

July 2016

# Review

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Blind Veterans UK | St Dunstan's since 1915



**On the cover:** Even the rain couldn't dull the joy of celebrating Her Majesty The Queen's birthday at The Patron's Lunch on The Mall on Sunday 12th June. From left to right: John Cantwell, Tricia Robinson, Joyce Fleet and Elaine Cantwell.

**Back page:** Andy Allen surfs during the sixth Project Gemini that this year took place from the Llandudno centre.



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**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 for the Brighton and Sheffield centres:** To book accommodation at the Brighton and Sheffield centres telephone the Booking Office on 01273 391500. If you have care needs please first contact your Welfare Officer.

**The Booking Office for the Llandudno centre:** To book accommodation at the Llandudno centre please telephone 01492 868700 and ask for the Booking Office. If you have care needs please first contact your Welfare Officer.

**ROVI IT Helpline:** If you need to speak with the ROVI IT Helpdesk please telephone: 01273 391447 for ROVI and IT enquiries.

**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.

## Blind Veterans UK Calendar

### Activities from the Brighton centre.

**July/August.**

Widows/Ladies Week 17th to 23rd July.

Transport Week 31st July to 6th August.

**August.**

Archery Club 14th to 20th August.

**August/September.**

Fishing Week 28th August to 3rd September.

### Activities from the Llandudno centre.

**July.**

Music Week 4th to 8th July.

Archery Week 11th to 15th July.

Recreation Taster Week 18th to 22nd July.

**August.**

Driving Week 8th to 12th August and 22nd to 26th August.

**September.**

Sea Fishing Week 5th to 9th September.

Cycling Week 19th to 23rd September.

### Activities from the Sheffield centre.

**July.**

Culture Week 18th to 22nd.

**August.**

Gardens Week 8th to 12th.

**August/September.**

Younger Week 30th August to 2nd September.

**To book Themed and Club Weeks at the Brighton and Sheffield centres.**

For further information and to book your place telephone the Booking Office on 01273 391500. If you have care needs please speak with your Welfare Officer.

**To book Themed and Club Weeks at the Llandudno centre:**

For further information or to book your place please telephone: 01492 868741 or 01492 868740. If you have care needs please speak with your Welfare Officer.

# From the Chairman.

## Your message from Tim Davis.

On 1st July 1916 the largest and bloodiest battle of the First World War, and in human history, began on the Western Front. It was The Battle of The Somme, and by its end on 18th November more than one million men had been wounded or killed.

Past editions of Review contain accounts by men who were blinded in the Somme Offensive. Men who rebuilt their lives at St Dunstan's Lodge in London's Regent's Park.

One of those men was our second Chairman Ian Fraser, who became Baron Fraser of Lonsdale CH, CBE. A man who through his leadership inspired the blind of many nations. He continues to inspire many of you today. Those of you who knew him personally, and those of you who only know of him from others, or from his autobiography or Review articles.

Lord Fraser inspired Blind Veterans UK President Ray Hazan OBE when he visited him in hospital just four weeks after Ray was wounded in Northern Ireland. That meeting, and in particular the ease with which Lord Fraser reached across and touched Ray on the knee to emphasise a point has stayed with Ray for 43 years.

You continue to inspire one another as you come together at our centres, Reunions and Lunch Clubs. And of course through Project Gemini, our annual exchange programme when blind veterans meet and learn from their peers from the Blinded Veterans of America and St Dunstan's South Africa.

In this edition of Review you will also read an article by Sharon Williams, Life Skills Manager at our Llandudno centre of the recent RESET Week when blind veterans of working age came together to look positively at where they are in their lives and assess where they want to be in the future. Again it shows the power of working together, learning from one another and gaining inspiration.

I would like to finish my letter by very publically congratulating Billy Baxter, Kevin Alderton and Steve Birkin, Blind Veterans UK's Pace Sticking team. In the parade at The Patron's Lunch they led the delegation of Armed Forces charities and organisations who are fortunate to hold The Queen's patronage. They also won a special award at Sandhurst in the Pace Sticking World Championships. Well done to each of you and to Drum Major Tony Taylor.

It was wonderful to see photographs of our 90 year old blind veterans who attended The Patron's Lunch and to read that despite the weather you had a wonderful time.



**Picture:** Her Majesty The Queen and HRH Prince Philip, The Duke of Edinburgh at The Patron's Lunch. **Photograph** by William Clelland.



**Picture:** Our second Chairman Ian Fraser, then Captain William Jocelyn Ian Fraser of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, who was blinded on 23rd July 1916 during the Battle of The Somme.

## **Blinded aged 18 at The Battle of The Somme he gained Victory over Blindness and still inspires today's young war blinded veterans.**

As we mark a centenary of The Battle of the Somme we bring you an account by Lord Fraser of Lonsdale from his 1939 autobiography. As Lieutenant William Jocelyn Ian Fraser of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry he was blinded on 23rd July 1916 during the Battle of the Somme when he was just 18 years of age. He was Chairman of our charity for 53 years.

"I am moved to write this now when I am only 45 because the outbreak of this war (World War Two) is already bringing some scores of young men, and women too, into this world of the blind in which I have lived so long. Their journey into the valley of the shadows, their quiet patient courage, their adaptability and their resurrection — for it is nothing less — into the world of men and women moves me strongly, reminds me of my own experience, and makes me want to set it down, partly, I think, to ease my own mind and partly because I hope it will be helpful to them.

"I have not discovered a new continent, or a new way of living; I have not the aptitude nor the desire to write sketches of the great men I have met; my life has simply been very interesting to me — the more so because I have had to find my own way of doing many commonplace things that seem easy enough to be taken for granted.

"And one is so thankful to be alive and well, to be taking part in the making of such momentous history, and to see our cause slowly but inevitably holding its own, and perhaps even beginning to prevail, that the importance which one used to attach to personal fortunes has receded to a better proportion.

"Now I look back over 25 years of blindness and find myself writing a book, and I begin to wonder why. And I begin to ask myself questions about things that I have rather taken for granted. Am I happy? Are my blinded soldier comrades of the Great War happy? If so, how is that? And what is happiness? We overcame our fear of solitude, which at the beginning seemed like a dark prison from which there was no escape. Never before had there been so many newly blinded persons of our age and sort before.

### **Back to the beginning.**

'The day I was struck I had spent that morning in charge of a burial party,

finding a last resting place for some of those who would not grow old as we that were left have grown old. We had fought in the afternoon, when I was knocked out by a bullet in the head. I am not sure if I lost consciousness, but I remember being bandaged up.

'I recalled my first experience under artillery bombardment. I had been frightened — frightened on two accounts: first of all for my own life and limb; and secondly, frightened lest I should let the show down; but I got over this as we all did, and though I continued to be frightened from time to time I got used to shell fire, and to crawling about and being sniped at, and to all the other hazards of that war, and even though later on shell splinters and bullets may have come very near to me, I was never so frightened again as I had been at first.

'When I was hit I remember being wheeled along on a stretcher — one of those flat things on a pair of wheels, rather like the barrows from which hawkers sell fruit. We seemed to go for miles down the Pozières-Bapaume road — a shell-swept road. I remember an injection of anti-tetanus serum, and the doctor marking a cross upon my forehead with indelible pencil. He told me about this; it was a sign that I had been inoculated, so that the next doctor wouldn't do it again. I remember thinking that was rather funny.

'Looking back now, after twenty-five years, I can only think of odd things that happened during these weeks — my cousin Lilia Howard who came out to see me, brought out by the Red Cross, because I was on the danger list, and who read to me for hours while I lay in the Casino at Le Touquet, which had been converted into a hospital.

'They cabled my parents in South Africa to tell them that I was dangerously ill. The danger was infection with the germs of meningitis or septicaemia. Once it was clear that I was not going to fall to either of these diseases my recovery was not in doubt. Medically I was a simple, straightforward case. I was not the subject of prolonged consultations and treatment, because there was nothing to consult about, nothing much to treat. The bullet had caused no serious harm to anything except my sight, and it had damaged that beyond repair. I was completely blind, but otherwise sound.

'I made the journey home in a hospital ship, across that fateful stretch of water: the English Channel, which six of us young subalterns from Sandhurst had crossed in the other direction only a few weeks before: the agent from Cox's

Bank, who came and spoke to me as I lay in my bunk on the hospital ship, and asked me if I would like to send a telegram and if I wanted some money. He sent the telegram and gave me a few shillings. I could not sign a cheque, but I promised to pay, and I did pay. (I have banked with Cox's now merged in Lloyd's ever since). The cheerful bustle of Victoria Station as people met the train and gave the wounded men chocolate and tea; the hush and the drawing aside of the cheerful crowd as they saw my stretcher lifted out, my face and head completely bandaged up. Then I was in an ambulance being driven through London in the early hours of the morning by a girl. Another girl sat in the back and held my hand.

'In England I initially spent about two weeks in St Mark's Chelsea, the 2nd London General Hospital, where most of the eye cases were concentrated, before they sent me out for convalescence. But I was more used to the idea that I might never see again, and much less doleful about my future now that I had heard the message of St Dunstan's. After convalescing in Dorset I went back to hospital. It was now well on to September 1916, and I had been blind since the 23rd of July, when a bullet had knocked me over and I had last seen the world.

### **Meeting Irene Mace.**

'Pearson was continually in and out of the hospital, and usually he himself was the first to visit a new arrival. But I had come in August, when St Dunstan's was closed for the annual holiday and Pearson was away in Harrogate. So he wrote me a letter and sent it with his personal assistant and guide, a V.A.D. named Irene Mace (Chips). She also brought me a Braille watch. I held the watch in my hand and felt the face with my thumb. For the first time since I was wounded I was able to tell the time.

'The value of the watch to me exceeded its usefulness. That is itself was considerable, for you tend to want to know the time often when you are in permanent darkness, and have no means of distinguishing even night from day. Of course, in hospital one could always ask. But that was the whole point. With this watch I did not have to ask anyone. I would never have to ask again. I was able to do it myself — do something that had before always been a visual act. It was an extraordinary pleasure to find that it was just as easy to do with the hands as with the eyes. Perhaps there were other things.

Pearson's letter assured me there were. Miss Irene Mace had read it before. But as she read it then, as I heard Pearson's message of encouragement and cheer

— man to man, blind to blind — I was astonished that someone who had never met me could know so exactly how I felt. The letter caught my mood, and I felt a great surge of new life. Pearson was not entirely responsible for that. Three things began my recovery. The first was the watch he had sent, and the second was his message; and every newly blinded soldier received these. The third factor was personal, but so important that I cannot imagine how all the others recovered without it. She had the softest kid gloves I had ever felt. I fell in love with Irene Mace.

### **At Regent's Park.**

"I accepted the invitation, and in 1916 entered a new world. So I went to St Dunstan's and a marvellous change came over me. It was partly that I was getting stronger; partly the example and invigorating personality of Sir Arthur Pearson himself; partly the example of other officers and men who had preceded me, and had settled down to a regular routine.

"The blinded soldiers, sailors and airmen at our Regent's Park training centre were 18 or 19 years of age or in their early 20s when they were blinded. They were fresh from the fields of France and Flanders, the deserts of the Near East, or the blue waters. Everything their young lives held out before them seemed to have gone. A curtain seemed to have fallen and blotted out all the brightness of the future. St Dunstan's was a haven of rest after the battlefield. It stretched a helping hand out to the blinded soldier, sailor or airman in pain, in need, in success or failure, in all the trials and tribulations of the day to day life, St Dunstan's sustains him materially and the spirit of St Dunstan's sustains him. I can testify from personal experience."

"The thing I found difficult to believe was that the men at Regent's Park were all as blind as myself. I was meant to find that difficult. All newcomers were — it was part of the treatment. It stopped me from saying or even thinking it was too difficult when I began learning myself."

Ian Fraser celebrated the second anniversary of his injury when he married Irene Mace. It was the beginning of a great and lasting happiness. In 1920 their only child, Jean, was born. In 1917 he started work as Sir Arthur's assistant and he established the After Care Department. By 1921 he had become his second-in-command, and when Sir Arthur died at the end of that year he became Chairman. He became an MP, a Governor of the BBC and a leading advocate for the wireless and talking books and newspapers.



**Picture:** Captain Ian Fraser rowing on the lake at Regent's Park as Irene Mace (Chips) coxes.



**Picture:** Ian Fraser leads a cheer to HRH HM The Queen ad HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh during the Royal visit in July 1962.

