, Suffolk served in the Royal Air Force from 1950 to 1952.

**Richard Bartrum** of Horsham, West Sussex served in the Royal Artillery from 1975 to 1992.

**Leonard Beacham** of Filey, North Yorkshire served in the Royal Air Force from 1945 to 1948.

**Kenneth Beckett** of King's Lynn, Norfolk served in the Royal Sussex Regiment from 1947 to 1949.

**Constance Bennett** of Cardiff served in the Women's Royal Naval Service from 1949 to 1953.

**Stanley Binks** of Saltburn By The Sea served in the General Service Corps and the Green Howards from 1946 to 1954.

**Gordon Black** of Flint, Clwyd served in the Royal Artillery and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers from 1953 to 1959.

**Richard Brittain** of Paignton, Devon served in the Royal Tank Regiment from 1954 to 1961.

**Arnold Brown** of Newcastle Upon Tyne, served in the Black Watch and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

**Stephen Capper** of Gillingham, Kent served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps from 1973 to 1988.

**Ernest Carr** of Gateshead, Tyne and Wear served in the Royal Navy from 1942 to 1946.

**Joseph Cass** of Billingham, Cleveland served in the Royal Air Force from 1951 to 1953.

**James Chapman** of Weymouth, Dorset served in the Royal Army Educational Corps from 1967 to 1983.

**Robert Churley** of Seaton, Devon served in the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm from 1943 to 1946.

**Alfred Cleal** of Harwood, Bolton served in the Royal Navy from 1944 to 1958.

**Phyllis 'Mary' Cliff (née Easterbrook)** from Crewe served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service from 1943 to 1947.

**George Collins** of Horsham, West Sussex served in the Queen's Regiment from 1961 to 1978.

**Frederick Cordery** of Bow Street, Dyfed served in the Royal Air Force from 1943 to 1945.

**John Cunningham** of Hexham, Northumberland served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps from 1949 to 1951.

**Michael Daniels** of Bassett, Southampton served in the Royal Air Force from 1952 to 1955.

**Raymond Davidson** of Abingdon, Oxfordshire served in the Royal Air Force from 1949 to 1951.

**Dorothy Dodd (née Bolton)** of Gillingham, Dorset served in the Women's Royal Air Force from 1953 to 1956.

**Kathleen Earp (née Green)** of Great Boughton, Chester served in the Women's Royal Naval Service from 1942 to 1945.

**Anthony 'David' Edgar** of Neath, West Glamorgan served in the Army Catering Corps in 1972.

**Albert Farrington** of Middlewich, Cheshire served in the Royal Army Service Corps from 1948 to 1950.

**John Fletcher** of Rochdale, Lancashire served in the Royal Air Force from 1946 to 1948.

**Sylvia Gedge (née Catling)** of Ipswich served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service from 1943 to 1946.

**Norman Gore** of Tuffley, Gloucester served in the Royal Marines from 1942 to 1946.

**John Greaves** of Redcar, Cleveland served in the Royal Air Force from 1952 to 1954.

**Robert Grocutt** of Cannock, Staffordshire served in the Cheshire Regiment from 1963 to 1972.

**Stephen Halliwell** of Salford served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps from 1971 to 1994.

**Cecil Hardy** of Barrow Upon Humber, South Humberside served in the General Service Corps and the Royal Army Medical Corps from 1944 to 1947.

**Roger Hayes** of Piddington, Northampton served in the London Scottish Battalion and the Royal Military Police from 1961 to 1968.

**George Hedges** of Southampton served in the Royal Navy from 1942 to 1946.

**John Hodgson** of Cleator, Cumbria served in the Border Regiment from 1952 to 1955.

**Trevor Howell** of Gosport, Hampshire served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers from 1947 to 1972.

