

Review

The journal of
Blind Veterans UK
July 2019

Inside:

Remembering
our gatekeeper

Our Vision in
Song choir

GOAL goes to
Llandudno

75 years

D-Day remembered



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss



Carved on stone

Hello, and a warm welcome to your July edition of *Review* magazine.

As a child, I was taken on holiday to Normandy in France, and for me those were happy times. Sun, sea and building lots of traditionally shaped sandcastles on the beach. In short, a slice of heaven. Yet, just a few decades previously in June 1944, those same glorious beaches saw the start of Operation Overlord, colloquially known as D-Day and the start of the Allied liberation of Europe.

Where I was playing happily with my bucket and spade, men fought and died on that hot beach in order to gain every square inch of ground back from an unyielding, devoted and still very potent enemy. Mercifully, perhaps, I was ignorant of that slice of history, of the immense sections of Mulberry breakwaters that are still present or the still formidable gun emplacements visible to this day.

Now – like the bulk of my generation and the ones that both come before and follow – I am grateful for the sacrifices made during those

tumultuous days. It's pleasing to note that during the commemorations that recently took place, many of our Members were there. You can find out more inside, including an account of a special dinner on board the Town-class cruiser *HMS Belfast* – itself a veteran of the Normandy landings and the ship which fired the second shot in the action.

We often see the words 'Their name liveth for ever more' written on cenotaphs and war memorials, and most of us acknowledge them with a short glance before carrying on our way. These few days have proved that the names carved in stone – no matter which conflict - really will live in the hearts and minds of those who are still with us, regardless of generation. Long may that continue.

Chris Gilson
Editor



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On the cover

Our veterans on parade at Llandudno Cenotaph



Taken to our hearts

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



ROBERT F. SARGENT / WIKIMEDIA.COM

Caption: Omaha Beach, 6 June, 1944

As the public's memory of the D-Day 75th commemoration fades, I still find myself returning to it. Partly this is because how much we, as a nation, take these sorts of events to our heart and how well we manage them. I watched the D-Day activities in Portsmouth on 5 June with nothing short of admiration for what the organisers had achieved – often in the face of some critical local media about public access. But this was eclipsed by the bearing of the D-Day participants themselves. I am constantly humbled by the self-effacing manner in which veterans of that era dismiss their own valour while honouring those that fought alongside them.

The standout moment for me was the short speech made by Her Majesty the Queen. Of all the dignitaries attending, she had the greatest claim on the day and, with quiet authority, she certainly made the point in her opening sentences:

“When I attended the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the D-Day Landings, some thought it might be the last such event. But the wartime generation - my generation - is resilient, and I am delighted to be with you in Portsmouth today.”

We were extraordinarily lucky to have had Her Majesty as our royal patron



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Caption - HRH Princess Elizabeth in the Auxiliary Territorial Service

for so long. Her empathy with so many of our Members comes directly from a shared experience, whatever the difference in background and class.

As Second Subaltern Elizabeth Windsor, she wore uniform at a time when the Home Front bore the brunt of the war, with the royal family steadfastly remaining with their people in London. We are equally lucky and privileged that she has now passed on this role to HRH The Countess of Wessex.

A turning tide

One other reason I dwell on the commemorations might seem a little churlish. I remain a little



concerned at one of the messages the media coverage seemed to leave behind. Our youngest generations could be forgiven for believing that D-Day was the sole turning point of the war. In fact, crucial as D-Day was, in May and June 1944 the tide was turning across every theatre of operations.

This is not to underplay the importance of D-Day. The Normandy landings were the necessary precursor to opening up the last front, the theatre of operations which took the fight straight to the Nazi heart. They were totemic, not just for UK but for the occupied countries of Western Europe which could now sense the imminence of liberation.

They were ground-breaking: notwithstanding the astonishing courage of those that closed with and crossed the beaches, or the audacity of the plan, this was an operation that was entirely underwritten by a vast logistic effort – crucial to maintaining momentum as the Allies swept across Europe. And it was to become strategically critical for the next 45 years, as it ensured the Western Allies (soon to become NATO) retained a balance of power with Soviet influence in Eastern Europe.

My point is really that we too quickly

focus on single events without recognising the wider context: this was truly a world war. I suspect we will make that mistake again. The Government has already announced that the 2020 early May Bank Holiday will be celebrated on Friday 8 May (rather than on the traditional Monday), to celebrate VE-Day. I think that is a cracking idea. I do hope that they will have the grace to commemorate VJ-Day as well: the 14th Army has been too often forgotten, as have other forces and non-combatants who fought and suffered far from Europe.

Admiring the royals

I should lighten the tone. In opening this piece, I touched on my admiration for the royal family. Despite that, my personal involvement with royalty has not always run smoothly.



Caption: Paul Luker



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Caption - VE-Day in London

On one visit to my squadron we were advised that the Royal Personage was not especially comfortable with idle chit-chat but was usually very interested in technical stuff. That settled the programme. We would get him straight into the hanger and onto an aircraft to meet my engineers. I should mention at this point one of my many failings: an appallingly shabby short-term memory for names. I therefore decreed that the only personnel that I would introduce to the Royal Personage would be those whose surnames I could easily remember – specifically those whose surnames were colours. You get the picture: SAC Green, Corporal White, Sergeant Brown, Flight Sergeant Black.

“My point is really that we too quickly focus on single events without recognising the wider context: this was truly a world war”

Come the day all went well until the end of the line-up. There stood my Junior Engineering Officer, known to all as “the JENGO”. A man I knew well. A man I chatted with daily. A man whose name had just deserted me; the synapse in my brain responsible for remembering it had gone off on a NAAFI break. Improvise! “May I present – ah – Flight Lieutenant Jengo”. The Royal Personage who had thus far registered scant interest in the others now brightened up: “Jengo. That’s an interesting name. Where do your family come from?”.

In the course of a totally fabricated five-minute account, we then learned that one of “Jengo’s” forebears from Cadiz had been ship-wrecked with the Spanish Armada off the coast of Northern Ireland, settled in Limavady, and established the first chorizo sausage-makers in Ulster.

That royal visit cost me an awful lot of beer. Some things deserve to be remembered properly.

The most special of days

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

The media was alive at the start of last month with its coverage of the 75th anniversary of both D-Day and the start of Operation Overlord in 1944. I managed to watch the 5 June Portsmouth ceremony on 'catch-up', and found it deeply moving. Here we were, with our Royal family and the leaders of the free world, collected



Caption: Nick Caplin

on the Solent coast to pay tribute to the endeavours of all who took part in that audacious operation.

Rightly, the politicians were very much in a supporting role, for the stars were the veterans themselves. It was a remarkable event and hats off to all involved in its impeccable organisation, particularly to Portsmouth Council who can't have been relishing the challenge of managing the Trump machine! We had our veterans present at the Portsmouth event, some in VVIP seats, and we had some of our D-Day members aboard MV *Boudicca* which made the pilgrimage to the Normandy beaches for 6 June. I am very much looking forward to catching up with Eddie Gaines to hear some of the stories of this epic voyage.

Our own events

Within Blind Veterans UK we held our



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Caption: Landing ships putting cargo ashore on Omaha Beach, 1944

own events to commemorate the day, notably our D-Day Reception on HMS *Belfast*. A few months ago a member of our Engagement team excelled themselves and managed to book this historic ship for us. It was a real coup - a commemorative reception on the 75th anniversary with our very own D-Day blind veterans hosted aboard a D-Day veteran.

Did you know that HMS *Belfast* played a pivotal role on the opening day as the flagship of Bombardment Force E, supporting troops landing at Gold and Juno beaches? She is one of only three remaining vessels from

the bombardment fleet, the other two being the USS *Laffey* and the USS *Texas*, both of which now reside in the USA. It had been planned that HMS *Belfast* would fire the opening salvo on 6 June but another cruiser stole her thunder by opening fire three minutes earlier.