## Blind Veterans UK Amateur Radio Week 6th to 12th March 2016 from the Llandudno centre. By Edna McGoff, QSL Manager.

This was the first meeting of 2016 when members of the Blind Veterans UK Amateur Radio Society gathered at Llandudno. The first floor lounge being changed into our radio shack for the week. Our friends Gordon Ward (MW0GGBR) and Grom Edwards (MW0HTG) had very kindly set up the aerials and radios ready for us to use. Hopefully to make contacts with other radio amateurs not only in this country, but also countries all over the world.

On Monday morning we all gathered in the radio room for a meeting to get to know any news since the last meeting. I am afraid this meeting started in a very sad note as Ray Peart the chairman reported that we would start with a period of silence as two of our members had gone silence key (deceased) during the last two months. They were Dennis Dawson (G0CIW) who helped to run the morning nets and also Dennis Cottrell. Both of these members will be sadly missed. Due to illness and other circumstance our number of operators were down but Ray Peart (G0FHK) and Dick Hardy (G3 TIX) worked very hard to keep the flag flying for Blind Veterans UK (GB0BVL) despite the bad conditions. One good thing was that we were able to welcome three new members Alan Carter, Jim Parker, and John Edwards.

Alistair [McGoff] and I assisted with the log keeping. Once again we were well cared for by all the management and staff not forgetting the catering staff who made sure that we were well fed — thank you all.

During the week it was good to have a visit from Haworth Jones (GW3TMP) and his wife from Mold who visited us last year and very kindly came to help us to operate. Amateur radio enables you to make new good friends with the same interests.

Now we are looking forward to our next meeting 28th August to 3rd September at the Llandudno centre and the 16th to 22nd October at the Brighton Centre for the AGM and luncheon.

Anybody interested in being a member please contact the Chairman Ray Peart (G0FHK) or Ray Hazan (G0PQQ). You can contact Ray Hazan on 01323 325904 or email: [ray.hazan@googlemail.com](mailto:ray.hazan@googlemail.com)



**Picture:** Ray (G0FHK) and Claire Peart beside the door and sitting at the Radio is Edna McGoff (M6ELA) and beside her is Grom Edwards (MW0HTG) and standing behind them is Gordon Ward (MW0GGBR).

### Are you paying to be sent paper bills?

Ray East, Area Welfare Officer for Yorkshire and Teeside sent in the below as it was brought to his attention by blind veteran Michael Walker, who quite rightly thought it might affect his fellow blind veterans.

Michael receives bills for his telephone service from BT. As he cannot easily access his bills online due to his vision impairment he continues to receive paper bills, in large print.

As BT charged him £1.50 a month for the paper bills he rang them to question it, pointing out they could send the bills via Articles for the Blind and save postage. Eventually they agreed to waive the £1.50 a month charge. Perhaps you too pay for bills from BT or other providers.

## Project Gemini 2016. By Colin Williamson, Contributing Editor.

The UK leg of the 2016 Project Gemini annual exchange programme took place during the week of 22nd to 29th May and for the first time in the project's illustrious history the gathering took place at our Llandudno centre. Another notable first was that a female beneficiary from both Blind Veterans UK and the US based Blinded Veterans Association participated in the week of fun, learning and companionship.

The exchange programme, which started back in 2011, brings together blind and vision impaired veterans from the UK, USA and South Africa to take part in discussions regarding advances in technology that could assist blind and vision impaired ex-servicemen and women. It gives the chance to experience the unique camaraderie that only exists amongst the Forces Community and to participate in a variety of cultural and educational visits which we hope will enhance their visit to the UK and to our amazing Llandudno centre.

This year we were joined by two board members from St Dunstan's South Africa, Dave Mitchell and Jeremy Opperman (who himself is blind) and the social welfare officer for their organisation, Andrea Burton. This small group arrived with the main party and stayed with us at the centre for a couple of days before visiting Harcourt Street and the Brighton centre. We were also privileged to welcome the President of the Association of Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) Dr John Clark who accompanied the five blinded veterans from across the pond.

The UK beneficiaries were Andy Allen, Tom Boal, Maria Pikulski and Mick Scanlan and the St Dunstan's South Africa members were former South African Air Force officer Neville Clarence and South African Defence Force soldier Don Wessels, who visited the Brighton centre back in 1992. Our American guests included long-time friend of Blind Veterans UK Dr Tom Zampieri and veterans Scott Scieszinski, Andrew Lessard, Monaca Gilmore and Joel Tavera. Incidentally Joel is the second most severely injured U.S. serviceman from the war in Iraq to survive his injuries and a very inspirational and jovial character.

The itinerary for the week was produced by Mark Hollis, Activities Team Leader at the Llandudno centre and what a fantastic week he put together. Supported by his team which consisted of Lee Evans, Paula Sartain and Lisa Bowen, they

pulled out all of the stops to ensure that everyone had a brilliant time.

The Blind Veterans UK beneficiaries arrived at the centre on the Saturday and quickly settled into their rooms before enjoying a catch up and a few drinks at the bar. It was an early start for our photographer for the week Chris Nowell and myself as we were heading off to Manchester Airport the following morning to collect our fellow veterans so it was early to bed for us.

Everyone arrived safely and on time into Manchester so after a brief introduction we boarded the coaches and headed back to the centre. As often in Wales, we encountered four seasons in our journey back, much to the delight of some of the American participants as they hadn't seen rain for some time.

Upon arrival at the centre we were greeted by a small gathering of staff, beneficiaries and volunteers plus our very own Billy Baxter, immaculately turned out in his Llandudno Town Crier outfit who welcomed our guests in the time honoured fashion. Also on display were the flags of the Republic of South Africa and the Stars and Stripes flying proudly alongside the Union Flag. A wonderful gesture and much appreciated by all. There was just time for everyone to be allocated their rooms and drop their luggage before heading down to the dining room for a splendid roast dinner, courtesy of caterers TNS who supplied us with some fantastic meals throughout the week.

Sunday evening was spent getting to know one another in the bar and I'm sure that I can speak for all when I say that everyone slept soundly that night!

On Monday we were joined by Peter Rafferty, President of Revision Military (who very kindly sponsor Project Gemini) along with three of his colleagues, Mark, Claire and Charlotte. They joined the main group and underwent a tour of the centre's marvellous facilities with an opportunity to meet some of the staff and volunteers. After a superb buffet lunch we boarded the coaches once again and headed to Colwyn Bay where we had a go at surfing and some of the group piloted the speedboat. Monday evening was spent at the bar where some very tall tales were told about certain people's prowess on the surfboards!

A hot and sunny Tuesday morning saw us at Caernarfon Castle where we had a tour of the grounds and a talk on the history of the castle by Tony, the very knowledgeable and entertaining tour guide. We were also given a very interesting talk on the history of the Royal Welch Regiment by two lady volunteers from the Royal Welch Museum who let us handle some of the



artefacts and answered any questions that we may have had. Once again, we were treated to a delicious buffet lunch by our catering staff. In the afternoon we took the short drive to Zip World near the village of Bethesda to participate in Europe's longest and fastest zip wires. It was a thrilling experience and one to remember for a long time to come. After the excitement of the zip wire we headed off for a lovely fish and chip tea at a nearby restaurant, much to the delight of our overseas cousins.



**Picture:** Monaca Gilmore and Maria Pikulski test artefacts at Caernarfon Castle during Project Gemini 2016.



**Picture:** Flying through the air near Bethesda in North Wales at Zip World Velocity, the fastest zip line in the world and the longest in Europe.

Wednesday's weather was a bit hit and miss but it didn't dampen our enthusiasm as we looked forward to a day of hovercraft driving and an opportunity to have a go at driving an off road dirt buggy. These buggies, powered by a car engine, can reach speeds of over 100 miles per hour and were great fun to drive. Everyone enjoyed the day and we returned to the centre, mud splattered, to get ready for the visit to the Albion pub in nearby Conwy for a presentation on the art of brewing beer and the eagerly anticipated beer tasting session. After the visit to the Albion we headed back to the bar at the centre to celebrate the birthdays of Maria Pikulski and Debbie from behind the bar.

The transport was waiting for us on Thursday morning to take us to the Imperial War Museum in Manchester where we spent a few hours touring this impressive building and visiting the various halls which contained some amazing items of memorabilia from past wars and conflicts. We also had the opportunity to speak with a D-Day veteran who enthralled us all with stories of his personal experiences of the Normandy Landings.

In the afternoon we drove the short distance to the Airkix indoor skydiving centre where we participated in a simulated freefall skydive inside a vertical wind tunnel. Basically, giant fans draw air up through the flight chamber and return it down the sides. The air is then compressed and speeded up then fed back into the chamber resulting in a smooth flow of air which enables you to mimic a free fall skydive.



**Picture:** Tom Boal at Airkix Indoor Skydiving centre.

Everyone donned a flight suit, helmet and goggles and then we were given a presentation on what positions to adopt on entering the flight chamber and various signals to learn in order to make things as safe and enjoyable as possible. It was a fantastic experience and something to remember for a long time to come. After a nice meal in a nearby restaurant we headed back to the centre and a few beers before retiring to bed for a good night's rest in preparation for a busy day ahead.

It was a beautiful sunny start to Friday as we jumped aboard the coach to take us to our next adventure, this time in Birkenhead and a really interesting visit to a German U Boat; U Boat-534. We spent a fascinating morning touring the cross-sectioned U Boat and handling some of the precious artefacts such as an experimental torpedo, a cog belonging to an Enigma machine, various weaponry and personal effects and listening to a very knowledgeable tour guide. After lunch we took the Mersey Ferry across to Liverpool and took in the iconic Beatles Tour.

Friday evening's Regimental Dinner proved to be a very special occasion indeed. It started off with a bugle call from Billy Baxter who informed us all in his inimitable style that we had to make our way to the lawn for the start of the festivities.

On our way down the sloping path to the croquet lawn we heard the sound of singing and much to everyone's delight, Trio Canig a trio of Welsh tenors were performing for us! The weather was kind to us and we had a very pleasant hour or so sipping champagne, nibbling on canapes and listening to the lovely sound of this male vocal group. Unsurprisingly, Billy couldn't resist it when the trio broke into Tom Jones' classic 'Delilah' so he persuaded centre manager Steve Boswell to escort him to the mike and joined in with the singing! Don't give up the day job Billy.

Another fantastic touch was a piper, dressed in his full Highland regalia, who piped us all from the lawn back to the centre and into the beautifully laid out dining room where we all took our seats in anticipation of a wonderful night to come. We were not to be disappointed.

There were some really heartfelt speeches made that evening from our own beneficiaries and our guests from the USA and South Africa. Llandudno centre manager Steve Boswell, CEO Nick Caplin and Activities Team Leader Mark Hollis, who put together the itinerary for the week, also delivered some very

inspirational and uplifting presentations. The food, as always, was tremendous and Steve Baxendell and his staff from TNS were roundly applauded. Our overseas guests were presented with their honorary life member certificates, printed on the finest Welsh slate and a bespoke Project Gemini coin by our CEO and they responded by presenting Nick with some gifts of their own to display around the building. The Blind Veterans UK participants were also presented with their coins.



**Picture:** Chief Executive Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB present Joel Tavera with honorary life membership of Blind Veterans UK.



**Picture:** Maria Pikulski, Dr Tom Zampieri and Colin Williamson at the Regimental dinner for Project Gemini 2016 from the Llandudno centre.

After the formal dinner was over the guests retired to the bar where there were some more rather unusual, gifts presented. I'm sure that I speak for everyone saying that we all had a fantastic night and credit must go to everyone involved in the planning, preparation and delivery.

Saturday was spent shopping in Llandudno for souvenirs to take back to the US and South Africa and we also said our farewells to the UK contingent who left for home.

It was an early start for the US veterans on Sunday as the transport had to leave for the airport at 3am. Chris Nowell and I had volunteered (press ganged more like) to wave the guys off so it was with bleary eyes that we said our goodbyes and promises to keep in touch. Neville and Don, the two veterans from South Africa, didn't have to leave until after lunch.

It was an amazing week and thanks to everyone at the Llandudno centre for making it so special. In particular, we'd like to thank staff from Rehab and Training, Housekeeping, Transport, Care, the caterers, reception, management, and our wonderful volunteers. There are many more to numerous to mention who all contributed in some way to making the week such a fantastic success. We take our hats off to you all, you're a credit to the organisation.

Project Gemini will be back to the Llandudno centre in 2018 and we really look forward to seeing you all again. Thanks again for a great week!



**Picture:** Billy Baxter in his regalia of Town Crier of Llandudno greets the 2016 Project Gemini participants at the Llandudno centre.



