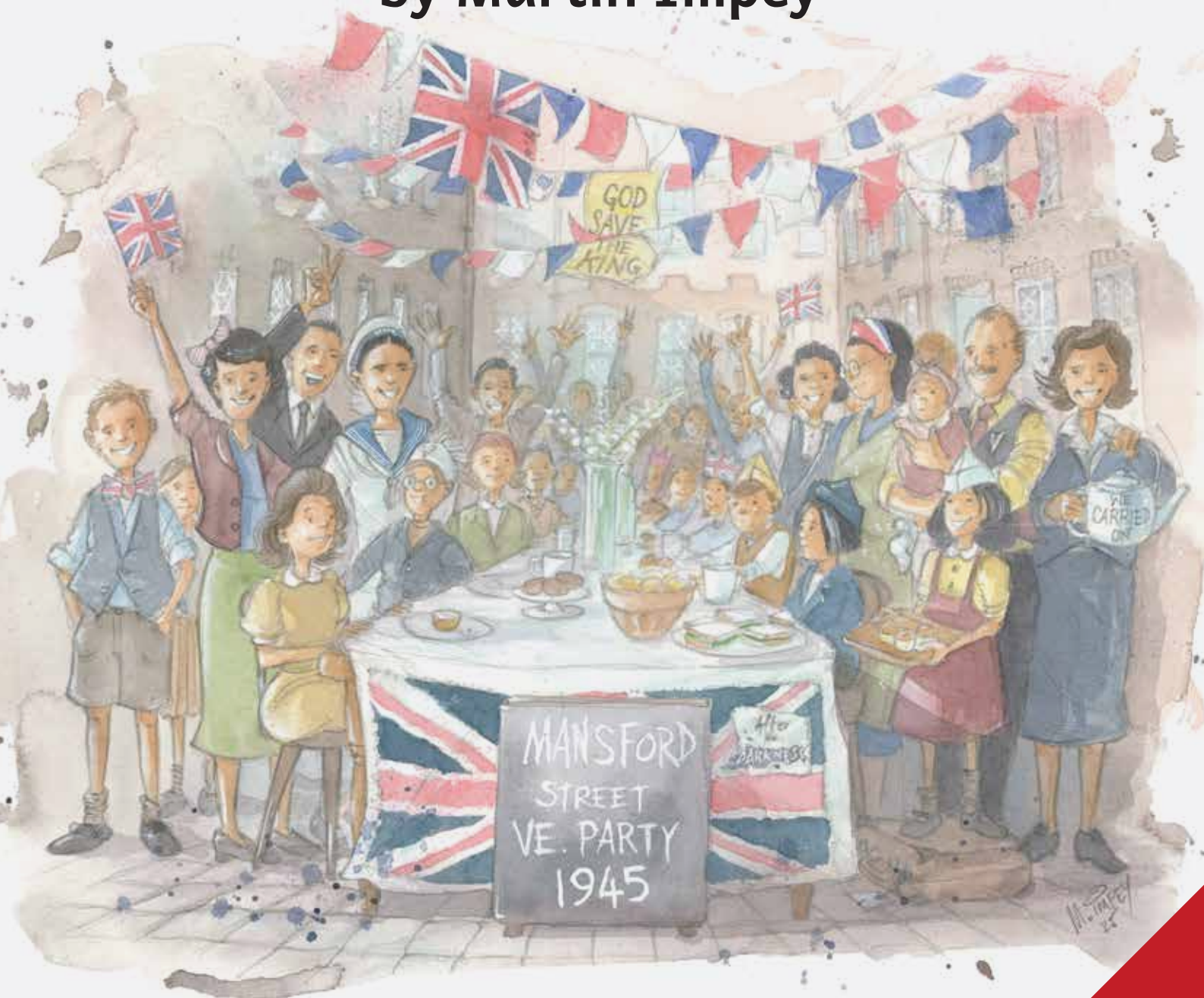


After the DARKNESS

Fun memories of VE Day illustrated
by Martin Impey



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss



For
6-11
year olds

“ 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...



As Patron, I am deeply moved by the stories of resilience, camaraderie, and hope that continue to inspire us today. ”

HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh GCVO
Patron of Blind Veterans UK

About Martin Impey

Martin is an award-winning artist illustrator with over 50 books under his belt. He says:



Photograph by Molly Impey

“ Blind Veterans UK 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. ”



VE Day 80: After the Darkness

On 8 May 1945, after nearly six long years of fighting, Germany finally gave up and the war in Europe was over!