The cruiser is said to have targeted the German gun battery at La Marefontaine which subsequently played no meaningful role in defending the beaches. The crew also played a role in treating casualties and helped to clear the beaches. It was a privilege to be aboard her, and →

I am happy to report that she fired a three-gun salute bang on 11am at the start of our event.

Visibly moved

I'm pleased to say that we had 120 guests sitting down for lunch on the ship that day, and these included supporters, donors, MPs and other people that we would like to bring into our family. As with the Portsmouth event, the stars were our very own blind veterans, and our guests were visibly moved by the stories that they heard.

John Baker served in the Royal Pioneer Corps and landed in Normandy before going on to assist in bridge building for the Rhine crossing. John Connolly had joined the Royal Navy as a Boy Seaman and supported the D Day landings aboard the Emerald-class cruiser HMS *Enterprise*. Arthur Barnes served in the Royal Artillery as a gunner in merchant ships bringing vital equipment to the new Normandy beach-heads. Nev' Lees joined the Royal Navy and supported the operation as a radar operator, subsequently serving in the Pacific. Bob Jones joined the Royal Navy and landed on the morning of 6 June in a Landing Craft assault, his job being to clear obstacles to allow others to land. Fanny Hugill joined the Wrens and was in the Ops Room at Southwick Park working as a plotting officer on the night of 5-6 June.

We also had Joan Osborne BEM with us. Her husband Bob had lost his sight, his right leg below the knee, his left lower arm and sustained damage to his remaining hand as a result of a blast on the Normandy beaches.

Last but by no means least, Royal Engineer Ron Cross was one of the very first soldiers to storm the beaches. Ron was in an AVRE (Armoured Vehicle Royal Engineers) whose job it was to clear away obstacles and to breach ditches in order that tanks could come ashore. Ron made a speech at the lunch on behalf of all of our veterans present on this day, talking of this experience and bringing the operation to life. It was a remarkable speech and I was struck by the clarity of his recall and by his modesty and humility. It is very clear from my chat with Ron and with all our D-Day veterans that this event was important to them, and their thoughts and memories were mainly of the many thousands who lost their lives as a result of that operation.

Our lunch showed the charity at its very best: the staff who attended to every detail, our wonderful volunteers and supporters and, most of all, our extraordinary veterans. It was a privilege to be with them as part of this commemoration on this most special of days.



Caption: Craig Lundberg celebrates at John O'Groats on 21 June

News

1,000 miles and over £10,000 - Craig has done it!

Congratulations to member Craig Lundberg who has completed his Land's End to John O'Groats cycling challenge.

Craig, a former corporal in the Duke

of Lancaster's Regiment, set off on the long journey with sighted pilot Callum Edge on 11 June and the pair cycled for 10 days in a row, going all the way from the bottom to the top of the country.

This is a challenge that Craig didn't think he'd ever be able to take on after losing his sight during a rooftop battle in Basra in March 2007. →

The challenge was very tough with the team having to battle through the terrible wind and rain that hit the country in mid-June. Craig also had to be treated for a knee injury 300 miles in.

As well as raising money for Blind Veterans UK, Craig, Callum and the rest of the Blind Tandem Challenge team are supporting the charity Vision Aid Overseas which helps children with sight conditions in developing countries.

The team have been supported by the leading convenience store group in the UK, SPAR, to allow them to take on the challenge. They made a stop at a SPAR throughout the journey to top up on food, drinks and moral support.

■ You can still support Craig and the team by visiting www.virginmoneygiving.com/team/blindtandemchallenge or text bike to 70577 to donate £10.

Our founder receives English Heritage Blue Plaque

Sir Arthur Pearson, our founder, was commemorated with a blue plaque on 26 June. The plaque marks the

“I wanted them to be led to look upon blindness, not as an affliction, but as a handicap; not merely as a calamity, but as an opportunity”

Grade II* listed house on Portland Place in Marylebone where he lived with his wife and some of the first blinded servicemen supported by the charity, then known as St Dunstan's, in the later years of the First World War and just afterwards.

As he wrote, ‘I wanted them to be led to look upon blindness, not as an affliction, but as a handicap; not merely as a calamity, but as an opportunity’.

Our Chief Executive, Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB, said: “Sir Arthur's mantra of achieving Victory Over Blindness still guides the principles of Blind Veterans UK to this day. We now support veterans of every generation regardless of when they served or how they lost their sight but his original mission is still at our core.

“I'm sure Sir Arthur would be proud that his legacy is still being felt by

thousands of blind veterans today, over 100 years after he lived in this house with some of the very first blinded veterans of the First World War.”

One of our Members who attended was Peter Price. Peter has been supported by us since 2010. He is 70 and lost his sight due to cone dystrophy. Since then he has gone on to become a very keen and



Caption: The plaque in position

successful blind archer holding many records in the sport.

Peter's Grandfather, Ernest Sayers, also had cone dystrophy and lost an eye during the First World War. He started to be supported by the charity the year before Sir Arthur Pearson died. Peter still carries his Grandfather's Braille watch, these were given to all blind veterans when they joined St Dunstan's. Blind Veterans UK still provides a watch to every new veteran it supports today, although these are now talking watches.

English Heritage's Chair of the Blue Plaques Panel, Ronald Hutton, said: “Arthur Pearson was a tireless advocate for blind people, particularly those blinded in the service of their country and we are delighted to celebrate his legacy here today, where he lived for a number of years, at a house once listed in the street directory as ‘Pearson's Hostel for Blind Officers’.”

The plaque was unveiled by Sir Arthur Pearson's Great-Granddaughter, the Hon. Marya Egerton-Warburton and Colin Williamson, the President of Blind Veterans UK. The building the plaque is displayed outside is now occupied by the Association of Anaesthetists.



Caption - Members of the Vision in Song choir in fine voice

Vision in song

Our choir of blind veterans releases their first songs

A choir made up of our veterans from Essex has released its first music. The songs were released on 24 June to mark the beginning of Armed Forces Week.

The Choir, called Vision in Song, formed last year and were introduced in *Review* then. A community support worker from the charity helped set up the choir as she spoke to a number of blind veterans in the Essex area who mentioned that they either missed

singing or would love to give it a go.

The 10 members who make up the choir represent all three branches of the British Armed Forces: Army, Navy and RAF and they range in age from 76 to 96. They perform an assortment of numbers from war-time classics to patriotic anthems and jazz hits.

Their first EP, "*Sing As We Go*", is made up of three war-time classics: *Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag*, *It's*

“Words cannot express how much joy Vision In Song has given me and I’m so thankful to Jennie and Blind Veterans UK for making it happen”

a Long Way to Tipperary and the title track *Sing As We Go*.

Jennie Hammond, the community support worker who helped form the choir, says: “The rehearsals have really brought the group together and provided companionship which is so crucial in combating the isolation that is so often felt in older people, particularly if they have a disability like sight loss.

“It all started with visiting one of our veterans called Danny. I visited him at home and was really moved by his story. His great love was singing but when he lost his sight he was unable to be accommodated by his old choir. I made it my mission to make sure Danny could sing as part of a choir group again.”

Member Danny Williams, says: “Jennie asked me what I missed most since my sight loss and without hesitation I told her it was being part of a singing group. Words cannot express how much joy

Vision In Song has given me and I’m so thankful to Jennie and Blind Veterans UK for making it happen.”

Another member who sings in the choir is former Royal Artillery wireless operator Ted Cruse, he says: “Vision In Song has given all of us a chance to sing again when we thought we never would. There is a real sense of camaraderie in the group and we all really look forward to rehearsals.”

The songs are available for the public to download and stream on all the main sites and will be included at the end of the recorded *Review* this month.

The release of the EP is also accompanied by the group’s first music video although we’re pretty sure it won’t be their last.