**Picture:** Buggy driving.



**Picture:** Ready for paddle boarding and surfing.

## The Combat Veteran Players presents *Richard III* by William Shakespeare London 7th July.

Richard, the victorious soldier, struggles to make a transition to peacetime, and instead becomes one of Shakespeare's most notorious villains. Now the award-winning Combat Veteran Players (CVP) gives its unique interpretation of Shakespeare's classic story of Richard III.

From the company behind acclaimed tours of *Henry V* (2013) and *Hamlet* (2014), at venues including The Globe, Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) Dell Stage and throughout the West End.

The Combat Veteran Players will perform as part of the RSC's Open Stages Programme in the Leicester Square Theatre in July this summer.

Formed in 2011, the CVP is a company of ex-Service personnel who have come together to overcome mental trauma, injury and related difficulties through skill building and performance of high quality Shakespeare. It brings a perspective to *Richard III* and its protagonist that no other company can match. The Company is embracing the 400th Anniversary commemoration of Shakespeare's death and recently performed for His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales, on the site of Shakespeare's home, New Place. CVP have been fortunate to work with the support of The Royal Shakespeare Company and the Shakespeare's Globe on London's Bankside.

This is part of a short tour which opened at the Swan Theatre in Stratford Upon Avon on 26th June before moving to London's Leicester Square Theatre on 7th July and then around various schools nationwide.

To buy tickets for the 7th July 1845 performance at the Leicester Square Theatre in London telephone the Box office on 020 7734 2222 or email: [boxoffice@leicestersquaretheatre.com](mailto:boxoffice@leicestersquaretheatre.com)

For further information visit [www.combatveteranplayers.org.uk](http://www.combatveteranplayers.org.uk) The production is generously funded by ABF The Soldiers' Charity, Help for Heroes and Stoll.

Shaun Johnson, a former soldier who will play Richard III said: "After the auditions, I was genuinely delighted to be cast as Richard III. I had been following Richard's exhumation story and the Richard III Society for several years with great interest and immediately favoured him as my favourite past time King. Shakespeare wrote of Richard in a different light to probably appease the Protestant Queen Elizabeth but historians now paint a very different picture of the last Plantagenet King.

"I resonated with his struggle of being a Catholic because I too, as a Catholic, struggled as a soldier to make sense of the religious divide during my tours of duty in Northern Ireland in the early 1980s. My grandmother was of Irish Catholic descent and often scolded me for, "fighting our own" as she put it. My mental battle had already started before I even left England to fly to Belfast, but I wasn't the only one effected by family mind warfare battles, I knew of some soldiers who came back from tours of Northern Ireland and whose family never spoke to them again.

"In previous productions we often see actors adorned in military medals, in certain scenes during this production, I am quite proud to wear not only my own medal but my great grandfather's First World War medal, my grandfather's Second World War medal and my father's medals.

"The training from the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Globe Theatre has been massively instrumental in developing my acting skills. We had the best of the best from the RSC and the Shakespeare's Globe practitioners. I was once shy of Shakespeare but now treat it as an art and have become very protective of it as any artist would do in their own artistic profession.

"My first play was *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the trendy Old Vic Tunnels as Lysander. *Henry V* followed playing the sly Dauphin and Corporal Nym. My hardest role was playing *Hamlet* at the fabulous Shakespeare's Globe on London's Bankside. I had to dig inside to find a character to suit and often didn't like what I found in my cupboard. Last year was a very cheerful production of *Twelfth Night* at the Leicester Square Theatre, playing Malvolio was remarkable. The cast as always bonded to produce a wonderful show.

"I was a very different person after leaving military Service. I drifted, failed to connect, drank and became very depressed. After two serious suicide attempts

and spending 10 weeks in a secure hospital, I finally began to live again. My wife Joan was massively instrumental and stayed with me through all the struggles, without her I doubt I would be here today. She made me open up and face my mental problems. I joined the CVP in 2010 and have literally taken off in a different direction. Confident, safe and in love with life again I am convinced God sent Joan to save me.

"As much as I love Shakespeare, I'd like to experience something different to help me grow as an actor, I am hopeful to be cast in a West End production in early 2017 about a homeless veteran. Maybe it's also time to find an agent and finally after all this unforgettable life-changing support, stand on my own two feet again!

"As Richard III is a play about war, the CVP can really bring another layer to the production that no other company can. I learn something new about the play with each rehearsal. The rehearsal room is so dynamic, full of people who have such different skills and experiences that they are ready to bring to the production. Everyone is so ready to jump up to help and support each other in a way unlike any cast I have worked with."

### **Harold Smart's experiences of Charles Bonnet Syndrome.**

I enjoyed reading the article in the May issue of Review by Hilary Brown about Charles Bonnet Syndrome. I was classified as partially sighted some four years ago and joined Blind Veterans UK soon afterwards. It was not long after that I experienced hallucinations, but having read about them in a leaflet from the Macular Society I was not particularly concerned.

My first hallucinations were of an elderly couple dressed in black and as the leaflet had claimed were in Victorian or perhaps Edwardian clothing. Other images of people in 1930s dress followed. As the months progressed these images were replaced by geometric shapes and coloured blocks and last year my hallucinations seemed to have almost stopped. However I find now that when I stand at the bus stop looking down the road waiting for a gap in the traffic, the road itself does not disappear and is complete but cars do disappear some 300 metres away only to reappear some 50 metres from me. Rather concerning, although I am now used to this so can take care!

Additionally when watching television the screen appears complete, but if I suddenly move my gaze to the adjacent plain magenta painted wall for a very

brief moment a microscopic area of the television screen appears but for less than a second. I am a former electronics engineer who at times designed circuits for a particular purpose and so am intrigued by these images that I have been experiencing. I would put forward a theory that Charles Bonnet syndrome does not go away but that the visual cortex gradually trains itself to replace the absence of information with what was received just beforehand to complete the picture. I am aware that digital television receivers are programmed in this way as the vision signal consists of thousands of individual packages and if one or two are lost or distorted on reception then the TV memory will look at recently arrived (complete) packages and put them in place of the distorted or lost ones. I would suggest that our brains can be trained to do this. Hence my view of the road, which is a constant, stays there, but a car, which is transitory, does not.

I have also done some research on macular degeneration and have been told by consultants at the Machin Clinic at Warwick Hospital where I attend that my macular has not only been damaged but has also had a microscopic pin hole created through it which is why I suffer from Charles Bonnet syndrome. That means that there is no signal transmitted to the Visual Cortex from this particular area. I have found by experiment that my 'signal absence' is about ten degrees to the right of centre.

I would therefore suggest that those sufferers who experience Charles Bonnet Syndrome do so because they have minute pinhole(s) in their macula and those that do not still have a complete albeit damaged macula.

I was going through some very old photographs that I had not previously examined and came across this one. It is of my mother's parents and is the very first hallucination seen by me when I developed Charles Bonnet syndrome. They were always dressed in semi-mourning clothes as their son Harold was killed in World War One and his body was never found. I found His name on the Menin Gate Memorial in Belgium. You can guess why I was so named.



**Picture:** Harold Smart's grandparents who featured in his first hallucination.

## Introducing RESET Week for younger members of working age. By Sharon Williams, Life Skills Manager (Llandudno).

The Llandudno centre held the first RESET week from the 9th May that is aimed at younger members of working age.

### So what is RESET?

RESET stands for Reflection, Expectations, Setting Goals, Evaluating and Taking those goal forward into life.

It's an engaging, thought provoking and enlightening week where members have the opportunity to look positively at where they are in life and assess where they want to be in the future. It's a week that motivates even the most unmotivated!

### How did the first RESET week go?

Six members attended the week, each with very different goals and aspirations. The week was made up of group activities but it had also been tailored to individual sessions that were specific to the needs of each member. Throughout the week the members were able to refocus on themselves and look positively ahead. By the end of the week the group left with a clear and timely goal plan to take forward. Members had a lot of fun, felt more confident and left very upbeat about the future.

### So what does RESET week cover?

It offers members time to think, plan and get motivated into knowing "What's next for me?" It doesn't give the solutions but it helps to reset a members thoughts and look at what could be ahead.

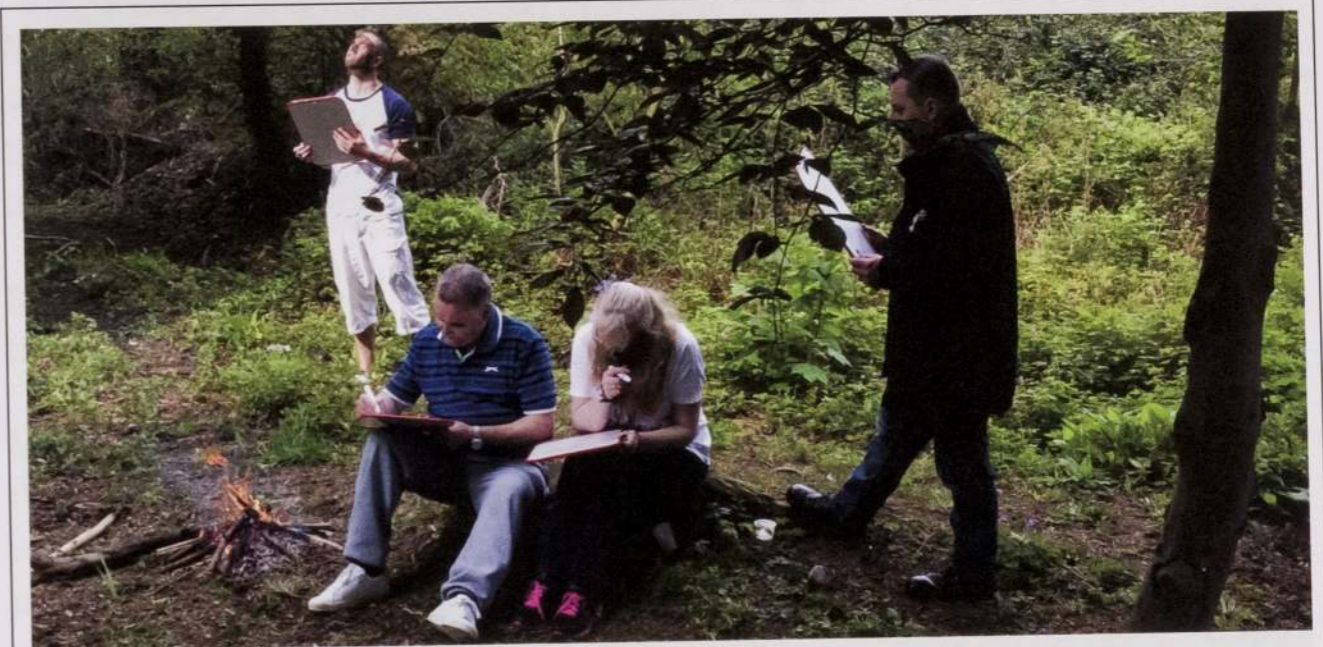
Some of the things covered were goal planning, activities, resilience training, self-awareness training, meeting other members, benefits checks, information and advice, group session, 1-1 session, the ability to open up, and last but not least attend, to the infamous "Can't Cook, Won't Cook" evening with chef extraordinaire Andy.

In the first instance please contact your Welfare Officer if you feel you could benefit from a RESET week and you are a younger member of working age.

### Chris Bennett – Member feedback of the week

"Overall I had an amazing week and on a personal level really opened up. I learnt new things about the way I think and act with certain things in my life. I just want to thank all the staff who arranged helped and supported us through this short journey as it was brilliant and a real insight that I will take away with me.

"It has helped me on so many different levels from getting away from reality for a bit to understanding myself a bit better to just getting stuck into everything with the guys, and lady, and just having some fun. Again brilliant, amazing and I enjoyed every minute of it thank you!"



Picture above: Reflect, Expect, Aspire and Chat. Below: The group.





**Picture above:** Mark Abel competing in the 2016 Invictus Games in Orlando, Florida. **Picture below:** Mark and Anita Abel at The Invictus Games.



## Mark Abel Invictus Warrior! By Colin Williamson, Contributing Editor.

Former Army Corporal Mark Abel recently took part in the Invictus Games held in Florida in the USA as part of the swimming team for Team GB and he took some time out of his busy schedule to talk to the Review about his experiences at the games.

**Review.** "Hi Mark, congratulations on being part of an epic adventure! How did you feel when you first heard that you had been selected to represent your country?"

**Mark.** "I was so elated, in fact so happy, excited and proud about having been selected to represent the UK. I was also nervous and a little apprehensive about the prospect of putting on a UK team kit. So much was going on in my mind, I got very little sleep that night believe me!"

