



Review

The journal of
Blind Veterans UK

August 2023



Armed Forces Day

Blind veterans gather around the country to show their support for the Armed Forces community

Inside:

Veterans Games 2023

My Battle of Atlantic week at Llandudno



Rebuilding lives after sight loss



The 2024 Birmingham International Tattoo

We invite you to join us at Britain's biggest indoor tattoo, the 2024 Birmingham International Tattoo on **Sunday, 11 February** at the Resorts World Arena.

An event unlike any other, the 2024 Birmingham International Tattoo brings together marching bands, pipes and drums, field gun racing and much, much more. There will also be a spectacular Grand Finale featuring over 1,000 performers.

We have a limited number of subsidised platinum tickets for our registered blind veterans who would like to come along to enjoy the show together with their fellow blind veterans.

Please book your place using the form on our website: blindveterans.org.uk/tattoo. You can also call us on **0300 111 22 33**.

Once booked online, our customer services team will be in touch within five working days to take your payment over the phone.

Please note that due to popular demand we can only offer up to two tickets per blind veteran.

Travel to the venue and accommodation is **NOT** included and these tickets are not wheelchair accessible.

For more information visit the event site: bhamtattoo.com/

Tickets:
£10
(RRP £35)



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On the cover

Member Brian Eldridge holding the Blind Veterans UK flag at the Armed Forces Day event in Scarborough



Open conversations

CEO, **Adrian Bell**, reflects on the conversations he has had with Members since starting with the charity in April this year and provides updates on important projects

I am really enjoying meeting with many of you on my travels and hearing from you on your thoughts about the charity. I have been fortunate enough to enjoy a part of the military week at Llandudno and the same at Brighton



Caption: Adrian standing outside the Llandudno Centre

and, attend both military dinners, as well as attend a Members' lunch in Cwmbran. I have really enjoyed these visits and, as ever, learnt a lot from all involved and would like to thank you for your openness and honesty and for taking the time to speak with me – thank you.

I was also very fortunate to be invited to Ray Hazan's Memorial Service at Brighton recently which was a truly wonderful affair. Although I never had the privilege of meeting Ray, our past President, it was obvious just how much he was loved and respected by all. It was a truly wonderful and moving service in which his sons gave the most warm, heartfelt and amusing eulogies in which they made clear just how much the charity meant to Ray and his family. I have also heard from many about just how much Ray did for them. What a great man!

In my visits and conversations, I also hear a lot from you about a number of broad-ranging issues which include regional social gatherings, your relationship with staff and volunteers, accessibility, and wider societal issues. Many of these I cannot answer immediately, mainly because I lack prior knowledge of the issues, but do please bear with me as I am looking at them and will report back in due course.

The move to Rustington also comes up a lot and we communicated last month that we will be taking a phased approach to that opening. Partly, I want to ensure that refurbishment works are complete, or as near complete as possible before our permanent residents move in, and also to manage the recruitment, training and induction of all the new staff for the Centre. I am working with Head of Centre, Lesley Garven, on what we will be able to offer this year, even though it will be extremely limited for visitors. However, I would reassure you all that we will have a full programme of events from Christmas onwards. We will update you all shortly.

Finally, one very important societal issue I must raise with you is that of the proposed closures of ticket offices at the UK's railway stations. We are a member of the Visual Impairment Charity Sector Partnership alongside

seven other UK sight loss charities. We have signed a joint letter from the Partnership to the Secretary of State for Transport expressing our concerns. This was sent on Monday 10 July and asked for:

1. A meeting with the Minister, Huw Merriman.
2. A pause on the consultation.
3. That, when any consultation on the modernisation of the railway happens, it should be truly accessible.
4. A detailed update on the Rail Accessibility Action Plan as promised in 2019. Without sight of this and clarity on the plans, the closure of ticket offices would be premature.
5. And that, given the involvement and sign-off of Government in this process, we would expect that the Department for Transport would carry out Equality Impact Assessments and that these should be published immediately.

We further sought assurances that the Government and the train operators will abide by the result of the consultation. I will keep you all updated on progress.

I very much look forward to meeting more of you as I continue my travels around the country over the course of the summer. 🇬🇧

News

nominees and their nominators have been invited.

For those who are unable to attend in person, we will be doing a live video stream of the ceremony, meaning everyone can watch and be involved from the comfort of their own home.

The Founder's Awards were held annually prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in recognition of the first 16 war blinded veterans welcomed by Sir Arthur Pearson in 1915 to our training Centre at St Dunstan's Lodge in London's Regent's Park.

We are very excited to host the Founder's Awards ceremony again after three years of being unable to.



Caption: Gary Morrison collecting his award in 2018

Ray Hazan's Memorial

We know many of our Members would have liked to attend our former President, Ray Hazan's memorial at the Brighton Centre in June to pay their respects to him and his family. The service encapsulated Ray's spirit: beautiful, humorous and heartfelt.



You can watch a recording of Ray's service via the QR code left: If you have difficulty opening the link,

please contact your local community team.

Founder's Awards Ceremony 2023

In last month's issue of Review, we published the list of our Founder's Awards nominees.

We are pleased to be able to share details of the Founder's Awards ceremony this year, which will be held at the Llandudno Centre in October. All

JON ANDERS WIKEN / ADOBE STOCK



Caption: Signpost

Questionnaire - how are you feeling?

Blind Veterans UK is keen to understand how our veterans are doing at the moment. How are you feeling in yourself?

We want to know if you're already accessing services out there that are supporting you with your mental health and wellbeing, or if you'd feel



more comfortable accessing this support from Blind Veterans UK or a partner organisation.

To gain a better

understanding, Blind Veterans UK would hugely value your views to inform us on how we can better support you in this area.

The questionnaire is anonymous, fully confidential, and will take you under five minutes to complete.

The questionnaire can be found on our website: www.blindveterans.org.uk/wellbeing or by scanning the QR code below, left.

Alternatively, Members can request a link to the questionnaire is emailed to them by their Community Team or via our Member Support Hub.

■ To request this please either contact your Community Team or the Member Support Hub by calling 01273 391447 or e-mailing mesh@blindveterans.org.uk

NHS Veterans Health Services

Op COURAGE is the NHS mental health specialist service designed to help serving personnel due to leave the military, reservists, armed forces veterans and their families.