Given and received

Your column from Blind Veterans UK chaplain
Clare Callanan

In the past I've herded cows (childhood spent next to a farm), children (primary school teacher) and soldiers (Army chaplain). Despite this, accompanying blind veterans around London on a Project Gemini trip was different once again.

It is always both humbling and a privilege to view things through



Caption: Padre Clare Callanan

other people's perceptions and understandings. What were these veterans from the other countries going to make of these iconic buildings of our capital city? How were they going to enhance our understanding; those of us who can effectively see them any time we wish? How were they going to move us out of our own perceptions and open us up to other valid viewpoints?

Somewhere in the few days spent with these veterans was the word 'grace'. Grace, from a Christian perspective, is understood to be the unmerited favour of God - given to us who have no basis upon which to be shown it. It is used with a sense of humility. It was humbling indeed to share meals, laughter, tears, challenges, and feel just plain awe and wonder at what we were seeing and experiencing.

It was in the honesty and honouring of people we both met and in our conversations. Grace was literally in the gift of pure Gospel singing by Raine, one of the US veterans, of 'Amazing Grace'. Grace was in the thanksgiving for food prepared and shared at the formal dinner.

Indeed grace was in everywhere and in everyone. Freely given and freely received. Thank you.

An open letter from Blind Veterans UK Trustee Chris Cardwell

Dear Member,

I represent our organisation on the NHS England Armed Forces Public Patient Participation Involvement Group (PPPIG) which helps the NHS understand the challenges that the Armed Forces community faces in negotiating the complexities of the health system.

We know the difficulties faced by our veterans and others in the community, and our group, which is taken from this wider community is working very hard with the NHS to improve things where they are needed, and highlight really good practice to improve the NHS for all.

I will be asking our group to look at the specific challenges experienced by those of us with visual impairment, but our current initiative is on improving services for those with mental health problems.

You may not have been aware of work the NHS has done to raise awareness of veterans and Armed Forces mental health initiatives, which includes producing a set of briefing papers.

There is a general brief on issues faced by veterans, and a letter has gone to both clinical commissioning groups and

mental health trusts which helps to understand the challenges. If you wish to know more, then these documents are available from your Blind Veterans UK community support worker.

I hope that wider publicity will help us play a part in educating the staff of the NHS of the challenges we face, by knowing about them and helping to raise awareness.

There is a very good Armed Forces team in the NHS in England - many of whom are veterans themselves - and there is a great deal being done. We know it is not perfect, and we are very happy to hear of specific issues, but I believe we also have to help ourselves by being aware of what is being done to assist us.

Please feel free to share this information. It would really help me if you could let me know who you have shared this with, and give me feedback. This group listens and acts.

I cannot help with individual health problems but you can email me at chris.cardwell@blindveterans.org.uk or write to me at Blind Veterans UK, 12-14 Harcourt Street, London W1H 4HD.



Asian lettuce wraps

A light and flavoursome meal from our resident chef

Penny Melville-Brown

If you want something lighter but scrumptious this summer, try this quick and easy dish I was taught in Virginia Beach, USA.

Method

- Heat the oil in a frying pan.

Ingredients

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, peeled and diced
2 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
1 (8oz) can water chestnuts, drained, rinsed and chopped
1 lb ground (finely minced) brown turkey meat
¼ cup soy sauce
Sauce:
¼ cup ketchup
4 teaspoons rice vinegar
4 teaspoons sesame oil
1 teaspoon dried red pepper flakes (two for a spicier flavour)
2 tablespoons brown sugar
1 head iceberg lettuce (or your lettuce choice), separated into individual leaf 'cups'
¼ cup spring onions, chopped
¼ cup peanuts, chopped

- Add the onions, garlic and water chestnuts and sauté for 3-4 minutes.
- Add the turkey and cook for about five minutes.
- Mix the sauce ingredients together and then add to the pan. Cook until the turkey mixture thickens.
- Take the pan off the heat and spoon the mixture in to the lettuce cups and garnish.

My tips:

1. Chicken, white turkey meat, pork, beef or other meat could be used but cooking times will vary. The meat is more like sausage meat than mince.
2. Serve with plain basmati rice and oriental green beans which can be cooked while the turkey mix thickens with the sauce.



RAPTORCAPTOR / ADOBE STOCK

Gemini goes to Brighton

Our president, **Colin Williamson** talks about hosting an international contingent in Brighton

Blind and visually-impaired veterans from the UK, South Africa and the United States recently gathered together at the Brighton centre under the umbrella of Project Gemini. It's the annual exchange programme which sees Members of Blind Veterans UK, the Blinded Veterans Association (USA) and St. Dunstan's South Africa come together for a week of peer-to-peer support, learning, camaraderie and activities and has become a very popular event in our charity's calendar.

Our Members Alan Walker, Peter Graves, Sue Eyles, Jan Price and Kerry Reed were joined by South African's Pieter Engelbrecht and Abraham 'Braam' Naude plus our American guests, Lonnie Bedwell, Lawrence Harrison, Raine Rich and Reynaldo 'Rey' Reyes.

It was an early start for some of us on Sunday morning as we had to head to Heathrow airport to collect the two groups who arrived into different terminals at around about the same time. With the help of Alan Walker and Sue Eyles, we three 'greeters' slipped into a well-rehearsed drill and after a couple of hours (our South African veterans had a problem identifying their luggage) we had everyone together and were on our way back to Brighton and our home for the week - Port Hall, an eight bedroomed detached house owned by the charity close to the centre.

Hasty unpacking

After orienteering our guests around the house, and undertaking some hasty unpacking we boarded the coach and drove to Devil's Dyke, a



Gemini

Caption: Project Gemini visits the Palace of Westminster

popular beauty spot on the South Downs where we had lunch and got to know each other. Sunday evening was spent relaxing in the bar at the centre.

Monday morning soon came around, and we had arranged for the group to have a guided tour of our Brighton centre and a fantastic virtual reality demonstration by our IT specialists Matt, David and Leon. Everyone really enjoyed the session, although one of our American friends became a little

“With the help of Alan Walker and Sue Eyles, we three ‘greeters’ slipped into a well-rehearsed drill”

too excited and somewhat hysterical during one particular demo, much to the amusement of the rest of the group and the consternation of one of the IT instructors. Our international guests really enjoyed the tour and commented on how amazing our centre was.

After a superb buffet lunch in the Trophy Room, we were joined by members of our staff before we all trooped downstairs to the sports hall and participated in an eagerly awaited archery competition which saw the UK take on the ‘rest of the world’. Great fun was had by all and there was some amazing talent on show too.

Late afternoon saw the group head off to Brighton Marina via the undercliff walkway, for a game



of ten-pin bowling. Once again, the competitive spirit was well and truly on display. How naïve of me to think that ten-pin was a non-contact sport...

Tuesday saw a visit to Portsmouth and its historic naval dockyards, where we were given a tour of HMS *Victory* and a really interesting boat trip around the harbour. The weather gods were very kind to us and we enjoyed a really lovely sunny day, much to the disappointment of Pieter and Braam who wanted to experience some traditional British rain. Dinner in the evening was courtesy of TNS Catering at the Brighton centre, where good old fish and chips was served with the usual accompaniments - curry sauce and mushy peas!

An early start

It was an early start for the group



Caption: Go karting

on Wednesday as we were off to London and a visit to the Houses of Parliament, which was kindly arranged by Dr Renata Gomes and her wonderful research team. We were met at Brighton railway station by the manager, Daniel Sands, who greeted us all warmly and had his team take us to our train for the trip to the capital. Thanks to Daniel and his colleagues and also a special thanks to Govia Thameslink Railway for providing us with free rail travel for the day.