**Review.** "Which family members travelled to the states with you and what did they think of it all?"

**Mark.** "I was accompanied by my lovely wife Anita who stayed with me at the athlete's hotel. As part of the team, Anita was caring for my safety and wellbeing. She was there to support me and to make sure I was at the right place at the right time, especially as everything was on such a big scale. My son Sam also travelled out to Orlando, accompanied by his Grandad Bill and Granny Sue. They formed part of the friends and families that had been set up by the Royal British Legion and Fisher House. This was so that friends and families could come along and support their loved ones who were competing at the Invictus Games.

Bill and Sue said: "The games were a lifetime experience that both inspired and humbled us, but also gave us a new outlook on life after being with heroic athletes who showed what they could do rather than what they could not do."

Anita said "I am very proud of what my husband manages to do each and every day, but to see him compete at the Invictus Games in Florida, representing the UK, was a truly memorable event. He is now an international athlete who, when he is not working, has now committed himself to many different new sports, which gives him confidence and a sense of achievement."

Mark along with his son Sam, recently abseiled down Abberley Clock Tower to raise funds for a local charity, Sight Concern Worcester, and at the end of June will be doing a tandem skydive from 15,000ft in aid of us here at Blind Veterans UK".

Sam chipped in and said "I had an amazing time watching my dad and all of the other competitors. It was great fun but also remarkable to see what people could achieve even though they had major disabilities".

**Review.** "What was the opening ceremony like? It looked amazing on the television".

**Mark.** "The opening ceremony was exciting and nervous at the same time as all of the athletes were gathered away from the stadium. The athletes were there taken to the back of the stage ready to start the procession of countries. Along the way I did manage to grab a photo with BBC1 presenter Gabby Logan, who was presenting and covering the Invictus Games. As we walked out onto the stage the stadium erupted into applause and cheers. What an amazing experience walking out through the smoke in UK team kit, a feeling of immense pride. We witnessed a sensational ceremony filled with excitement and emotion as stories of athletes Invictus journeys were played out. The Opening Ceremony also included musical performances by British sensation Laura Wright and international star James Blunt and Gareth Malone's Invictus Choir. The Ceremony featured an unprecedented number of military performances, including the US Army Herald Trumpets, US Army Band, US Navy, US Air Force, US Army Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps and the US Marine Corps Silent Drill Team. HRH Prince Harry opened the games and we were also treated to a speech from the United States First Lady Michelle Obama. And by Ken Fisher, Chairman of the Organising Committee and CEO of Fisher House, which is a network of comfort homes where families can stay at no cost while a loved one is receiving treatment."

**Review.** "The atmosphere must have been amazing, what was it like for you?"

**Mark.** "The atmosphere was electric at all the events, with all of the nations and supporters providing great support for all of the athletes. I can say that whilst competing at the swimming pool complex the noise was phenomenal as we were waiting to be called forward. However, as I was walking out to the starting blocks I can't remember hearing the crowd. I had become so focused on what I had to do to the point of emotional breakdown. I know that whilst watching

the wheelchair rugby and basketball, it produced the most noise as it's fast and furious with no prisoners. Whilst walking around at the ESPN World of Sport and Disney resorts ground staff, volunteers and the general public wanted to stop and chat to us thanking us for our service which you don't get from anywhere else".

**Review.** "Did you mix with other nation's athletes?"

**Mark.** "Yes we did mix with the other athletes not only at the start line but also as spectators watching the different sporting events, cheering not only for our own country but for others too. We also chatted over mealtimes both at the ESPN World of Sport and at our hotel, The Shades of Green. Everyone had their own story and journey to tell about their road to recovery."

**Review.** "How did it feel to be part of the closing ceremony knowing that this was the end of your adventure?"

**Mark.** "The closing ceremony was a lot of fun, all the athletes were behind the stage out of view from the public having a laugh and joke as well some of the nation's started to sing some of their own military songs. Considering how much noise was being made by the athletes the public never heard any of it surprisingly. We were all greeted by rapturous applause and a standing ovation as we were presented with our Invictus Games Medals before taking our seats to enjoy performances by Jordan Smith, Season 9 winner of hit show The Voice, who performed Adele's 'Set Fire to the Rain' accompanied by a gospel choir and the first nationally recognised wounded warrior band, Vetted, took to the stage to a standing ovation. American Idol Season 11 winner, Phillip Phillips also performed. In a touching tribute, actor Wilmer Valderrama presented the Jaguar Award for 'Exceptional performance' to Sarah Rudder from the US team for displaying true determination and grit from start to finish. Professional wrestler and sports superstar John Cena then joined the stage to present the Land Rover 'Above and Beyond' award to the Sitting Volleyball team from Georgia, who won a Bronze medal in the competition. The team were honoured for their inspiring example of the Invictus spirit, as not only competitors, but also as teammates."

The Invictus Games flag was handed over to Canada, where the games are being held next year in Toronto. Prince Harry took to the stage and gave a truly Invictus speech with a standing ovation.

**Review.** "You mentioned Prince Harry. Did you meet him?"



**Mark.** "Yes I was lucky enough to meet and see Prince Harry on a number of occasions. I met him first when I went to Buckingham Palace back in April, when the UK team was announced. Also several times as he walked around the Games chatting to not only to the athletes from all the different countries but also spending time with the friends and families and having photos taken with them. He is a very down to earth guy. My family were watching the UK team playing sitting volleyball and all of a sudden Anita announced "look, Prince Harry is coming". With that Harry climbed past me and sat up on the seat next to my son. He began chatting to some of the friends and family from the UK. When he got up to leave, I stood up to offer him some assistance down off the seating. I managed to have a brief chat and jokingly asked about an invite to Balmoral Castle. I grew up in Royal Deeside in a small village called Aboyne, not far from Balmoral Castle. Harry knows the local area well.

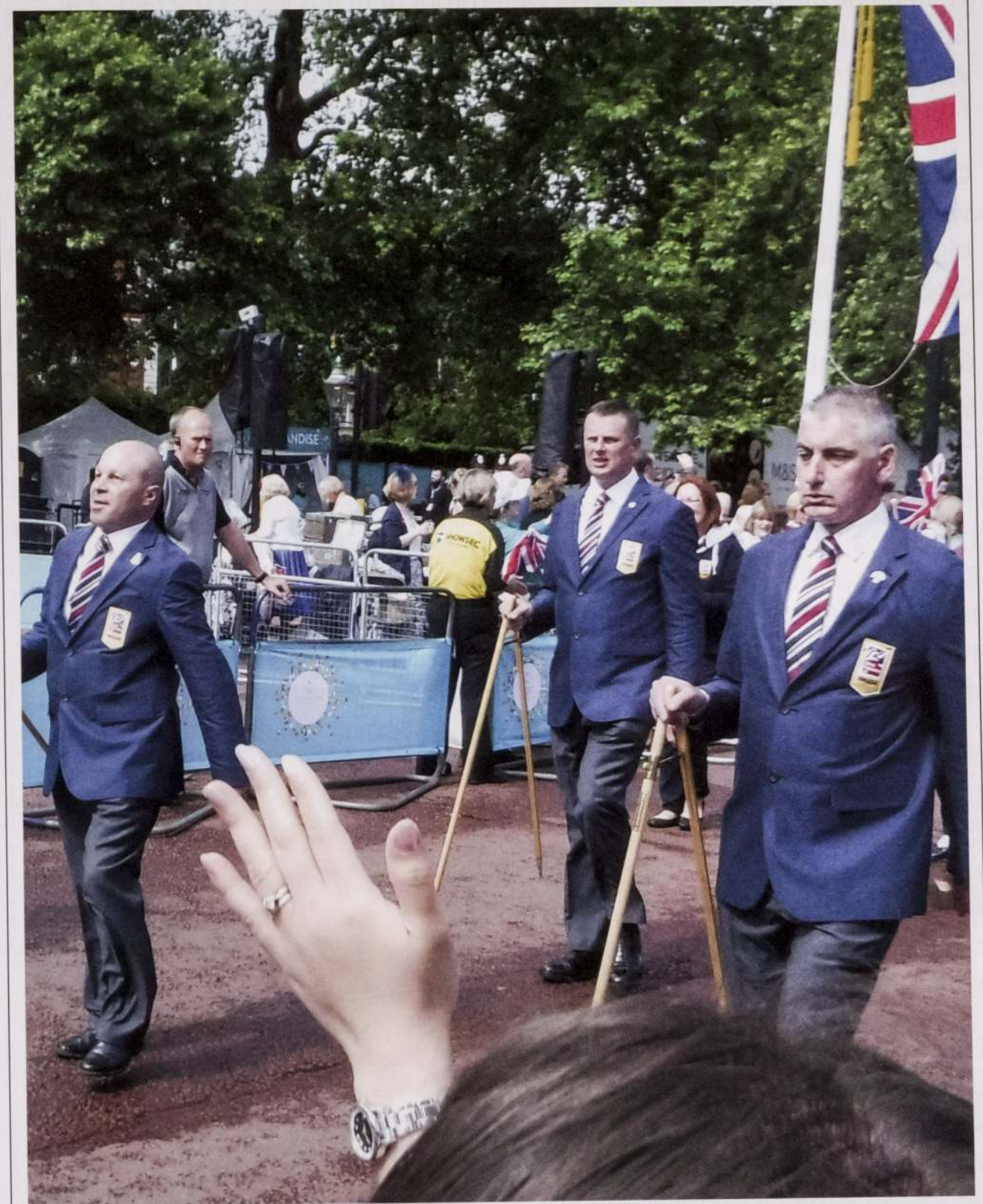
Since coming back from the Invictus Games, Anita and I have been to a luncheon at the Palace of Westminster with the other members of the UK team to celebrate our participation at the games and also this week been to the Kia Oval for a home coming dinner, where Prince Harry gave a wonderful and very moving speech. We were lucky again to talk and have our pictures taken with Prince Harry. The Invictus Games were an unforgettable experience not just for me but for all of my family and I'm really proud and humbled to have been part of an amazing event".

**Review.** "Thanks Mark and good luck for the future".

## The Athlete. By George Fallowfield.

Strength of the well trained muscle;  
Force of the heart's warm thrust.  
Might of the active sinew;  
Greatly in these we trust.  
But back of them all is the courage;  
The asset that wins the game.  
Back of the stride — judgement;  
Back of the brawn the brain.

## Blind veterans celebrate Her Majesty's 90th Birthday at The Patron's Lunch. By Catherine Goodier.



**Picture:** Left Billy Baxter and right Kevin Alderton who formed part of Blind Veterans UK Pace Sticking team who took part in the parade at The Patron's Lunch to celebrate the 90th birthday of HM The Queen.

Let the rain kiss you. Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops.  
Let the rain sing you a lullaby. [Langston Hughes]

Holding picnic baskets and clad in waterproof ponchos we let the rain beat upon our heads with silver liquid drops (albeit rather large and persistent ones), as, undeterred, we enjoyed the festivities of The Patron's Lunch, for what is a little rain when there are good times to be had with friends.

On Sunday 12th June we were part of the 10,000 strong throng of people who made their way to The Mall in London to picnic with The Queen at the biggest street party to celebrate the 90th birthday of our Patron, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. We were there as ambassadors of Blind Veterans UK to enjoy The Patron's Lunch and celebrate Her Majesty's commitment to over 600 organisations and charities of which she is Patron. It was time to show our gratitude to our Queen for her service and her support of so many charitable causes during her 63 year reign.

To much applause HRH The Duke of Cambridge, joint President of The Patron's Lunch, thanked everyone for showing that the Great British public doesn't let a little rain spoil a good day out. He praised The Queen, saying that she is at the helm of his family, the nation and the Commonwealth, and that she is the one head of state that world leaders can turn to for a first hand perspective of the arc of history over the last six decades.

Introduced by HRH The Duke of Cambridge, The Queen thanked everyone present and those holding parties for the support and encouragement that she is given. She hoped that the happy celebrations would remind everyone of the many benefits that occur when people come together for a common purpose as family, friends or neighbours. She paid tribute to the commitment, selfless devotion and generosity of spirit that is shown by the hundreds of charities and voluntary organisations that were represented on The Mall.

Former Wren, Joyce Fleet, who is featured on the cover, was one of the 90 year old blind veterans who was invited to attend. Speaking in appreciation Joyce said: "It's absolutely wonderful to be here. I was saying to Tricia [Robinson] my Welfare Officer that 70 years ago I marched in the Victory Parade in London down The Mall with the WRNS. It was a wonderful day and the sun didn't shine that day either! We marched for a few hours, but that wasn't a problem as I wasn't quite 20 then. I enjoyed my few years in the WRNS, married an airman and had 68 years of married life. Joining Blind Veterans UK has been wonderful

for me as I've had so much help. It means that I can still make my cakes using talking books and talking kitchen scales and I have a read easy machine. It's a wonderful charity. Everyone is wonderful and I'm grateful to be here today and to be so close to the Royal Family as they went past."