**Clive Hunt** of Pershore, Worcestershire served in the Royal Air Force from 1946 to 1949.

**Edward Inglesby** of Liverpool served in the Army Catering Corps from 1959 to 1971.

**Norman Jolliff** of Newton Hall, Durham served in the Royal Navy from 1942 to 1946.

**Victor Jones** of Birmingham served in the Royal Navy from 1946 to 1948.

**Adelaide 'Joyce' Kane** of Saltburn By The Sea served in the Women's Royal Naval Service from 1945 to 1946.

**Charles Lambert** of Stockton On Tees, Cleveland served in the Durham Light Infantry from 1952 to 1954.

**Philip Lewis** of Cotgrave, Nottingham served in the Royal Air Force from 1965 to 1971.

**James Lincoln** of Houghton Le Spring, Tyne and Wear served in the Royal Navy from 1943 to 1946.

**Hubert Lumb** of Balterley, Crewe served in the Queen's Royal Regiment and the Lancashire Fusiliers from 1943 to 1947.

**John Mackian** of Lochgelly, Fife served in the Royal Navy from 1961 to 1965.

**William Maitland** of Beaumaris, Gwynedd served in the Royal Air Force from 1942 to 1947.

**John Mallam** of Fleetwood, Lancashire served in the Royal Signals from 1949 to 1964.

**Peter Manning** of Newcastle Upon Tyne served in the Royal Marines from 1955 to 1962.

**Donald Matthews** of Preston, Lancashire served in the Royal Air Force from 1950 to 1952.

**Joan McKendrick (née Hannaford)** of Bournemouth, Dorset served in the Women's Royal Naval Service from 1942 to 1946.

**Barry Metcalfe** of Wellingborough, Northamptonshire served in the Royal West Kent Regiment from 1959 to 1964.

**Pauline Mole (née Mingay)** of Abingdon, Oxfordshire served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service from 1939 to 1942.

**Arthur Morgan** of Letchworth Garden City served in the Royal Auxiliary Air Force from 1949 to 1953.

**Winston Morgan** of Port Talbot, West Glamorgan served in the General Service Corps and the Royal Army Service Corps from 1942 to 1947.

**John Morris** of Newport, Gwent served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers from 1952 to 1957.

**Sidney Morris** of Stockton On Tees, Cleveland served in the General Service Corps and the Royal Pioneer Corps from 1945 to 1948.

**Peter Newton** of Leeds served in the General Service Corps and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers from 1945 to 1948.

**Margaret Oxland (née Craddock)** of Stockbridge, Hampshire served in the Women's Royal Naval Service from 1941 to 1945.

**Stanley Pugh** of Hereford served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps and the Royal Army Service Corps from 1950 to 1952.

**Frederick Roberts** of Kirkby In Ashfield, Nottingham served in the Fleet Air Arm from 1942 to 1946.

**Geoffrey Roberts** of Brightlingsea Colchester served in the Royal Navy from 1943 to 1947.

**Randall Roberts** of Mold, Clwyd served in the Royal Air Force from 1947 to 1952.

**Ieuan Rowlands** of Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan served in the Royal Army Service Corps from 1953 to 1954.

**Robert Sargent** of Scunthorpe, South Humberside served in the Royal Air Force from 1943 to 1947.

**Ben Saunders** of Lowestoft, Suffolk served in the Royal Air Force from 1941 to 1946.

**Ronald Saunders** of Stowmarket, Suffolk served in the Royal Air Force from 1942 to 1947.

**Ronald Sharp** of Wallingford, Oxfordshire served in the Royal Fusiliers and the Royal Artillery from 1939 to 1946.

**Norman Sharples** of Bristol served in the Royal Signals from 1970 to 1976.

**Stephen Singleton** of Lytham St. Annes, Lancashire served in the Royal Air Force from 1950 to 1952.

**Noel Sleigh** of Cromer, Norfolk served in the Royal Air Force from 1943 to 1947.

**Donovan Smith** of Grantham, Lincolnshire served in the Royal Artillery from 1956 to 1994.

**Peter Soanes** of Darlington, County Durham served in the General Service Corps and the Royal Armoured Corps from 1946 to 1948.

**Daphne Somerfield (née Waldock)** of Hayling Island, Hampshire served in the Women's Royal Naval Service from 1943 to 1946.

**Barbara Stotesbury (née Judd)** of Steyning, West Sussex served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service from 1943 to 1946.

**Roy Thomas** of Ellesmere Port, Cheshire served in the Border Regiment, South Lancashire Regiment, Lancashire Fusiliers and the Army Air Corps from 1941 to 1947.

**George Thorpe** of Mansfield, Nottinghamshire served in the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers from 1946 to 1954.

**George Tootle** of St. Helens, Merseyside served in the Royal Artillery from 1953 to 1955.

**Arthur Walton** of Durham served in the Royal Signals from 1936 to 1946.

**Eric Wells** of Henfield, West Sussex served in the Royal Air Force from 1950 to 1952.

**Ralph Western** of Rugby, Warwickshire served in the Royal Air Force from 1951 to 1953.

**William Whitehead** of Failsworth, Manchester served in the King's Regiment and the Border Regiment from 1957 to 1964.

**Frederick Yardley** of Whitleigh, Plymouth served in the Royal Navy from 1955 to 1969.

**Marjorie Young (née Berry)** of Polegate, East Sussex served in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force from 1947 to 1949.