Prime Minister Winston Churchill told everyone the great news over the radio and crowds rushed to the streets hugging, dancing and celebrating together.

Even though the war wasn't over in the Far East yet, everyone was so happy because it meant that life could slowly start getting back to normal.



This amazing day became known as Victory in Europe (VE) Day, and it happened exactly 80 years ago.

Experience the excitement of VE Day

Over the following pages, you can relive the thrill of VE Day through the memories of six amazing people we help who served in the war. All six are almost 100 years old now, or even older, and their stories are funny, exciting, inspiring and true!

Each story has been beautifully illustrated just for you by the talented artist Martin Impey. Rich with emotion and lots of fun details, we're sure you will enjoy looking at them.

Martin's even hidden the title of this booklet within each illustration.

Can you spot it?

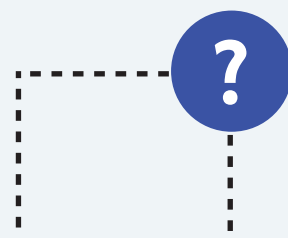


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Celebrate VE Day 80 in the classroom

Get talking about VE Day

What do you think life was like in the war?
What does it mean to be a hero? We've included questions like these throughout this booklet to prompt classroom discussions and show why the experiences of those who lived through the war are so important.



Decorate your classroom

If you're throwing a VE Day 80 party, why not make the most of our fun decorations? Our bunting, flags and party hats are easy to download and print, and you can even make your own newspaper hats just like the ones our veterans wore on VE Day!



Visit our website at
blindveterans.org.uk/vematerials

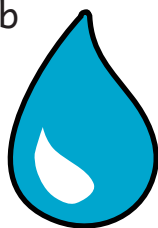


Joan's proud tears



What happened when the men went off to fight? Women like Joan stepped up and felt proud to do their part in helping to win the war.

Joan joined the ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service), which was the women's branch of the Army. She was good at her job and worked her way up to Sergeant, but she always worried about the soldiers fighting on the frontlines. Plus, she was tired of surviving on tiny food rations.



During the war, food was limited, so people couldn't buy much – not even enough clothes or shoes. So, when peace was finally declared in Europe, Joan and her husband were so excited.

Joan says:

“ I was crying with happiness. Everyone was excited! We hadn't been able to buy clothes for years! If you wanted a new dress, you just couldn't get one. For six years, we had all been away from home, and suddenly, all that stress was lifted.

We were out on our bikes and we saw people lighting bonfires in the streets, so we kept stopping and cycling around them. That's the part I remember most.

Back then, none of us expected luxuries like cars or even phones at home. But we made it through the war, and I'm proud to think that I helped. ”

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What would you miss most if you couldn't buy your favourite things?

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How has life for women changed since the war?



Les's rowdy celebration



Les was part of a crew sailing the Atlantic Ocean, and he'll never forget the wild celebrations on VE Day – especially because of one very silly sailor.

What could be worse than spending your 18th birthday being tossed around by rough seas on an old ship with enemy submarines nearby? Well, imagine being stuck there for your 19th and 20th birthdays, too!

The journeys were dangerous, and many sailors lost their lives. So, when Les and his shipmates found out the war in Europe was finally over, they couldn't have been happier.



Les says:

“ We were in a harbour when we found out the news, so we all rushed off the ship to celebrate. Everyone was shouting and cheering.

When we got back, we saw something crazy. A sailor from the next ship had climbed all the way to the top of a huge crane... and started taking off his clothes!

All the ships shone their lights on him, and everyone was laughing and yelling. We knew he would get in trouble when he finally came down, but it was a sight we would never forget! ”

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What do you think life was like for sailors during the war?

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What can we learn from older people who lived through the war?

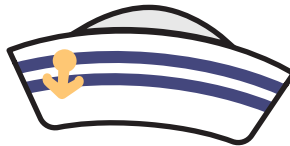


Peter's impossible task

Imagine you're at the best party ever, but then someone tells you that you can't join in the fun. That's exactly what happened to Peter on VE Day.

At 17 years old, Peter started training to be a radar mechanic on a ship. His job was to help spot enemy ships and submarines.

But he also had to take turns doing something called 'shore patrol'. This was like being the Navy's police. He would march into the local town, tell people what to do, and make sure other sailors weren't getting into trouble.