As the Parade passed by everyone tucked happily into their M&S picnic hamper and cheered on the performers, including our own Blind Veterans UK Pace Sticking team of Billy Baxter, Kevin Alderton and Steve Birkin. They were led by sighted Drum Major Tony Taylor.

Following the National Anthem D-Day veteran John Douglas, one of the 90 year old blind veterans, said "I'm an old soldier. I was brought up with The Royal Family and it's an honour to be here today. I was born in 1925 seven years after the end of the First World War when King George V was on the throne. When I wear these medals on the Remembrance Parade it's on behalf of my father who fought in the trenches at the Battle of the Somme from 1st July. He was a Seaforth Highlander, 9th Scottish Division. This has been a very special day and it's an honour to be here with my son Colin. Thank you Blind Veterans UK for inviting me in my 90th year to celebrate our Queen's 90th birthday and the Duke of Edinburgh's 95th birthday."



**Picture:** Proud son Colin and with his dad blind veteran John Douglas.

Another person enjoying a birthday was 30 year old Ken Facal. As HRH The Duke of Wessex stopped to speak with Blind Veterans UK party PR Officer Charlotte Mackenbach informed him it was Ken's 30th birthday. Turning to wish Ken a happy birthday he told him not to expect them to put on such a lavish birthday party in his honour next year!



**Picture:** The sun came out for the Royal procession as Ken and Bella Facal celebrated Ken's 30th birthday in style at The Patron's Lunch.



**Picture:** Earlier in the day!



**Picture:** Paul Plimm and 90 year old blind veteran Thomas Rogers, who beat Her Majesty to her 90th birthday by a few weeks. Thomas said: "It's been a smashing day and weather didn't dampened anyone's fun. Mind you that's typically British."

Joy Folkard travelled to The Mall with her friend Pauline Haller. Joy who has been a blind veteran for six years said: "It's nice to be here today, although I've been to several of these occasions and it's the only one I've got soaking wet at, but it doesn't matter in the slightest as a the atmosphere and the parade is wonderful." When asked how she came to Blind Veterans UK Joyce replied: "I was in the WRNS during the war stationed in Southend. The night that I went on duty the estuary was absolutely crowded with ships. I was on duty the whole night sending signals to all the ships and in the morning when I came out there wasn't a single ship left. It was amazing, absolutely amazing. I'm very pleased that they are now receiving their Legion d'honneur. I enjoy coming to all of these occasions. I also really enjoy Blind Veterans UK Reunions and Jo Fishwick my Welfare Officer is wonderful. It's nice to feel that you belong to something. I'd like to meet other former WRNS. I'm a naval plus person as my father was in the Royal Navy and I thought they started the war just so I could get into the WRNS."



**Picture:** Rain didn't stop play for Pauline Haller and Joy Folkard.

Lovebirds Eileen Prince and Bill Braund enjoyed The Patron's Lunch with Bill's daughter Rosemary and her son William and Kathleen Hurt.

Eileen said: "I've been a member of Blind Veterans UK for about five years and it's lovely to be here today. I just wish the weather had been a bit better, but it won't dampen our fun!"

Bill who has been a blind veteran since 2008 said: "I've enjoyed every moment of being a blind veteran. It's the best organisation I've ever joined and one of the best organisations ever founded.

Eileen and Bill met at a day centre where they live and love blossomed. As Eileen served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service Bill introduced her to Blind Veterans UK and as Bill's daughter Rosemary says they now come as a pair.



**Picture from left to right:** Back William Clelland and Rosemary Clelland and front Bill Braund and Eileen Prince.

More happy revellers were Edna Bowman-Sutton who was there with Kaye.

"We're having a brilliant time except for the rain, but that hasn't stopped us having fun as it's been brilliant. My particular highlight, apart from seeing the Royal Family, which was a great treat and our own blind veterans pace sticking team was the band of the Royal Marines. They're marvellous."

"I've been a blind veteran for three years and it's given me a new lease of life. (This was echoed by Kaye). The help they give you is absolutely wonderful. I did my training at home as staff came from the Llandudno centre, which meant that I didn't have to travel to one of the centres and the people who came were absolutely wonderful. I use a scanner and phone and it's just great. They've made my life a lot easier. I love the Review too."

That's what we like to hear Edna!



Picture: Kaye Sutton and Edna Bowman-Sutton.



**Picture:** Glynis Gillam, Working Age Members Case Manager with blind veteran Carl Adamson and his partner Charlene. Only a few days before Carl had been presented with a Volunteering Award for his work at the Llandudno centre by Lord Dannatt at The Tower of London.

The day after the Queen trended on Twitter with her Neon at Ninety for her trooping the Colour outfit Glynis praised Her Majesty's popping pink outfit.



**Picture above left:** Member Services Manager Hilary Fox, whose idea it was for Blind Veterans UK to attend The Patron's Lunch, is featured with Kelly Ganfield and Kelly's wife Sarah. **Picture above right:** Kelly Ganfield with PR Officer Charlotte Machenbach and Sarah Ganfield.

When asked how he enjoyed the day Harry Hitch, a 90 year old blind veteran, replied: "It's been a most enjoyable day. We had the rain but everybody seemed to accept it and have a great time. It's all part of being English and it's been a great day and one that I wouldn't have missed for the world. I only wish that I could see so that I could see more, but the atmosphere here is really great and the Parade as it's gone past is smashing. I've been able to appreciate it and Clare Balding's commentary is very good as she explains everything. It was very moving when Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh went past with the Royal Family. It's difficult to explain, but it was so very moving.

Colin Hitch said: "It's an absolutely fantastic event and to get so close to the Royal Family and for them to spend so much time talking to everyone was really good to see. A once in a lifetime day that you wouldn't experience anywhere else. It's been a really, really great event and thank you to Blind Veterans UK for inviting us today."



**Picture:** The end of a wonderful celebration. Colin Hitch with his dad blind veteran Harry.



**Picture:** Broadcaster and campaigner Dame Esther Rantzen DBE stopped to speak to the Blind Veterans UK party.



**Picture:** Stan Waddingham and Susan Woodford.



**Picture:** Ron and Margaret Davies.



**Picture:** The very lovely Yvonne Traynor with her equally lovely son John.



**Picture:** Stan Norton and Vivienne Harrison.



**Picture:** Lovebirds Helene and Walter Exall who married last year after meeting at Blind Veterans UK.

## Blind Veterans UK Pace Sticking Team make history at Sandhurst World Championships. By Mark Wheeler, PR Officer.

On 16th June Billy Baxter, Kevin Alderton and Steve Birkin made history when they were the first civilian team to compete at the Pace Sticking World Championships at Sandhurst. They were led by the sighted Drum Major Tony Taylor when they took on pace sticking teams from across the Armed Forces and around the world.

The origin of the pace stick, which looks like a large pair of compasses, is claimed by the Royal Regiment of Artillery, who used a "gunner's stick" to measure the distance between their guns in the field. But it was adapted and used by the Infantry as an aid to drill and can be opened up to measure a perfect pace when marching.

The art of pace sticking competitively involves keeping perfect time, coordination and dressing to keep in a straight line. Skills that are hard enough to master for serving soldiers but made particularly challenging if you are blind. The stick is spun on the ground whilst marching and the team have had to master several skills including changing the hand holding the stick, whilst still keeping perfect pace.

When talking about how the idea for the team emerged Kevin Alderton says: "It came about through a conversation with a fellow blind veteran. We were just speaking about some of the things we missed since we left, and one of the things was actually drill. Eight months later, here we are!"

Billy Baxter, who many of you will know as the R&T Liaison Officer at the Llandudno centre, and who has no sight, marched in the middle of the three veterans and has talked about the importance of being able to return to drill training after losing his sight.

He says: "It has been brilliant for all of us to go back to our old training as well as learning new skills and we are so proud to represent the charity that has changed our lives."

As you have seen and read in the previous pages of this edition of Review the team were able to practice for the event by marching in the Patron's Lunch Parade. They led the delegation of Armed Forces charities and organisations that hold The Queen's patronage that paraded on the Mall to celebrate Her Majesty's 90th birthday.

Team member and blind veteran Steve Birkin says: "It was a huge honour to have been asked to represent the charity at the Patron's Lunch Parade and we all got such a buzz from the cheers and applause of the crowd."

Drum Major Tony Taylor, who faced new challenges in training blind veterans and had to adapt his methods. He says:

"I've had to rethink the way I'm teaching them, and try to explain and move their hands into the correct position. They have all worked extremely hard and we wouldn't be taking part if we thought we were there to make up the numbers."

The team had regular training sessions and were able to compete at the World Championships after competing in a qualifying event at Wellington Barracks in May.

Chief Executive of Blind Veterans UK, Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB, said: "Our pace sticking team is a perfect example of what Blind Veterans UK is all about and we are hugely proud of them. For more than a century our charity has provided our members with the skills and support to regain their independence and achieve victory over blindness. Like so many of our veterans, Billy, Kevin and Steve have demonstrated that there is life beyond sight loss."



**Picture:** Steve Birkin, Billy Baxter, Kevin Alderton and Drum Major Tony Taylor at the World Championships at Sandhurst.

**Jim Hodgkinson speaks of his father, Private JW Hodgkinson MM, 2nd Bn Lancashire Fusiliers, by Catherine Goodier, Editor.**

As we mark the centenary of the Battle of the Somme I interviewed members of Blind Veterans UK whose family were involved in the Somme Offensive. Jim Hodgkinson from Manchester joined Blind Veterans UK in 2008 and I spent an afternoon with him and his wife Ruby, as Jim told me about his father and his father's time in WWI when he Served with 2nd Bn Lancashire Fusiliers.

Although his father never spoke of his experiences during World War One Jim knows of his father's bravery from the War Diary of Lieut Hawkins, 2nd Bn Lancashire Fusiliers. We have reproduced Lieut Hawkins's war diary from October 12th 1916 below.

October 12th 1916 was the day that Private Jim (Ginger) Hodgkinson 4088, 2nd Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers saved the life of Lieut Hawkins during the Battle of the Somme. For that outstanding act of bravery he was awarded the Military Medal. We begin Lieut Hawkins's account:

At 2.30am I started off to the assembly position with my Co. H.Q. which consisted of C.S.M. Laverick of D.C.M., my runner Ginger Hodgkinson, my servant Hargreaves and the Co. Signallers and Orderlies.

At about 6am the preliminary bombardment began and lasted all day until Zero Hour. It was very slow and very regular. A few shots fell short into 'D' Co., but nothing very exciting happened at first. (The rest of the diary is written by hour and minutes as the events of the day become somewhat crowded).

12.15pm: Several Huns running and crawling in No Man's Land carrying a machine gun. Had a few shots at them.

12.30pm: Twelve Huns came into our line and surrendered. Some excitement. Things assume a rosy aspect and point to a fairly easy show.

1.0pm: Watches sent to Bn. H.Q. for synchronising.

1:30pm: Watch sent back and following additional orders received from Brain, Zero hour 2.5pm. The Duke to attack the length of trench occupied by the Hun between A Co. and then at 2.25pm the rest of the Division to attack.

Accordingly we sat down and waited for Zero hour.

2pm: Bombardment increased. Bayonets fixed.

2.3pm: Hun plane flew straight down own line about 300 feet up, may have seen trenches crowded with men. None of our planes in sight.

2.5pm: Fiendish Row. Zero hour. Heavy enemy barrage on 10th Brigade Machine Gun Barrage. Dukes attacking on our right but can't see much.

2.10pm: Shrapnel shell on top of us. Laverick hit on steel helmet and stunned. Several casualties.

2.15pm: Awful noise impossible to make oneself heard. Several men got excited and went over the top on their own. Keen as hell to go.

2.20pm: Shell landed on CO. H.Q. all Co. signallers and runners knocked out except Ginger. Hargreaves badly knocked.

2.25pm: Johny Greaves and 5 Platoon off followed by the rest of the Co. Johny shot through the lung five yards in front of our parapet. Enemy machine gun barrage pretty unhealthy. Our own barrage which should have waited for us has gone on with the Dukes and 25 mins. in front of us.

Ginger and I follow the Co. over. Run like hares and find ourselves well away in front of the Co.