We were welcomed by a lovely day in the capital as we took the short walk from Victoria Station to our first visit of the day, the Palace of Westminster where we were fortunate enough to sit on the plush red leather seats in the chamber of the House of Lords. It was fun to learn something about the history of this great British establishment, an integral part of the institution of Parliament. Our next visit was to the House of Commons, where luck would have it we were allowed into the public gallery to listen to Prime Minister's Question Time, an unforgettable experience - especially in today's volatile political climate. Our South African and American guests came away very well impressed.

The next port of call was the Tower of London and a fascinating delve into the history of this iconic



Caption: Project Gemini at Hever Castle

London landmark. We were given an informative and very interesting talk on the long standing association with the Tower by the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, delivered by the Regimental London Area Secretary, Major (Retd) Mick McCarthy MBE, whose knowledge of the regiment and its history are second to none. We then visited the Fusilier's Museum with its rich collection of uniforms, silver, flags, paintings and other memorabilia dating back to the Regiment's formation back in 1685.

It was a tired but happy bunch that arrived back at Port Hall later that evening.

The old competitive spirit

In the afternoon on Thursday, we visited Q Leisure, a go-kart track in Albourne, near Hassocks. We had a lovely lunch sitting outside of the café and bar by the picturesque pond in the glorious sunshine, and after lunch we were invited to don our protective overalls, helmets and gloves then, following a safety briefing we were allowed onto the track.

It was a fantastic adrenaline rush and once again, the old competitive spirit was in full flow as one of our Members, Kevin Alderton, took on one of our American guests, Rey Reyes, for the title of 'King of the Track'. Forget about the epic Formula One battles and intense rivalry between Niki Lauda and James Hunt back in the seventies, this was on an entirely different level! Both drivers were going flat out, and woe betide anyone that got in their way. It really was a great day out and highly recommended for anyone that wants to experience the thrills of driving at speed again.

Next issue

Our concluding part of the Project Gemini visit... watch this space

Who exactly was Sergeant Hetherington? - a mystery solved

Our Information and Archives Executive **Rob Baker** tells the story of the gatekeeper of St Dunstan's

We are fortunate to have in our archives thousands of photographs spanning the history of Blind Veterans UK from our beginnings in 1915 to the present day. Most of those taken in a pre-digital era have now had digital copies made, and



Caption: Our doorman at far right

we use these in all kinds of ways - in particular on our social media channels.

Combined with our other records, the photographs are a wonderful resource to illustrate and tell us more about the previous activities of the charity, our past blind veterans and others including staff, volunteers and supporters. However identifying who is in all of the photographs and what is going on can sometimes be far from straightforward, even when names and other information is given on the back of, or (in photo albums) beneath, the pictures. For example, the first half of the 20th century was a more formal age, and men and

women were often referred to by their surnames, preceded by Mr, Miss or Mrs - or in the case of those who had served, their rank. Identification of a person with an unusual or rare name is then usually straightforward, but detective work can be needed if it is a popular surname such as Smith or Williams.

Much terrific detective work has been done in the last few years by our archive volunteers John Hurst and Sue Blakeley-Kerr, enabling us to identify many more people and tell their stories. However, occasionally we hit a brick wall. This was the case with Sergeant Hetherington who was our doorman/gatekeeper for a number of years. He is featured in several of the photographs we have, and from these we knew that Hetherington had joined us by early 1917, if not before, and was with us until at least 1921. The *Review* told us that he had served in the war with the Northumberland Fusiliers, where he took part in the Battle of Mons

“Much terrific detective work has been done in the last few years by our archive volunteers John Hurst and Sue Blakeley-Kerr”



Caption: Sergeant Ernest Hetherington

and then the Battle of the Marne. Here he lost his right arm.

Other qualities

In addition to his duties as a doorman Hetherington also sold copies of *Review* to passing members of the general public and tickets for concerts which raised funds for our work. We said of him that ‘...he is altogether as useful as only an old soldier knows how to be.’ In addition to his other qualities, Sergeant Hetherington was also reported →

to be an expert in antiques and to be planning to work as a dealer when the time came for him to leave us. However, attempts to find out more were hampered by our not knowing his first name – Hetherington is a popular surname in the north east and as a result we were not able to identify him from lists of those who served in the Northumberland Fusiliers.

So, we decided to feature Sergeant Hetherington's story on our website and on social media and appeal for information. We were delighted when we were then contacted by his granddaughter, Sheila Curtis. Sheila was able to give us his full name – Ernest Jones Hetherington. She also very kindly supplied us with a great deal of further information



Caption: On duty at the gates

about him, from her own research. We learnt amongst other things that he had worked as a young man as a dental mechanic and had on one occasion run away to join the circus, although he returned home. He twice joined the army under assumed names. Later - under his own name - he served in both Boer wars, and in India and Ireland. He married in 1904; the couple went on to suffer a personal tragedy a few years later when their first-born infant son died after his clothing caught fire.

Active and engaged

Ernest joined up with the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers on 6 August 1914 and was posted to France soon afterwards. His right arm was badly damaged in battle in November, and removed the following month. He joined us either when, or quite soon after, we moved into St Dunstan's in Regent's Park, which was in March 1915; he was still with us when in 1921 we moved across Regent's Park to St John's Lodge. He clearly played a very active and engaged role with us in our early years, and his inclusion in so many photographs with our blind veterans suggests a close affinity with them.

Sadly Ernest did not live for very long after his time with us; he died in 1926 aged just 53. He is buried in Islington Cemetery.

Getting together

It's our Reunion season and **Anika Backhouse** reports on the latest round of gatherings across the country



Caption: Cardiff Reunion. Members singing the Welsh national anthem with the choir

**Cardiff Reunion
Wednesday, 22 May**

In Cardiff, we held the largest Reunion for blind veterans in the South West and South Wales region. Around 170 veterans, their guests, and staff and volunteers joined together at Cardiff City Football Club.

The place was buzzing with good humour and song. We were pleased to be joined by the Tenovus Cancer Care choir, who sang a number of songs ranging from wartime jazz to iconic pop and tunes fit for the football terraces. These included Elvis' 'Always On My Mind' and





Caption: Surrey. Guests seated at tables

the infamous 'You'll Never Walk Alone' by the Isley Brothers. As ever at the Cardiff Reunion, veterans joined together to sing the Welsh national anthem, to resounding applause.

One of our volunteering couples said that they were proud to be part of such an amazing day with amazing people.

Surrey Reunion Thursday, 23 May

We hosted the Surrey Reunion at the Hilton Hotel in Cobham. The event, which gathered over 80 attendees, including 35 veterans, was not only a great opportunity for the guests to eat a delicious three course meal, but to also reacquaint with old friends and make new ones.

For Paul Luker, our chairman and trustee of Blind Veterans UK, the Reunion reunited him with a fellow ex-Royal Air Force Member.

They met five years ago, when Paul first introduced him to our charity and encouraged him to join, due to his military past and visual impairment. They met again for the first time since at the Surrey Reunion; it was an emotional and moving moment for the pair of them.

Bournemouth Reunion Tuesday, 4 June

Local veterans and their guests from Bournemouth and the surrounding areas came together for the first ever Blind Veterans UK Reunion to be held in Bournemouth.

The event took place at the Vitality Stadium, home to the local football team. Almost 100 people came together to catch up with old friends and make new ones.

In addition to veterans, widows and their guests, a number of volunteers supported the event by helping out with transport, among other duties. This coincided nicely with National Volunteers Week, and provided an opportunity for these volunteers to be presented with their 2019 pin badges by Paul Luker.



Caption: Chorley. Smiling veterans, guests and staff seated around a dining table

Feedback about the event has been very positive and we look forward to using the venue next year.

The Reunion lunch also provided all those present with the opportunity

to wish one of our veterans, Eileen, a very happy birthday for when she turns 100 in July!

Chorley Reunion Tuesday, 11 June

The Chorley Reunion was a wonderful event held by Blind Veterans UK at the Hallmark Hotel in Leyland, hosting over 70 guests, including 30 veterans and two widows.

