

November 2016

Review

Blind Veterans UK | St Dunstan's since 1915



On the cover: Daredevil young blind veteran Kelly Ganfield is shown taking part in the Zipwire as she flies from the roof of the Brighton centre.

Photo by Mark Pile.

Back page: Enjoying the RHS Award winning woodland garden at the Llandudno centre.

Photo by Slater King.



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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 Llandudno centre.

November.

Military Week 7th to 13th.

Activities from the Sheffield centre.

December.

Christmas Week 12th to 16th.

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.

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From the Chairman.

Your message from Tim Davis.

In last month's Review I referred to World War One and the origins of our charity. I also commented on the growth and changing needs of members of Blind Veterans UK, and in this month's message I'd like to expand on both subjects.

There is much we can learn from the events of World War One; we must never forget the greatest sacrifice that was made by so many to preserve the independence and security of Great Britain and its Allies. One hundred years ago the Battle of the Somme reached its bloody conclusion with a million men wounded or killed. As I type these words, I'm left breathless at the thought of the scale of such a sacrifice. It continues to make me want to better understand and learn the cause of this and other conflicts in our history. I'm hopeful that if we all take such an interest, particularly those leaders in national governments with the onerous responsibilities they have, there may be greater hope that such a scale of human conflict can be avoided in the future.

My thoughts also turn to our charity and Lord Fraser, our second Chairman, who at the age of 18 was blinded on the Somme on 23rd July 1916. The great work and benefit of the charity, then and now, must be preserved and built on, so that veterans who are living with the effects of vision impairment can rely on us to provide the best and most relevant support throughout their life.

Over the coming years the numbers of veterans who have a vision impairment will rise, mainly through age related disease as a consequence of the swell in the number of former Servicemen and women who served in, and after, World War Two. Our intent is simply this — that we stick to our core and founding purpose so that we may welcome those veterans into the family of Blind Veterans UK. To do so we must also recognise the differences in needs, and the changing needs, for those we support, now, and in the future.

As members of Blind Veterans UK you know from your own experiences the difference this will make to future blind veterans, who, as you once did, will begin their journey through the 3As to learn the skills they need to reclaim their independence to again lead full lives.

In this Review, our Chief Executive Nick Caplin, explains how this will be achieved. My Trustees and I fully endorse the strategy, and believe it is the right thing to do. Importantly, donors have very kindly and generously given for a purpose, and we will do the right thing by deploying those funds to provide the best services to help veterans who have a vision impairment.

We welcome your responses, thoughts and questions about the changes, and invite you to pose your questions to Nick Caplin. If you would like to ask Nick a question about any of the changes please contact Hazel Buckthorpe before 10th November. You can reach Hazel on email hazel.buckthorpe@blindveterans.org.uk or telephone her on 020 7616 7963.

We will record Nick answering as many of your questions as possible for inclusion in the December Review. I'm sure you will appreciate that we are unable to answer all questions in this way, as we only have use of the Review's recording room for a couple of hours.

On a different note, I'd like to turn a spotlight on some of our volunteers. I'd like to thank Dave Burrows, Eric Brotherton and their fellow members of the Fleet Air Arm, who for many decades have given their support during the annual Remembrance weekend. For many years, working with his committee, Dave has also made the Summer Camp at HMS Sultan possible and news from the latest Camp features in this edition.

In this Review you will also read of Joanna Tann, Volunteering Development Officer at the Llandudno centre, who with hundreds of volunteers transformed four acres of woodland into an enriching space that is enjoyed by all who visit. I'm sure that many of you reading this are nodding your head in agreement.

I would like to remind you that you have until 12th December to propose someone for a Founder's Day Award. Please read on in this Review for further details.

On a final note, I look forward to meeting those of you who will be at the Remembrance weekend.

Noticeboard.

Dates for your diary and useful information.

Blind Veterans UK London Christmas Carol Concert Tuesday 6th December.

Please come and join us on Tuesday 6th December for a festive evening at St Marylebone Parish Church in London when we will celebrate Christmas with our annual Carol Concert. It will be an evening of joyous celebration as you sing carols and listen to the church choir and orchestra in a beautiful setting. During the Carol Concert there will be special readings from Blind Veterans UK's ambassadors and Lord Blunkett, and you can enjoy mulled wine and mince pies as you leave the church at the end of the Carol Concert.

For more than a century our charity has been associated with St Marylebone Parish Church, as it is where the First World War blinded veterans were married and where their children were Christened.

Doors open at 6.15pm and the concert starts at 7pm. Tickets are priced at £10 for members of Blind Veterans UK and £15 for non-members. You can purchase tickets online at www.blindveterans.org.uk/carolconcert or telephone Vicky Wong in the Blind Veterans UK events team on 020 7616 7959.



Order your 2017 VIP large print diaries.

As we approach 2017 you can now place your orders for VIP calendars, diaries and address and telephone books.

- A 2017 A3 Calendar is priced at £5.75.
- A 2017 A4 Desk Diary is priced at £8.99.
- A 2017 A6 Pocket Diary is priced at £5.35.
- A VIP Address Book is priced at £9.25.
- A VIP Telephone Book is priced at £9.25.

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



Picture: The 2017 VIP large print wall calendar, desk diary and pocket diary.

You have until 12th December to nominate for the 2017 Founder's Day Awards.