2.50pm: Fifty percent of Co. already down. Whole Bde appears to be held up. L/Cpl. Fenton one of my Lewis Gunners has got his gun going in a shell hole on my left. Awful din can hardly hear it yelled at Sgt. Manin to take the 1st wave on. He's lying just behind me. Ginger says he's dead. Sgt. Mann on my right of 7 platoon also dead. Most of the men appear to be dead. Shout at the rest and get up to take them on. Find myself sitting on the ground facing our own line with a bally great hole in my thigh, doesn't hurt much but bleeding like hell. Ginger also hit in the wrist. Awful din still. Most of the Co. now out. Ginger ties my leg up and I put my tie round my leg as a tourniquet. Fortesque on my right about five yards still alive. He had a bullet through his steel hat and another had broken the skin on his nose. Funny how one noticed these things.

Yell at him to come over to me. Show him my leg and tell him to carry on. He



gets into a shell hole to listen while I tell him what to do. Shot through the heart while I'm talking to him, Addison also wounded and crawling back to our lines. That all the Officers and most of the N.C.O.'s can't see anything of Bolton and S Pl. Start crawling on back, back to our own lines. Bump. "What's that Ginger?" "Dead man Sir." Dam. Turns over and drag along on my stomach. Ginger helps me along. About 75 yards to go, leg still bleeding fast, and my trousers have been cut off me. Feel rather naked. Beastly uncomfortable also rather faint. Bloody row still. Make another effort and roll over our parapet on to Laverick who has recovered and is just coming up. Ginger dives off for stretcher bearers. Awful shindy still. Feeling rotten. Stretcher bearer arrives. Takes my Field Dressing off. Hole in my thigh. I can put my fist into it. Full of mud too. They tie me up and cart me off to a small hole somewhere near in original assembly trench. Laverick goes off to collect the Co. Only 12 men left out of a hundred.

2.40pm: Johny Greaves carried along and put in another small hole. Badly hit in lung. Can't get away till dark.

3pm: Got an awful pain. Laverick has collected the remnants of the Co. in the front line. Himself Sgt. Bolton and a dozen men. Attack an absolute failure.

5pm: Feeling rotten. Keep losing consciousness. Beard a Subaltern in the Dukes passes. Asks how they did. He says he is the only Officer left. Nine Officers killed, six wounded. Ask him if he is going to Bn. H.Q. He is. Will he tell Brain how things are, and that Johny and I are here. He will. Must have fainted again.

6pm: Still in this beastly hole. Johny very quiet. 10% reserves come up.

11pm: Stretcher Bearers come up and Johny carried off.

Another stretcher party come along and take me away. Beastly journey down. Essex and King's Own all coming up. Stretcher bearers have to get into the open. After a long time we get to the road. John Carr and L/Cpl Owen meet us with a stretcher. Take me over and send S.B's back for someone else. John and Owen start off with me, to Bn. H.Q. Drop me off stretcher twice, John keeps patting my head and telling me I am O.K. Reach Bn. H.Q. Brain and Blencs come out and give me a drink. Willis sends me a message to say, I'll soon be in town. Cheers me up a bit. Brain tells me our casualties.

Poor Old Daddy Mansell killed. Robin, Greaves, Kirkland, Addison and others wounded. Bolton missing. Watkins and Sammy Howarth only two to get

through. Whole show dud. The doctor decides to send me on at once. I am lying on a stretcher in a trench near Battalion H.Q. Damned shell bursts near, and covers me with mud. Don't seem to mind a bit. Seem apathetic since getting hit. Am sent off to a Dressing Station near Givenchy and thus sever connection with the Bn. again after 'months' spell.

Although Lieut Hawkins wrote that he severed all connections with the Bn. he did not sever connections with Ginger. The two would stay in touch for the remainder of their lives. Here Jim Hodgkinson junior speaks of his father.

Jim said: "My father was a very quiet man. He was a good father and after the war he joined the railway where he worked hard to look after his family. He would occasionally go to the music hall and I would go with him and to the pub too as he liked a pint and game of cards, but never to excess. We'd talk, but he never talked about himself, he always wanted to talk about me, or anyone else but him. I wish I'd asked him more questions about his time in WWI, but I doubt he'd have answered them.

"I know that he was wounded twice. As Lieut Hawkins writes he was shot in the wrist during the Battle of the Somme. That was when he was awarded the Military Medal for saving the life of Lieut Hawkins. I know my father was gassed in France as I have a photograph of him in his blues when he was convalescing in the South of England. Again I only know about that because once a year he would go into hospital for treatment. As the railway only gave him one week of leave a year he would go in for treatment during his holiday. He never complained. He just got on with it.

"My father was a Foreman/Timekeeper at Central station in Manchester. Each day he would pin his ribbons on the lapel of his railway jacket before he walked the two miles from our home in Monsall to Central station. His colleagues nicknamed him Rainbow, but my father didn't take any notice of them and he wore his ribbons as they told the story of his time during WWI and he was proud to have fought for his country in the Great War for Civilisation. During the Second World War he joined the Home Guard as so many of the First World War men did. He would wear his ribbons on his uniform and on Remembrance Sunday he would proudly wear his medals to the Service of Remembrance.

"Although my father didn't speak of the war he told me one thing: that on one day in 1916 three telegrams landed on my grandmother's doormat. One told her that her youngest son John, who was only 16, had been lost at sea,

presumed drowned. He was Serving onboard HMS Hampshire that carried Field Marshal Lord Kitchener on a diplomatic mission from Scapa Flow. Their voyage should have finished in Russia, but it is believed HMS Hampshire struck a mine laid by a German submarine. Another telegraph told her that my father had been wounded, there was no further information, just that he had been wounded. The third telegram was to inform her that her eldest son Alec had been captured and made a POW. Like my father Alec did return home at the end of the war, although unlike my father he was never the same as he suffered from what would be recognised today as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Sadly my uncle John did not return home, his final resting place is at sea.

"My father's association with Lieut Hawkins lasted for the rest of his life as they kept in touch and he would send my father money and gifts. My father didn't expect these gifts, although they were of course welcome. My father was happy that they remained friends throughout their lives, but Lieut Hawkins never forgot what my father had done on that day of October 12th 1916. When I was a young boy a box was delivered for my father. It was from Egypt where Hawkins, was posted. I opened it up and it was full of hay and I fished around inside until I found a large £5 note, which was equivalent to two weeks wages. There was also a bronze plate that Ruby and I still have today, it's engraved with hieroglyphics that show the story of Egypt from the birth of the Nile.

"The young Lieut Hawkins with whom my father had Served rose to become Brigadier V F S Hawkins, DSO, MC.

"Today my father's Military Medal, his ribbons, papers and photographs are with my son Jim. On 12th December 2013 Jim and I decided that when it is the appropriate time we will give them to the Lancashire Fusiliers, their rightful home."

You can read the War Diary of 2Lt Hawkins, 2nd Bn Lancashire Fusiliers, The Somme at: [www.lancs-fusiliers.co.uk](http://www.lancs-fusiliers.co.uk) The full link is: [www.lancs-fusiliers.co.uk/gallerynew/2LFWW1/2lww1somme/2lww1somme.htm](http://www.lancs-fusiliers.co.uk/gallerynew/2LFWW1/2lww1somme/2lww1somme.htm) We would like to thank Captain Eastwood BEM, CQSW of the Lancashire Fusiliers website.

I asked Jim how he heard of Blind Veterans UK, and I don't know why I was surprised by his response, as the person who first told him about us is responsible for bringing in many new members.

Jim began: "Ruby and I were on holiday in Scotland in 2008 when we took a bus. During that bus ride we spoke with a charming woman from Lancashire who was on a walking holiday. She asked about my failing eyesight and if I had Served in the Armed Forces. I told her I had and she gave us her phone number and told me to phone her when we got home and she'd tell me about Blind Veterans UK. I did and that was the first step to getting my life back, as that charming woman was Maria Pikulski, and she helped me to join Blind Veterans UK. Until then I thought things were over for me and I'd sunk into depression. Now I once again have a full life thanks to Maria Pikulski, Blind Veterans UK and my Welfare Officer Sharon Gradwell. I can never repay them for all they have done.

"The first thing Sharon did was to arrange my training. She has since arranged for a stair lift to be put into our home and for a workshop to be built in the garden as I go in there to do the mosaic work I enjoy. I learnt mosaic work at the Brighton centre. I also did computer training and that is another lifeline. I use a telephone with large buttons and a very basic mobile phone that the ROVIs taught me to use. The level of training is incredible and from that first meeting with Maria Pikulski, the first meeting with Sharon Gradwell and the first time I entered a Blind Veterans UK centre for training my life was put back on track."



**Picture:** Private Jim 'Ginger' Hodgkinson is shown kneeling in the front row second from the left. The photograph was taken when he was in hospital in England recovering from his wounds.

## **Escape. An account by Leo Neasham, a WWI blinded veteran who fought at the Battle of the Somme, from the November 1986 Review.**

It was way back in 1916, a long while ago you may say. There is no calendar of the experiences in a man's life, as there is a calendar of his years. The Battle of the Somme had been raging for over three months during which time I had seen action in Month Bon, July 1st, and Delville Wood on July 12th. The terrible slaughter by the gods of war of those days had reduced the battalion to a mere trickle of its normal strength. Seventy five percent of the lads had not returned with us. For a few weeks various activities were a part of life's militarism, and drafts of young men were sent to join us to rebuild those broken ranks and bring the battalion up to its full strength. It was then that we marched some 100 miles or so.

Each battalion boasted a band to precede the column and lead the en avant in maintaining step. It consisted of about 50 lads, who were non-combatant and remained at battalion headquarters, wherever that may be, when we were holding the line. During an attack they became stretcher bearers. On marches they played popular tunes, and the lads would try to cheer up their miserable existence by singing.

About this time, an ecclesiastical dignitary — we were told it was the Archbishop of Canterbury — decided that these bands should play hymn tunes that could be measured in correct time to marching feet, and thus enable the high morale of the troops to be maintained. Such hymns 'Onward Christian Soldiers', 'Oh Jesus I have promised', and others, too numerous to mention. Certainly, the marching feet seemed firmer and the heavy equipment lighter. The lads gave voice to these familiar honours; they composed their own words, and each repeated tune encouraged another verse of castigation and vituperation on the enemy. Such interpretation of the beautiful poetry, those lovely hymns, must, surely, have shamed the cassock.

And now for the business of war, for that was our real business. On September 26th we moved into the line for the attack on Thipeval. History, more than I ever could, recorded this terrible event. And with the vast proportion of the lads never to join us again to share this Armageddon. We were informed that during the first few days of October, the Germans had been frantically digging, or repairing, redoute, a semi-circular earth-work without flanking its defences, thus bringing their front line too dangerously near to ours. I was included in

the two bayonets teams of 10 men each, led as all attacks I had known on the Somme, by a Lance Corporal, often given a second stripe making him Acting Corporal, just because it may prove necessary to send in replacements for casualties, or maybe, as carriers of hand grenades. This ridiculousness, because the Officer's little red book clearly states that 10 men can be commanded by a Lance Corporal, or Senior Private, but more than 10, it must be a Corporal.

Instructions were to go through the night in battle order. Any personal goods we may possess (you would know that was very little) were to be placed in the packs — a bag like monstrosity, carrying anything you may own, and strapped to your back. These packs were to be marked with your identity name and number and handed in at a dug-out on route until you returned.

It was interesting to find the Regimental Sergeant Major standing at the entrance to this hell hole, as the packs were being handed in. I had not seen him close at hand before, although I could recognise him from the one who performed in front of the parade and gave us our movement orders. In the half light of early dawn, he seemed a very good looking man, of about 45 years, and greeted me with a warm smile. He did not speak and so I could not speak to him, but I can always see him now — a kindly, sympathetic expression on his warm countenance. He must have been realising that we lads were moving away from him to the unknown, as he said very calmly, 'Good luck lads.' I never saw him again in person, but I've seen visions of that moment many times in the years that have passed.

And so we trudge on for the business on hand, which was to break into separate teams, one moving to the left, the other to the right. To approach this Swobbern redoute, as it was called, as full dawn breaks, and jump into this so described trench from each end, clear out the few German occupants, and hold on until the lads occupying our own front lines could move over and relieve us. Now this excursion was undoubtedly the brainchild of the Sam Brown gang, who would think it out from the comfort of the spacious lounges in their delightful chateau way back 10 miles or so. Maybe our Colonel would be there, if we had a Colonel, I'd not heard of him and certainly never seen him.

When battalion orders appeared posted on a board in the trenches they end with an indecipherable signature followed by rank Lieutenant-Colonel, Commanding. But of course, it was all to be so unlike that design exercise. Dawn was now fast approaching. Having crawled some distance in the sea of mud, it seemed wise to find some cover, for a most advanced shell-hole possible, large enough to give hiding to the team.