# 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.**

**Bryan Aylward** of South Croydon, Surrey died on 1st September 2015, aged 81. He joined the Royal Signals in 1952 for National Service. He trained at Catterick and served in the UK as a Clerk before being discharged in 1954. He remained on part-time National Service from 1954 to 1958.

**Florence 'Joan' Bantin (née Funnell)** of Great Yarmouth, Norfolk died on 22nd October 2015, aged 97. She joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1942 and was attached to the Royal Signals. She served in various UK locations including Guildford, Tonbridge, Newcastle and London before discharge in 1945.

**Harry Barber** of Brighton, East Sussex died on 2nd November 2015, aged 96. He joined the Royal Artillery in 1940, serving with the 74th Medium Regiment and the 22 Field Regiment. He served in Tunisia and took part in the Salerno Landings in Italy before moving to Greece. He was discharged as a Gunner in 1946.

**Robert 'Bert' Barclay** of Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire died on 10th October 2015, aged 87. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1947, specialising as an engine mechanic. He assisted in the maintenance of aircraft on the Berlin Airlift and later in a variety of locations in the UK before going to BAOR. He was discharged in 1955 as a Senior Aircraftman.

**Francis 'Frank' Blackburn** of Southport, Merseyside died on 3rd October 2015, aged 90. He joined the Royal Air Force as aircrew in 1943. A wireless operator with Bomber Command he was later with Transport Command stationed in Iraq. He was discharged as a Sergeant in 1947.

**Thomas Brassington** of Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear died on 1st November 2015, aged 98. He joined the Royal Navy in 1943, where he served in the UK, (Scapa Flow) the Atlantic and the Pacific. He was discharged as a Writer in 1946.

**Jack Burleigh** of Truro, Cornwall died on 25th October 2015, aged 92. He joined the Royal Engineers in 1942 serving in the UK, France, Germany, Egypt and Palestine. He was discharged as a Sapper in 1946.

**Olive Clark (née Copley)** of Rhyl, Clwyd died on 11th October 2015, aged 82. She joined the Women's Royal Army Corps in 1953. She trained in clerical duties at Guildford and Salisbury, serving at Saighton camp in Chester in the Army HQ. She was then posted to BAOR HQ in Mönchengladbach for two years; she met her husband while serving in Germany. She was discharged in 1956.

**Leslie Cook** of Macleod, Victoria died on 8th September 2015, aged 90. Joining the Hampshire Regiment in 1942 he fought in both the North African and Italian campaigns. He was in Italy when the war ended and returned to the UK for discharge as a Corporal in 1947. He served twice in the Hampshire Regiment (TA), from 1953 to 1959 and from 1963 to 1964.

**Harry Crosbie** of Liverpool, Merseyside died on 16th October 2015, aged 79. He joined the South Lancashire Regiment in 1955 and after training was posted to Berlin and later to Kenya. He became Heavy Weight Boxing Champion of his unit and completed his service in 1959 leaving as a Private.

**Edwin 'Eric' Elliott** of Romford, Essex died on 24th October 2015, aged 91. He joined the Royal Navy in 1943. He became an Able Seaman working on HMS Staffness commandeering German trawlers. He served on a variety of trawlers and minesweepers in Africa, the Arctic, the Mediterranean and on Atlantic convoys. He was discharged in 1946.

**Raymond Gorringe** of Sunderland, Tyne and Wear died on 9th October 2015, aged 91. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1942, completing specialist communications training at Blackpool. He was posted to a night fighter squadron in Middle Wallop before transferring to the Royal Navy in 1943 prior to D-Day. He was posted to the Maldives and India. He was later transferred to HMS Persimmon, an HQ ship working off the coast of Burma before discharge as a Telegraphist in 1946.

**Henry 'Tom' Green** of Stockton On Tees, Cleveland died on 21st October 2015, aged 87. Joining the Royal Navy in 1947 he served with the Fleet Air Arm at various naval air stations including Yeovilton, Abbotsinch and Londonderry. He was discharged as a Petty Officer Air Fitter in 1954.

