



Review



The journal of
Blind Veterans UK
May 2025

V
VE Day
80

Celebrations across the UK

Blind veterans recall their joy on VE day

Inside:

Goodbye and thank you to Llandudno
Memories brought to life



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss



A message from HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh GCVO

As we mark the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe, we take this opportunity to reflect on the extraordinary sacrifices and resilience of those who served during the dark days of the Second World War.



HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh

For the veterans who served with unwavering courage – both on the front line and in essential supporting roles, the end of the war in Europe brought profound relief to some, while others struggled. Many continued to serve our country, courageously putting their lives at risk. Each story is different – just as each veteran is unique and requires tailored support to adapt to their sight loss. It is their perseverance and fortitude that we honour.

As Patron, I am deeply moved by the stories of resilience, camaraderie, and hope that continue to inspire us today. We remember not only the victory of 1945 but also the lasting legacy of those who served – ensuring their contributions are never forgotten. 🇬🇧

HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh GCVO
Patron on Blind Veterans UK



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On the cover

Portrait photograph of Member Thomas Cuthbert, taken by photographer Richard Cannon for our VE Day campaign.

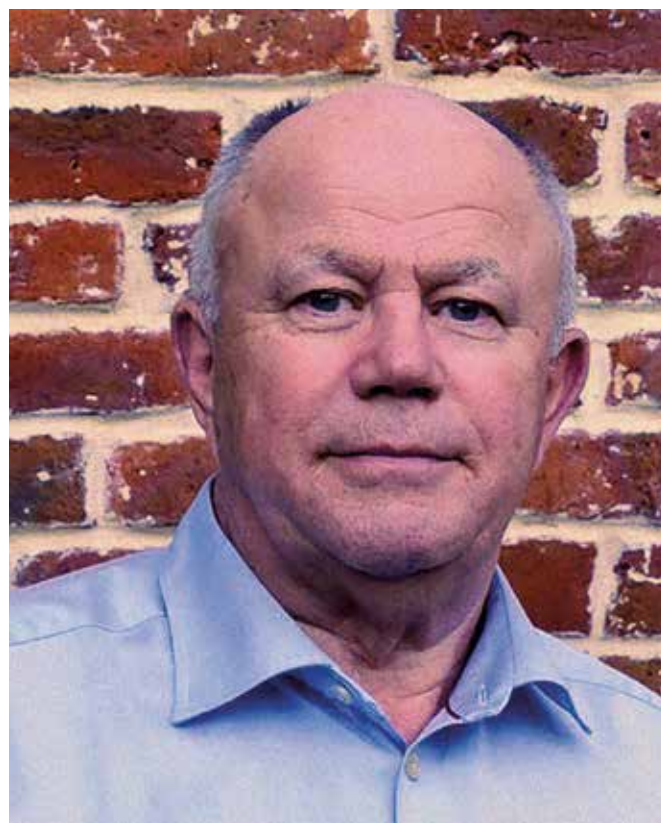


Reflection and heartfelt Gratitude

A message from your Chair, **Barry Coupe**

Hopefully you will have all received your recent letter from the charity explaining the sad decision taken to confirm closing our Llandudno Centre.

I want to reiterate the points I made in that letter how the wonderful team at Llandudno has provided exemplary



Barry Coupe

support to our veterans over the last 13 years. It is the case that taking this difficult decision is in no way a reflection on them and all their hard work.

As I have said, the board had to take action to ensure this charity is still here for all blind veterans now and in the future. This really is a necessary step towards making the charity more financially sustainable and helping secure the charity's future.

I'm sure that all of you who have visited the centre in the last 13 years will join me in thanking the whole team of staff and volunteers for the invaluable contribution they have made to the charity and the lives of our veterans.

The staff at Llandudno held an event to mark the closing of the centre and you can read more about that including the words shared by the former Centre Manager Kathy and our President Colin on page 12.



Bryan Naylor's watercolour painting: 'They were proud to serve'

This month marks 80 years since VE Day and the end of the Second World War in Europe. We are proud to share more amazing stories from some of our WWII veterans on page 14.

I would like to thank two fantastic artists who have added their support to our VE 80 celebrations. Firstly, Martin Impey, the amazing illustrator of War Horse, has volunteered to support the charity by producing 13 fantastic illustrations of the VE Day memories of some of our WWII Members. A selection of these will be displayed at The National Museum of The Royal Navy in Portsmouth and The Cartoon Museum in London and you can read more about them on page 18.

Finally I would like to thank our very

own blind veteran artist Bryan Naylor who has produced his own images for the anniversary. These have now been adapted into a set of postcards which will be sold to raise money for us. I am very much looking forward to joining staff, volunteers and Members at a small event alongside our statue at Manchester Piccadilly Station to mark the occasion.

I know there are many other events taking place across the country that week including our military dinner at Petwood Hotel in Lincolnshire, the location where the Dambusters Raids were planned. By all accounts it's going to be a fantastic day and I hope all of you attending it, or any celebrations for VE 80, enjoy yourselves. 🇬🇧

Llandudno Centre Update

Following the difficult decision to close our Llandudno centre, we have received many enquiries about what is now happening to the building and its contents, including items of significant and sentimental meaning to Members and their families.

We will now begin the process of decommissioning and investigating the best options for the charity and will



Llandudno Centre 2024 Remembrance

update on this when there is further information.

We have a small team in place to ensure that the security and maintenance of the building are upheld. They will be working with our supporter care team to manage enquiries about items such as memorial items and memorabilia.

■ **If you have any questions or requests, please send an email to supporter.services@blindveterans.org.uk or call 0300 111 2233.**

Quality in Befriending Excellence Award

Blind Veterans UK has achieved the Quality in Befriending with Excellence Award for the second time! This award is the only award in the UK specifically tailored for befriending services, demonstrating the excellent volunteering support we provide for Members and the positive experience Volunteers have with the charity. We are one of 18 charities that holds this award across the UK.



Befriending volunteers make a huge difference to the lives of our Members

Our UK-wide befriending service has been running for over 5 years and can be provided either in person (including in the home) or over the telephone, as well as group befriending opportunities. Many of our befriending volunteers have experience of military service – either their own or a loved one's – which means they have a good understanding of members' experiences in the military. All volunteers receive training to understand how to support people living with sight loss.