Op COURAGE can help you and your family with a range of support and →

treatment, from helping you transition from military to civilian life, to liaising with charities and local organisations to support your wider health and wellbeing need (such as help with housing, relationships, finances and employment).

In line with launching this new service, the Veterans Trauma Network has now been renamed Op RESTORE following engagement with other veterans, providers and charities.

Op RESTORE uses a network of both civilian and military consultants, along with welfare support from military charities, to support a veteran's physical health using a holistic approach.

UK Covid Inquiry

The UK Covid inquiry wants to hear people's experiences of the pandemic and is running a large-scale listening exercise. The main way to do this at present is to submit experiences via a survey form link on the following page: covid19.public-inquiry.uk/every-story-matters/

For those who cannot go online, there will be paper versions available. Later this year we plan to open a phone line to help people who wish to share

their stories but find it harder to do so online. These accessible versions will be launched throughout the summer.

Paper versions of the online form are available from the Public Inquiry directly (email contact@covid19.public-inquiry.uk or write to FREEPOST, UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry).

As well as the survey, there will be other strands to the listening exercise, including in person events around the UK, dates and locations to come. There will also be some piloting of specific activities to reach particular communities, such as residents of care homes. 🇬🇧



Caption: A two-metre distance sign

CHRIS DORNEY / ADOBE STOCK



Caption: Staff with Member David at Plymouth Armed Forces Day event

Celebrating Armed Forces Day around the country

On Saturday 24 June, Members across the country celebrated Armed Forces Day

Armed Forces Day is an opportunity for people to come together and show their support for those who make up the Armed Forces community, including serving members of the military, reservists, veterans, cadets and their families.

Staff, volunteers and Members, as well as our supporters, attended events in Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and England.

The Welsh city of Newport played host to this year's celebration, which →



Caption: Newport stand, below: Newport rugby ground

included a parade through the streets of the city centre and a military concert at the Welsh Rugby Union stadium.

Our Community Team Leader for the area, Ffion Davies, said: "Our veterans had a fantastic time and loved being involved in the day, especially the military concert at the Rodney Parade Stadium which is home to the Dragon's rugby team. A special thank you to the team who kindly gave our veterans their chairman's box so they could shelter from the heat of the day."

Caption: Member portraits

In Plymouth, we had an information stand within the veteran's village area, alongside other charities and organisations, to offer advice, information and support to veterans and their families.

Local Community Team Leader, Aaron Garratt said: "It was an extremely hot and busy day, but it was fantastic to be a part of the event."

The charity's supporters were also involved in the action. In North Wales, the West Conwy Volunteer Police

Caption: Armed Forces Day Scunthorpe

Cadets set themselves a challenge to walk six miles from Colwyn Bay Pier to Llandudno Pier. The group aged between 13 and 18-years-old raised £404 for Blind Veterans UK.

Participants from this year's Veteran Banger Rally, which is taking place in September, were also out and about at events collecting money for Blind Veterans UK.

The Banger Rally challenges teams of two to four people, one of whom must be a veteran, to buy a

Caption: Member Simon standing in front of his billboard

car for less than £1,000 and work together to jazz it up. They will then use their mechanical skills (and a bit of determination!) to hopefully travel 1,500-miles across Europe to Gibraltar.

Did you spot us in London? Last month, we launched a new campaign across the capital for Armed Forces Day – a series of billboards displaying portraits of veterans on huge digital screens.

The emotive photographs feature →



Caption: Member Mike Tetley

nine of our Members who lost their sight in conflicts including the Falklands, Northern Ireland, Iraq and Afghanistan.

One Member, Simon Brown, lost his sight when he was shot through the face by a sniper while leading a mission to recover six stranded colleagues in Iraq.

Simon says: "Remembrance is an important time of year when we

commemorate those we've lost. Armed Forces Day gives us the opportunity to celebrate those who are still with us and put themselves in danger to protect us.

"These portraits highlight both the tragedy and triumph of our veterans in service and recovery.

"I'm proud to be a part of this campaign to show service personnel and veterans that we'll be here for them when they need us."

The charity worked with award-winning photographer, Richard Cannon, to capture the images. Richard says: "It was an honour to photograph these heroes who gave so much for their country.

"When deciding on how to approach the portraits of the blind veterans, I wanted to give them a sense of pride and presence in the final image. So, I shot them slightly below the eyeline to give them a more powerful look. I hope the viewer will feel a sense of respect and admiration for these brave individuals."

■ **The campaign directs members of the public to our website at blindveterans.org.uk so they can read the stories of all Members featured.** 🌐



Caption: Veterans Games athletes

Veterans Games bring soldiers together

Member **Andy Leitch** tells us all about his experience representing Blind Veterans UK this summer in the Veterans Games hosted in Tel Aviv, Israel

What a week representing Blind Veterans UK at the Veterans' Games with six other Members and their families, alongside other Military charities. These games started in 2019 for wounded, sick and injured ex-forces personnel of the British Forces and Israeli Defence Force and their families.

With little sleep on the plane to Israel, we arrived to a very warm welcome of heat as the plane doors opened. We arrived at a fantastic hotel positioned on the beach front of Tel Aviv and after checking in, tried to grab a little sleep before the first of the meet and greets from our amazing hosts. →



Caption: Athletes at the Veterans Games 2023

We then had our first meeting with Israel's veterans at their magnificent rehabilitation centre, Beit Halochem (translated 'home of the warrior'), as they hosted the opening ceremony with fine food and drink and made us all feel truly welcome. This is where we would compete against them over the next three hard long days.

Over the next few days, the team split off to compete in swimming, shooting and cross fit. On the second day, we were joined by the MP Johnny Mercer (current Minister of State for Veterans Affairs) who had been watching the competitions. We had the pleasure of having him present us with our medals. And we can happily say the

Blind Veterans UK group were able to bag quite a few of them!

When we weren't competing, we managed to enjoy exploring Tel Aviv, as well as an abundance of food and drink! One of our last adventures out involved participating in a Remembrance service where we all paid tribute to those that never made it home. As we walked around the graves, we couldn't help but notice some of their ages. One was only 14, making us all reflect on what we have in common across all military groups.