The Reunions are special occasions where Members meet and remember stories from their past; the Chorley Reunion made no exception.

It was also a special occasion for Percy Harrison and his wife Joan as it marked their 64th wedding anniversary.



Caption: Bournemouth. Friends greeting each other

Wheelbarrow man

Donations to the charity sometimes have interesting back stories. **Lynette Denzey** discovers how one man supports us with wheelbarrows



Caption: Daz in his workshop

Our man-about-town, blind veteran and staff member Simon Brown hails from Morley near Leeds, Yorkshire and his profile in the town is high. Simon, 40, was shot while serving in Iraq in 2006, losing one eye and most of the sight in his other eye.

Daz Speight, a native of Morley now living in Dewsbury, had seen several articles about Simon in the local newspapers and then saw him on TV. In Daz's words, 'I was in awe of the man, what he has been through and what he has achieved, and I wanted to do something, contribute in some way to the charity that helped him'.

Daz admits he is not a marathon runner, so he was not going to be able to raise money that way, but he is a skilled joiner, that has been his trade all his life.



Caption: In the workshop

His idea was to make decorative wheelbarrow planters for gardens.

Expensive wood

Wood is expensive, and Daz reckons each wheelbarrow he makes uses around £12 worth of timber, but his local timber merchants, Drayson & Sons in Dewsbury - owned by his friend Nigel came to the rescue by supplying what was needed.

With the wood and the skills, Daz swiftly went into production using his home workshop, 'Think man-cave with fridge and dart board', he says, 'my escape room when my partner Sil is watching soaps on TV'.

He started by making 30 wheelbarrows, gave two away and then sold the rest. The demand was high, and although he makes them



Volunteers

Caption: The finished product

in time for Spring when people are refreshing their gardens, he ended last year with a waiting list of orders.

In the meantime, the marketing and sales is down to Sil, who uses Facebook to inform people that, 'It's that time of year folks, get your orders in early to avoid disappointment'.

This year's wheelbarrows have already been sold, and Daz has donated the money to the charity, 'To help you to carry on with the good work'.

So, our man-about-town Simon, timber yard owner Nigel, marketing and sales guru Sil and joiner Daz have all contributed towards the charity receiving a very generous donation.

Thank you all.



Caption: Reflection at Llandudno

Remembering the day

We marked the 75th anniversary of D-Day with some special events, as **Mark Wheeler** and **Laura Weir** report



Caption: Bob Jones on HMS Belfast

Blind Veterans UK marked the 75th anniversary of D-Day in style with several events across the country.

These events included commemorations in Llandudno and on HMS *Belfast* in London.

We were proud to welcome eight of our D-Day veterans on to the impressive cruiser - herself a D-Day veteran which fired some of the very



Caption: Fanny Hugill on HMS Belfast

first shots on 6 June, 1944.

We hosted a lunch for the veterans and family members as well as supporters of Blind Veterans UK.

Guests were welcomed with the firing of the ship's guns at 1100 precisely and our D-Day veterans were treated with the appropriate level of reverence. Several of them were asked by the public to pose for





Caption: Never to be forgotten

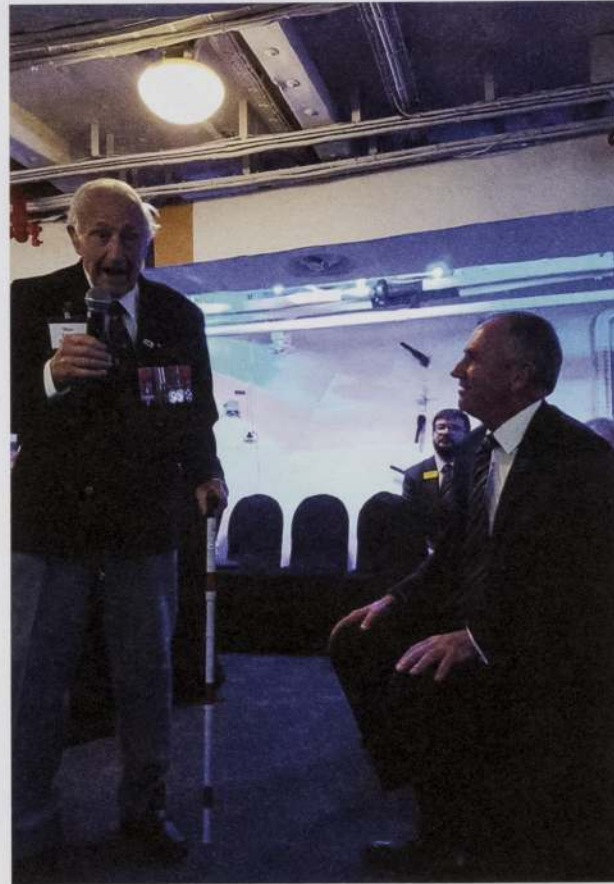


Caption: HMS Belfast

photographs and sign autographs like our Member, Bob Jones.

Speaking passionately

One Member, Ron Cross who is now 99, gave a speech about his memories of landing at H-Hour on June 6 and how he felt on the day and afterwards. He also spoke passionately of the support Blind Veterans UK has provided to him since losing his sight, particularly highlighting the difference the IT training and equipment has made to him.



Caption: Ron Cross takes to the floor

All the guests who were able rose to their feet to give Ron a standing ovation when he finished his speech.

The charity also took the opportunity to remember those veterans we supported after losing their sight in the days and weeks after D-Day. Members like Freddie Collingwood who was blinded by a mortar in Normandy.

Unfortunately, Freddie died last year at the age of 92.



Caption: The day also saw a march on the Llandudno Promenade to the Cenotaph

A march on the promenade

Our training and rehabilitation centre in Llandudno also welcomed blind veterans and their families to attend a march from the Llandudno Promenade to the Cenotaph on the D-Day anniversary which was followed by a remembrance service.

The march was also attended by the Mayor and Mayoress of Llandudno, the Royal British Legion, Association of Wrens, Royal Naval Association and the Ysgol Craig Y Don school choir.

The day was part of a whole week of organised activities at the centre for members to enjoy. Other activities during the week included a tour of RAF Valley as well as a Second World War vehicles and equipment display.

In Elmswell in Suffolk members gathered for a 1940s tea dance to mark the occasion. The afternoon involved a special guest appearance from the singer, Miss Jayne Darling while the guests enjoyed their afternoon tea.

Getting out in Llandudno

The Get Out and Live Group (GOAL) recently spent some time in Llandudno. **John Brice** tells all



Caption: Face to face with a barn owl

On Monday, 13 May, Blind Veterans UK Members John Cantwell, Mick Farrar, Jim Green, Bryan Jones, Nik Murray, Carole Sharpe, Derek Thomas, Jeff Wright and John Brice assembled at our Llandudno centre for the annual GOAL Group event.

Tuesday started with us catching the open-top tour bus to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Conwy, listening to the informative commentary on the way. On arrival we made our way through the historic town to the quay, where we were to board the Princess Christine for a trip around the bay. While we waited, we visited the smallest house in Britain, which measures just 72in wide, 122in high and 120in deep. Incredibly, it was occupied until 1900.

Returning from our very informative cruise, we had lunch on the quay in



Caption: The GOAL group enjoys the glorious North Wales coastline

the glorious sunshine before it was time for the Conwy Town Trail. On the way, one member was unwell and returned to the centre by taxi, escorted by John Cantwell, while the rest of us finished the trail. Then it was time for the tour bus back. As some good news, our 'casualty' recovered without any ill-effects.

A mine of information

Wednesday dawned, and our

eagerly awaited tour of Great Orme. Unfortunately we had another casualty, caused by 'skating' in the shower and needing several days to recover as a result.