The sailors didn't like being told what to do, so they were excited when peace was declared, and they could finally have fun. But guess what? It just so happened that it was Peter's turn to do shore patrol on the same day!



Peter says:

“ Six of us young sailors marched behind an officer into town, and it was total chaos! Everyone was so loud and excited. There was no way we could calm them down!

We were supposed to march in pairs, trying to keep things in order, but it was impossible! People kept running up to us, pulling us out of line, and just having fun with us. Women kept kissing our collars for good luck. I don't know how we made it through the crowd!

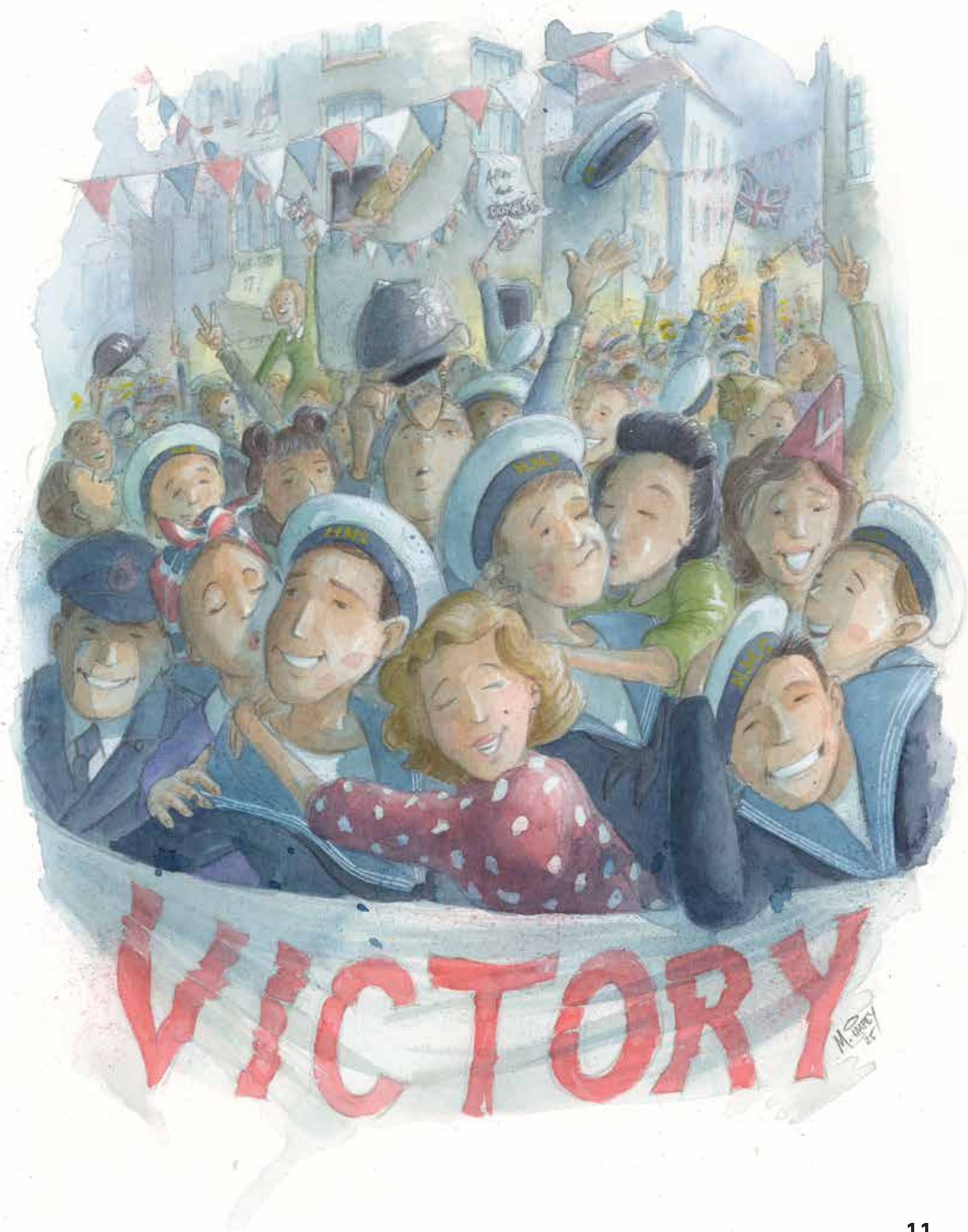
But the best part was after all that craziness, we were given free fish and chips. They were delicious! ”

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How would you have felt in Peter's situation?