On the last day of the games, all teams entered into a tug of war, box runs and a small circuit, which was just



Caption: Blind veterans swimmers at the Veterans Games

great fun thanks to our leader Craig's encouragement. Loads of photos were taken followed by medals and a little bit of singing.

The games were rounded off with a closing ceremony hosted at the amazing Yitzhak Rabin Center (One of Israel's newest museums) with international acclaimed architecture and panoramic views of the city. We listened to speeches from our Israeli hosts and our own veterans who reflected on the motto of the Games, 'Uniting Extraordinary People'. We said goodbye and thank you to our hosts and friends for the week that shared their part of the world with us all.



Caption: Member Peter and his wife, Kay, at the memorial service

As I look back over all the pictures taken that week, the games' chat group and my thoughts whilst writing this, I reflect on what a life experience we all have just had.

For a while, I have hidden behind my family and a small group of friends where I know I'm comfortable in my surroundings. But the Veterans Games, being with other veterans with different disabilities, has shown me that if you remove the 'dis' from 'disabilities', then you have the 'abilities' to do whatever you want. You might need to adapt, but just give anything a go. You never know, you may just have the best time of your life. 🇮🇸

My Battle of Atlanta week

Member **Ruth Warren**, 87, describes her recent stay at our Centre in Llandudno

I'm just back from eight days away at Llandudno, having been there for Military Week. It was the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic and, as my father served in

the Merchant Navy and latterly the Royal Navy, I wanted to represent him there.

This is my diary of the week...



Caption: Members and staff in Liverpool

Sunday

I was picked up by lovely driver, Charlie, who didn't mind that I had extra luggage, including a dress bag as well as a case! The journey was very pleasant, and although I felt apprehensive, I was put at ease by our wonderful driver.

When we arrived at the Centre it was like coming home! The welcome was warm and everyone was pleased to see us. We were orientated to our rooms and shown all the gadgetry before afternoon tea and coming together as a group. We then all met up at supper time and it was nice to be reacquainted with an old friend.

Monday

We started the day with World War II cooking, making Anzac biscuits; then took part in a military music quiz, which was great fun, and made Navy knots, tying bends and hitches. There was plenty of laughter and banter, and it was a great kick off to the week.

Tuesday

A trip to Liverpool to the Maritime Museum, which was very interesting. Having not been to Liverpool for some years, it was also very nostalgic. We had lunch on HMS Eaglet and there was evening entertainment for those who still had the energy, assisted by the Sea Cadets.



Caption: Ruth and 'The Lads'

Wednesday

This was World War II weapon stands day, including a private collection and talk. Such a good insight into what was available in the 40s. We then had a super time dressing up in Navy uniforms. It was very educational, and there were lots of giggles.

In the afternoon we enjoyed a 40s tea dance, which was a great success, dressing up in themed attire and dancing the afternoon away. A →

wonderful atmosphere, with plenty of camaraderie, and entertainment running on into the evening.

Thursday

We went to the Airworld Aviation Museum and the town's HM Coastguard helicopter station, which was great fun. Then it was Remembrance evening, which was incredibly moving, again with fantastic company. Dinner, as usual, was excellent.



Caption: Ruth with staff member

Friday

We played Navy games, including deck hockey and bucket ball, which involved lots of hysterical laughter and not so many bashed ankles! We then learnt about the origins of Naval expressions, took part in a military quiz and enjoyed evening music with a live performer.

Saturday

As this was a free day, I went into Llandudno with the boys. Great fun!

Sunday

We set off early for the Battle of the Atlantic parade in Liverpool. Princess Anne took the salute and lots of naval personnel were there. The pavements enroute were crowded and I have never felt so proud to march again in the city of my birth. The first time I marched there I was 17 and a half years old. Who could have believed that 70 years later I'd be marching there again?

Monday

This was both a happy and a sad day as we all said our goodbyes... What a special week, as it always is in Llandudno. I'm already looking forward to going back again.

All in all, this Military Week was incredible. If you haven't already been, you really should try it sometime. 🌍



Caption: Avril on the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage

Our trip of a lifetime

Member **Avril Staunton**, 68, and her husband Michael, share their experience of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage

Member Avril Staunton, and her husband Michael, have recently walked the 400 mile-long Camino de Santiago pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage was something

the couple always promised to do. However, Avril, who has deteriorating eyesight, was recently diagnosed with a rare form of dementia so Michael was determined to do it sooner rather than later, even despite health →



Caption: Avril walking

problems of his own.

Avril enlisted into the British Army in 1975 after studying medicine at Liverpool University. She spent most of her service in Germany and was discharged in 1981 with the rank of captain. In 2000, she returned to England and married Michael who had also served in the Armed Forces before becoming a civilian medical officer with the Royal Marines.

Back in the UK, Avril worked as a GP and set up a gynaecologist centre in Bridgewater.

Michael says: "One of the first signs of Avril's dementia was sight loss. In around 2010, we noticed she was



Caption: Avril standing on a path

beginning to have difficulty seeing the keys on her laptop properly and then began to have small scrapes in the car as her spatial awareness deteriorated.

"Over time, Avril has become more confused and often mistakes one object for another, for example, a knife with a spoon. One day, we were taking the dog to the groomers and Avril entered the hairdressers next door and handed over the dog explaining she'd be back in two hours.

"We treat the misunderstandings and confusion with humour. It's all we can do.

"I've always promised I would take her on this adventure. None of us know



Caption: Avril and husband, Michael

how long we've got and with Avril's sight deteriorating, it wasn't an option to leave it any longer."

The couple chose to walk the Camino Frances route to reach Santiago de Compostela, also known as the French Way, and set off at the end of April.

Michael says: "The full route took us six weeks to complete and in that time we only took two days off from walking. Most days we would start at 6am before the day became too hot.

"We visited some incredibly beautiful places along the way. When we set off it was spring and we walked past striking poppy fields. I thought of the great uncle I never met who fell at

Flanders Fields and we thought of all those who have gone before us.

"We really took our time to take in the different shades of colour as we walked - the greens of the grasses and hedges, the yellows of the different fields of wheat. I described everything to Avril as we went.