■ **Our amazing volunteers are on hand to visit or give you a call. Get in touch with your local team for more information.**

Philip paints for Spring Art Trail

Member Philip Sutton, 96, has painted one of 50 elephant sculptures for a spring arts trail on the Dorset coast.

A renowned British artist, known for his vibrant use of colour and expressive style, Philip has produced and painted Ponty the elephant for the Stampede by the Sea trail taking place at locations across Bridport, West Bay and Lyme Regis.

Philip said "When I paint, I express my personality through my art. Working on Ponty was a joy" adding that he named the elephant Ponty after the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty as he found him quite inspirational.



Philip Sutton sketching a seascape

In your community

Read about some of the social gatherings across the country that have taken place this summer and brought together Members in their local areas

In Plymouth

Our latest Plymouth Coffee Morning was a fantastic success! It was well attended, busy, and full of chatter and laughter as our Members, volunteers, and staff came together for a great time.

We were delighted to be joined by member Lee, who spoke about his



Plymouth coffee morning

upcoming swimathon in support of the charity for VE 80. Thanks to the generosity of those who attended, we raised over £150 to support his incredible effort - well done Lee!

We also welcomed Glenn, the Veterans Outreach Coordinator, who spoke about the range of services that are available to veterans in the Plymouth area.

In the South East

The south east craft group had a wonderful time carefully creating amazing paper mache hot air balloons, painting them in bright colours, and filling them with an assortment of chocolate eggs. As a finishing touch, Jean Rowland, our dedicated volunteer added an extra egg with a hand made fluffy chick hat on top for Members to take home with them. It's a lovely supportive group who encourage each others creativity and get stuck in with learning new crafts.



South east craft group balloons

In Middlesbrough

A great afternoon was had at our expanding Middlesbrough group, where this month, they had a Eurovision Song Contest quiz, helped Member Frank celebrate his 97th Birthday, (you can tell how excited he was to be hearing they had a cake for him).

This group is expanding and Members are really enjoying the camaraderie of coming together for a chat with likeminded people who share their experiences.

Do you want to know what's going on in your local area? Contact your local community team who can tell you everything you need to know.



Middlesborough group gathering

In Sleaford

The Sleaford social group met up last month, run by Member and volunteer Peter Ruffy supported by volunteer Keith Appleby. A brilliant group meeting to support each other. Members had a great time catching up and sharing their experiences. A wonderful time was had by all! 🍷



Sleaford social group

Goodbye and thank you

Last month saw our Llandudno Centre sadly close its doors for the final time. An event was arranged that allowed the staff to say their goodbyes to the building, the town, and each other

A piper and drummer started proceedings before speeches and sermons. Finally, the Blind Veterans UK flag was lowered for the last time.

The former Centre Manager Kathy Boardman gave a short address to the membership of Blind Veterans UK. She said:

“The fact that this is such a sad ending is unquestionable proof that as a team we have lived, loved and shared amazing experiences with each other and, more importantly, with our Members.

But let’s not cry any longer because it’s over, let’s smile and laugh because it happened at all.

It is my privilege to give a message

to our membership on behalf of this magnificent team.

The nature of change has meant that we have not been able to see you to say our goodbyes which has been really tough. But there are too many of you, you live too far and wide for us to bring you here on this important occasion.

If we could sit with you now, we would thank you for your company, for your friendship, for your honesty and for your humour. We have felt privileged to have heard your life experiences, your stories, your challenges and your insecurities and then watched you despite all of those begin your life-after-sight-loss journey. We have seen you gain inspiration and support from other Members and overcome your

struggles through your own sheer determination.

This Centre has been a place where magic happened. Some of the magic came from the team here. Their skills, competencies, experience, and knowledge has delivered services and activities that are second to none. But who the team are, and how they have worked with you has created a chemistry that has made this service impeccable, unrepeatable. I would like to thank the team here, all of them, for their commitment, loyalty, resilience and care of the membership and for

each other. You are, and always have been, exemplary.

But the Centre has also been a magical place because of our Members. I will never be in situations like this ever again, with blind veterans throwing axes, playing golf, air rifle shooting, horse riding, on a ludicrously long zip wire, paddle boarding, driving at speed, firing arrows, hiking. The list is endless and many times these activities have been undertaken in fancy dress!

We regret nothing, we hold these memories dear and celebrate all



Heart shaped contrails over the Llandudno centre

of your successes. We want you all to continue your sight loss journey and remember your times in Llandudno with a smile on your face. You have changed us all irrevocably, we are better people from being in your company, and we are OK. We looked after each other through this change and we leave this magical place, wishing you well.

Thank you!"

Our President, Colin Williamson, was also in attendance. He provided a response to the staff and volunteers on behalf of the membership. He said:

"It is both an honour and a privilege to have been invited to join you all here at the Llandudno Centre on this beautiful spring day as we celebrate the life of this outstanding centre and the tremendous achievements of its amazing staff and volunteers.

In 2016, during an international exchange to the centre, a war blinded member of St. Dunstan's South Africa, Don Wessells, said the following. "Attitude is such a small thing but can make such a huge difference to people's lives and I have never experienced, in my life as a blind person, the kind of warmth, friendliness and first-class hospitality shown to me and my fellow

blind veterans by the staff at the Llandudno Centre. It is such a unique facility and everyone who works here should feel extremely proud". We, the Members of Blind Veterans UK, echo those sentiments.

I first visited this centre back in 2010, not long after we had purchased the property. Back then, the site was just a hastily abandoned, rather forlorn looking, sorry state of affairs. Little did I know then what this iconic building would eventually turn out to be and what lasting memories we would all have of it.



Celebrating VE Day at Llandudno

"We want you all to continue your sight loss journey and remember your times in Llandudno with a smile on your face"

It has left a mark on our hearts and on our consciousness and we will always carry part of it with us and leave part of us behind. On behalf of the entire membership of Blind Veterans UK, I'd like to offer sincere and heartfelt thanks to everyone connected to this wonderful oasis. It's amazing and dedicated staff, our fantastic volunteers, the colourful cohort of Members who have been fortunate enough to have visited, the first-class catering team and the community of Llandudno. Each and every one of you have played a part in its success, and you should all be rightly proud of your achievements.

