

## TENACIOUS BY NAME...

AN ALL-BLESMA CREW PLOTS A COURSE  
FOR ADVENTURE ON THE TALL SHIP SV TENACIOUS

### Remembering those we lost

100 years since the end of WWI, Remembrance Day 2018 was more poignant than ever **p28**



### The SAS and The Falklands War

Blesma's ex-Chairman has written his memoir about commanding SAS troops in combat **p50**

### This Is Not For You was for us

24 Members receive rave reviews as they star in a production to commemorate WWI **p54**





# RUSH<sup>FOOT</sup>

NOT JUST ANOTHER CARBON COPY



CHOPART

KID

LOPRO

ROGUE

HIPRO

H2O

ROVER

Dynamic

Durable

Smooth

 orthoeurope<sup>®</sup>

Discover the full RUSH range  
at [ortho-europe.com](http://ortho-europe.com)

Ortho Europe, Ability House, Nuffield Way, Abingdon, OX14 1RL  
01235 552 895 | [info@ortho-europe.com](mailto:info@ortho-europe.com) | [www.ortho-europe.com](http://www.ortho-europe.com)



# CONTENTS

Inside the Winter 2018 issue



Photography: IWM/Getty Images Peter Holdgate, Andy Bate, Simon Hildrew

## News

**ON THE UP DOWN UNDER** 04  
Blesma Members steal the show for Team UK at the fourth Invictus Games in Australia

**SPOTLIGHT ON** 10  
Jonny Holloway fought to save his leg for two years. What happened next changed his life

**YOUR NEW FAVOURITE THING** 16  
New year, new you? It couldn't be easier to try something new in 2019. Just give Blesma a call

**HAVE FUN, RAISE FUNDS** 20  
There are lots of fundraising events planned for 2019, so why not run, jump or bake for Blesma?



## Features

**1918-2018: ONE CENTURY ON** 28  
100 years after the end of WWI, our Members remember during a special day at the Cenotaph

**SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN** 34  
The Association's chaplain discusses belief, bereavement and being there for soldiers

**ADVENTURE AHOY!** 36  
Members crew a tall ship and set sail for the open seas to commemorate the end of WWI

**THE FALKLANDS AND THE SAS** 50  
Blesma's former Chairman, Sir Cedric Delves, has written a book about his Falklands War

## A Day in the Life

**VANESSA LUCAS** 58  
absolutely loves her job as Outreach Officer for the Midlands Area. She explains why...



## USEFUL CONTACTS

### Editorial

020 8548 3513  
od@blesma.org

### Membership Services

020 8548 3515  
diw@blesma.org

### Activities

020 8548 7094  
activities@blesma.org

### Fundraising

020 8548 3517  
fundraising@blesma.org

### PR and Media

020 3954 3023  
commmgr@blesma.org

### General Enquiries

020 8590 1124  
chadwellheath@blesma.org



Please send any written correspondence to the Blesma office at: Frankland Moore House, 185-187 High Road, Chadwell Heath, Romford, Essex RM6 6NA

**Special thanks to:** All our Members, Heather Betts, Brian Chenier, Lorna Dorrell, Barry Le Grys, Jess Mackinnon, Jess March, Emily Mizon, Bryony Stevens, Ian Waller **Blesma Magazine** is published on behalf of the **British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association (Blesma)** by **ScratchCreate**. British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association Charity Numbers: England and Wales 1084189, Scotland SC010315; Company Limited Guarantee No. 4102768. Contact ScratchCreate at david@scratchcreate.co.uk or paul@scratchcreate.co.uk Printed by Wyndeham Grange. This publication may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form, in whole or in part, without the prior permission of the publishers. All prices and addresses are correct at the time of going to press. Every care has been taken in the preparation of this magazine to ensure the contents is fully accurate, but neither ScratchCreate nor Blesma can be held responsible for the accuracy of the information herein, any omissions or errors, or any consequence arising from it. The views expressed by contributors, customers and Members might not reflect the views of ScratchCreate or Blesma. Publication date: Winter 2018. © Blesma 2018.