The Founder's Day Awards are a time for us to celebrate our charity and all that is great about it, but to truly be able to celebrate we need you to nominate those who you feel deserve one of these highly prized Awards.

Historically the Founder's Day Awards are held annually on 26th March, the date in 1915 when the first 16 war blinded veterans entered the new training centre at St Dunstan's Lodge in London's Regent's Park. However, as that day will fall on a Sunday, Founder's Day will take place on Wednesday 29th March 2017 at the Llandudno centre.

The winners of the 2016 Founder's Day Awards featured in the May Review, and if you know someone you think has excelled, and is eligible to be a recipient of a Founder's Day Award in 2017, please do nominate them.

The categories for the 2017 Founder's Day Awards are:

1) Community Award. This award is for the best contribution to their local community or the family of Blind Veterans UK. The Community Award is open to members, spouses, widows and widowers.

2) Training Achievement Award. This award is given to the best novice who has shown great ability or perseverance as they learn new skills. It is only open to members of Blind Veterans UK.

3) Creative Art Award. This award recognises endeavour in a creative activity and encompasses art, handicrafts, sculpture and music. If practical, an example should be sent with the proposal form. If this is not practical, then please do send a photograph. This award is only open to members.

4) Sports Person of the Year Award. Open to members only, this celebrates an exceptional sporting achievement or achievements during the award year.

5) Outstanding Achievement Award. This is for a member who has achieved an outstanding level of independence via their participation in activities promoted or provided through and by Blind Veterans UK. This award is only open to members.

6) Innovator of the Year Award. This award is given to a person or organisation who successfully introduced a good idea or device to Blind Veterans UK.

For guidelines and a proposal form, please contact Hayley Goldsmith-Williams. You can write to Hayley at Blind Veterans UK, Queens Road, Llandudno LL30 1PT. Or, if you prefer, telephone Hayley on 01492 868746 or email her at Hayley.Goldsmith-Williams@blindveterans.org.uk

Nominations are treated in confidence and will be discussed by a Selection Committee in January 2017 so please submit your entry by 12th December 2016. Nominees are not informed that they have been nominated until the Selection Committee has reached their decision.

Place your Star of Remembrance at one of our centres this Christmas.

Each year in December the Christmas trees in our Brighton, Llandudno and Sheffield centres display messages of Remembrance for your loved ones as you write them on a golden star tribute card and place your special message on a branch of the tree. Throughout December hundreds of moving tributes adorn the branches of our Christmas trees.

If you are visiting one of the centres in December you can complete your special tribute card and hang your Star of Remembrance on the tree. Stars are available from the reception desk at each centre.

If you do not have plans to visit our centres during December, but would like a star hung on your behalf, please contact Laura Hepburn, Tribute Officer at Blind Veterans UK on telephone 020 7616 7953.

The annual Blind Veterans UK Themed Week and Holiday supplement for 2017.

The annual supplement that lists activities and holidays at our centres in 2017 will be issued with the December 2016 edition of the Review.

From the December 1931 Review. A St Dunstaner's Escape. Man left among the dead of the Somme.

A man who was left with the war dead in France, and was only saved from being buried alive by a comrade, related his experiences to one of our representatives. He is Mr Robert Westwood, of The Marshes, Bellerby, near Leyburn, who although he is blind as a result of injuries received on the battlefield, carried on business on a poultry farm as well as if he had full use of his eyes.

In July 1916 Robert was with the 7th East Lancashire Regiment in the Mametz Wood on the Somme when he was badly gassed and received terrible face and body injuries, which were thought to be fatal. He was taken for dead and was placed with the dead soldiers for burial. Fortunately for Mr Westwood, a comrade thought he would have a last look at his fallen comrade and discovered that he was still breathing. He was rescued and although months of hospital care saved his life, he lost his eyesight.

While undergoing treatment a second catastrophe happened. Mr Westwood accidentally set fire to his face. "It was quite my own fault," he declared. "You see, I am very fond of cigarettes and while my face was swathed in cotton wool and bandages I was not allowed to smoke. However, I found a cigarette, but could not secure a match. After some difficulty I found some paper and a gas ring from which I lighted the paper." The cotton wool and bandages caught fire and Mr Westwood's head was soon enveloped in flames. The timely throwing of a bucket of water over his head probably saved his life.

This war hero has a poultry farm which is a credit to him. He knows every inch of ground on "The Marshes," and loves his work. His friendship with his pigeons, which he tamed himself, is remarkable. At a call from Mr Westwood, Lady, a speckled blue tumbler pigeon hen, alights on his head and calls to her four mates, who settle on Mr Westwood's arms and feed out of his hands.

Mr Westwood came to St Dunstan's in June 1917 where he trained as a shoemaker, but the trade did not agree with his health, so he took up poultry farming.

Private Robert Westwood, 7th East Lancashire Regiment, Enlisted: 26th August 1914. He died on 25th June 1942.



Picture: A First World War St Dunstaner training as a poultry farmer. Could this be Mr Robert Westwood?



Picture: The First World War blinded St Dunstaners, the first blind veterans to our charity training in poultry farming.

Postcard from France. By Catherine Goodier.

1st July 1916. 'I'm well. Things are going ok and I'll write as soon as I can'.

Those are the last words that 20431 Pte Arthur G Sillence, 11th Battalion The Suffolk Regiment wrote to his beloved wife, their son and two daughters. In the precious final hours of his life, hours before the piercing call from the whistle announced zero hour and men poured from their trenches and the Battle of the Somme commenced, he thought not of himself, but to reassure his family. He found a place to write a postcard home, a postcard from the trenches — a postcard that arrived after his death.