We often hear the phrase 'the family of Blind Veterans UK' and sometimes it can feel like a bit of an overworked cliché; but the staff and volunteers at this centre, since day one, have always felt like family to our Members. "Passionate, kind, thoughtful, fun and professional" are just some of the many descriptors that Members have used when describing the staff here at the centre, and you have all left a long-

lasting, life-changing and meaningful impact on their lives.

There are three types of people in this world. Dreamers, who dream what life could be but spend more time thinking than doing; Doers, who constantly put in the hard yards and work tirelessly but are far too busy to realise that there is something else out there. Creators are the people who have a vision, and who are determined to see it through to the end. That's you, the staff and volunteers at this centre, you are the creators, and you have made such wonderful things happen.

Whatever magic dust that was sprinkled so abundantly around this centre when it first opened its doors found its way into your hearts and into your souls, and you have made this place so special, and in turn helped to make us, the Members, who and what we are and I'd like to thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

Team Llandudno. You always delivered; and you always placed the needs of Members first and foremost. This is a bittersweet day as we lower the standard for the final time but one thing I will never forget are the memories of this wonderful centre. Its amazing staff and volunteers will stay with me, and my fellow Members, forever." 🇬🇧

Celebrations across the UK



As Churchill declared peace at 3pm on VE Day, people flooded the streets in celebration. Members **Thomas, Peter, John** and **Arthur** fondly recall the moment they heard the news – and the jubilant revelry that followed

Thomas's story: 'You don't realise how exciting it was'

D-Day veteran Thomas happened to be on leave on VE Day and attended a street party organised by his mother.

"I found out on the radio. I was glad the war had come to an end. You don't realise how exciting it was to know it had ended.

"My mum and other women in our street organised a tea party for the children where I lived in London's Bethnal Green. There were buns and cakes, and different things on the table... Lemonade and that.

"I felt so excited, and it was lovely to see the children enjoying themselves and having fun. They just couldn't stop enjoying themselves."



Blind veteran Thomas stands (circled) home on leave and in uniform



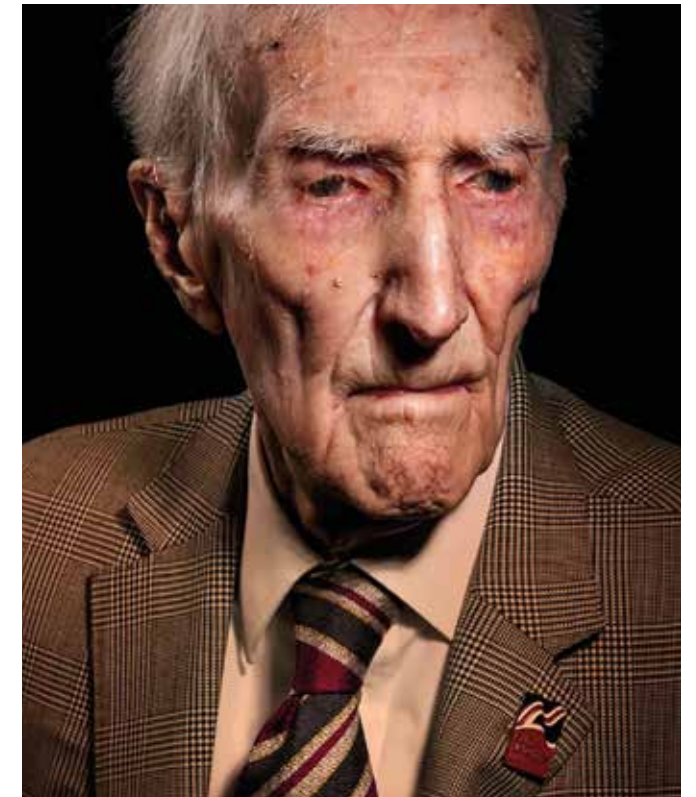
Member Thomas

"After the party, I had to go back to the barracks on the Isle of Wight. I had fun there too. I had a few drinks!"

Soon after VE Day, Thomas married his childhood sweetheart who had suffered a terrible tragedy during the war.

"The war in Europe ended in May and we got married in June. We were only

"My mum and other women in our street organised a tea party for the children where I lived"



Member Peter

19 so you can imagine what some people thought, but we were boy and girl friends, about 13 when we met.

"My wife's sister and mother had died in the tube disaster in Bethnal Green in 1943 – 178 people got trampled to death. I often think back to the time when it happened. My wife had four brothers in the Armed Forces and when you think of all four coming home alright, but two women got killed...

"Thing is, my wife would have died too, but I was on leave at the time and had taken her to the cinema. That's why she wasn't with her mother." →

Thomas served on a Mulberry Harbour for D-Day, which the Queen later described as a 'floating bomb'.

Now 99, Thomas says, "I'll never forget D-Day. It makes me feel proud, what we did. I didn't want it to go on anymore with more people dying. I had quite a few people die during the war."

Peter's story: 'It was absolute mayhem!'

Still just 17 on VE Day, former Petty Officer Peter was only six months into his training on the Isle of Man when he found himself tasked with policing jubilant crowds.



Member Arthur

"The fish and chip shop was thrown wide open to feed us.. It was absolute mayhem!"

"The news came through on our local broadcast system and, unfortunately, it was the day I was on shore patrol. There were six of us youngsters with a Petty Officer, and we had to go out into the streets of Douglas to see that people were behaving.

"Quite a task on VE evening! Everyone was so boisterous, and the idea that we could do anything about it was ridiculous.

"There were all these ladies coming up wishing to kiss our collars, which you do for luck, and the fish and chip shop was thrown wide open to feed us.. It was absolute mayhem!"

Arthur's story: 'Boy, the atmosphere was good!'

Just three days after being conscripted, Arthur found himself back home enjoying a street party – alongside someone who would change the course of his life.

"I'd just started my training in the Royal Army Service Corps in Lincoln and, so on VE Day I was still there. When we

were told the news we were sent on leave, so I came home to Sheffield to join in with the celebrations. Boy, the atmosphere was good!

"I remember we held a parade to celebrate. At one point, I was stood next to these two young women and got talking to them. And that's how I met my wife, Nancy.