# NEWS

News, views and opinion from the world of Blesma

## UK top of the medals table Down Under

**T**eam UK topped the medals table at the fourth Invictus Games, which took place in Australia at the end of October, thanks in part to a strong contingent of Blesma Members. Held at the Sydney Olympic Park, which was the centrepiece of the 2000 Olympic Games, competitors from 18 nations contested 11 sports in the latest Invictus Games, which were created specifically for injured, wounded and sick Armed Forces veterans by Prince Harry in 2014.

And the military spirit certainly shone through down under. Mark Ormrod, 35, a former Royal Marines Commando who lost three limbs to an IED on Christmas Eve 2007, may have won four gold, one silver and two bronze medals in swimming, rowing and athletics, but his highlight of the Games was seeing a friend succeed.

“I met my own target, and I used a few hang-ups from last year’s Games where I felt some of the categories hadn’t worked well, as motivation,” said Mark after the event. “Sydney was a blur, absolutely crazy, and it was great to win, but the best bit was seeing my roommate, John Mitchell, get a bronze in the powerlifting.”

“I know what he’s been through and how hard he’s worked in the build-up to the Games, which makes his achievement even more impressive. There was a great atmosphere among the team and that kind of thing summed it up – if you weren’t competing, you were supporting.”

Blesma Member and Team UK’s Vice Captain Spencer Bull, 51, who has multiple sclerosis, couldn’t agree more.

“Watching individuals I’d seen at the start of selection, who had regained their self-esteem and confidence doing things they’d never dreamt of, was hugely rewarding,” he said.

“It was all pretty special. The Australians are brilliant at doing this kind of event. I felt so privileged to compete in sailing with the Sydney Opera House to my left and Sydney Harbour Bridge behind me!

“And in the swimming I competed in front of 7,500 people in the same pool that Ian Thorpe had raced in during the Olympics. I’ll never forget that!”

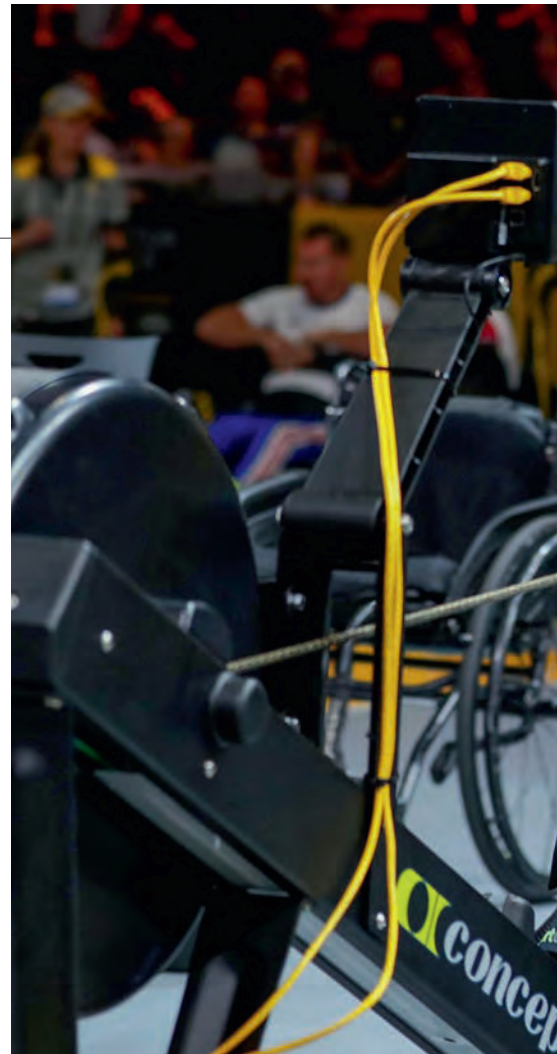
### COOPERATION AND COMPETITION

For Spencer, who served with The Royal Green Jackets and The Rifles, the fact that his wife and three sons could see him compete was a vital element of the Games.

“It was very special that my family came out,” he says. “I was able to show my children that life goes on. They’d never seen me compete, or do anything like that before. It closed a loop for me – I was able to be a role model to my kids in a way that I couldn’t have been a few years ago.”