As his young widow read it she ran her finger over every letter as she called him to mind, as she hoped that it was all a mistake and that he was not dead. That one day he would come home to her and to their children. That he'd walk through the door and put his kitbag down. Her hopes were fruitless; he did not return. He was with the majority in the great beyond, one of the 19,240 men who were killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, men who on memorials are proclaimed as the Glorious Dead. Pte Sillence, soldier, husband, father. A man who was loved. A man who was mourned. A man who is remembered.

That postcard is a physical reminder of the men, who like Pte Sillence, were in France to fight in the war to end all wars, the Great War for Civilisation. That postcard, now faded by age, as he was not allowed to fade, has been passed down through generations of his family. On 1st July 2016, one hundred years to the day that Pte Sillence died in action, 24454595 Sgt Stephen Richards, late of The Queen's Regiment brought the postcard to those former battlefields as he attended the Centenary Ceremony of Remembrance at the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme. As he stood where his great grandfather once stood it was in a landscape unrecognisable from that which Pte Sillence would have known. Today it is a place where people find great solace as they trace their relative's name on the memorial and walk in the surrounding rich green countryside. It is a place of peace, a place for reflection.

Many of you will know Stephen Richards who has worked as a driver at the Brighton centre for more than two years. Or you may have attended the Intro Week dinners that he runs at the centre. On 1st July 2016 he was in France to represent his great grandfather Pte Sillence, Blind Veterans UK and the soldiers who were blinded on the Somme, the First World War blinded veterans.

Recalling the moving historic occasion Stephen said: "The atmosphere was charged and as I stood there on the anniversary of a centenary since the balloon went up and the first day of the Battle of the Somme began, I thought of my great grandfather. I was with blind veteran Richard Haynes and beside us was a French lady whose grandfather had been killed on the Somme. Everyone there shared a common link, we had all lost relatives during the First World War. I've been to the Somme battlefields before and to the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, but it was a special honour to be there one hundred years to the day that the Somme Offensive began, and young men like my great grandfather went over the top and into battle.

"It was awe inspiring as there were thousands of people, but there was a great stillness as family members stood and read letters that had been written at the Somme. Letters just like the one I carried with me. I was very proud to be there to represent my great grandfather as his name is on the Thiepval Memorial. That's what moved me. That I was his great grandson and I was in the area where he last saw the world. God Bless Him. It brought a tear to the eye to be honest. I'm very proud of my great grandfather and he follows me everywhere I go. It was a great honour to be there in a place that is special to me, and is special to our charity as it welcomed the soldiers who were blinded on its bloody battlefields. It was one of many honours in my work with Blind Veterans UK, a very special charity, and a very special place to work."





20431 Private Arthur G SILLENCE
11th Battalion The Suffolk Regiment

Picture: The photograph on the previous page was taken by Stephen Richards during the centenary ceremony at the Thiepval Memorial To The Missing of the Somme. It shows the thousands of people who attended the ceremony that was organised by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission as they sit in front of the mighty Thiepval Memorial.

Picture left: A last photograph of Pte G Silience with his family.



Picture: Blind veteran Richard Haynes with Stephen Richards as they stand in front of a tank from the Somme Offensive with the Thiepval Memorial in the distance.

HMS Sultan Summer Camp 2016. By Dave Burrows.

This year camp was held from Friday 5th to Saturday 13th August, with just 16 members of Blind Veterans UK applying to attend, it was another year of small numbers. Nevertheless, with our usual team of volunteers (dogs) in attendance we strived to make the week eventful and enjoyable. New campers this year were Danny Lee, Chris Pett and Rod Murchison.

From an organisers point of view, Friday is always an anxious day as people are travelling from all parts of the country and by various modes of transport, it is with some relief when all blind veterans and dogs have arrived in HMS Sultan and settled into their accommodation. A period of anxiety follows as the new campers get used to single cabins, bathroom facilities and the layout of the establishment. We were hosted by the Warrant Officers & Senior NCO's Mess and were welcome to use their recreational facilities and dining rooms for the duration of our stay.

Following dinner we held a welcome brief that outlined the aims and objectives of the camp, a health and safety brief and the emergency procedures to be followed in the event of an incident. The program of activities for the week was explained by Andy Salter and the need to be ready on time for each event was stressed.

With an excellent weather forecast and Cowes week about to start, what better way to begin the program than a visit to our friends at the Gosport Cruising Club. As ever we received a really warm welcome from the Commodore Steve Smedley and Iris Davis (club secretary) had seven skippers and crews poised to take us on the water in and around Portsmouth Harbour. With a selection of yachts, catamarans, and cruising boats to choose from, a great morning was had by all, some even venturing out into the Solent and across to Ryde on the Isle of Wight. On return to the Clubhouse, many volunteers had worked to provide a splendid buffet and spent a few hours talking to the campers over a beer or two. A vote of thanks was delivered by Nigel Whiteley and another very successful visit was brought to an end.