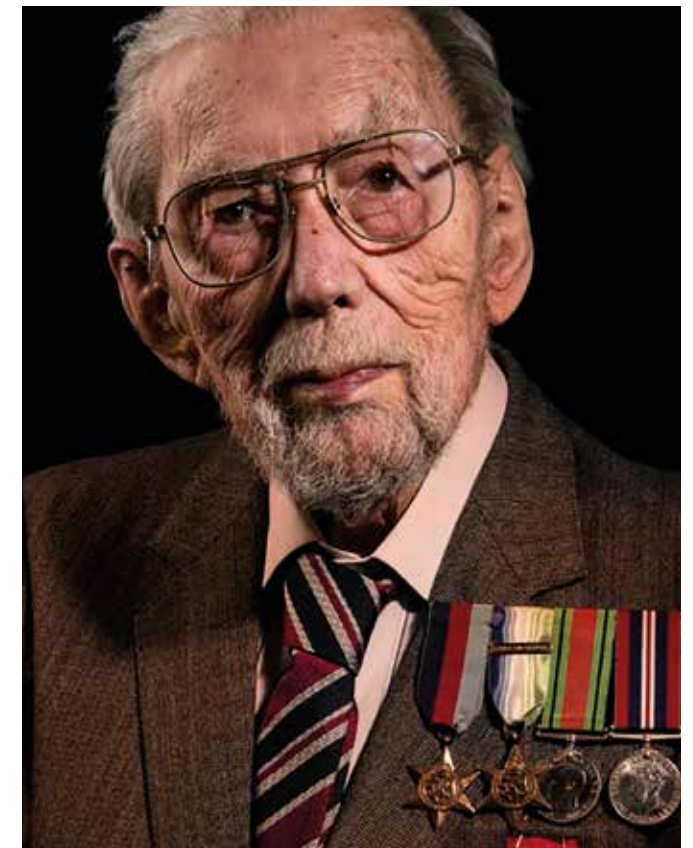
"It was just a chance meeting, but that's when it all started. We were married for 71 years."

John's story: 'There were serious celebrations!'

Stationed at the tip of Scotland, D-Day pilot John remembers the party in the Mess when peace was declared - and going on to witness the Nuremberg trials.

"We were all expecting the war to end soon. When it was announced my main feeling was one of 'Well, what are we going to do now?' It took a bit of getting used to. We were all tensed up for the job, but we didn't need to be anymore. We could relax.

"There was only one way to celebrate in those days and that was to drink as much beer as we could!"



Member John

"That evening, there were some serious celebrations in the mess. There was only one way to celebrate in those days and that was to drink as much beer as we could!

"At the end of the war, our squadron provided a courier service for the Nuremberg trials. I was sat adjacent to the courtroom with a huge glass window, so I could see all the Nazi leaders sitting there, like Goring and Hess.

"It was really quite surreal, and amazing to see them being brought to justice." 🇬🇧

Memories brought to life



As part of our 'After the Darkness' VE Day campaign, we captured the fascinating VE Day memories of 13 Members who were there for the historic day



Nina: "The happiest days of my life were in the army..."

In order to bring these memories to life, we worked with our long-term supporter, and renowned illustrator, Martin Impey, to create vivid illustrations. Martin is the artist behind well-known books such as War Horse and Blitz so was the perfect man for the job.

He says: "The charity is very dear to my heart as I had family members who lost their sight in the First and Second World Wars, so when they asked if I wanted to do this, I jumped at the chance."

"It's so important that we commemorate this moment as one of the last times as a nation that we can show love, respect, and appreciation to a generation who gave so much for us all. It was an honour to connect with these heroes and to illustrate their memories of VE Day. I hope people enjoy seeing them as much as I enjoyed creating them."

We've included three of the illustrations here. You can see all of them at blindveterans.org.uk/illustrations

There will be a special film about the illustrations, including interviews with Members Peter Knight and Joan Harding, that will be broadcast on BBC's The One Show on 5 May.



Les: "He climbed up to the top and just stripped off!"

Nina

I wasn't called up; I volunteered for the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) about two years into the war. My sister told me to, saying I'd be able to down tools and walk out as soon as it ended. But when it did come to an end I was asked to carry on, and I wanted to.

The happiest days of my life were in the army with the other girls. I know it's an awful thing to say, but I look back on the war as a happy and contented time.





Derrick: “I’d just had my 21st birthday when we could hear the Russians coming”

Les

We’d just done a convoy when we found out about the announcement, so we went out and had a few drinks. Everybody was shouting and carrying on.

And then we came back and a stoker off the next ship to us got up on a big crane. He climbed up to the top and just stripped off!

“To us it was amazing that, when we woke up in the morning, we found there were no guards”

All the ships had their headlights on him. So, we went out on the upper deck and looked up. We couldn’t see very much, but he continued getting undressed.

He wasn’t supposed to be up there, and there was a punishment waiting for him when he came down, but he’d had too much to drink, probably.

So that’s what I remember about VE Day!

Derrick

I was a prisoner of war for just over a year. We ended up in the camp at Stalag Luft III, a very large camp with a lot of civilians. I’d just had my 21st birthday when we could hear the Russians coming. The Germans didn’t realise they were so close.

To us it was amazing that, when we woke up in the morning, we found there were no guards, just a few Russians around the camp. Within an hour, we were down the local town having a look around. 🍷



80 lengths for VE Day 80



Devon Member **Lee Whitfield** will take to the water and swim 80 lengths of his local pool to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day and raise money for the charity

Lee, 49, and from Plymouth, will swim a total of 2,000 metres on 8 May at Plympton Swimming Pool starting at 8am and hopefully finishing by 8pm.

He says: “As a child, I was part fish



Lee outside Plympton Pool

and loved to be in the water. I was never a strong swimmer but have always found being in, on, or near water therapeutic.

“Until this week, I’d not swam more than two lengths of the pool for quite some time and since losing my sight I’ve found I can’t walk in a straight line, let alone swim in a straight line, so this is going to be a huge challenge for me.

“I need help to get in and out of the pool and once in I feel like a human pinball, bouncing off the ropes marking off my lane and only discovering I’ve reached the end when I bang my head and then know it’s time to turn around.”