There was superb cooperation between the teams, too. “In one swimming event, the Australian coach told me there was only one guy in the classification, so he couldn’t compete,” Mark said. “So I gave

**“I WAS ABLE TO SHOW MY CHILDREN THAT LIFE GOES ON. IT CLOSED A LOOP FOR ME - I WAS ABLE TO BE A ROLE MODEL TO MY KIDS IN A WAY I COULDN’T A FEW YEARS AGO”**

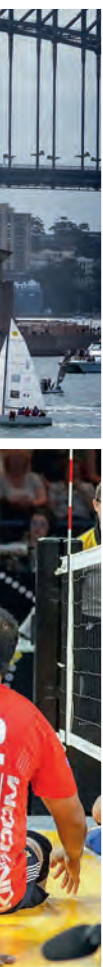






**Above: Mark Ormrod rows his way to gold**

**Below: Prince Harry, who started the Games in 2014**



**Armistice Day**  
Members remember (p28)

# welcome

We come to the close of the centenary year commemorating the end of WWI. Blesma was born in the aftermath of The Great War and, for nearly 100 years, the intent of the Association has remained unchanged. But while Blesma shall never deflect from its determination to be there for its Members, throughout their lives, the method has changed with the times in order to stay relevant to the membership.

Blesma remembered WWI, with Members at the heart of the activity. Members formed the cast of *This Is Not For You* and crewed a tall ship to Jersey and France. The Autumn issue of *Blesma Magazine* was a commemorative issue, brought to life by Members. All these projects were challenging, moving and positive for the participants; a fitting commemoration.

We continue our approach to build upon the strengths of the Association, adapting as appropriate to meet the new demands and opportunities of changing times and circumstances. Careful management, combined with the continuing generosity of our donors, has ensured that our financial situation is healthy.

We have thus been able to increase annual spending on Membership Services and the Activities Programme. Grants have increased by 46 per cent over the past four years to support the additional cost of living with limb loss and to counter distress caused by tighter public spending. Next year, there will be 60 events in the Activities calendar, with more emphasis on regional- and family-orientated activities, all aimed at improving quality of life and overcoming issues associated with limb loss.

Our reserves permit us to think long term and spend wisely, for greater effect. The Board is very clear that Blesma must be there through life for its Members, ready for the unforeseen.

The UK Government and Devolved Administrations launched a Strategy For Our Veterans late this year. It pursues six core themes; from veterans being able to build healthy relationships and integrate into their communities, to veterans having the resilience and awareness to be law-abiding and contributing citizens. We were consulted, and I am pleased Blesma already includes a good deal of the themed content in our thinking and our own public Strategic Plan.

Looking forward to the coming years, the UK Government acknowledges that long-term health and wellbeing needs for the most complex injured will need close attention, and Blesma aims to be engaged fully in this arena. We will continue to work hard to influence government policy to safeguard the interests of our membership.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I wish all Blesma Members, supporters and staff a very happy Christmas and a fruitful New Year.

**General Sir Adrian Bradshaw KCB OBE**  
Chairman





**Thou shalt not pass:  
Peter Dunning halts  
the Australians**



**Focused: Double  
gold medal cyclist  
Michael Swain...**



**...and Team UK  
grabbed silver in  
sitting volleyball**

him a race! I'd never swum breaststroke before, but I did about 20 minutes practice and then we went for it." Needless to say, Mark came away with the gold!

Scott McNeice, 34, from Derbyshire, whose left leg has been amputated above the knee, took part in his first Invictus Games in Australia. "I enjoyed all of it," he said. "I'm only a year post-op, so I'm still getting used to being an amputee.

"I'm an archer, but it's only been a few weeks since I've made the move from shooting in a wheelchair to standing up, because I've now got a new prosthetic that can automatically lock. I loved the team shoot and I also competed in cycling,

swimming, wheelchair rugby, wheelchair athletics and sitting volleyball," added Scott, who is still serving in the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps. "It was a bit too much really, I think I'll concentrate on fewer sports next time! But I had a great time, and picked up two silver medals and a bronze.