Taking the Great Orme tram to the Halfway Station, we met up with park warden Siôn Dafis, our guide from last year. Siôn is a mine of information, recounting tales and facts covering hundreds of centuries, →

and identifying unique flowers, plants and birdsong, as well as geology and architecture. We had lunch at the ancient St. Tudno's Church, with fantastic views out to sea and over the Orme - especially on a beautiful sunny day. Returning to the Halfway Station, we had to say hurried thanks and goodbyes to our guide as the tram was waiting to leave. Until next year, Siôn.

Thursday, and off to Conwy again, this time to visit Plas Mawr (Great Hall), which was the home of MP and baronet Sir Robert Wynn and was built from 1576-85. This imposing 16th century, Elizabethan house is well worth a visit and we were privileged to have lunch in the sunny courtyard, between the house and the guardhouse.

We also visited Aberconwy House, a 14th century Merchants House, the only surviving house of its kind.

“We had lunch at the ancient St. Tudno's Church, with fantastic views out to sea and over the Orme - especially on a beautiful sunny day”

Once the home of a ship's captain, it emphasises the difference in status between the captain and Sir Robert Wynn.

We had hoped to visit the Toll House, but it was not open, so we did our own tour of the suspension bridge before returning to the centre.

To whit, to woo Julia

On Friday we were off to an owl sanctuary. If you have never been to an owl sanctuary, this is a must visit venue. This one had 47 different owls to see, many of which you will can stroke. They are not only beautiful, but warm, with super-soft, silky feathers. From little Otis, only five inches tall, to the larger ones, you will be enchanted by their personalities and different characters.

Our guide Julia was both passionate and knowledgeable about her subject as she took us round the sanctuary, which is separate to Bodafon Farm Park but housed in its grounds. If you take your dog with you then **beware**, the farm dogs are not as friendly or controlled as they should be.

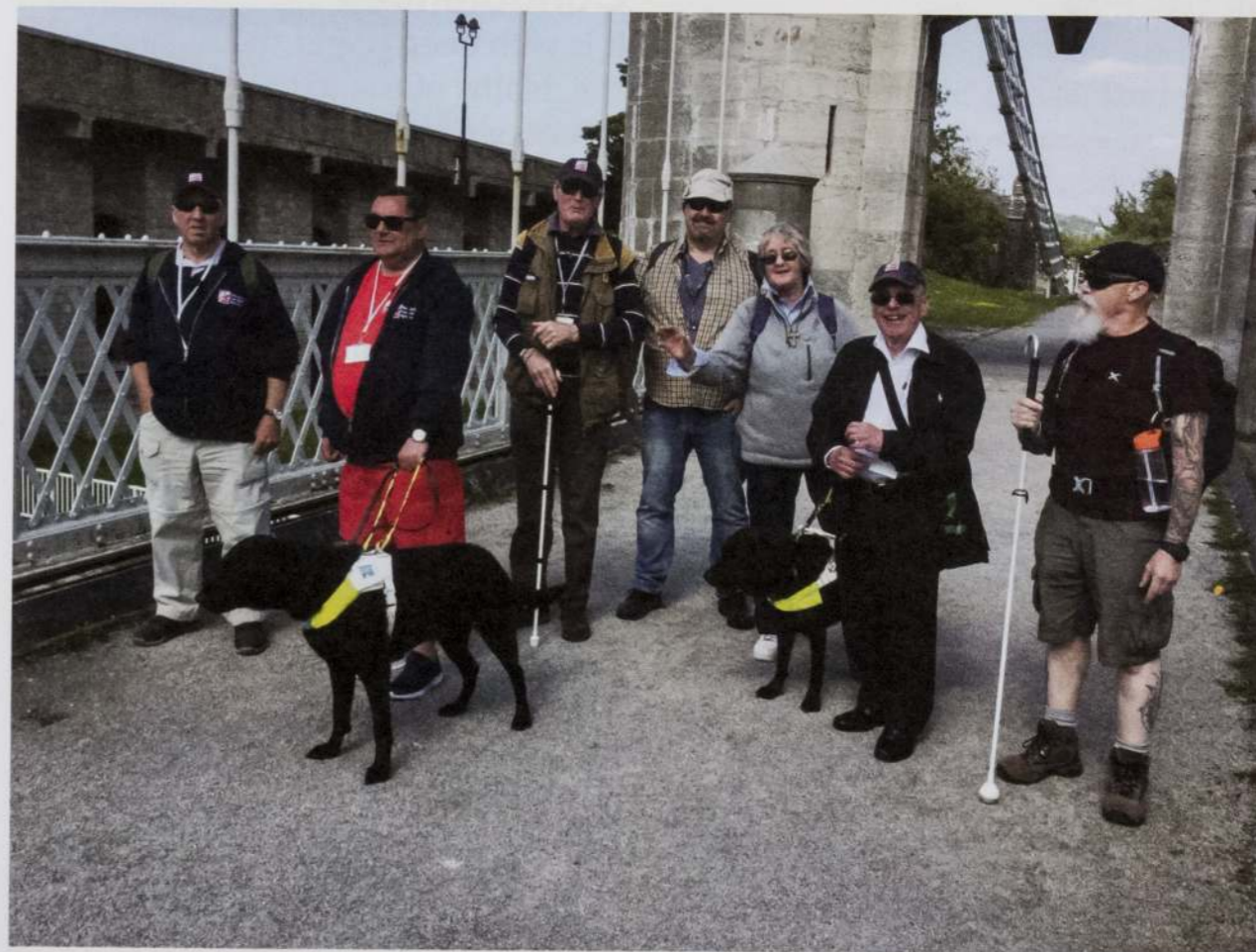
We returned to Llandudno, to visit the Home Front Experience which is dedicated to the life of civilians in Llandudno during the Second World War. It's a bit of a timewarp inside,

and you will find many things that bring back memories of childhood, even for those born after 1945.

Saturday came, and saw the end of another GOAL Group event - with everyone travelling to the railway station to make our way to our respective homes.

On behalf of the GOAL Group, we give our grateful thanks to the Blind Veterans UK Centre at Llandudno for another great visit.

Thank you to our volunteers, the transport department, catering, and care for tending to our walking wounded and all the unseen, unsung people who contributed in so many ways. And especially to Nicola Clough, who again acted as my 'gopher', delivering a seamless, stress-free liaison with the departments and a successful event. Au revoir, until next year.



Caption: That GOAL group in full - your author is second from right



Family news

Birthdays

Ruby Stubbs who celebrates her 100th birthday on 5th July.

John Tomblin who celebrates his 100th birthday on 19th July.

John Duff who celebrates his 102nd birthday on 19th July.

Schera Masters who celebrates his 100th birthday on 7th July.

Eileen Pockett who celebrates her 100th birthday on 5th July.

Condolences

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.

Irene Blake who died on 8th May 2019. She was the wife of George Fredrick Edward Blake.

Joan Bulbeck who died on 1st February 2019. She was the wife of William Bulbeck.

Freda Joyce Davis who died on 1st June 2019. She was the wife of Ronald Charles Davis.

Joan Eileen Lewis who died on 25th February 2019. She was the wife of the late Denis Alan Lewis.

And in other news...

Firstly, warmest congratulations to Stourbridge-based Member Bob Petford and his wife Joan - they celebrated 60 years of marriage on 27 June. We're pleased to reproduce a photograph taken at their wedding at Wollaston near Stourbridge.



Best wishes too to Member Mark Maddocks, who now lives in Austria. He and his wife Elisabeth are the proud parents of Rebecca who was born there on 15 April. Congratulations to all the family from all of us at *Review*.



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

Thomas Atherton of Wigan, Lancashire died on 1st May 2019 aged 93. He served from 1946 to 1947 in the Royal Navy as an Able Seaman.

Eric Bates of Chichester, West Sussex died on 27th May 2019 aged 91. He served from 1945 to 1948 in the Army as a Private.