Lee lost his sight suddenly in his mid-40s following a brain haemorrhage. He says: “What I thought was a →

Sunday morning nap, turned into something much more serious. I went into a coma and the doctors were preparing my family for the worst. When I woke in hospital a few weeks later, it wasn't immediately obvious that I'd lost my sight as I was hallucinating and seeing all sorts of things; it was absolutely terrifying.

"When I realised what had happened, I thought my life was over. I was discharged from hospital a day before the country went into the first Covid lockdown adding to my feeling of loss and isolation. I just stayed inside for six months selling or giving away everything I owned."

Lee received a phone call out of the blue from a Community Support Worker for the charity offering support.

Lee says: "I had all but forgotten about my military service as it was very brief and I wasn't at all sure of accepting the support of the charity at first but reluctantly agreed to have a visit.

"Blind Veterans UK has been amazing; the charity has given me back the skills and confidence to face up to my new life and to make the most of every day. I've been provided with counselling and technology.

"I'm hoping that with this challenge I can give something back to the charity"

Having the charity by my side has made me feel safe.

"I'm hoping that with this challenge I can give something back to the charity and pay respect to those men and women who made it possible for us to live as we do now. It is important that we do not forget their sacrifice."

Lee has set himself a fundraising target of £80 but has already exceeded this. He is now excited to see how much he can raise. If you would like to help him reach his target, please visit his fundraising page: justgiving.com/page/leesswimathon

Lee is one of many veterans and supporters undertaking activities to commemorate and celebrate VE Day while raising vital funds for Blind Veterans UK.

■ **If you are inspired by Lee and would like to get involved, visit the Blind Veterans UK website: blindveterans.org.uk/fundraise**



Tony and Dai at the bus stop

"My confidence has grown"

...says Swansea Member after Welsh bus challenge

A Member from Swansea has completed a 563-mile journey around Wales using only public buses to raise money for the charity

In just three days, Tony Gale, 60, and

fellow Army veteran and friend Dai, who is 74, used their bus passes to travel in a loop starting and finishing at the Swansea Veterans Hub which they were also raising money for with the challenge.



Tony and Dai caught their first bus at 8.05am on Wednesday 19 March and boarded their last bus back to Swansea at 7.46am on Saturday 22 March, arriving back in time for breakfast.

Tony says: “We were blown away by our welcome, there was a fantastic turn out and Dai and I felt very emotional. The bus company made an announcement to welcome us back as we arrived in Swansea and the bus drivers all hooted their horns and other passengers clapped and cheered.

“The veterans who attend the hub

formed a guard of honour and a piper started to play as we came around the corner towards the hub. The Mayor of Swansea and his wife were there along with three military captains and a whole group of Air, Army and Navy cadets.”

Tony and Dai set off with enough food and supplies including a tent and sleeping bag to last six days just in case they missed any buses.

He says: “Every single bus ran to time, there was no standing in the rain waiting for late buses. I was



Tony and Dai back in Swansea

“The bus drivers all hooted their horns and other passengers clapped and cheered”

amazed and it went far beyond my expectations.

“On the Tuesday night before we set off, I was panicking and worrying that I would fail and I’d let everyone down – Blind Veterans UK, Dai and the veteran community. I was fearing that other passengers and the bus drivers would get frustrated with me as I tried to board the buses or that I’d get in their way and face aggression but I had not needed to worry at all as this was the complete opposite of what I experienced.

“As we boarded the buses, Dai would let the drivers know that I was blind; every single driver offered their assistance to help me get on and off and they all let me know when we’d reached the stop I needed. It wasn’t only the bus company staff, the passengers we came across were amazing too, all moving seats to allow Dai and I to sit together at the front of the bus. My experience on the buses was fantastic.

“My confidence has grown so much

as a result; so much so that this week I am going to catch the bus from my home to the Swansea Veteran’s Hub for the first time entirely on my own. I know now that I can do it and I know that the bus drivers and passengers will be there to help me. I am now so determined to give things a go and not have to fully rely on others.”

Before starting the challenge, Tony had said: “I want to show what a blind person can do and how, with rehabilitation from Blind Veterans UK, I’ve been able to get back my independence and navigate around.”

Tony had been concerned about the challenges posed by public transport for the blind and visually impaired and is looking forward to providing his feedback to the bus companies.

He says: “I want the bus companies to know how fantastic their drivers were. It has been an amazing experience and because of this challenge I feel ready to go forwards now in my sight loss journey. I want others to know that sight loss isn’t a barrier to using the buses and with a bit of confidence, it can provide a new level of independence.

“My only feedback to the bus companies would be that I travelled on three buses that gave audio



“I also wanted to raise awareness among the public and the veteran community”

when arriving at stops which was really helpful as a way of tracking where I was and knowing when to get off. The technology is there so it would be fantastic if more buses could be equipped with it. There were also a couple of bus stops in larger towns that had screens you could press which told you when the next bus would be arriving and where it was going. Again fantastic technology which it would be amazing if it were rolled out wider. However, if I didn't have Dai with me, I wouldn't have known the screens were there.”

Dai and Tony served together in the Army. Tony joined the Parachute Regiment at 16 and underwent basic training in Aldershot but he suffered an injury to his ankle which meant he was unable to complete the jumps and therefore transferred to the Royal Regiment of Wales.

During his 15-year service, Tony undertook three tours in Northern Ireland, served in the Falklands for eight months and spent three years in Hong Kong.

Tony was diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy in both eyes. He now has no vision in his left eye and very little in his right.

He says: “I was really deflated before I found Blind Veterans UK, I wasn't sure what my life would look like. I hadn't left the house for five months but with the support and rehabilitation of the charity, I'm now back in the right frame of mind and this has got me through.

“Last year I had my toes amputated and this put me off walking but I was again supported by the charity and now I have taken on this challenge to say thank you.

“I didn't just want to raise money for the charity; I also wanted to raise awareness among the public and the veteran community. Along the route I spoke to many veterans either at veteran hubs or on the buses and I am proud to have spread the word.”