"Sport has been an important part of my rehabilitation. People thought I wouldn't be ready for Invictus, but I proved them wrong. Competing has really helped me adapt to my life after injury."

That is something Mark Ormrod has witnessed time and time again. "I've seen this event change lives – even save lives,"

he said. "It gives injured veterans focus and motivation – all the things you can lose when you're injured. It can get you out of a dark place and flip your life around."

Mark, says he is now "done" as an Invictus athlete, but he will be staying active – doing crossfit and Jiu-Jitsu – and he hopes to become a mentor.

It was Scott McNeice who stole the show at the very end of the Games, though – by proposing to his partner Caitlin at the closing ceremony in front of 50,000 people and a huge global TV audience.

"It was a great moment and she was genuinely surprised," he laughs. That was perhaps the best result of the Games!





## INVICTUS 2018 ROLL OF HONOUR

*Team UK topped the medal table in Australia, winning 72 medals – 28 gold, 22 silver and 22 bronze – well ahead of Ukraine in second place with 20. Here's to all Blesma's athletes*

<b>Spencer Bull</b> (Vice Captain)	Athletics, Sailing, Swimming	<b>Pa Modou Njie</b>	Indoor Rowing, Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> )
<b>Andy Carlton</b>	Athletics, Swimming	<b>Mark Ormrod</b>	Athletics ( <b>Bronze</b> in IF6 Discus and Shotput), Indoor Rowing ( <b>Gold</b> in IR1 Four-Minute Endurance and One-Minute Sprint), Swimming ( <b>Gold</b> in ISA 100m Freestyle and 50m Breaststroke, <b>Silver</b> in ISA 50m Freestyle)
<b>Peter Dunning</b>	Wheelchair Rugby ( <b>Silver</b> )	<b>Richard Pullen</b>	Wheelchair Basketball ( <b>Bronze</b> )
<b>Philip Gillespie</b>	Archery, Indoor Rowing	<b>Netra Rana</b>	Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> )
<b>Michael Goody</b>	Cycling, Swimming ( <b>Silver</b> in ISC 100m Freestyle, <b>Gold</b> in ISC 50m Backstroke and Freestyle, <b>Bronze</b> in 50m Breaststroke, <b>Silver</b> in Mixed 4x50m Freestyle Relay)	<b>Daniel Richards</b>	Cycling
<b>Murray Hambro</b>	Athletics	<b>James Rose</b>	Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> ), Wheelchair Basketball ( <b>Bronze</b> )
<b>Wayne Harrod</b>	Cycling ( <b>Bronze</b> in Road Cycling IRB2 Time Trial)	<b>Clive Smith</b>	Wheelchair Rugby ( <b>Silver</b> )
<b>Ryan Hewitt</b>	Wheelchair Basketball ( <b>Bronze</b> )	<b>Michael Swain</b>	Cycling ( <b>Gold</b> in Hand Bike IHB2 Criterium and Time Trial)
<b>Kushal Limbu</b>	Athletics ( <b>Gold</b> in IT1 100m and 200m, <b>Silver</b> in Mixed 4x100m Relay), Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> )	<b>Aveuta Tuila</b>	Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> )
<b>Scott McNeice</b>	Archery ( <b>Bronze</b> in Team Open Recurve), Athletics, Cycling, Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> ), Swimming, Wheelchair Rugby ( <b>Silver</b> )	<b>David Watson</b>	Athletics ( <b>Gold</b> IF6 discus and shotput), Indoor Rowing ( <b>Silver</b> in IR1 Four-Minute Endurance and One-Minute Sprint)
<b>Michael Mellon</b>	Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> ), Wheelchair Basketball ( <b>Bronze</b> ), Wheelchair Rugby ( <b>Silver</b> )		

### MAY THE FOUR BE WITH YOU

*Netra Rana, 36, lost his left leg below the knee to an IED in Afghanistan in 2008. He is the only Blesma Member to have taken part in all four Invictus Games*

**You've competed in London, Orlando, Toronto and now Sydney. Which Invictus Games has been your favourite?**

I've really enjoyed them all! London was special as it was the first one, but I think I have to say that Sydney has been my most enjoyable so far. It was a really good atmosphere, and I loved mixing in with people and making new friends there.