"The walk was not without its challenges; we had some extremely sad news from home in May. Avril wanted to be back at home with her family, but after much discussion and support from her brother back home we stuck with it.

"Avril is incredibly physically fit but I miscalculated my own fitness level and after about a month I started to get tired, especially after consecutive 30km days. But I knew we had to keep going."

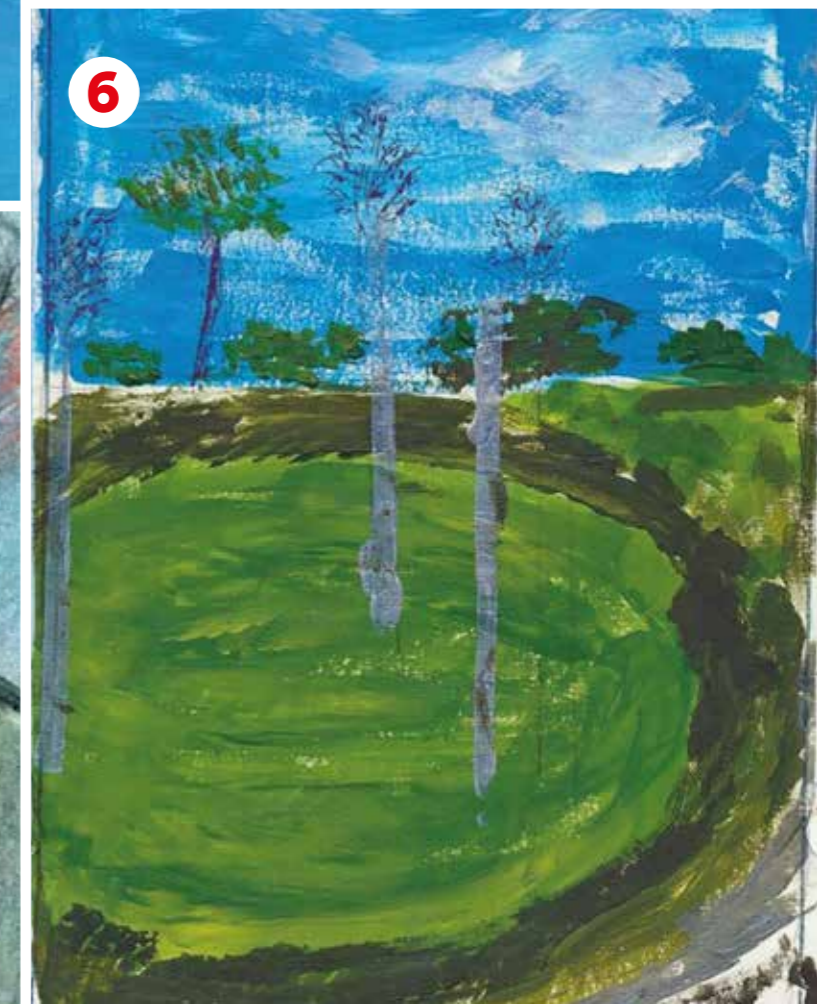
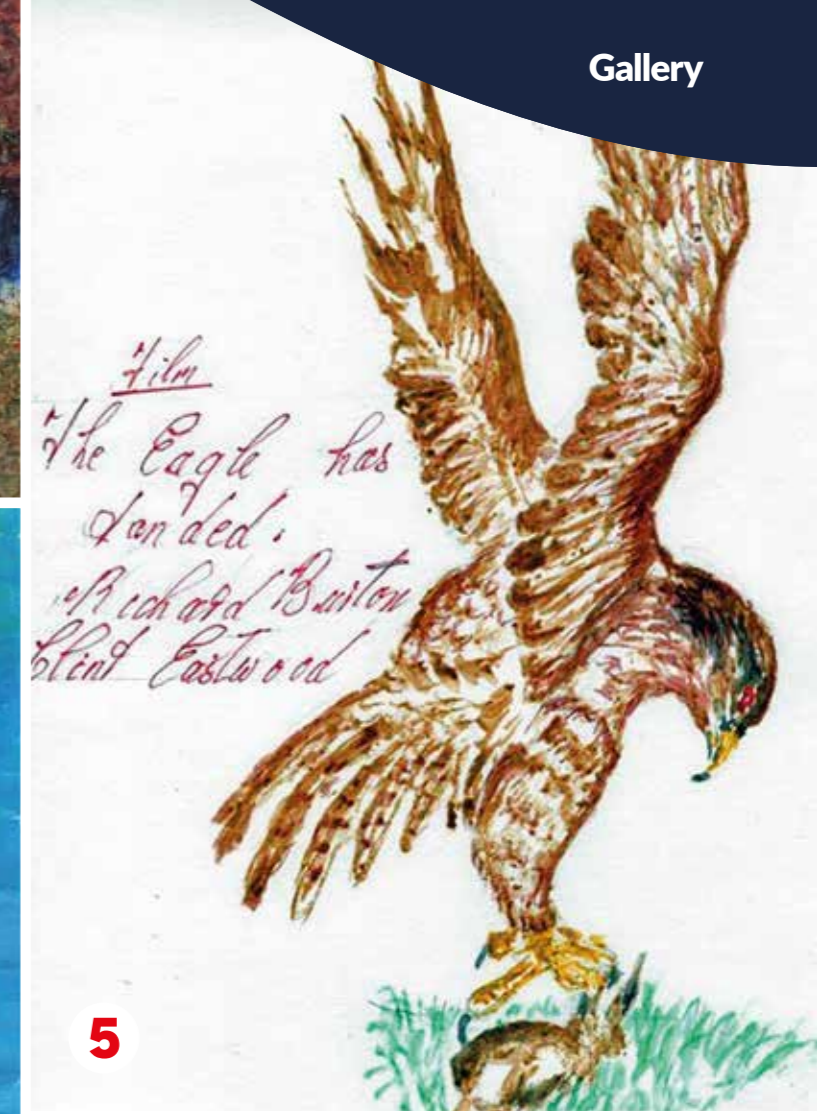
Michael now hopes to make the walk an annual event in order to raise money for the world's first ever centre for rare dementias which will provide support, education and research for health care professionals.