Another firm favourite with the campers over many years has been gliding, sponsored by the RN Gliding Club at the former Fleet Air Arm Training

Establishment HMS Daedalus. Dave Howell, a pilot with the club has a long association with the charity, as St Dunstan's and now as Blind Veterans UK, and kindly arranged for flights on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. All blind veterans who wanted to fly got the opportunity, some on both days. The very patient 'dogs' got their reward on Sunday with flights over the Lee/Gosport area, and with stunning weather they got fantastic views. Another popular activity on Sunday afternoon was the archery competition organised by The Havant and Hayling Bowmen, long term supporters of the camp. Experienced and novice archers had fun and achieved some very respectable scores.

Sports morning was a resounding success and we were formally welcomed by Captain Towell RN to HMS Sultan, he commented that it was our 20th successive year since we relocated from HMS Daedalus and was keen to support the event as much as he could. With the campers split into four teams and our lady helpers making up a fifth team, we launched into a fun morning of skill and daring. Louise Timms, Sports & Rec Manager at the Brighton centre, called in to see us and Mark Lovatt made his first visit to camp since taking up his new post.

The afternoon was spent in the company of the Rowner Bowls Club, a really friendly group who provided tuition and guidance to the campers. With a bar and very pleasant weather, it was always going to be a success and we discovered a talented player in Danny Lee, a new camper. He consistently struck the 'Jack' to the point that everyone thought we had brought a 'Ringer'. Our long standing friends at Court Barn Conservative Club in Lee on the Solent provided another evening of entertainment when there was a quiz followed by a splendid buffet that had been sponsored by the Lions of Fareham.

Tuesday's event was a first visit to the Tank Museum at Bovington in Dorset. After a relatively traffic free trip and 90 minutes in our executive coach, we arrived to be met by Elwyn Walker who, in conjunction with Mrs Jeni Knight, had planned our visit. Security passes issued, we were transported to meet with Warrant Officer Jim Nowell (brother of blind veteran Chris Nowell), who delivered a very warm welcome to the School Combat Wing; he introduced his team of Instructors and divided us into two groups. The first group were shown the tank simulator, where army recruits progressed very quickly from novice motorists to the next stage of driving a tank under real time conditions. Geordie, our Instructor gave an excellent brief on the simulator kit, with its multi-screens and play station controls. Due to the difficulty in accessing the vehicle simulator only a few of the dogs were invited to 'give it a go'.

Tom Atkinson, Popeye Law and Dave Wybrant all gave a good account of themselves, however, they all were declared unfit to drive a tank!

The second group were shown the different vehicles currently in service and we were invited to get in and have a good look around. Respect to anyone who serves in these machines, cramped and stripped of any home comforts, one can only imagine operating in hot hostile environments.

We had the annual 'let's cheat at golf' tournament (crazy golf actually) where the scorecards wouldn't have looked out of place at Troon, I've never seen so many holes in one! Another great evening on Wednesday, dinner followed by a quiz and superbly hosted by members of the Wardroom, HMS Sultan. There were several Engineering courses running, so we were entertained by Air Engineering and Submarine Engineering Officers who fully entered into the spirit of the evening, great fun was had by all. Sadly, the fishing was cancelled due to a corporate event, but it will be back next year.

Thursday morning was pretty much a free time and the chance to do whatever you wished, the weather remained better than expected, although not too hot, and this enabled small groups to explore the local areas of Lee on the Solent, Fareham and Gosport (a chance to buy presents for the wife, maybe?). In the afternoon, HMS Sultan held a Families Afternoon and many of our veterans and dogs enjoyed an afternoon of attractions, live music and fun with free ice creams proving very popular. The rest of the team prepared for the Presentation Evening, where we get a chance to say 'thank you' to the local Clubs and Societies that have supported us this year. An event such as this takes a lot of organising and without the support of an army of volunteers, it just wouldn't happen.

Captain Towell RN, Commanding Officer of HMS Sultan, was our guest of honour and presented prizes for the Individual and Team Sports events. We were also delighted that Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB, Chief Executive of Blind Veterans UK joined us and witnessed the success of the campers. The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the 'Don Minter Trophy' that is awarded to the blind veteran who had contributed most to the success of the camp. This year it was awarded to John Taylor. The Archery awards were presented by the Havant and Hayling Bowmen's Pauline Jeffs.

Entertainment was provided by our resident MC Martyn Webb, who told bad

jokes by the dozen between presentations and whilst photographs were taken. A great singer and some wicked dancing, followed by another buffet, rounded the evening off. For those who didn't buy any presents, there was one last chance to bag a prize in the raffle and auctioned items of jewellery kindly donated by Eltikki Jewellers of Lee on Solent.

Friday had a slight change of plan, Canoeing was added to the program as we couldn't book our usual slot earlier in the week. So, a few people missed the AGM and wash-up meeting, but generally speaking it was agreed that it had been another very successful camp. The evening was its usual quiet affair with people packing to leave and just having a few drinks before an early night. Saturday saw the camp come to an end, another week that had just flashed past! Transport arrived on time and people collected by families came and went and so it was all over for another year.

Kind regards to all involved from Dave Burrows, Committee and helpers.



Picture: Blind veteran John Taylor, right, was presented with the Don Minter trophy by Captain Towell RN, Commanding Officer of HMS Sultan.



Picture: Sammy Dyer and Charlie Eastwood at the Tank Museum at Bovington in Dorset.



Picture Everyone involved with HMS Sultan Summer Camp. The much loved Dave Burrows is seated front row centre right with Captain Towell RN.

Escape to Llandudno 2016. (The escapades of the G.O.A.L. Group). By Richard Haynes.