**What was your personal highlight of the Sydney Games?**

I really enjoyed taking part in the sitting volleyball. We had one very exciting match against Jordan that was just great – they were beating us, but we came back to win it. The spirit was great and it was a real thrill.

**Will you be back for more in 2020?**

Who knows! There isn't an Invictus in 2019 but it will be in The Netherlands in 2020 and that sounds great. I'll see how I am doing, but I think I will probably apply. Sport has been a major part of my rehabilitation, and I get so much out of these events.







## BLESMA BIKER IS RECOGNISED BY BRISTOL POST

ONE-ARMED MOTORCYCLIST CHRIS Ganley has been recognised for his sporting achievements. Chris scooped the Bristol Post Sports Personality of the Year and the Disabled Sports Performer of the Year gongs at the recent Bristol Post Sports Awards 2018.

The awards evening was held at Bristol City FC's Ashton Gate stadium and was hosted by the BBC's John Inverdale.

"I was listening to the incredible stories of some of the other nominees and didn't think I had a shot at winning," Chris said, "so I certainly didn't expect two awards. It was an inspiring and overwhelming evening!"

Chris lost his left arm above the elbow in a motorcycle crash in 2014. Just six months after the accident, he was back on a bike and now competes in the Thundersport GB Championship on an adapted Yamaha R1.

"For the last two seasons I have focused on growing my confidence on the track, but from now on it's all about improving my riding," said Chris, who managed to clinch fourth in this year's championship despite having issues with his bike through the entire season. "We were chasing faults on the bike all year, and if we'd consistently had full power, I think I would definitely have finished a few places higher in some of the races!"



# Making Generation R to take centre stage

The successful Blesma Community Programme has been renamed the Making Generation R programme with immediate effect. In exactly the same way as its predecessor, Making Generation R highlights Blesma's ambition to invest in its Members, using their stories to inspire a new generation of resilient young people.

"Since its launch in 2016, the Blesma Community Programme has trained more than 54 Members as storytellers," said Ian Waller, Blesma's Operations Director. "By the end of 2018, the Making Generation R workshops will have inspired more than 22,000 young people from mainstream and private schools, Special Educational Needs schools, colleges, Pupil Referral Units and hospital schools."

Young people increasingly struggle with feelings of anxiety, low self-esteem and

a lack of confidence. In this environment, learning to be resilient can make a big difference to young people's lives. Making Generation R, the successor to the Blesma Community Programme, trains injured veterans to take their powerful and inspiring life stories about overcoming adversity into schools to help teach pupils about everyday resilience. This learning allows the students to better cope with the stresses of growing up, including bullying, exam pressure or even feelings of anxiety.

The programme is aiming to reach 30,000 students by the end of 2019, and is also striving to raise awareness of the need to teach resilience differently after YouGov research found that 78 per cent of teachers say they have seen a pupil struggle with a mental health problem in the past year.

## HAT-TRICK FOR HAMMERS

West Ham United FC championed the work of Blesma once again in November when Members and staff were invited to the club's training ground and their London stadium.

On 21 November, a group of seven travelled to the club's training ground in Romford to watch the team train and meet the players. A few days later, on Saturday 24 November, Blesma staff, volunteers and Members headed to the London Stadium, home of West Ham, armed with collection buckets as the mighty Hammers took on Premier League champs Manchester City.

This is the third season in which the club has extended its support to the charity.







## Simon Harmer named one of 'most influential'

**B**lesma Member Simon Harmer, who lost both his legs to an IED blast in Afghanistan, has been included in the Shaw Trust Disability Power 100.

During a reception at the South Bank Centre in October, Simon was announced as one of the most influential people with a disability in the UK for his work supporting Service charities and fellow injured veterans.

Simon joined the Army as a Combat Medic in 1997. A little more than 10 years later, in 2009, he stood on an IED whilst serving in Afghanistan. Simon rebuilt his

life, throwing himself into challenges across the world – from adaptive skiing to riding across northern France on a hand bike, to completing the Race Across America.