He aims to arrange for others who have been diagnosed with rare forms of dementia to take on the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, this time along the Camino Ingles route which though still incredibly beautiful is less physically challenging. 🍷

Artistic flair

We are pleased to present more artwork by our Members for the National Creative Project

Captions: **1. Carol Sharpe - Lighthouse in Blue** **2. Michael King - Autumn**
3. Peter O'Malley - Sunflower **4. Steve Thompson - Churchill**
5. Alan Warren - The Eagle Has Landed **6. Mickie Robinson - View From My Flat Window**



Making the most of my life

After losing his sight in Afghanistan, inspiring Member, **John Dawson**, 34, shares his incredible journey

At just 23-years-old, Guardsman John Dawson, was shot in the head in Afghanistan. He lost his right eye and thought he wouldn't walk again.

Eleven years on and John, who is now 34, has recently spent a week participating in an extensive wellbeing programme at Llandudno joining in with boxing, air rifle shooting, archery and more.

John joined the Grenadier Guards in 2009 when he was 18. He trained at Catterick Barracks and spent a year guarding the royal palaces before he was told the news that he would be deployed to Afghanistan.

"I didn't know what to do when I left school and decided to join the Army as that would be a solid career and I'd travel the world. Well, it turned out to be an extremely short career, but I

don't regret my decision to join.

"When I was told I was going to Afghanistan, I was happy to go. It was my job and what I'd trained for, but I had a feeling I'd be injured. I just didn't know how."

In 2012, while on duty protecting the locals in Helmand Province from the Taliban, John was shot in the head by a sniper.

"My friend had been guarding the roof and I took over from him so he could get some food. I'd only been up there ten minutes when I was shot. The impact threw me across the roof. My friend ran up to find me and thought I was dead due to my injuries."

John has no memory of what happened next, but now knows he was rescued from the roof by helicopter



Caption: John and the Llandudno Wellbeing Specialists team

which was under enemy fire. He was transported to Camp Bastion where he was stabilised before being flown back to Brize Norton and cared for at Queen Elizabeth Hospital where he remained in a coma for six weeks.

"I underwent reconstruction surgery as I'd lost the right-hand side of my skull and, along with that, my right eye got left behind on that roof in Afghanistan. I had a titanium plate fitted and a prosthetic eye."

A doctor from Headley Court visited

John and told him there was a space for him there where he could be rehabilitated.

"I was at Headley Court for two years. To start with I couldn't walk, talk, speak or eat. I had to learn to do all those things again.

"In the early days, I was incredibly angry and would try and run the nurses down in my wheelchair. I couldn't make sense of what was happening to me.

"I'm in a much better place now, I →



Caption: Above left: Boxing sessions, above right: Air rifle shooting session, below right: John practicing cleaning strategies

have my down days, but I had friends that lost their lives in Afghanistan - I was one of the lucky ones that got to come home. I have to deal with the cards I was dealt and make the most of my life.

"I still have my left eye and I've been able to see my two children grow up. I won't let what happened define who I am.

"Stays at Llandudno have given me a chance to recharge my batteries

and the help I've been given with technology has made my life so much easier in my flat. The Amazon Alexa I have helps me to stay in touch with my children. And my Community Support Worker, Anne, is always on the end of the phone if I need her.

"I'm so happy that I have Blind Veterans UK in my corner. Nothing is too much trouble for the staff and the other veterans are fantastic. I'll definitely be back at one of the Centres for another stay soon." 🇬🇧



Listen here

We can't wait to go back!

New Member **Michelle Campbell** started identifying as a transgender woman around 20 years ago. Here, she writes about her first ever week in Llandudno

I was in the RAF in the 70s and started identifying as a woman many years ago but only recently came out on social media. What really surprised me was that some ex-military Facebook sites, usually awash with banter and crude humour, have been nothing but welcoming.

The military community can be surprisingly accepting and adaptable.

I have glaucoma and joined Blind Veterans UK earlier this year. In April, my partner/carers, Brian, and I enjoyed our first ever week at the Llandudno Centre - and I stayed there throughout as Michelle.

We would usually find going on holiday quite daunting, what with Brian's mobility issues and my vision impairment, but going to the



→ **Caption: Michelle sat on an aircraft**

Centre made it so easy and enjoyable that we can't wait to go back as soon as possible.

Before we'd even arrived, we were impressed by the comfortable transport there, driven by attentive and professional staff. On arrival our baggage was whisked away to our large, airy, bright, and clean room, which I'm told had a fine view over Llandudno and the sea. I'm always happy when I'm near the sea.

The staff at the Centre were delightful - everyone treated me as Michelle from the moment I arrived, to the moment I left. What more could I want?

Blind Veterans UK made me feel as welcome as I hope and trust everyone is made to feel. I was particularly impressed that no one singled me out for any kind of special consideration beyond my disability; this is exactly what I'd hoped for.



Caption: Michelle standing in front of an aircraft

It meant a lot to me that the staff were so natural, accepting and, frankly, just completely ordinary with me. And yet they occasionally had the kindness to compliment me on a dress or something.

On the first night at dinner time, I noticed that there were two place cards for me - one saying 'Michael' and the other saying 'Michelle'. As a transgender woman I was quite touched by this gesture as I do identify

with both names. I think this level of care is typical of the way the staff at the Centre look after their guests.

On one occasion Brian and I were going out into town and, on our way out, we noticed that a seam on my dress had unravelled. I went to reception to ask for a safety pin and when one couldn't be found, Gaynor, one of the reception team, went to the craft centre for a needle and thread. She came back and stitched the seam for me before I went out. Such a caring service!



Caption: Michelle and Brian

Everyone at the Llandudno Centre wants to help. If you're unsure of where you're going, a member of staff will always appear to ask what can be done to help you. Nothing seems to be any trouble.

One of the biggest pleasures of the stay was sitting at the dinner table and in the bar exchanging experiences and insights with other people with glaucoma.

And, on top of this, the town of Llandudno was something of a surprise: - we couldn't remember the last time we'd seen such a clean and attractive town.