The coded message arrived in June headed by "Hello all stations this is....." I racked my brains where were the SLIDEX cursor settings hidden? Yes, in the May Review's copious 'hatches, matches, and dispatches' pages. Decoded, checked and double checked, the message read "Escape TO Llandudno 2016, Warning Order. Dates: 26 Sep - 1 Oct, multi-skilled team required. Those averse to speed and height need not apply". Three months later the team assembled C2, J2 and RPG, more of whom later. But enough of this tom foolery for the moment.

So what is G.O.A.L. Group all about? The acronym stands for Get Out And Live. We are open to both male and female members of Blind Veterans UK between the ages of 60 and 76. Our Vision is to "encourage members to take the helm and steer themselves to an independent lifestyle with the support of like-minded vision impaired people".

Activity weeks are organised for up to eight members two or three times a year and tend to be based at either our Brighton or Llandudno centres or a Services linked facility in one of the bigger cities e.g. The Union Jack Club. The weeks are usually a mix of culture and adrenalin rush events, interspersed with rekindling friendships over a glass/cup of something in a hostelry

So what was on offer on this year's second Group activity week at the Llandudno centre this Autumn?

The initial task for every member is to make their own way to the venue. Most of us travel by train and in the case of this week we all met up at Manchester Piccadilly, the sound of tapping canes on stairs and platforms telegraphed the arrival of yet another 'VIP' on platform 14 from which the all stations to Llandudno Junction train departed.

Having savoured the delights of a good breakfast culture was our first port of call in the form of Carnarvon Castle, where back in 1969 Prince Charles was invested 'Prince of Wales'. The 'Battleship' of its age, the Castle was never finished and thanks to it being out on a geographical limb escaped the fate that Cromwell imposed on so many of the country's medieval fortifications.

The Castle is the home of the Regimental Museum of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, excellent but not the easiest of sites to negotiate for the vision impaired. It was here that we saw and befriended of first poppy seller, one ? was ex RCT – much to Graham Walker's delight, tyre pressures, servicing schedules and stations they had served in were discussed.

As is usual there is seldom sufficient time to take in everything and before we knew it, we were off to a slate quarry at Bethesda to sample the delights of Zip World Velocity, the fastest zip line in the World and longest in Europe. We struggled into red boiler suits, donned helmets and harnesses and like convicts in a chain gang trudged off to savour the 'Little Zipper' before experiencing the bum numbing ride up the mountain in a refurbished Bedford 4T: what a delight to stand on terra firma at the top and see the shape of the surrounding countryside unfold around us.

As with every adrenalin rush activity safe briefs and manifold, but finally members were being hooked on and were hurling down the wire, where speeds of up to 80 mph have been achieved. Perhaps the bravest of us all was John Bower, the most vision impaired, who 'flew; like the rest of us. If you haven't had a go then why are you waiting?

Day 2 was meant to be go karting, but the "plans Of Mice and Men often go awry" and we ended up taking in more culture and heading for the delights of Chester. 'Three blind mice', John Cantwell, Peter King and myself, Richard Haynes tripped their way around the City Walls, an easy walk that even we could not get lost on! The weather graced us with one of those 'Indian summer' days, what more could we ask for at the end of September?

Thursday saw us travelling to Manchester for more extreme sports in the form of Airfix Flights, "what" you may ask "is that". Stand an wind tunnel vertically and then turn on the fan, the result is that providing you follow the instructors directions you float in the resulting air current, however before you get to fly you need to sign away your life, don a tight fitting padded suit and helmet and do the unimaginable fall forward through an open doorway with the rest of the team watching you. Exhilarating? Undoubtedly, physically tiring yes, but on the second flight the instructor offers you the opportunity to rise to the top of the dome twice, the sensation is indescribable. So who were the most accomplished flyers, who else but the two Carols, Sadler and Davies

So how do you follow that on your last day at the Llandudno centre? A gentle trip on the train to the summit of Snowdon. As for the rest of the week, the day dawned fine and we set off from Gorsaf Llanberis, I'll spell it you can pronounce it! And wended our way slowly up the mountain, waving to energetic walkers and those who had gone the full hog and paid for a ride on the quaint little steam train. Higher and higher we climbed and still the weather remained fine allowing us to view the spectacle of Snowdonia and for those facing backwards for much of the way up, the back of Peter King's yellow waterproof, great view Pete! We had high hopes of being able to see for miles when we got within reach of the summit station but 150 yards below it the mist enveloped the train and the temperature plummeted. Five of the seven wrapped up warmly and fought our way to the ridge below the summit where some kind visitor took our photograph. None of us had taken out a bank loan to afford a hot drink at the summit café so it was back down to civilisation and a spot of lunch; was that a large chips Graham wanted?

It goes without saying that most evenings saw us gathering in the bar where the stocks of brandy, shiraz and Magners' cider all took a severe beating. So did we enjoy ourselves and will we be putting our names forward for next year's jaunt? The answer is a resounding YES!



Picture: GOAL Group members John Cantwell, John Bower, Graham Walker, Peter King, Carol Sadler, Carol Davies, and Richard Haynes.



Picture: Blind veteran Mick Kelbie completed the 'deathslide' from the Brighton centre in 1987.

Turn to pages 46 and 47 to see some of today's blind veterans who completed the Zipwire from the roofs of the Brighton centre in October 2016.

Blind Veterans UK's vision impaired football weekend held at the American Express Elite Performance Centre in Brighton 23rd to 26th September 2016. By Colin Williamson.