We parted from the other team and followed Ginger, our Corporal into the shell hole he had selected. It was always full of water, but we could lie on the side and recover our energy sufficiently at least to think. We were about three feet from the periphery of the redoute. We could hear voices of the enemy, a guttural sort of sound, rumbling noise, all around us. We could discern the bodies of the lads lost in the last attack, their pink faces looking upwards. Strange how men fall on their backs, seldom otherwise. They'd not been lying there very long, which was evident from the pinkness of their faces. In about two weeks they would turn green, and after five or six weeks would be black. It was possible to tell how long ago it was that they had died. Many, I noticed were Lancashire Fusiliers.

And so it became necessary to make a dash for our objective. There were no trenches as such, just an enormous bog or morass of deep sticky mud, churned into wet heaps by shelling, and affording little or no protection. However we were there. But it was impossible to follow our intended assault. Ginger took up a position in the centre of the team. The bombers passed their Mills hand grenades to we first two. The Germans seemed to be buzzing about, at odd moments blue uniforms could be seen, an occasional helmet, and several times the round pillar box cap they wore. It was an eerie sort of silence just then, no shelling or even rifle fire. The Huns had left the flanks of this position and congregated in the centre. We moved along a yard or two and I hoped to get a little nearer to them. We thought better and we first two crawled up behind them and showed the bayonets. Ginger said, "Try a couple of Mills hand grenades." That was a mistaken decision. They were ready, as we were to learn in the next few minutes.

Their hand grenades were coming over like rain. The lads behind were catching them and hurling them back as we'd often done before. The grenades had a five second fuse, and if the distance is not too far they can be thrown back, by those who can catch them. It was important to keep heads down. Whilst we wondered what next to do, I don't know, perhaps a half an hour or so had passed away, with each side exchanging hand grenades — suddenly I noticed, I suppose the others had also, a sniper had climbed out onto the periphery of their redoubt, lying down very flat and still. He was about three yards away from me. At that moment a young officer came up. How he had organised himself sufficiently to be interested in this affair I could not imagine, a bravado so unusual without a bravura. I hadn't much time to look at him, but I'd seen him before. He had joined us from England about two days prior to this, I'd

heard his name but I am unsure of it now — think it was Preston, or Penrose, something similar. He had replaced a nice lad, 2nd Lieutenant called Williams whom we had lost at Thiepval.

Anyhow, there he was, looking very smart in a new light fawn double breasted trench coat, complete with epaulettes and rank badges, a new highly polished green steel helmet with rank star emblazoned on the side. He came and positioned himself beside me, holding a new revolver in his left hand. This seemed unusual but perhaps he was ambidextrous. It was saddening to see him there. Maybe his collar and tie friends or acquaintances had made him be Orderly Officer for the day as he was a new boy. But who knows, this may be the reason we as some of his platoon were sent on this mission of murder.

One of the rules of the game, as defined in the said little red book, states clearly that under no circumstances is it permitted to address an officer, unless first addressed by him. I so much wanted to tell him to keep down, to avoid revealing himself to the sniper. He was so vulnerable in this well dressed state, but I dare not speak because he hadn't spoken to me! He could have shot me for insubordination! That revolver, in a shaking hand, looked dangerous.

It seemed important to me to have a peep at Mr Sniper. Removing my tin hat, for that was how we described the shrapnel helmet; my face pressed to a little heap of wet mud, the sniper was clearly visible, from such a short distance. As he lifted his face to reload the rifle, I saw a good looking young man. He had removed his head dress to reveal the fair hair of the Aryan race, quite a good camouflage in the mud. Lads passed the word down, 'keep bumming, we'll try and get him.'

At this time the Second Lieutenant in his nervous excitement decided to have a look. With his tin hat still on his head, he stretched up to see further whom the lads referred to. Bang! He rolled back into the trench, out-stretched in the mud. The lads gathered him up under the arms and dragged him away. He was occupying six feet of our standing room, limited standing too it was, and we hadn't space. We didn't want to walk on him. We had walked on several German dead, we hated that, despite the horror of the occasion, it was something we preferred to avoid.

To be continued. Leo Neasham joined the Royal Norfolk Regiment on 7th October 1914. He was wounded in the Battle of the Somme when he lost his left eye and sustained shrapnel wounds to his right eye.

# Family News.

## Congratulations to:



**Picture:** Peter Johnson on the Christening of his great grandson Alby. From right to left Peter Johnson, his grandson holding Alby, Mary and Janet.

## Birthdays:

**Sally Whittaker** who celebrated her 102nd birthday on 24th July.

**Toni Middleton** who celebrated her 101st birthday on 18th July.

## Anniversaries:

### Platinum (70th):

**Bert & Brenda Hill** of Accrington, Lancashire on 13th July.

**Len & May Mills** of Paddock, Huddersfield on 27th July.

**Doris & Frank Dewhurst** of Llandudno, Gwynedd on 27th July.

### Blue Sapphire (65th):

**Dennis & Hilda Blake** of Brentwood, Essex on 7th July.

**Ken & Margaret Rawcliffe** of Blackburn, Lancashire on 14th July.

### Diamond (60th):

**Mary and Jeffrey Bailey** of Worthing, West Sussex on 9th June.

**Reg & Dolores Fawkes** of High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire on 7th July.

**Derek & Joyce Hansford** of Weymouth, Dorset on 21st July.

**Edward & Jean Scott** of Sunderland on 21st July.

**David & Joyce Owens** of Liverpool, Merseyside on 28th July.

**Colin & Freda Dennis** of Doncaster, South Yorkshire on 28th July.

**Brian & Ruth Chandler** of Coventry, West Midlands on 30th July.

### Ruby (40th):

**Brian & Mamie Drake** of Whitby, North Yorkshire on 12th July.

### Pearl (30th):

**John & Jane Deas** of Gosport, Hampshire on 5th July.

**Peter & Linda Price** of Peterborough, Cambridgeshire on 12th July.

**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.**

**Iris Andrews** who died in 2016. She was the widow of the late Frank Andrews.

**Joan Bingham** who died on 23rd May 2016. She was the widow of the late Dennis Bingham.

**Emma Hojka** who died on 6th May 2016. She was the widow of the late Hilary Hojka.

**Patricia Munday** who died on 19th January 2016. She was the wife of Cyril Munday.

**Lorraine Pearson** who died on 11th May 2016. She was the widow of the late Cyril Pearson.

**Sarah Riley** who died on 22nd April 2016. She was the wife of Richard Riley.

**Edith Vickery** who died on 11th May 2016. She was the widow of the late Wilfred Vickery.

# Welcome to Blind Veterans UK.

**Edward Alexander** of Coventry served in the Royal Air Force from 1939 to 1946.

**Norman Armstrong** of Speke, Liverpool served in the Royal Air Force from 1940 to 1946.

**Eric Ashall** of St Helens, Merseyside served in the Kings Own Fusiliers from 1950 to 1953.

**Harold Ashfield** of Epsom, Surrey served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps from 1950 to 1955.

**Geoffrey Ashman** of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire served in the General Service Corps and the Royal Engineers from 1944 to 1947.

**Tom Atkin** of Bedlington, Northumberland served in the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers from 1952 to 1958.

**Ronald 'Ron' Bartlem** of Chester, Cheshire served in the Royal Artillery from 1952 to 1953.

**Gordon 'Bill' Bates** of Aintree, Liverpool served in the Merchant Navy from 1938 to 1949.

**Ron Baxter** of Ebbw Vale, Gwent served in the Royal Navy from 1944 to 1946.

**Roger Beech** of Rugby, Warwickshire served in the Royal Navy from 1962 to 1968.

**Anthony Benham** of Sevenoaks, Kent served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps from 1958 to 1960.

**Neville Buss** of Andover, Hampshire served in the Royal Armoured Corps and the Royal Artillery from 1957 to 1993.

**Philip Carter** of Wombourne, Wolverhampton served in the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers from 1946 to 1978.

**John Clifford** of Cockermouth, Cumbria served in the Royal Army Pay Corps from 1955 to 1989.

**William Culshaw** of Worsley, Manchester served in the Royal Artillery from 1941 to 1946.

**Patrick Curtis** of Newcastle Upon Tyne served in the Royal Air Force from 1968 to 1977.

**Glyndwr Davies** of Torquay served in the East Surrey Regiment from 1939 to 1946.

**Peter Donaldson** of Higher Kinnerton, Chester served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers from 1976 to 1989.

**Raymond 'Ray' Donnelly** of Edinburgh served in the Royal Navy from 1977 to 1994.

**David Dutton** of Biggleswade, Bedfordshire served in the Royal Air Force from 1957 to 1959.

**Eric Dyson** of Blackpool, Lancashire served in the General Service Corps and the Royal Army Pay Corps from 1947 to 1959.

**William Edwards** of Ashbourne, Derbyshire served in the General Service Corps and the Royal Army Service Corps from 1945 to 1948.

**Gerard Fleming** of Bishop Auckland, County Durham served in the Royal Air Force from 1952 to 1954.

**Edward Gaines** of Poole, Dorset served in the Royal Navy from 1943 to 1947.

**William Gwillim** of Mayals, Swansea served in the Royal Army Educational Corps from 1951 to 1953.

**Samuel Harris** of Peterlee, County Durham served in the Royal Air Force from 1953 to 1958.

**Joyce Henley-Hudson née Cannon** served in the Women's Royal Naval Service from 1944 to 1946.

**Fred Hill** of Bolton, Lancashire served in the Royal Navy from 1946 to 1948.

**Peter Holyfield** of Kendal, Cumbria served in the Princess Louise's Kensington Regiment, Middlesex Regiment and the Durham Light Infantry from 1942 to 1944.

**Peter Laing** of Marden, Hereford served in the Royal Engineers from 1944 to 1948.

**James Lanaghan** of Sunderland, Tyne & Wear served in the Royal Navy from 1946 to 1948.

**Rosemary Lang née Le May** of Gosport, Hampshire served in the Women's Royal Naval Service from 1943 to 1946.

**John Lewis** of Horwich, Bolton served in the Royal Tank Regiment from 1956 to 1963.

**Philip Mabberley** of Swindon served in the Royal Air Force from 1943 to 1947.

**Gerard 'Gerry' Madden** of Wadebridge, Cornwall served in the General Service Corps, Army Air Corps and Parachute Regiment from 1944 to 1948.

**Donald MacFarlane** of Colby, Isle Of Man served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers from 1957 to 1959.

**Terence 'Terry' McCarthy** of Banbury, Oxfordshire served in the Royal Air Force from 1945 to 1982.

**Harry McIlreavy** of Pentraeth, Gwynedd served in the Royal Armoured Corps, Queen's Royal Irish Hussars and the Ulster Defence Regiment from 1957 to 1972.

**Annie McLean** of Bathgate, West Lothian served in the Women's Royal Army Corps from 1957 to 1961.

**Robert Moorcroft** of Coventry served in the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm from 1945 to 1947.

**Thomas Mullen** of Cheadle, Cheshire served in the General Service Corps and the Royal Army Ordnance Corps from 1946 to 1948.

**James Overton** of Harrogate, North Yorkshire served in the Royal Artillery from 1955 to 1956.

**Slawomir Posiell** of Rochdale, Lancashire served in the Polish Army from 1945 to 1948.

**George Purvis** of Doncaster, South Yorkshire served in the General Service Corps and the Royal Signals from 1942 to 1947.

**Heulwen Riley** of Caernarfon, Gwynedd served in the Women's Royal Air Force from 1947 to 1949.

**Hugh Robinson** of Plymouth, Devon served in the Royal Air Force from 1956 to 1958.

**William Robinson** of Lowestoft, Suffolk served in the Royal Navy from 1950 to 1972.

**Harold Ross** of Erdington, Birmingham served in the Royal Artillery from 1954 to 1957.

**Brian 'Michael' Rowley** of Rochester, Kent served in the Royal Air Force from 1955 to 1958.

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

**John Shaw** of Durham, County Durham served in the Royal Army Service Corps from 1957 to 1960.

**Violet Slater** of Weston Super Mare, Avon served in the Women's Royal Army Corps from 1957 to 1965.

**James Sothern** of Selby, North Yorkshire served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps from 1953 to 1955.

**Clive Talbot** of Bradford, West Yorkshire served in the Royal Air Force from 1951 to 1954.

**Frank Timmiss** of Shildon, County Durham served in the Durham Light Infantry from 1956 to 1961.

**Mavis Watson née Hogben** of Eastbourne, East Sussex served in the Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service from 1953 to 1955.