I should also add that, judging by the stares, I may well have been the first transwoman ever to be seen there! 🌈

Member voice

Our Member Engagement team updates you on the latest opportunities and upcoming events



Caption: Billy Baxter

Your voices are important to us, and this month we would like you to share your experiences and stories from your military careers. We would like to hear from Members with a National Service, Regular, or Reservist background with a great story to tell.

Your Member Engagement Officer, Billy Baxter, would like to hear from you directly. It's important we celebrate our pasts, so it is there to be

remembered in the future.

■ Please contact **Billy.Baxter@blindveterans.org.uk**

Member Engagement Events

These military-related events are an opportunity to meet up with other Members.

- 10 September 2023: Help for Heroes Community Games (Loughborough)
- 22 September 2023: HMS Raleigh Pass Out (Cornwall)
- 19 October 2023: RAF Cranwell Pass Out (RAF Cranwell)
- 11 November 2023: Union Jack Club Engagement Event (London)
- 12 November 2023: Cenotaph Parade (London)
- 23 November 2023: HMS Temeraire PT Pass Out (Portsmouth)
- 11 February 2024: The Birmingham International Tattoo (Birmingham)

■ **To register your interest to attend any of these events, please contact your community teams for further support.** 🇬🇧

Forces Fact

Flag Heads is a term used by the Army to describe Lancer regiments and Lancers. The term comes from the thin lances contained within the cap badge or Motto. The only current "Flag Heads" are the Royal Lancers.

Sent in by: Rob Loseby

This Month in History

August 2, 2023, marks the 33rd Anniversary of the start of the Gulf War, when Saddam Hussein invaded his small, oil-rich neighbour in the summer of 1990, the world faced its first full-scale post-Cold War international crisis.



Caption: Challenger tank during Operation Desert Storm

PHC HOLMES / WIKIPEDIA

Military Slang

Gleaming - commonly used term by all servicemen and women to describe something that is good, excellent, or impressive.

Sent in by: Kevin Allerton (Member and Working Age Member Liaison Officer)

■ If you want to share your "Forces Fact" please get in touch via email: **ForcesFact@blindveterans.org.uk** or contact your community support worker who will be able to submit on your behalf.



Listen here



Caption: Salad leaves

National creative wellbeing programme

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

To sign up to or find out more about the following creative activities or hobby circles, simply call 01273 391447. You can leave a message on our answer machine if you'd just like to request a project pack. All our projects come with VI and reader-friendly

instructions, as well as the option of audio on a USB stick if requested.

GARDENING

Salad Leaves

A beautiful and tactile mix of colourful salad leaves which will brighten up

GARNAR/ ADOBE STOCK



Caption: Sketchbook

your windowsill and your dinner plate. No need to worry about tiny seeds as we have stuck them to a tissue paper sheet, so they are nicely spaced and easy to plant. We'll send you some delicious recipe ideas to try as you harvest your crop.

ART

Sketchbook for Beginners and Improvers - August, September, October

For both aspiring and established artists, another exciting selection of challenges to start you off on your drawing journey or enliven

your practice. The sketchbook is the foundation of an artist's work and we've put together a selection of themes to inspire you. You'll receive an A4 spiral bound sketchbook, with carefully chosen high contrast drawing materials, and some materials to add colour to your work.

CREATIVE HOBBY CIRCLES

Facilitated by the NCWP team and our Member volunteers, Members with a shared interest meet monthly by Teams telephone or video call for a chat and to offer ideas, tips and support with ongoing NCWP projects.

Gardening: very popular with those who've signed up for our gardening projects, a chat group to share the seasons and offer support with VI friendly gardening indoors and out.

Knitting, crochet or weaving: for those of you who enjoy a chat about your latest projects with wool.

Painting and drawing: if you enjoy doing art whether just starting out or a seasoned artist, this is the space to chat with other VI artists and exchange ideas tips and support.

Woodwork: for those of you interested in woodwork, woodturning, wooden model making, for peer support, tips and encouragement →



with your wooden model projects.

Photography: we have a Facebook page (Blind Veterans UK Photography) and a fortnightly Photography chat group. Anyone with an interest in photography is welcome. It's a chance for a chat and there are regular guest speakers.

Thank you to those who have completed and returned the surveys we have been sending out in the NCWP packs since May. Please continue to do this for each project you do. Your feedback is very important and we will use it to plan future projects and services.

■ **The National Creative Wellbeing Programme team** 🍷

Caption: Camera

OPPORTUNITY FOR VI AND BLIND ARTISTS. International Drawing Competition for the Visually Impaired.

An invitation from Charles Emmanuel Schelfhout, President of Art & Low Vision, himself a blind artist: 'Year after year, the competition has become an effective tool that allows visually impaired people to avoid the trap of boredom and even depression; to create an independent activity and to rediscover lost joys.'

The finalists' works will be exhibited at the major ophthalmology congress OB 2023 in Brussels, where their authors will be rewarded with magnificent prizes.'

■ **More information can be found on their website:**
www.ArtAndLowVision.be

Member stories from our NCWP

Our National Creative Wellbeing Programme has provided opportunities for Members to harness their creativity and also develop long lasting friendships. Here are some of their stories

The Best Fundraising Team

Members **Noeline Charlesworth** and **Muriel Frampton** have built a strong bond through the NCWP Knitting Hobby Circle, which is a monthly telephone group chat.

They have been virtual friends for three years and a couple of weeks ago they finally managed to meet each other face to face, whilst on holiday at the Llandudno Centre and they had a joyous week together.

Wanting to do more than just catch up and relax, Noeline organised a fundraising event. With a table set up in Hogwarts, Noeline asked Muriel to knit some rather marvellous hedgehogs with sweets hidden inside them. Muriel, being such a whizz with the knitting needles, knocked out



➔ **Caption: Noeline and Muriel**



Caption: Muriel's marvellous hedgehogs

a fair few hedgehogs, which sold out immediately. What a team!

■ **The NCWP Knitting Hobby Circle runs on the third Thursday of each month and is open to any Member interested in knitting, crochet, weaving or wool craft. Simply call 01273 391447 for more information.**

Oh Play That Thing

Member Steve Thompson tells us how the NCWP has helped him in different ways and encourages other Members to give it a go.

I'm very proud to be a Member of Blind Veterans UK and they have helped me a lot over the years.