"Some people believe football is a matter of life and death, I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that." The late, great, Liverpool F.C. manager Bill Shankly, 1913-1981.

We didn't get off to a particularly good start. Expecting a light supper and an early night on the Friday before we participated in what turned out to be two full-on days of competitive football. We were instead invited to attend the Dinner Dance held at the Brighton centre to celebrate one year on from the highly successful Centenary Dinner Dance held at the centre in 2015. It was a splendid occasion enjoyed by all but unfortunately, as happens so often on these occasions, some of us (no names, no pack drill) enjoyed the festivities a little too much.

So it was a weary looking bunch that gathered together for breakfast the following morning at the Brighton centre, for what would be the first but hopefully not the last, of a weekend of vision impaired football for working age members. After a hearty breakfast and numerous cups of strong coffee the group eventually perked up enough to board the coach and head for Brighton and Hove Albion's new training ground in nearby Lancing.

The state of the art training facility was opened in 2014 at a cost of some £32,000,000 and includes 13 full and smaller sized natural grass and artificial grass pitches, plus a half-size covered indoor pitch.

We were introduced to our coaches for the weekend, Lisa and Kieran who work at the training ground and they started the session by giving us all a gentle work out and a few stretching exercises before handing us all a football so that we could acquaint ourselves with the ball that's used in the vision impaired version of the game. The ball is smaller and heavier than the 'normal' football and contains beads to make it rattle. After been given some tips on how to control the ball when running with it we were then put through a series of exercises to make sure that we were warmed up sufficiently in order for the game to begin.

We were then divided into two teams and spent the rest of the day playing matches against each other. Let's just say that some of the tackling was 'bordering on the reckless' and some of the shooting 'very erratic'! A few of us were unlucky and picked up injuries during the first half of the day which unfortunately for me resulted in having to sit on the side-lines for the rest of the weekend but it didn't spoil my enjoyment as I paced the line encouraging my team mates and laughing at some of the performances. It was fantastic to see the smiles on people's faces knowing that everyone out on the field was having a great time and enjoying each other's company.

And that's the beauty of football, it's a team game; it's not the team with the best players that win, it's the players with the best team that go on to be successful.

Everyone really enjoyed the weekend so much so that there is now the possibility of Blind Veterans UK entering a team in the vision impaired league which has teams scattered throughout the country.

If anyone is interested in joining the team, please get in touch with Kevin Alderton at Harcourt Street kevin.alderton@blindveterans.org.uk

I also spent some time talking with some of the beneficiaries who attended the weekend.

Jeff Stockwell is from Guilford and served with the British Army as a chef and has been a member of Blind Veterans UK since 2015. I asked him why he had put his name forward for this weekend.

"I put my name down for the weekend because it was something different. I've been involved in a lot of walking events over the past year and decided to branch out and try something new. I was never a great lover of football but I like to spend some time with the lads and thought this would be a good opportunity. I've really enjoyed these last few days and glad that I made the effort. I'm actually staying on at the centre for the rest of the week to try my hand at woodworking".

Former Wren Sue Eyles jokingly says she "was coerced into coming along" as she had originally put her name down for the 'tough-mudder' event but had to pull out so she was told "okay, you can do the football weekend instead"!

Anthony 'Tony' Cooke of Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire died on 28th September 2016, aged 84. He joined the Royal Navy in 1947 at 15 and trained at HMS Ganges and was a ships diver before joining the Fleet Air Arm as an Observer in helicopters. After commissioning he became an instructor at RNAS Culdrose, RNAS Lossiemouth and HMS Portland, but was frustrated not to have frontline jobs at sea. He was discharged as a Lieutenant in 1975.

John Copland of Dumfries, Dumfriesshire died on 20th September 2016, aged 92. He served in the Royal Engineers from 1942 when he was posted overseas to Algiers to take part in the North African campaign and later the Italian campaign before eventually being posted to Greece. He discharged as a Sapper in 1947.

Henry 'Frank' Cosgrove of Wirral, Merseyside died on 15th September 2016, aged 94. He joined the Royal Marines in 1941, volunteered for the Commandos, landed in Normandy and fought through to Germany. He was a Marine in 1946 when he was demobbed.

George Cresswell of Washington, Tyne and Wear died on 7th October 2016, aged 86. He joined the Royal Navy as a leading cook at the age of 18. He served in the UK and during the Korean War and in Malta and Gibraltar, aboard HMS Ocean, HMS Glory, HMS Theseus, and HMS Roebuck. He was discharged in 1955 as a Leading Hand.

Grenville Davies of Birmingham, West Midlands died on 20th September 2016, aged 97. He joined the Royal Army Ordnance Corps in July 1939 and went to France with the British Expeditionary Force. He was taken prisoner and spent the war in a PoW camp at Hamlin, Poland. He was repatriated in early 1945 after he and his fellow Prisoners of War had completed the 85 day, 870 mile Long March to Hamburg, which many did not survive. He was demobbed in 1946. He published a book, *Came the Day*, about his time in captivity.

Sydney 'Syd' Davis of Ashford, Middlesex died on 4th September 2016, aged 93. He joined the Queen's Surrey Home Guard on 29th May 1940 and was based in Cranleigh, Surrey. He was demobilised on 31st December 1945 when his unit was disbanded.