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What would you have done to celebrate VE Day?

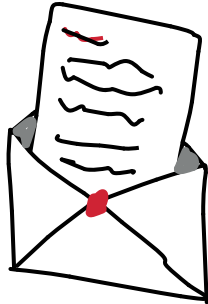


Ruth's surprise letter



Ruth really hated the war and wanted to do anything she could to help. But she had no idea that everything was about to change...

When Ruth was 19, she had a good job working as a cashier in a bank. But she wished her friends didn't have to risk their lives on the battlefield.



She decided she wanted to do more to help, so she sent off an application to join the Wrens, which was a special part of the Navy for women. Then she nervously waited to hear back.

Ruth says:

“ I opened the letter from the Wrens and found out I had been accepted! But later that same day, I heard that the war had ended! I was in shock!

It was so exciting to know the war was over. I ran around the house turning all the lights on because we hadn't been allowed to do that for six years! Then I decorated the garden with flags and had a fun picnic with my sister, my boyfriend, and some friends.

Soon after, I started my training with the Wrens. Some parts were hard, like cleaning the concrete steps, but other parts were fun, like learning to march. But the best thing was that I met my husband on the base as he was a pilot, so everything turned out for the best in the end! ”

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How did women help win the war?

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What can you do to help create a more peaceful world?



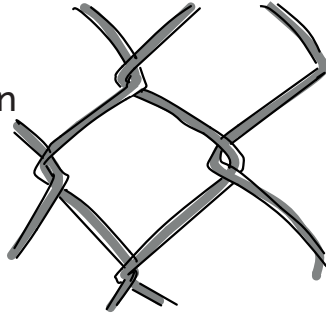
M. J. IMPEY
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Derrick's newfound freedom



After Derrick's plane was shot down, he was captured by the Germans and kept as a prisoner of war for more than a year.

Derrick had to stay in German military camps, where he slept in simple huts with bunk beds. The toilet was just a long ditch.



If a prisoner tried to escape, they would be sent to the "cooler" as a punishment. This was a small room where they would be locked up on their own and given very little food.

As the Germans started to retreat, they forced prisoners like Derrick to march home with them, walking for miles through the cold and snow all the way back to Germany.

Derrick says:

“ It took us two or three weeks to march to Berlin. We slept in barns along the way and ate whatever food we could find. At night, we had to huddle together to stay warm. If you took your boots off, they'd freeze, and you couldn't get them back on the next morning. So, we slept with our boots on.

It felt amazing when we were finally freed and flown back to England. My mother had been told I was alive, but I couldn't call her because she didn't have a phone. So, I got the bus home and surprised her.