One of the things I've enjoyed the most is the National Creative Project, especially during the pandemic. They provided a much-needed distraction and a focus for my creativity during lockdown.

I think I've done most of the art and craft projects, as I've always been interested in art. My other loves are jazz music and theatre. I used to be a jazz critic for my local paper in Guernsey. I like to draw and paint and have used jazz as an inspiration for my artworks.

I was lucky enough to see the great Chet Baker at Ronnie Scotts in London and for a while I hosted my own jazz show on local BBC radio and once did a talk at the Blind Veterans UK Brighton Centre.

Sadly, I lost my amazing wife Kate in January this year. As you can imagine I've been devastated by this and am still coming to terms with life without her. For a while I no longer felt like doing anything creative as I felt overwhelmed by grief. My wife was my everything and I'm still feeling lost without her.



Caption: Steve with CSW Peter Hatfield



Caption: Left: Steve at the BBC, right: Steve's portrait sketches

However, I do believe in the power of art and music to heal and have started to paint and draw again. By focusing on something else like music, painting or a drawing, you are shifting the focus away from your grief just for a few moments and this can be a positive thing. I can quite literally get lost in jazz music and in art. I genuinely believe it has the power to help you through the tough times.

I would encourage anyone to have a

go at the projects as you don't have to be an expert to enjoy it. Some of the artwork produced and published in the Review each month is amazing. But what really matters is the taking part.

As the joke goes: "A person was walking in Columbia Square in New York. They approached five jazz musicians and asked them how to get to Carnegie Hall, and one man replied "practice, practice, practice." 🎷

Carers Review

A page dedicated to the families and friends who care for our Members, **Stacey Barham** shares the latest opportunities and useful information to support you in your caring role

In honour of Carers Week last month, we want to recognise the support that is needed for unpaid carers.

The pandemic has made a difference to us all and, in some cases, has amplified the difficulties that carers face on a daily basis.

The theme for Carers Week 2023 was 'recognising and supporting carers in the community'. With this in mind, I thought I would highlight some of the useful organisations that can help you locally.

Local carers centres and support organisations

Many organisations offer support over the telephone, online, or by visiting you at home, but there are also carers centres in some cities.

For example, in the South East, there is Care for the Carers in East Sussex or Carers Support East Kent. On the other side of the country in the South

West, there is Cornwall Carers Service.

■ **To find out what support you can access locally, you can use the two following websites:**

www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/our-local-directory/

www.gov.uk/find-local-council

Blind Veterans UK support

We're not just here for our blind veterans. We're also here for those who care for our Members, day in, day out.

We understand how difficult it can be for spouses, partners and family members when someone loses their



Caption: Billy and wife, Karen, outside the Llandudno Centre

sight. We offer advice and support to help you adjust to looking after someone with a vision impairment.

We'll also make sure that you're caring for yourself too and connect you with other carers who share similar experiences so you can share your story and learn from others. To make this happen, we organise Carers Breaks at the centres, as well as events and coffee mornings in your local area through your community teams. If you would like to see how you could connect with other carers, please contact your local community team.

Carers and families engagement panel

Are you a carer to a Blind Veterans UK

Member? Then why not get involved in shaping the support you receive from the charity by joining our carers and families engagement panel?

The panel meets once a month to discuss the needs and experiences of our carers, and suggest ideas for social activities, and how we can best share valuable information with one another.

■ **Anyone who is a family member, partner or friend caring for one of our Members or assisting them with day-to-day activities, is welcome to join. Simply contact Stacey Barham on 01273 391483 or at stacey.barham@blindveterans.org.uk.**



Quiz time

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

1. What paper size shares its name with a road from Bristol to London?

2. Which company created the Kinder Egg?
a) Nestle b) Ferrero c) Cadbury

3. What does the acronym 'AKA' stand for?

4. On its maiden voyage, the Great Western sailed from which location?
a) Bristol b) Dover c) Southampton

5. What is the record for how many hot dogs can be eaten in 10 minutes?
a) 36 b) 68 c) 76

6. In which sport could you have a Fosbury flop?

7. The Royal Command Performance is now known as what?

8. What is the smallest Australian state?

9. What British bank note ceased to be legal tender in 1988?

10. True or false: Humans breathe in and out approximately 20,000 times a day.

Answers on Page 47



Family news

Birthdays

Kathleen Birchall who celebrates her 102nd birthday on 13 August 2023.

Stanley Cox who celebrates his 100th birthday on 8 August 2023.

Leslie Dean who celebrates his 101st birthday on 3 September 2023.

Josephine Donaldson who celebrates her 102nd birthday on 5 August 2023.

Reginald Eyles who celebrates his 105th birthday on 6 August 2023.

Frederick Jewett who celebrates his 100th birthday on 21 August 2023.

John Morton who celebrates his 103rd birthday on 30 August 2023.

Sydney Podd who celebrates his 101st birthday on 17 August 2023.

George Simpson who celebrates his 100th birthday on 12 August 2023.

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

Condolences

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

Lillian Culley who died on 19 June 2023. She was the wife of Roger Culley.

Kathleen Cunningham who died on 1 June 2023. She was the wife of John Cunningham.

Audrey Dickins who died on 19 May 2023. She was the wife of Alan Dickins.

Irene Alice Mabel Pepperell who died on 1 January 2023. She was the wife of William Pepperell



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

Michael Edwin Absalom of Havant, Hampshire died on 1 June 2023 aged 96. He served as a Marine in the Royal Marines.

Edward Joseph Barnett of Romford died on 26 May 2023 aged 84. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Service Corps.

Douglas Roy Beeston of Llanymynech, Powys died on 28 June 2023 aged 89. He served as a Fusilier in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

Robert Hood Brown of Bourne, Lincolnshire died on 9 June 2023 aged 75. He served as a Sergeant in the Royal Air Force.

George Barry Clarke of Dorchester, Dorset died on 18 June 2023 aged 98. He served as a Sub Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve.

Peter Ferguson Collins of Edinburgh died on 13 June 2023 aged 83. He served as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

Michael Joseph Doyle of Yate, Bristol died on 5 June 2023 aged 89. He served as an Acting Boatswain in the Royal Navy.