Robert 'Bob' Dobinson of Richmond, North Yorkshire died on 8th October 2016, aged 91. He enlisted in the Fleet Air Arm in 1943 where he served on Swordfish and Seafires in the Pacific Fleet. At the time of discharge in 1946 he was a Leading Air Fitter.

Olive 'Ray' Farmer née Sutton of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire died on 25th September 2016, aged 89. She joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1944, serving first in England and then Germany after the war. She was discharged as a Sergeant in 1949 and did voluntary work for the WRVS and the British Red Cross.

Beryl Franks née Cutler of Bexhill on Sea, East Sussex died on 1st October 2016, aged 95. She trained at the Royal Academy as a ballet dancer before joining the Land Army at the outbreak of the war. In 1943 she joined the WRNS in the Writers Office and later moved into the Transport Pool. She was mainly based in Yeovil at a Fleet Air Arm Station but was later in Bonn, Germany as part of the Control Commission. She was a Wren at the time of discharge in 1946.

Elizabeth Hansen née Tattle of Stockton on Tees, Cleveland died on 1st October 2016, aged 94. She joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1942 and served with 150 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery as a PT Instructor in various locations including Scotland, Wiltshire and Bristol. She discharged in 1945 as a Sergeant.

Edna Heads née Elkins of Cramlington, Northumberland died on 8th October 2016, aged 90. She worked as a shop assistant before she joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1945, serving at the War Office in London. She was discharged as a Lance Corporal in 1948.

Stanley Hughes of Scunthorpe, South Humberside died in 2016, aged 91. In 1943 he joined the Royal Marines, training in Portsmouth and Gosport before he was posted to Cromarty in Scotland. He took part in the D-Day Invasion and served in France as a motor mechanic driver. He was demobbed in 1946.

Arthur Johnson of Wisbech, Cambridgeshire died on 19th September 2016, aged 97. He joined the Royal Artillery in 1939 and later took part in the D-Day Invasion going through to Arnhem. He was discharged in 1946 as a Gunner.

Godfrey Jones of Porthcawl, Mid Glamorgan died on 2nd September 2016, aged 90. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1943. He served in France, Egypt, Palestine and Cyprus and was discharged as a Leading Aircraftman in 1950.

William 'Harold' Jones of Welshpool, Powys died on 9th October 2016, aged 95. Harold joined the Royal Welch Fusiliers in 1937 and served in the UK and in Burma. At the time of discharge in 1946 he was a Fusilier (Signaller).

Leonard Judd of Haverhill, Suffolk died on 2nd October 2016, aged 95. He started work as a toolmaker, a Reserved Occupation during WW2, and in 1942 when he was allowed to he joined the Royal Air Force. He qualified as aircrew and served as a Flight Engineer in Lancaster aircraft with the Pathfinder Force, based at RAF Oakington with 582 Squadron. He discharged in 1946 as a Warrant Officer.

Denis Keeble of Ipswich, Suffolk died on 27th February 2016, aged 91. He joined the General Service Corps in August 1942 and transferred to the Royal Artillery a month later, serving with the 73rd Light AA Regiment. His unit took part in the Normandy invasion and fought through to Germany; after the war he was posted to Palestine and Egypt. He was discharged in 1947.

Roger King of Towcester, Northamptonshire died on 1st October 2016, aged 84. Joining the 1st Kings Dragoon Guards for National Service in 1950 he served in Omagh, Northern Ireland and Hamburg, Germany. Discharged in 1952 he remained in the TA until 1956.

Joseph 'Joe' Lindsay of Glasgow, Lanarkshire died on 3rd October 2016, aged 96. He joined the Royal Artillery in 1938 and following training in Glasgow served in the UK where he developed his knowledge of the 25 Pounder gun. He was deployed to France after D-Day advancing through France, Belgium, Holland, over the Rhine at Wessel and into Germany. Wounded in Germany he was discharged as a Lance Bombardier in 1946.

Sidney Malin of Hampstead, London died on 1st October 2016, aged 91. He joined the General Service Corps in February 1945 for initial training and transferred to the Royal Engineers a month later. Commissioned in 1946 he served in Germany and the UK until discharged as a Lieutenant in 1948.

Frank McEvoy of Carshalton, Surrey died on 7th October 2016, aged 76. Due to his poor eyesight he joined the Army Catering Corps in 1960. Attached to the Parachute Regiment he was posted to Singapore, Kuwait, Bahrain, Cyprus, Libya, Germany and Northern Ireland, and whilst in the UK he was based in Aldershot. He was released to the Reserves in 1977.

Ronald Miller of Bournemouth, Dorset died in 2016, aged 82. He served in the Army from 1952 to 1954.

Lesley Milne née Ewen of Lee on the Solent, Hampshire died on 2nd August 2016, aged 74. She served in the WRNS from 1959 to 1961 when she trained at HMS Dauntless in Reading. She served across the UK in the motor pool and was driver to the Captain of HMS Excellent.

Olive Montgomery née Southwood of Southport, Merseyside died on 9th August 2016, aged 87. During her service in the WRNS from 1947 to 1948 she was an officer's cook on HMS President, HMS Victory and HMS Nuthatch.

Bernard Myerscough of Liverpool died on 13th September 2016, aged 90. He joined the Coldstream Guards in 1943 and served in Belgium and North-West Europe from 1944 until 1946. He then served with the Middle East Land Force in Palestine and Tripoli from 1948 until 1950. He was discharged as a Private in 1952.