**Raymond 'Ray' Williams** of Welshpool, Powys served in the Royal Air Force from 1953 to 1956.

**Margaret Wilson née Chapman** of Mansfield, Nottinghamshire served in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force from 1942 to 1946.

# 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.**

**George Beattie** of Falkirk died on 14th May 2016, aged 83. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1951, training as a Fireman. He served in England, Scotland and Egypt and was discharged as a Leading Aircraftman in 1955.

**Joseph 'Ben' Bennett** of Poole, Dorset died on 18th May 2016, aged 95. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1941. He served both in the UK and towards the end of the war with a fighter wing of South East Asia Air Force. He was discharged as a Leading Aircraftman in 1946.

**Frederick 'Fred' Brown** of Kidderminster, Worcestershire died on 28th May 2016, aged 90. He joined the South Staffordshire Regiment briefly in April 1944 before moving to the Royal Army Ordnance Corps for three months. After the war ended he was with British Army of the Occupied Rhine stationed with 5 Division before discharge in 1948.

**William Bourner** of Lewes, East Sussex died on 11th May 2016, aged 102. He served in the Merchant Navy from 1941 to 1953.

**Edward 'Ted' Bunce** of Lee On The Solent, Hampshire died on 15th May 2016, aged 94. He enlisted in the Royal Air Force in 1941. Assigned to an airfield construction squadron he fought in the North African campaigns of Tobruk and Benghazi and moved to Malta. He discharged as a Leading Aircraftman in 1946.

**Wallace Burnet-Smith** of Brighton, East Sussex died on 22nd May 2016, aged 93. An understated man he enjoyed a highly interesting career in the Royal Air Force from 1941 to 1972 when he served in all British territories leaving as a Flight Lieutenant.

**Frederick Clarkson** of Liverpool died on 10th May 2016, aged 85. He served in the Kings Regiment in 1952.

**William 'Bill' Cogan** of Frome, Somerset died on 1st December 2014, aged 88. He joined the Royal Navy in 1943 and qualified as a wireman. He served in various ships and was discharged in 1946 as a Leading Wireman.

**Beryl Cole** of St Brelade, Jersey died on 28th May 2016, aged 88. She enlisted in the WRNS in 1947, serving as a pay clerk. By the time of discharge in 1949 she was a Leading Wren.

**Peter Dabell** of Sheffield, South Yorkshire died on 12th May 2016, aged 86. He joined the Royal Navy at Chatham in 1947 and trained as a Stoker Mechanic. He served ashore at HMS Excalibur and later in the destroyer HMS Chequers. He also worked in Malta Dockyard and the Firth of Galloway in Scotland. He completed his service in 1954.

**Frederick 'Fred' Dance** of Northampton, Northamptonshire died on 20th May 2016, aged 79. He joined the Royal Signals for National Service in 1955. He served in Germany and after his discharge as a Signaller in 1957 he stayed on in the TA until 1960. In 1965 he rejoined the Queens Regiment (TA) finally leaving in 1967.

**Robert Darney** of Goring By Sea, West Sussex died on 19th May 2016, aged 99. He served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps and Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers from 1935 to 1959 leaving as a Corporal. His initial service in the ROAC saw him deployed to Norway from where he escaped back to the UK. He then transferred to the REME to work on Radar, based in Gibraltar for most of the war.

**Eugene Feehan** of Southport, Merseyside died on 19th May 2016, aged 98. He joined the Royal Engineers in 1940 and after training was posted to Egypt. He then went to Malta and took part in the Italian campaign, fighting through to Austria. He was discharged as a Sergeant in 1946.

**Albert 'Bert' French** of Broadstairs, Kent died on 15th May 2016, aged 100. He joined the Royal Signals in 1932 and throughout his service career he spent a total of 27 years in India and Malaya before discharge from regular service as a Captain in 1958. He joined the TA as permanent staff for 10 years and later posted as a Retired Officer in Germany with HQ 1st British Corps. He transferred to Ashford in the same post with Kent HQ Intelligence Corps and retired in 1979.



**Michael Griffith** of Birmingham died on 21st October 2015, aged 90. In a reserved occupation during the war he enlisted in the General Service Corps in 1945 later joining the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1946. He was discharged in 1948 following service in Palestine.

**Norman Harrison** of Saltash, Cornwall died in 2016, aged 95. He served in the Royal Navy from 1941 to 1945 leaving as a Sub Lieutenant.

**George Heath** of Great Barr, Birmingham died on 6th May 2016, aged 91. He joined the Duke of Wellington's Regiment in 1942 and transferred to the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, fighting in northern Europe. He was discharged as a Private in 1946.

**Francis Hillier** of Stonehouse, Gloucestershire died on 23rd April 2016, aged 82. He joined the Royal Air Force for National Service in 1953 and served in Stafford until discharge as a Leading Aircraftman in 1955.

**Joseph Hirsh** of Chiswick, London died on 25th May 2016, aged 96. He joined the Royal Signals in 1941 and was posted to the 18th Division in Singapore and was there for precisely four days when he was taken prisoner. He was later taken to Thailand to work on the Railway. When he began to go deaf he became a hospital orderly. He was discharged in 1946, leaving as a driver.

**Walter Jakeman** of Birmingham died on 27th May 2016, aged 90. He joined the Royal Navy in 1944 as a Wireman. He transferred to the Royal Marines in 1945 based at Gosport and was posted to Malta soon after the siege was lifted and spent the remainder of his service there. He was discharged in 1946.

**Adolf Kolodziej** of Sheffield, South Yorkshire died on 24th March 2016, aged 87. He joined the 19th Polish Anti-Tank Regiment in 1942. He was deported to Siberia and then joined the Allied Forces under British command. He fought in Europe and the Middle East before discharge in 1949.

**Eric Lewis** of Kenilworth, Warwickshire died on 23rd May 2016, aged 93. He joined the Royal Signals in 1941. He was posted to West Africa, then India and fought in the Burma Campaign. He was discharged as a Corporal in 1946.

**John Lofts** of Salisbury, Wiltshire died on 29th May 2016, aged 93. In 1942 he joined the Gloucestershire Regiment and went on to serve in 148 Infantry Brigade, The Sherwood Foresters Regiment, 166 Officer Cadet Training Unit and The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, before being discharged as a Captain in 1947.

**Roy Markham** of Seaton, Devon died in 2016, aged 93. He joined the Royal Navy in 1941 and served with Combined Operations in Malta and Gibraltar, largely onboard merchant ships as a communicator. Subsequently with coastal forces he was discharged in 1946.

**Warren McDivitt** of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire died on 2nd May 2016, aged 93. He joined the Royal Navy in 1941, carried out his seamanship training at HMS Ganges and served onboard coastal minesweepers. He served in UK home waters, the Mediterranean and spent time in Malta, Greece, Italy and North Africa before he was demobilised in 1946.

**Anthony McMeekin** of Newcastle Upon Tyne died on 17th May 2016, aged 81. He joined the Royal Air Force for National Service in 1955 and served as a storeman at RAF Calshot until 1957.

**Eric Moran** of Beverley, North Humberside died on 22nd May 2016, aged 98. He served in the York and Lancaster Regiment from 1940 to 1946 in North Africa and Italy until discharged as a Lieutenant.

**William 'Arthur' Morley** of Sheffield, South Yorkshire died on 17th May 2016, aged 89. He served in the York and Lancashire Regiment from 1945 to 1946 and then transferred to the Duke of Wellington Regiment until 1948, leaving as a Lance Corporal. After service at home and in Sudan he was posted to Palestine but got as far as Fayed, Egypt where he was a POW camp guard. The camp held 20,000 German prisoners who were subsequently repatriated. He then transferred to Khartoum.

**Bernard Morrell** of Crewe died on 22nd May 2016, aged 88. He enlisted in the Royal Air Force in 1945 and served in the UK, Burma, Singapore, Malaya and Hong Kong, discharging in 1955 as an Aircraftman First Class.

**Olive Norris** of Shirehampton, Bristol died on 30th May 2016, aged 86. She joined the WRNS in 1948 training as a steward. She was an officer's steward in Londonderry and became a Captain's steward at RNAS Yeovilton. She was then

at the RNAS Brawdy in South Wales and was discharged as a Leading Wren Steward in 1954.

**Irving Nuttall** of Rawdon, West Yorkshire died on 28th April 2016, aged 80. He completed his National Service in the Royal Electrical and mechanical Engineers in Cyprus and North Africa from 1956 to 1958.

**James 'Jim' O'Brien** of Maesteg, Mid Glamorgan died on 1st June 2016, aged 101. In 1935 he joined the Army, training with 1/7 Dragoon in Edinburgh prior to being posted to India with the 13/18th Hussars. He returned to the UK in 1938 and was later deployed to France with the BEF and was evacuated through Dunkirk. He then served in Egypt and subsequently Italy before being discharged as a Warrant Sergeant, but later rejoined serving until 1949.

**John Pearson** of Hampton, Middlesex died on 7th May 2016, aged 96. He joined the Royal Navy in 1940, training as a Telegraphist. He served in HMS Manchester in the Mediterranean and Edinburgh and was discharged as a Temporary Leading Telegrapher in 1946.

**Lionel 'Jack' Pelly** of Hunstanton, Norfolk died on 10th May 2016, aged 93. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1939 and qualified as a Fitter 2A. He then joined a Spitfire Squadron at RAF Colerne and was posted to Sudan. He also spent time in Khartoum, Egypt, Palestine, Malta, Libya and the UK. He was discharged as a Corporal in 1949.

**William Raine** of Bathgate, West Lothian died in 2016, aged 93. He joined the General Service Corps in April 1944, transferring to the Leicestershire Regiment in June 1944 and the Royal Military Police in October 1945. He served in the Far East and was discharged as a Company Quartermaster Sergeant in 1947 after which he served with the Royal Military Police (TA) from 1951 to 1955.

**John Rickard** of Wirral, Merseyside died on 10th May 2016, aged 91. He joined the General Service Corps in February 1945 and transferred to the Army Catering Corps the following month. He served in Shorncliffe and later in the Middle East with the 9th Battalion Parachute Regiment in Palestine, discharging as a Private in 1948.

**Phylis Seabrook** of Westcliff On Sea, Essex died on 22nd February 2016, aged 100. She joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1939 and specialising in catering she served in a variety of UK locations and was discharged as a Corporal in 1945.

**Leonard 'Len' Semmens** of Dorchester, Dorset died on 23rd April 2016, aged 91. He joined the Royal Army Pay Corps in 1943 and served in Colchester and Nottingham. He was discharged in 1954.

**Arthur Shaw** of Halesowen, West Midlands died on 17th May 2016, aged 91. He served in the Home Guard before joining the Royal Army Ordnance Corps in 1946. He served in North Wales in explosive disposal before discharge in 1948.

**Albert Southerden** of Halifax, West Yorkshire died on 19th May 2016, aged 83. He was called up for National Service and joined the Royal Air Force in 1953. He carried out his basic training at RAF Padgate and his advanced training at RAF Locking where he qualified as a Ground Wire Mechanic. He served in the UK and Germany before being discharged in 1955.

**Robert Stewart** of Downham Market, Norfolk died on 1st June 2016, aged 95. He served in the Royal Navy from 1941 when he specialised in radar. Serving in the UK the majority of the time he was shore-bound. He was discharged in 1946 as a Temporary Lieutenant.

**John Thornton** of Doncaster, South Yorkshire died on 13th May 2016, aged 87. After training with the General Service Corps from June to August 1946 he joined the Royal Armoured Corps. He spent two years at Catterick before being posted to Egypt in 1948. He was discharged as a Trooper in 1950.

**Gordon Tull** of Woodley, Berkshire died on 5th June 2016, aged 93. He joined the General Service Corps in August 1942, transferred to the Royal Artillery and then to the Royal Army Service Corps. He served in North Africa, Italy and Palestine, was discharged as a Private in 1947 and served with the RASC (TA) from 1951 to 1957.

**Margaret Walker** of Alnwick, Northumberland died on 13th May 2016, aged 79. She joined the WRNS in 1955 and after training in the victualling branch at Wetherby she served at Abbotsinch before returning to Wetherby as a member of the Ship's Company. She moved to HMS Ceres and after it closed in 1958 she moved to Chatham where she was discharged as a Leading Wren in 1959.

**Robert Wilson** of Thornton Cleveleys, Lancashire died on 10th March 2016, aged 96. He enlisted in the Royal Army Service Corps in 1939 and trained as a driver in Liverpool. Moving to London he was posted to France with the British Expeditionary Force and drove tank transporters. He was discharged in 1946.