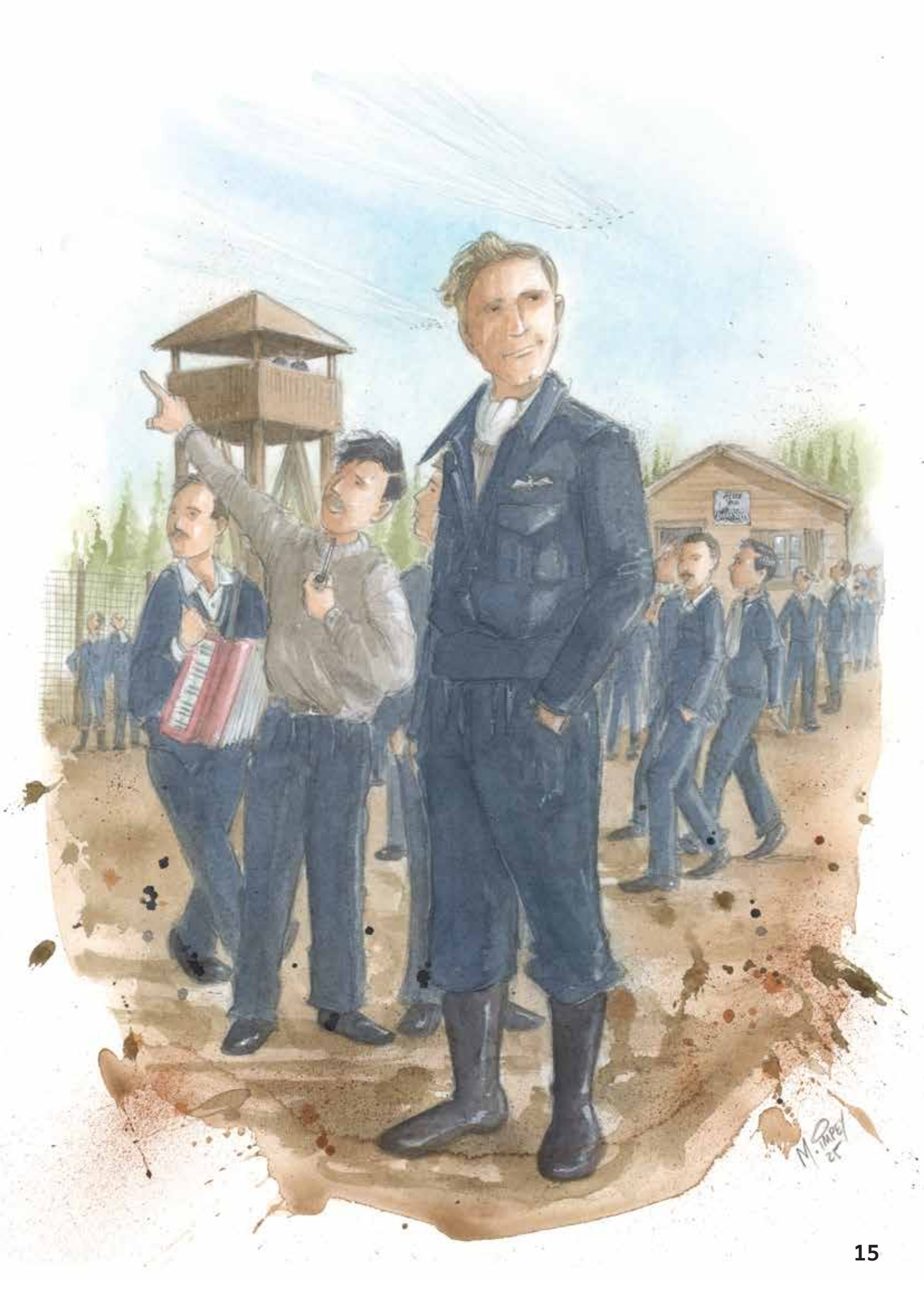
I remember there was a big 'Welcome Home Derrick' sign over the front door. When my mother opened the door, she shouted, 'He's here! He's here!' ”

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What can we learn from Derrick's experience?

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Why is freedom so important?



Matt's great escape

Some soldiers, like Matt, continued to fight, despite VE Day. He was chosen to be in the SAS – a group for the best soldiers.

Matt joined the army when he was 17, and his fearless attitude quickly stood out. Soon, he was leading soldiers much older than him through battles in Italy. After that he was chosen for the SAS, where only the toughest soldiers were picked.

While Britain celebrated VE Day, Matt was still behind enemy lines in the mountains of Italy. He had parachuted in to raid enemy supplies and equipment, and the only way out was on horseback!



Matt says:

“ Ten of us parachuted in and because I was the smallest, I drifted away from the others. So, instead of landing on the top of a mountain, I landed in the valley below.

I was looking around, excited and a little scared. Then, I heard footsteps, and a little Italian woman appeared and said the password, telling me she was on our side.

I stayed in her village for a while. Then, when I heard the war in Europe was over, I had to ride a horse for miles to the coast. Riding on a horse and hearing bullets whizz past my head... it wasn't exactly fun, but I made it through! ”

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What stands out for you about Matt's story?

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What makes someone a hero?



About Blind Veterans UK

We believe that everyone who has served in the Armed Forces (known as a 'veteran') deserves respect and support. But for those who lose their sight, life can be really tough. The things they loved to do, like their hobbies, might suddenly seem impossible. Even meeting friends or going out for a walk can feel too scary.



That's where we come in. We help blind veterans rebuild their lives. We welcome them into our friendly community, give them support and training to boost their confidence, and organise activities so they don't feel lonely. And we do this for as long as they need us, making sure they can live the happy, full lives they deserve.

For more VE Day stories and illustrations, plus videos of our amazing veterans talking about their experiences, visit our website at



blindveterans.org.uk/storiesofveday