David Nicholson of Brighton, East Sussex died on 28th June 2016, aged 78. He joined the Royal Navy in 1954, serving with the Fleet Air Arm in a safety equipment role. He discharged as a Leading Airman in 1966.

Alexander 'Lex' Park of Coatbridge, Lanarkshire died on 13th August 2016, aged 92. Joining the Royal Air Force in 1940 he served in the UK as a carpenter working with De Havilland's on Mosquito aircraft. He was discharged as an Aircraftman Second Class.

Phyl Pipe née Friend of Stowmarket, Suffolk died on 15th September 2016, aged 92. She joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1942 and worked in the War Office Wireless Service as a Morse operator in Harrogate, Yorkshire. She was discharged in 1945.

Albert Prior of Peacehaven, East Sussex died on 1st September 2015, aged 95. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1939 and trained as an aircraft fitter at RAF Hensford, Staffordshire and was posted to Scotland, South Africa and finally India, where he worked on Liberator bombers in support of the Burma campaign. He returned to the UK and was demobilised in 1946.

Archibald 'Martin' Reid of Maidenhead, Berkshire died on 28th September 2016, aged 78. He enlisted into the Royal Air Force in 1956, serving in the UK, Borneo and Singapore. He held the rank of Corporal at the time of discharge in 1968.

Dulce Robertson of South Brent, Devon died on 13th September 2016, aged 93. She joined the WRNS in 1941 and trained as a War Plotter. She was commissioned and worked at Mount Wise, the Maritime HQ in Plymouth. She was discharged as a 3rd Officer in 1945.

Abdul Sattar of Shepherds Bush, London died on 26th January 2016, aged 99. He served in the Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery in India from 1941 to 1946 when he was discharged as a Gunner.

Thomas 'Tom' Sidaway of Stockton on Tees, Cleveland died on 13th September 2016, aged 86. He joining the Durham Light Infantry in 1948 and trained at Bransford Castle in Dereham before being posted around UK. In 1949 he completed his service as the Rail Transport Officer at Richmond Station and was released to the Reserves until 1959.

Harold 'Wally' Slatter of Stroud, Gloucestershire died on 24th September 2016, aged 81. He served in the Royal Armoured Corps 13/18 Hussars from 1957 to 1959 leaving as a Trooper. He served in Germany, Singapore and Malaya.

Kenneth Spillman of Brentwood, Essex died on 8th September 2016, aged 91. Already in the Air Training Corps at the age of 17 he learnt to fly Tiger Moths. He joined the RAF in 1944 and trained as an electrician. He served at RAF Biggin Hill, then at RAF Stradishall with Lancaster bombers and then in Bari, Italy at the end of the war. He was later involved in the Berlin Airlift. He was discharged in 1947.

John Stafford of Steyning, West Sussex died on 14th September 2016, aged 94. He joined the Rifle Brigade (TA) in May 1939 under age and was mobilised at the start of the war. He transferred to the Royal Artillery in 1940 and in 1941 to the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. He fought in North Africa and later in Italy and Austria. In 1942 he joined the Royal electrical and Mechanical Engineers until discharged as a Staff Sergeant in 1946.

Peter Thomas of Orpington, Kent died on 3rd October 2016, aged 77. He joined the Royal Air Force for National Service in 1960 and served in Aden until 1962, discharging as a Leading Aircraftman.

Eric Ward of Seaford, East Sussex died on 19th September 2016, aged 86. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1947 and served at RAF Watton. Posted abroad to Egypt, Cyprus and Malta he was discharged in 1957 as a Sergeant.

William Watkins of Gloucester, Gloucestershire died on 9th September 2016, aged 82. He joined the Gloucestershire Regiment in 1952. He should have been drafted to Korea but it was cancelled at the last minute as his Regiment had been captured. He was discharged in 1954, but remained on part-time national service with the Royal Artillery (TA), until 1958 when he discharged as a Drummer.

William Whatling BEM of Halesworth, Suffolk died on 29th July 2016, aged 99. He joined the Royal Tank Regiment in 1936 as a full career soldier. He served in the UK and Germany rising to the rank of Staff Sergeant. He was awarded the British Empire Medal in 1947 and the Queen's Coronation Medal in 1953. He discharged in 1958.

Derek Widdowson of Audenshaw, Manchester died on 14th September 2016, aged 79. He completed his National Service in the Royal Army Service Corps from 1955 to 1957, transferring as a driver to part-time National Service in the RASC until 1961.

Charles Willmott of Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire died on 9th September 2016, aged 95. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1940. Qualifying as a weapons armourer he served in Sri Lanka and India before he discharged as a Leading Aircraftman in 1946.

William Wilson of Rushden, Northamptonshire died on 4th October 2016, aged 89. During the war he worked for the LNER in a reserved occupation, but joined the RAF as soon as he could in November 1946. He served in the Suez Canal zone, Iraq and the UK. He was discharged as a Corporal in 1956.

Charles 'Charlie' Winters of South Molton, Devon died on 28th September 2016, aged 94. He enlisted in the Royal Berkshire Regiment (TA) in 1940. In 1942 he transferred to the Worcestershire Regiment and fought in India and Burma. He was a Corporal at the time of his discharge in 1946.

Elizabeth 'Betty' Young née Warrender of Lochgelly, Fife died on 13th October 2016, aged 95. She served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service from 1942 as a Telephonist in the UK until discharged as a Private in 1946.