■ **If you or someone you know would like help and advice on using public transport visit blindveterans.org.uk/transport.**

■ **If you would like to help Blind Veterans UK raise awareness of the support they offer and to help raise vital funds visit blindveterans.org.uk/fundraise 🇬🇧**



A day in the life of our recycling team

On the road with the team giving a second life to assistive technology

Blind Veterans UK's recycling team travel thousands of miles each year, not only to refurbish and reissue specialist vision equipment but also delivering independence, dignity and connection to our veterans around the country.



Danny delivering a CCTV scanner

Behind every reconditioned CCTV scanner or magnifier is a powerful story, one of hope restored and challenges overcome. These pieces of assistive technology aren't just tools, they're lifelines. And thanks to the team's tireless efforts, every donation goes further, transforming not just resources, but lives.

Earlier this month, team member Danny made a journey to Nottingham to visit Fred, a blind veteran and recent recipient of a CCTV scanner. These devices use a camera to magnify text and images onto a screen, allowing our veterans with sight loss to read mail, enjoy newspapers, or check the football results. For Fred, a lifelong Chelsea fan, this was more than a gadget, it was a return to the simple pleasures of everyday life.

“Behind the screen there's a camera facing downwards”, explained Danny, training Fred on how to use →



the scanner. "So, whatever you place on the tray underneath gets projected onto the screen. You can zoom in until you can start to read the words". As Fred tested it out, it wasn't long before he could check the Chelsea results for himself.

Fred shared that his sight loss had been gradual, worsened by two detached retinas, and how that had affected his confidence. "You start getting a bit worried about the things you normally do, you wouldn't be able to do them. But this charity is very worthwhile. It helps no end of people. It brightens up your life."

The work of the recycling team does more than reduce waste or extend the life of equipment, it brings joy, purpose,



Member Fred using the scanner

"Behind every reconditioned CCTV scanner or magnifier is a powerful story,"

and a sense of normalcy back to people who have lost it.

On Danny's visit, Fred shared his reluctance to accept support saying, "I felt a bit guilty at first, because I was blind in the right eye, but my left eye wasn't too bad. You don't always want to accept that you need help."

By giving each piece of equipment a second life, the team ensures that every donation works harder. It saves resources, reduces costs and enables more veterans to benefit from the charity's support. Whether it's CCTV scanners, magnifiers, or other specialist kit, each item is carefully refurbished, reissued, and hand-delivered when possible, with a healthy dose of training and compassion on the side. Veterans regain the ability to write, read, cook, and enjoy hobbies they'd feared they had lost.

This is just one of the many unseen journeys, like Fred's, that begin with a knock at the door and a little help from the recycling team who turn old tools into new opportunities. 🌟

The 2025 Blind Veterans Summer Camp at HMS Sultan

By Lorraine 'Lorry' Osman, Organising Secretary.

The 2025 Blind Veterans Summer Camp at HMS Sultan will take place again from 1400 Friday 1st August until 1400 Friday 8th August 2025.

There are a limited number of places for Blind Veterans UK Members due to Service accommodation constraints, but please do not let that put you off applying to attend as we will accommodate as many blind veterans as possible and helpers.

Applications

We have endeavoured for many years to create a summer camp 'family' and to maintain that ethos and atmosphere we do have Members who regularly participate. That said, we are careful to ensure that places are offered to new applicants each year.

There are no boundaries with regard to age or physical ability but checks with the community teams will be conducted to ensure suitability. We are very aware this is an excellent opportunity to provide some respite for both the 'campers' and those who are providing regular care.



Summer Camp from 2023

■ **To apply for consideration this year please contact: Lorraine 'Lorry' Osman – Organising Secretary by the following methods Email: Lorraine.osman325@mod.gov.uk**

Applications will be forwarded and an attendance list will close on 28th May 2025 and everyone will be informed if they have been successful or not by end of June 2025. I look forward to receiving your applications and hopefully meeting up in August. 🌟

Five ways to improve your wellbeing

Small steps towards a healthier and happier life



ABUNDZU / ADOBE STOCK

1

Strong social connections can lead to increased happiness

In today's fast-paced world, maintaining mental and emotional health is as crucial as physical fitness. Research indicates that incorporating five simple practices into your daily routine can significantly boost your overall wellbeing. These steps; connecting with others, staying active, learning new skills, giving back, and being mindful, offer a holistic approach to leading a fulfilling life.

1. Connecting with others Building and nurturing relationships can provide emotional support and enrich your life:

- **Reach out:** call, text, or email friends and family. Reconnecting with someone you haven't spoken to in a while can be especially rewarding.

2

O / ADOBE STOCK



Tai chi, yoga, or pilates enhance flexibility and promote relaxation

- **Engage locally:** Greet your neighbours, chat with shop assistants, or join local clubs and classes to meet new people.

Strong social connections can lead to increased happiness and a sense of belonging.

2. Get Active

Physical activity benefits both the body and the mind:

- **Exercise regularly:** Activities like walking, jogging, or gardening can improve mood and reduce anxiety.
- **Household Tasks:** Cleaning and decluttering can be therapeutic and provide a sense of accomplishment.

- **Gentle Movements:** Practices such as tai chi, yoga, or pilates enhance flexibility and promote relaxation.

Regular activity can boost self-esteem and help you achieve goals.

3. Learn something new Challenging your mind can improve self-confidence and provide a sense of purpose:

- **Educational content:** Watch documentaries or read non-fiction books to expand your knowledge.
- **New skills:** Learn a language, pick up a musical instrument, or try a new hobby.
- **Culinary adventures:** →

Experiment with new recipes to enhance your cooking skills.

Continuous learning keeps the mind sharp and engaged.

4. Give back

Helping others can create a sense of reward and community:

- **Express gratitude:** Thank someone who has made a difference in your life.
- **Offer Support:** Spend time with loved ones who need company or assistance.



Notice the textures and flavours in your meals

“Mindfulness practices can reduce stress and enhance overall wellbeing”

- **Volunteer:** Engage in community service or assist with local projects.

Acts of kindness can enhance your mood and foster social connections.

5. Be mindful of your surroundings

Paying attention to the present moment can improve mental clarity:

- **Sensory awareness:** Notice the textures and flavours in your meals or the sensation of water during a shower.
- **Nature Connection:** Spend time outdoors, observing the sounds and smells around you.
- **Body scan:** Regularly check in with your body to identify areas of tension or relaxation.