Ronald Thomas Benton of Rhyl, Clwyd died on 1st March 2019 aged 89. He served from 1948 to 1950 in the Royal Air Force as a A.C. 1.

Dennis Francis Blake of Brentwood, Essex died on 8th April 2019 aged 100. He served from 1939 to 1946 in the Army as a Rifleman.

Penelope Ann Blake of Burnham-On-Sea, Somerset died on 6th April 2019 aged 92. She served from 1950 to 1953 in the Royal Navy as a 3rd Officer.

Esther Stella Bromley of Salford, Greater Manchester died on 15th May 2019 aged 94. She served from 1942 to 1954 in the Army as a Private.

Alfred Brooks of Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire died on 1st June 2019 aged 92. He served from 1942 to 1946 in the Army as a Private.

Patrick Colin of Lee-on-the-Solent, Hampshire died on 6th May 2019

aged 87. He served from 1949 to 1950 in the Royal Air Force as a S.A.C.

Donald Cook of Hull, East Riding of Yorkshire died on 1st June 2019 aged 95. He served from 1953 to 1969 in the Royal Air Force as a Chief Technician.

Ronald Darlington of Barnsley, South Yorkshire died on 20th May 2019 aged 90. He served from 1947 to 1949 in the Army as a Private and Gunner.

Robert Walter Davey of Bristol died on 1st June 2019 aged 95. He served from 1942 to 1946 in the Royal Navy as an Able Seaman.

Frederick Doyle of Thetford, Norfolk died on 28th May 2019 aged 91. He served from 1947 to 1949 in the Royal Air Force as a A.C. 2.

Frederick Duncan of Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex died on 11th June 2019 aged 71. He served from 1967 to 1992 in the Army as a Private.

Eileen Dykes of Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset died on 20th May 2019 aged 93. She served from 1944 to 1947 in the Royal Navy as a Wren.

Victor Cyril Ellaway of Cwmbran,

Gwent died on 14th May 2019 aged 96. He served from 1942 to 1947 in the Army as a Private.

Arthur Fisher of Haywards Heath, West Sussex died on 30th May 2019 aged 93. He served from 1943 to 1946 in the Royal Navy as an Able Seaman.

Adele Irene Forbes of Bournemouth, Dorset died on 25th May 2019 aged 99. She served from 1942 to 1946 in the Army as a Private.

Arthur Stanley Gawthorpe of Selby, North Yorkshire died on 10th June 2019 aged 93. He served from 1944 to 1946 in the Army as a Trooper.

Douglas Earl Gibson of Brighton, East Sussex died on 4th June 2019 aged 99. He served from 1940 to 1946 in the Army as a Private.

Ian Gillespie of Turriff, Aberdeenshire died on 1st March 2019 aged 94. He served from 1943 to 1946 in the Royal Navy as a Cook.

Anthony Clifford Gordon of Guildford, Surrey died on 11th May 2019 aged 93. He served from 1943 to 1947 in the Royal Air Force as a Corporal.

Joan Margaret Haynes of



Tamworth, Staffordshire died on 29th May 2019 aged 90. She served from 1946 to 1947 in the Royal Air Force as a A.C. 2.

Cedric John Hollands of Ashford, Kent died on 25th May 2019 aged 95. He served from 1939 to 1954 in the Royal Navy as a Leading Seaman.

Eric John Logan Hunter of Bath, Somerset died on 1st May 2019 aged 88. He served from 1949 to 1986 in the Army as a Major.

John Little of Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan died on 9th June 2019 aged 99. He served from 1938 to 1975 in the Royal Air Force as a Warrant Officer.

Audrey May Manning of Wilmslow, Cheshire died on 7th June 2019 aged 93. She served from 1944 to 1946 in the Royal Navy as a Wren.

Kenneth Marshall of Lancaster, Lancashire died on 19th May 2019 aged 89. He served from 1948 to 1950 in the Royal Air Force as a A.C. 1.

John Picton Miles of Bristol died on 1st May 2019 aged 93. He served from 1943 to 1945 in the Royal Air Force as a A.C. 2.

Winston Rees Morgan of Port Talbot, West Glamorgan died on 23rd May 2019 aged 97. He served from 1942 to 1947 in the Army as a Driver.

Dennis Arthur Neale of Cardiff, South Glamorgan died on 3rd June 2019 aged 94. He served from 1943 to 1961 in the Army as a Private.

Albert Henry Parlour of Crawley, West Sussex died on 13th May 2019 aged 87. He served from 1949 to 1950 in the Army as a Sapper.

Robert Gordon Paul of Poole, Dorset died on 10th June 2019 aged 92. He served from 1945 to 1947 in the Royal Navy as an Air Mechanic 1st Class.

Philip Pestana of South Shields, Tyne and Wear died on 1st May 2019 aged 88. He served from 1952 to 1955 in the Royal Air Force as a L.A.C.

Michael John Roberts of Northallerton, North Yorkshire died on 31st May 2019 aged 69. He served from 1967 to 1985 in the Royal Air Force as a S.A.C.

Hugh Frankie Robertson of Preston, Lancashire died on 23rd May 2019 aged 97. He served from 1943 to 1947 in the Army as a Private.

Jadwiga Rybinska of Greenford,

Middlesex died on 25th May 2019 aged 95. She served from 1942 to 1949 in the Army as a Lance Corporal.

Kenneth Smith of Eastbourne, East Sussex died on 20th May 2019 aged 98. He served from 1941 to 1946 in the Army as a Sergeant.

Ivan John Robert Spall of Lowestoft, Suffolk died on 3rd June 2019 aged 98. He served from 1940 to 1946 in the Army as a Gunner.

Jack Stead of Preston, Lancashire died on 29th May 2019 aged 83. He served from 1954 to 1966 in the Royal Air Force as a Corporal.

Reginald Stevenson of Sheffield, South Yorkshire died on 25th May 2019 aged 81. He served from 1956 to 1964 in the Army as a Private.

John Michael Taylor of Pontefract, West Yorkshire died on 1st May 2019 aged 85. He served from 1951 to 1952 in the Royal Air Force as a L.A.C.

John Teeling of Widnes, Cheshire died on 4th March 2019 aged 81. He served in the Army as a Private.

John Raymond Thorne of Woking, Surrey died on 23rd May 2019 aged 84. He served from 1950 to 1959 in the Royal Navy as a Leading Seaman.

Vernon Peter Trenfield of Worcester died on 8th June 2019 aged 92. He served from 1946 to 1948 in the Army as a Trooper.

Peter Cyril Trigg of Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire died on 1st June 2019 aged 91. He served from 1946 to 1947 in the Army as a Gunner.

Roy Waistnidge of Lincoln, Lincolnshire died on 31st May 2019 aged 80. He served from 1958 to 1960 in the Royal Air Force as a Senior Aircraftsman.

Eric John Watts of Ipswich, Suffolk died on 10th April 2019 aged 94. He served from 1942 to 1946 in the Royal Navy as an Acting Petty Officer.

John Edward Windebank of Hitchin, Hertfordshire died on 18th May 2019 aged 89. He served from 1947 to 1949 in the Army as a Signalman.

George Worden of Seaham, County Durham died on 27th May 2019 aged 93. He served from 1944 to 1948 in the Army as a Corporal.

David Richard Yardley of Ellesmere Port, Cheshire died on 19th May 2019 aged 57. He served from 1978 to 1978 in the Army.



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Caption: A Challenger tank during the first Gulf conflict

Remembering the Fallen of recent conflicts

Our president, **Colin Williamson** continues looking at recent conflicts which have involved our Armed Forces in the last three decades.

The Gulf War. 1990-91

In order to fully understand the origins behind the Gulf War, fought between Iraq and the US-led coalition forces, you first have to delve into the murky waters of the Arab states' frequent and often violent territorial disputes around the Persian Gulf region.