Bernard Eardley of Bury, Lancashire died on 24 December 2022 aged 86. He served as a Fusilier in the Lancashire Fusiliers.

Brian Edwards of Manchester died on 1 May 2023 aged 84. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

William Gaisford of Blandford Forum, Dorset died on 15 February 2023 aged 97. He served as a Sergeant in the Royal Air Force.

Harold Goodall of Wilmslow, Cheshire died on 1 June 2023 aged 102. He served as an Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Peter D Grey of Newcastle upon Tyne died on 4 June 2023 aged 82. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

Jeffrey Gronow of Carmarthen, Dyfed died on 15 June 2023 aged 81. He served as a Craftsman in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Gordon Edward Hammond of Budleigh Salterton, Devon died on 20 June 2023 aged 91. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

Ronald Harrison of Tamworth, Staffordshire died on 1 June 2023 aged 88. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

Michael Hawley of Dudley, West Midlands died on 5 June 2023 aged 86. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Signals.

William Head of Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire died on 1 June 2023 aged 90. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

Carol Elizabeth Heald of Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland died on 9 June 2023 aged 80. She served as a Private in the Women's Royal Army Corps.



John Brian Heaton of Colne, Lancashire died on 15 June 2023 aged 89. He served as a Private in the East Lancashire Regiment.

Jude James of Lymington, Hampshire died on 1 June 2023 aged 91. He served as a Leading Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Kaye Johnston of Larbert, Stirlingshire died on 22 May 2023 aged 87. He served in the Royal Artillery.

Delme Ieuan Caradog Owain Jones of Llanelli, Dyfed died on 2 June 2023 aged 89. He served as a Private in the Welch Regiment.

Derek Keeton of Lincoln died on 3 June 2023 aged 85. He served as a Flight Sergeant in the Royal Air Force.

John Alan Kelsall of Stockport, Cheshire died on 14 June 2023 aged 91. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Army Catering Corps.

Joseph Kemp of Sunderland died on 3 June 2023 aged 97. He served as a Private in the General Service Corps.

Charles Knight of Widnes, Cheshire died on 1 June 2023 aged 74. He served as a Senior Aircraftsman in the Royal Air Force.

Ivor LARBalestier of Bath died on 1 July 2023 aged 93. He served as an Ordinance Artificer 4th Class in the Royal Navy.

Vincent Loble of Lincoln died on 30 June 2023 aged 88. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Pay Corps.

Leonard Cecil Mason of Stevenage, Hertfordshire died on 8 June 2023 aged 95. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

Eileen Beatrice McCombe of Carrickfergus, County Antrim died on 6 June 2023 aged 100. She served as a Leading Aircraftwoman in the Women's Royal Air Force.

Michael Jakeman Moore of Alfreton, Derbyshire died on 5 May 2023 aged 90. He served as a Craftsman in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Joseph Mussett of Birmingham died on 3 June 2023 aged 71. He served as a Private in the Royal Anglian Regiment.

Arthur Nash of Reading died on 24 June 2023 aged 91. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

Elizabeth-Ann Neal of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire died on 13 June 2023 aged 100. She served as a Corporal in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

John Norris of Hull, East Yorkshire died on 1 June 2023 aged 70. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

Raymond O'Brien of Wallsend, Tyne and Wear died on 19 June 2023 aged 87. He served as a Private in the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers.

James Walter Owen of King's Lynn, Norfolk died on 15 June 2023 aged 96. He served as a Signaller in the Royal Signals.

David Michael Pidd of Boston, Lincolnshire died on 28 November 2022 aged 85. He served as a Private in the Green Howards (Alexandra, Princess of Wales Own Yorkshire Regiment).

Brian Portlock of Heywood, Lancashire died on 1 June 2023 aged 85. He served as a Steward in the Royal Navy.

Christine Mary Power of Llanidloes, Powys died on 3 April 2023 aged 102. She served as a Nurse in the Royal Navy.

Peter Ransford of Worksop died on 23 May 2023 aged 87. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

Lucy Woodhouse Seddon of Crieff, Perthshire died on 1 June 2023 aged 99. She served as a Private in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

David James Shaw of Arundel, West Sussex died on 5 June 2023 aged 89. He served as a Craftsman in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Graham Barlow Strong of Newport, Gwent died on 20 June 2023 aged 96. He served in the Royal Navy.

Edward Alan Taylor of Ipswich, Suffolk died on 21 June 2023 aged 84. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

Keith Thompson of Saltburn-by-the-Sea, Cleveland died on 15 June 2023 aged 93. He served as a Private in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Peter Thomas Walter of Bourne, Lincolnshire died on 15 June 2023 aged 88. He served as a Warrant Officer in the Royal Air Force.

John Henson Webb of Seaton, Devon died on 16 March 2023 aged 96. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Hampshire Regiment.

Robert Clive Welch of Staines-upon-Thames, Middlesex died on 8 June 2023 aged 92. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Engineers.

Ronald Douglas Wells of Watford died on 7 June 2023 aged 91. He served as a Private in the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment.

John Wiltshire of Littlehampton, West Sussex died on 30 May 2023 aged 86. He served as a Private in the East Surrey Regiment.



AGENTURFOTOGRAFIN / ADOBE STOCK



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**.

A different format?

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

The Brighton Centre 01273 307 811

The Llandudno Centre 01492 868 700

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 40 1. A4 2. Ferrero 3. Also known as 4. Bristol 5. 76 6. High Jump 7. The Royal Variety Show 8. Tasmania 9. The £1 note 10. True



Lottery prize increase

Our top prize in the Blind Veterans UK lottery is doubling to a huge £1,000!

The first draw of our new prize is on 18 August, and we'd love it if you could take part. As well as lots of other prizes to be won each week, as a lottery player you'll have the added bonus of being automatically entered into our quarterly raffle – where you could win **£15,000!**

You can play for just **£1** a month. Each ticket you kindly purchase helps support your fellow ex-Service men and women, to rebuild their lives after sight loss.

Please visit lottery.blindveterans.org.uk to play, when you play online you'll be saving our charity's money too. If you prefer you can also phone us on 0330 002 0285. Good luck!



Phone us on **0330 002 0285**
Play online **lottery.blindveterans.org.uk**