**Jack Hargreaves** of Keighley, West Yorkshire died on 16th October 2015, aged 94. He joined the Royal Signals in 1941 and soon became a driver in Company HQ serving in the North of England and later the South of England as part of the Mobile Ack Ack Operations. After D-Day he was deployed to France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. He was discharged as a Corporal in 1946.

**Sidney Hilton-Roberts** of Watford, Hertfordshire died on 3rd October 2015, aged 91. He served in the Royal Navy from 1941 to 1946 in Iceland, Russia and Home Waters, leaving as a Leading Cook.

**John Hobbs** of Worcester, Worcestershire died on 17th October 2015, aged 87. He was called up to the General Service Corps in 1946, before transferring to the South Staffordshire Regiment in 1947 when he was deployed to India. He was discharged as a Corporal in 1948.

**John Jackson** of Seaford, East Sussex died on 21st October 2015, aged 88. In 1945 he joined the Royal Signals and served as a dispatch rider in the UK and Palestine before discharge as a Signaller in 1948.

**Alwyn King** of Dorchester, Dorset died on 9th October 2015, aged 92. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1942, qualifying as an air mechanic and working on Mosquito rebuilds in North Africa. After the Italian invasion he assembled aircraft delivered from the US in Naples; he was discharged in 1947.

**Sidney King** of Eastbourne, East Sussex died on 24th August 2015, aged 91. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1942 and trained as a wireless operator and air gunner, serving with 13 Squadron in North Africa and Italy. He was in Berlin during the airlift in 1947 and was discharged as a Corporal in 1951.

**Norman 'Pete' Kitching** of Brighton, East Sussex died on 28th April 2015, aged 87. He joined the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in 1945. He served with the Infantry Corps in Canterbury and later in North Africa prior to discharge as a Craftsman in 1948.

**Barbara Lanceley (née Allen)** of Paignton, Devon died on 10th August 2015, aged 96. She taught exercise at the Women's League of Health and Beauty before she joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service (Duke of Wellington's Regiment) in 1939. She was commissioned in 1941, served in the UK and Kenya (Nairobi) and was discharged as a Subaltern Lieutenant in 1945.

**Evan Lewis** of Oswestry, Shropshire died on 17th October 2015, aged 90. He joined the Army in 1944 and trained at Brecon before joining the Royal Army Ordnance Corps as a storeman. He was posted to Birmingham and thereafter to a number of locations around the UK before being discharged in 1947.

**Peter Lillis** of Birmingham died on 12th September 2015, aged 86. He joined the Royal Navy as a Stoker Mechanic in 1947. He served in both the East Indies and Home Fleet and was discharged as an Acting Leading Seaman in 1954.

**William 'Ray' Longstaff** of Bishop Auckland, County Durham died on 19th October 2015, aged 93. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1941. He was involved with radar installation in Whitley aircraft before being sent to 53 Squadron as an engine fitter and was subsequently posted with them to Reykjavik, Iceland. He celebrated VE Day in Iceland prior to returning home to be demobilised in 1946 as a Leading Aircraftman.

**Donald MacKenzie** of Borehamwood, Hertfordshire died on 16th October 2015, aged 93. He joined the Royal Artillery TA in 1939 and was called up shortly afterwards. Initially posted to ack-ack batteries in London and Newcastle his battery was subsequently shipped to Durban and then on to Colombo, Ceylon for jungle training. They then deployed to Ranshee, Bai Ha, India to counter the threatened Japanese invasion, fighting through to Burma. In Rangoon when the war ended he was discharged as a Gunner.

**Donald May** of Gillingham, Kent died on 1st October 2015, aged 91. He enlisted in the Royal Navy in 1942 and was based at Malta during the siege, serving in the Mediterranean. By the time of his discharge in 1946, he was an Ordnance Artificer 4th Class.

**Norman 'Mac' McKean** of Seaford, East Sussex died on 27th October 2015, aged 96. He joined the TA in 1938 and was mobilised in 1939 at Tonbridge with the Royal West Kent Regiment and was a lorry driver in the transport pool. He then transferred to the Battalion HQ but was medically discharged in 1940.

**Dennis Moore** of Allesley, Coventry died on 11th October 2015, aged 90. He served in the Royal Air Force from 1942, becoming an Air Gunner. He served with the Australian Air Squadron (463 and 467 Squadrons) working on Lancaster Bombers. He volunteered for the 2nd Tactical Airforce and was posted to France and thereafter all round Europe with the Repair and Salvage unit. He was discharged in 1947, leaving as a Leading Aircraftman.