Mindfulness practices can reduce stress and enhance overall wellbeing.

Incorporating these five steps into your daily routine can lead to a more balanced and fulfilling life. Remember, small, consistent changes can have a significant impact over time. 🍕



Member voice

Our Member Engagement and Military Lead, **Tim Eckersley**, shares your latest news and updates



Members and friends at the last Annual Member Conference

Annual Members Conference

This year's annual conference will be held between the 22nd and 23rd May 2025 at **Aston Conference Centre, Birmingham, B4 7ET.**

We appreciate that not all Members will be able to attend the Conference so localised Community events will be held to provide the opportunity to hear about the key information provided by our Executive Leadership.

Please liaise with your local Community Team to find out what is going on near you, alternatively, you may also contact MeSH by telephoning: **0300 111 22 33**

- **If you have a question that you would like to ask, please telephone MeSH for support or complete the online form here: www.blindveterans.org.uk/question**

The deadline for submissions is the 28th of June 2025. →

Remembrance Weekend - Cenotaph 2025

There will be four main events in London for Blind Veterans UK over Remembrance Weekend in November 2025. Members are provided the opportunity to register for as many events as they like, however, due to limited spaces available for the Festival of Remembrance and Remembrance Parade, names will be chosen via a random ballot later this year.

■ **Sir Arthur Pearson Memorial Service** at Hampstead Cemetery,

London on Saturday 8th November between 11am to 12pm.

■ **Festival of Remembrance** at the Royal Albert Hall, London, on Saturday 8th November, arrival from 1pm.

■ **Informal evening social event** at the Victory Services Club, London on Saturday 8th November between 6pm to 10pm.

■ **Remembrance Parade** at the London Cenotaph on Sunday 9th November between 9am to 1pm.

■ **For Further information and to register, go to www.blindveterans.org.uk/cenotaphweekend**



Remembrance 2024 Cenotaph Group



Military Dinner at Sandhurst 2024

RMA Sandhurst Military Dinner

On 28th February, Members, guests, corporate guests and Sandhurst leadership joined Blind Veterans at a dinner within the Indian War Memorial Room. Members enjoyed a guided tour of Old College Building, followed by speeches and a delicious 3-course meal with the Military Wives Choir singing in the background. Members Ron and Michael were presented Founders Day Awards during the event by Brigadier Nick Wight-Boycott and Lt Col Daniel O'Connor.

Military Anniversaries - The Falklands War

On the 5th of April 1982, the Royal Navy were dispatched by the British Government to engage the Argentine

Navy and Air Force, a tactical move planned to disable Argentine forces and provide vital cover fire for British Forces to make an amphibious assault on the islands.

The conflict lasted 74 days and ended with an Argentine surrender on 14 June, returning the islands to British control. In total, 649 Argentine military personnel, 255 British military personnel, and three Falkland Islanders were killed during the hostilities.

Members Support Hub (MeSH) - Event Bookings

MeSH will now be able to support Members wanting to book onto any National Engagement Event or provide members event specific information.

■ **To contact MeSH please email MESH@blindveterans.org.uk or telephone: 0300 111 22 33.**

National Engagement Events

■ **To book a place at any of our National Engagement Events, please click here: www.blindveterans.org.uk/events, or telephone MeSH on 0300 111 22 33. 📞**

National Creative Project

This month's VI-friendly creative activities you can take part in – all from the comfort of your own home

Here is the May programme of VI friendly creative activities to take part in from home. Please call **01273 391447** to leave a message on the NCWP answer machine and request a project pack. You can also request a pack on the Members area of the website. All projects come with VI friendly instructions and the option of audio instructions on a USB stick or by



Butterfly house

email if you request it and you can take part in as many as you like!

We apologise for the delays in project dispatch throughout April. Thank you for your patience with this. There is enough stock to go round, and all requests will be sent out in due course.

Butterfly house: We're delighted to share this woodwork project with you. Once constructed, this acts as a safe haven for butterflies and other insects when hung in a sunny spot in the garden. To support with this project, we have labelled the pieces and added high contrast stickers to identify the pre-drilled holes, along with a step-by-step guide. You will need a hammer, Phillips head screwdriver and a bradawl.

Woodland trio – mouse: We're enjoying seeing photographs of your completed mice! This is part of our woodland trio of simple model kits



Woodland trio – mouse

which will be available throughout 2025. The hedgehog and squirrel will be available later in the year!

Spring mandala mosaic: We are so pleased to hear so many of you have enjoyed making our seasonal mandalas. We've enjoyed picking out some delicate floral colours for the spring mandala, which will come with pre-sorted and labelled tiles in separate bags and everything else you need for your mosaic. The summer mandala will be ready soon for you to complete the set!

We have regular distribution lists for our mosaic, wooden model and indoor gardening projects. If you'd like to be



Spring mandala mosaic

added to one or more of these lists, please get in touch to let us know what you'd like to receive. Once you're on this list, you will automatically be sent new projects for your preferred craft as soon as they're ready. If your circumstances change and you'd like to be removed from the list or pause your projects, just get in touch at any time and we can make the necessary changes.

■ **We always love hearing from you, whether it's to share photographs, feedback or just to have a chat about your crafting activities. Please don't hesitate to get in touch via ncwt@blindveterans.org.uk**



Quiz time

Our quizmaster **Ron Russell** tests your general knowledge

1. What planet is closest to the sun?

2. What is the most populated city in Australia?

3. Which Tennis Grand Slam is played on a clay surface?

4. Which legendary surrealist artist is famous for painting melting clocks?

5. What is the northernmost country in Africa?
6. In what year did Tony Blair become British Prime Minister?

7. From what grain is the Japanese spirit Sake made?

8. How many times has England won the men's football World Cup?

9. Street artist Banksy is originally associated with which British city?
- Answers on page 43



Caption: Banksy artwork, entitled ‘Swinger’, in New Orleans



Family news

Cyril Surman who celebrates his 100th birthday on 17 May 2025.

Edna D’Arcy who celebrates her 100th birthday on 12 May 2025.

Henry Hogg who celebrates his 106th birthday on 17 May 2025.