These disputes are mainly over the delineation of borders between the states, the ownership of oil fields which saturate the area, and access to the strategic ports and waterways. Tribal animosities also play a part, resulting in sudden and very violent conflicts.

On 22 September 1980, Iraq launched an air and ground offensive against its neighbour Iran, which followed a long history of border disputes between the two countries. Iraqis were also extremely concerned that the Iranian revolution of 1979 would be the catalyst for an upsurge of sectarian violence by its long suppressed Shia majority.

Despite Iraq attacking without warning the Iraqi army failed to capitalise on its rapid advances. The Iranians were a very formidable fighting force, and by June 1982, they had regained most of their previously enemy held territory. For the next six years until the end of the war in 1988, Iran was the dominant force, inflicting heavy casualties on the Iraqis until eventually a United Nations brokered ceasefire ended the dispute.

Despite the huge cost in military and civilian deaths (it is estimated that over one million people lost their lives) the conflict never really achieved Iraq's key objectives which was to take control of the Shatt Al-Arab waterway (therefore redrawing the border), taking control of Iran's oilfields and fulfilling their long time ambition to be the one dominant Arabian Gulf state.

The invasion of Kuwait

At the onset of the Iran-Iraq war, Kuwait had remained neutral. This

was to change in 1982, after Iran's leader, Ayatollah Khomeini attempted to export his brand of Islamic revolution and the civil disobedience that accompanied it, to neighbouring Kuwait. This led the Kuwaitis to start sending quite significant amounts of financial aid to the Iraqis, while Kuwait also acted as Iraq's major port after Basra was declared off-limits due to the heavy fighting around it.

At the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq owed Kuwait some US\$14 billion, that it had borrowed in order to help pay towards the cost of the conflict. Iraq was in no position to pay back the loan and asked for it to be written off, which Kuwait refused. Despite repeated attempts to resolve the situation both Iraq and Kuwait refused to budge over the issue.

By the end of the 1980s, Iraq was desperate to reduce its international debt which had risen to over US\$60 billion, and requested that the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) should increase the price of crude oil and decrease crude oil production in order to help the country increase its revenue and pay off its debts.

Meanwhile, Kuwait had been producing oil way above its OPEC quota and steadfastly refused Iraq's request →



UNKNOWN / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Caption: Civilians and coalition military forces celebrate the retreat of Iraqi forces from Kuwait

to limit production. In Iraq's corridors of power this was seen as a blatant act of aggression which could not go ignored. Another issue causing concern was the Rumelia oilfields near the border between the two countries. Iraq was convinced that Kuwait was slant-drilling across the border and literally stealing its oil from under its nose. Iraq demanded compensation which Kuwait refused. Tensions between the two countries increased until eventually, on 2 August 1990, Iraq's patience finally snapped and Saddam Hussein made the fateful decision to

invade Kuwait to begin what was about to become the Gulf War.

Granby begins

Operation Granby was the name given to the British military operations during the Gulf War and the British in-theatre Commander from October 1990 to March 1991 was Blind Veterans UK vice-patron, General Sir Peter de la Billière.

Over 53,000 British troops were deployed during the war and 47 servicemen lost their lives in the conflict. That total includes nine British servicemen who were killed in a so called 'friendly fire' incident when a U.S. Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt II attacked two Warrior infantry fighting vehicles. American deaths totalled 146, and the biggest single coalition loss due to an accident was 92 Senegalese soldiers who perished when their aircraft crashed on approach to Ras Mishab airport in Saudi Arabia.

In total, 34 nations joined the coalition in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, including Argentina, which sent transport planes and ships in support of the coalition. Although not sending any troops, Japan donated US\$14 billion to the cause, and military personnel from countries all around the globe, participated to some extent in the war. There were several Arab

countries that joined the coalition including Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and Syria.

Soon after the invasion Saddam Hussein began making threatening overtones regarding invading oil-rich Saudi Arabia. The United Nations Security Council were concerned that should the Iraqis carry out this threat, they would have access to most of the world's oil reserves.

Meanwhile the build-up of coalition troops in the area continued relentlessly. Saddam Hussein was given a date of the 15 January 1991 to withdraw from Kuwait or face the consequences. He chose to ignore the warning.

Aerial bombing

The conflict started with an aerial bombing campaign on 17 January. This was heralded as the start of the American 'Operation Desert Storm' phase of the war.

Initial targets for the bombing campaign were military bases, command and control facilities and mobile Scud missile launchers. These launchers, tracked by UK special forces, had been firing rockets into Israel in order to draw the Israelis into the war. The Iraqis hoped this would persuade Arab states who were already part of

the coalition to withdraw, rather than fight on the same side as the Israelis.

Over 88 Scud missiles were fired during the campaign and 72 Israelis lost their lives as well as 27 US servicemen whose barracks in Saudi Arabia were targeted.

The ground phase began on the 24 February, when US Marine units, supported by elements of the British 7th Armoured Brigade, crossed over the Kuwaiti border and advanced towards Kuwait City, preceded by an artillery and rocket barrage.

Several tank battles took place but the Iraqi Army's battle tanks were no match against the superior American and British models. Coalition forces rapidly advanced on the lightly defended positions held by the infamous Iraqi Republican Guard, and soldiers from the Kuwaiti army were tasked with liberating their capital. Little resistance was put up by the Iraqis, and the city was taken on 27 February, the same day as Saddam Hussein ordered the retreat from Kuwait.

Entering Iraq

The first British unit to actually enter Iraq was three patrols from B Squadron, 22 Special Air Service (SAS). These patrols were inserted →

behind Iraqi lines in order to pinpoint targets for coalition air strikes and supply routes, Scud missile launchers and communication bunkers.

It wasn't long before American, British and French forces began pouring into Iraq during early to mid-February, and the Iraqi Army fled in disarray. Rather than push on to Baghdad, coalition forces were ordered to pull back to the border of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

On 28 February, exactly one hundred hours after the ground campaign started, President Bush ordered a ceasefire and told the world that Kuwait had been liberated.

Although the US provided the largest contingent of troops, the UK committed the largest contingent of any European nation involved in the war.

Operation Safe Haven

Operation Safe Haven was the UK contribution to Operation Provide Comfort, a multi-national effort to provide protection and humanitarian aid to Kurdish refugees fleeing oppression by Saddam Hussein's forces in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Royal Marines from 40 and 45 Commando and other 3 Commando Brigade elements were involved in the operation.



UNKNOWN / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Caption: Lt. Col. John Abizaid (L) speaking with some Kurds

After the conflict had ended, British troops supported by members of the Netherlands Army and the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps, embarked on Operation Safe Haven in order to safeguard the people of Northern Iraq (mainly Kurds) from persecution from the defeated Iraqi Army, and provide aid to the thousands of refugees that had fled the fighting.

Despite a further war in Iraq since Operation Granby, which eventually led to the capture, trial, conviction and subsequent execution of Saddam Hussein and the fall of his government, the insurgency in Iraq continues.

As previously stated, 47 British service

Contact telephone numbers

Harcourt Street 020 7723 5021.

The Brighton Centre 01273 307 811.

**The Llandudno Centre
01492 868 700.**

The Booking Office for the Brighton centre: To book accommodation at the Brighton centre telephone **01273 391 500**. If you have care needs please first contact your Team Leader or Community Support Worker (CSW).

The Booking Office for the Llandudno centre: To book accommodation at the Llandudno centre please telephone **01492 868 700** for bookings and ask for the Booking office. If you have care needs please first contact your Team Leader or CSW.

Member Support Hub: 01273 391 447 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**.

Review Editor: You can telephone Chris Gilson, on **020 7616 8367**, email at revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk or write to him at **Review Editor, Blind Veterans UK, 12 - 14 Harcourt Street, London W1H 4HD**.



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sight loss



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14 September 2019

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