**John Oakley** of St Helier, Jersey died on 12th October 2015, aged 88. He joined the General Service Corps in April 1944, transferring to the Royal Artillery in August and served in Germany, Austria, Egypt and Palestine. A Private at the time of his discharge in 1952, he later joined the RAMC (TA) from 1959 to 1960.

**Marlene O'Hagan** of Washington, Tyne and Wear died on 18th October 2015, aged 68. She joined the Women's Royal Army Corps in 1969, serving in Germany and Catterick, attached to the Royal Signals. She was discharged in 1971 as a Private.

**Clifford 'Cliff' Oliver** of Ammanford, Dyfed died on 14th October 2015, aged 80. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1953 and qualified as an instrument maintainer before serving at several UK air stations including Melksham, Wiltshire and St Athan in South Wales. He was in Egypt and Sudan before his discharge in 1957 as a Corporal.

**Brian O'Neill** of Barmouth, Gwynedd died on 25th October 2015, aged 89. He joined the Royal Navy in 1944 and served as a Seaman in HMS Wren, a bird class frigate and did an enjoyable tour in the Persian Gulf. He was discharged as an Able Seaman in 1948.

**Keith Parsons** of Pensford, Bristol died on 30th October 2015, aged 87. He volunteered for the Army and joined the General Service Corps in 1945. In 1946 he transferred to the Devon Regiment and served in the UK. An athletic man, he was the Regimental 440 yards running champion and much enjoyed Army life. He left as a Corporal in 1948.

**Ernest Phillips** of Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands died on 17th October 2015, aged 89. He served in the Merchant Navy from 1943 to 1949 in the Atlantic and Adriatic Sea. He was an Engineer at the time of discharge.

**John Rhoades-Brown** of Waterlooville, Hampshire died on 13th October 2015, aged 86. He joined the Royal Air Force for National Service in 1947 and served at Pembroke Dock. He was discharged as an Aircraftman First Class in 1949.

**Ralph Sheffield** of East Grinstead, West Sussex died on 26th October 2015, aged 95. He joined the Royal Navy in 1939, where he served on Atlantic convoys (Corvettes) and the West African convoys. He was discharged in 1946. He joined the RNR in 1947 and retired as a Commander in 1977.

**Eve Tichy** of Exeter, Devon died on 19th October 2015, aged 90. She joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1942 and served in the UK as a driver until discharge as a Private in 1945.

**George Tyrrell** of Hackney, East London died on 17th October 2015, aged 89. He joined the General Service Corps in 1945 and transferred to the Royal Fusiliers in July. He served in Germany and was in the Royal Artillery for his final year. He was discharged as a Sergeant in 1948.

**Rosemary Watson** of Colchester died on 18th October 2015, aged 98. She served in the Women's Royal Army Corps from 1942 to 1946 leaving as a Sergeant.

**Mary Watt (née Francis)** of Ebbw Vale, Gwent died on 5th May 2015, aged 86. She joined the Women's Royal Naval Service in 1948, training at HMS President in Reading and spent a year as Officers Steward at HMS Seahawk in Cornwall. She took compassionate discharge in 1949, leaving as a Wren Steward (AR).

**Edward Widginton** of High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire died on 2nd November 2015, aged 89. He joined the Royal Navy in 1944 and served in the cruiser HMS Berwick. He was based at Scapa Flow and operated in the North Sea and Mediterranean before his discharge as an Able Seaman in 1946.

**Raymond 'Ray' Wiggins** of Shedfield, Southampton died on 13th October 2015, aged 87. He joined the Royal Air Force for National Service in 1946. He spent two years in Egypt before he was discharged in 1948 as an Aircraftman First Class.

**Ronald Williams** of Waterlooville, Hampshire died on 5th October 2015, aged 95. He joined the Royal Navy as a boy seaman in 1935 and trained at HMS St Vincent, Gosport. He qualified as a gunnery rating and served in various ships including the battleships, HMS Iron Duke, Royal Sovereign, Nelson and Repulse. He was stationed in the Far East and was sunk in three of his ships. He was discharged as a Petty Officer in 1960.

**Brinley Wills** of Wirral, Merseyside died on 1st October 2015, aged 99. He joined the Royal Army Pay Corps in 1940 and served in Bournemouth for the duration of the war. He was discharged in 1946 as a Private.