Jean Lees who celebrates her 102nd birthday on 24 May 2025.

Joan Harrison who celebrates her 102nd birthday on 5 May 2025.

John Harlow who celebrates his 101st birthday on 8 May 2025.

John Ryan who celebrates his 100th birthday on 21 May 2025.

Leslie Hutt who celebrates his 104th birthday on 28 May 2025.

Mary Johnston who celebrates her 101st birthday on 10 May 2025.

Neena Crossingham who celebrates her 100th birthday on 17 May 2025.

Phyllis Davies who celebrates her 103rd birthday on 26 May 2025.

Richard Clegg who celebrates his 100th birthday on 7 May 2025.

Richard Pelzer who celebrates his 101st birthday on 2 May 2025.

Victor Brown who celebrates his 102nd birthday on 29 May 2025.

William Allardyce who celebrates his 100th birthday on 27 May 2025.

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

Pauline Beacroft who died on 1st April 2025. She was the wife of James Beacroft.

Jeanne Tasker who died on 1st April 2025. She was the wife of Leslie Cyril Tasker.

Jean Threlfall who died on 1st of March 2025. She was the wife of Samuel Threlfall.

Barbara Armstrong who died on 14th March 2025. She was the wife of Robert Armstrong.

Betty Bird who died on 25th March 2025. She was the wife of Philip Bird.

Loretta Ashton who died on 20th March 2025. She was the wife of Peter Ashton.

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



Listen
here

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

Alfred William Fears of Royston died on 28 March 2025 aged 93. He served as a Leading Seaman in the Royal Navy.

Barbara Wood of Exmouth died on 01 April 2025 aged 93. She worked as the secretary to the director at Blind Veterans UK.

Cecil Guy Gordon of London died on 01 February 2025 aged 100. He served as a sergeant in the Royal Navy.

Cyril Birch of Wigan died on 01 March 2025 aged 97. He served in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Cyril Mathews of Brandon died on 09 March 2025 aged 97. He served as a Sergeant in the Army.

David Trevor Morris-Jones of Warrington died on 29 March 2025 aged 91. He served in the Royal Armoured Corps, Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

Denis Bell of Redcar died on 31 March 2025 aged 97. He served as a Temporary corporal in the Royal Air Force.

Dennis Proctor of Widnes died on 17th March 2025 aged 94. He served as a Private in the Parachute Regiment.

Dennis Alfred Clark of Coventry died on 26 March 2025 aged 94. He served as a Private.

Dilys Moryn May of Honiton died on 25 March 2025 aged 93. She served as a Medic in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

Edward James Morris of Wallasey died on 07 April 2025 aged 94. He served as a Steward in the Merchant Navy.

Eon Montague Hopkins of Eastbourne died on 22 March 2025 aged 95. He served as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

Frank Kirkham of Oldham died on 01 September 2024 aged 87. He served in the Lancastrian Brigade.

George Coker of Barnsley died on 21 March 2025 aged 91. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

George Alan Birkin of Mansfield died on 28 March 2025 aged 94. He served in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Gilbert Higham of Stockport died on 17 March 2025 aged 89. He served as a Corporal in the General Service Corps, Innskillin Fusiliers.

Howard Peter Williams of Milford Haven died on 20 March 2025 aged 93. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

Hubert Piens of Romford died on 25 March 2025 aged 95. He served as a private in the Royal Army Pay Corps.

James Reilly of Coventry died on 01 November 2024 aged 87. He served as a Private in the Royal Irish Fusiliers.

James Ernest Ferris of Peterborough died on 08 March 2025 aged 96. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

Robert Robinson of Durham died on 25 January 2025 aged 84. He served as an acting corporal in the Royal Corps of Transport.

Ronald Roberts of Ryton died on 21 March 2025 aged 94. He served as an L.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

John Gulbrandsen of Swansea died on 04 March 2025 aged 90. He served as an Able Seaman in the Royal Navy.

John Harvey of Trefdreath died on 10 March 2025 aged 92. He served as a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Artillery, Royal Welch Fusiliers.

Joseph Killington of Middlesbrough died on 18 March 2025 aged 91. He served as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

Kenneth Barnes of Cullmpton died on 02 April 2025 aged 90. He served as a Signaller in the Royal Navy.

Norman Harold Osgood of Dereham died on 12 March 2025 aged 105. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Military Police.

Peggy Harding of Torquay died on 12 March 2025 aged 99. She served as a 3rd Officer Wren in the Women's Royal Naval Service.

Robert Armstrong of Ryton died on 20 March 2025 aged 93. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

Ronald Roberts of Royston died on 21 March 2025 aged 94. He served as an L.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

Simon John William Hurrell of Cambridge died on 25 March 2025 aged 95. He served as a Guardsman in the Coldstream Guards.

Valerie Edna Shorto of Cwmbran died on 02 March 2025 aged 97. She served as an Acting Corporal in the Women's Royal Air Force.

William Arthur Swettenham of Richmond died on 28 March 2025 aged 92. He served as a Flight Lieutenant in the Royal Air Force.

Did you know that we can set up online Tribute Pages for the loved ones of staff, Members and Supporters? Find out more about setting up a Tribute Page here:
blindveteransuk.muchloved.org



Listen
here

Contact details

Contact address Blind Veterans UK,
126 Fairlie Road, Slough, SL1 4PY
0300 111 22 33

Member Support Hub (MeSH):
01273 391 447

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

Rustington Centre: 01903 945 300

Review Editor: 0300 111 22 33 or
revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk

Feedback: To give us feedback on any of our services, please email us at supporter.services@blindveterans.org.uk or call **0300 111 22 33**.

Donations: To make a donation, simply call **0300 111 22 33** or visit blindveterans.org.uk/donate.

To listen to Review on Alexa, the command is: **"Alexa, ask TuneIn to play Blind Veterans UK Review."** If you have any problems getting it to work, please contact the MeSH helpline on **01273 391 447**.

Quiz answers – from page 38

1.Mercury 2. Sydney 3.The French Open 4.Salvador Dali 5.Tunisia 6.1997 7. Rice 8. Once 9. Bristol

A different format?

If you would like to receive your copy of Review in a different format, please contact your Community Support Worker or ROVI for more information.

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