Driven by a desire to help those in a similar situation, he became a volunteer ambassador for several Service charities.

"I'm beyond proud to be named one of the UK's most influential people, it is a huge honour to be chosen to feature on this list," said Simon. "Since I became injured it has become incredibly clear what challenges those with restrictions face every day."

### NEWS BRIEFS

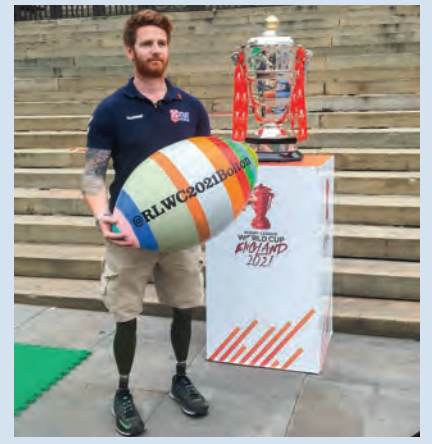
#### BLESMA MAN NAMED AS WORLD CUP AMBASSADOR

James Simpson has been unveiled as a Rugby League World Cup ambassador. His role will be to help promote the sport in the lead up to the World Cup, which will be held in England in 2021.

"It's amazing to be announced as an ambassador. I never thought the wheelchair game would be in a position where it had an ambassador at a World Cup. Its mind-blowing to see how much the game has grown," said the England and Leeds Rhino Wheelchair Rugby League star.

James served in 1st Battalion Yorkshire Regiment for 10 years before an IED took both his legs, three fingers and the muscle in his right forearm in Afghanistan in 2009.

This will be the first time the Rugby League World Cup features men's, women's and wheelchair matches alongside each other.



## Supporter puts in marathon stint for Blesma

A BLESMA FUNDRAISER REACHED an epic milestone in November in aid of the Association. Paul Commons, 52, from Maidstone, completed his 200th marathon in Folkestone on 27 November.

Since 2016, Paul has been running marathons and ultra-running challenges all across the UK, and has even competed in France and Germany.

"I started running four years ago when I realised I needed to change my habits. At the time I was 22 stone, was out drinking most weekends and didn't do any fitness. But then I started to run 5K events and slowly built up the distance," said Paul, who ran his first marathon in December 2016.

Now teetotal for three years, Paul has lost more than eight stone, runs every day, and tries to run two marathons every weekend.



Not even birthday celebrations bring rest – he celebrated his 50th by running the Thames Meander, marked his 51st birthday by completing a Meangate 50-mile ultra-marathon, and completed The Ranger

Games marathon in Reading as part of his 52nd birthday celebrations!

Paul was inspired to run the last 40 marathons of his incredible milestone for the Association after meeting Blesma Member Rob Copsey, who lost his leg in 1994 when he stepped on a landmine while serving in Rwanda.

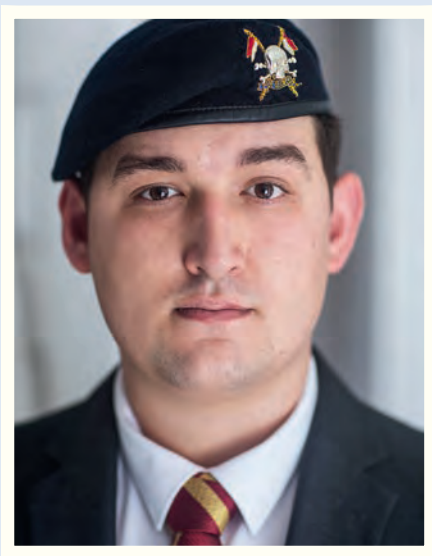
"I ran an event in Gravesend and got chatting to Rob about his injury. I decided to fundraise for Blesma as it's a great charity and looks after inspirational people. When I'm running and feel like I want to give up, I think of the guys who have lost limbs and that makes me carry on!"

Conquering 200 marathons isn't the end of Paul's marathon journey, however, as he already has his sights set on completing another 100 in 2019!



In the spotlight

## Jonny Holloway



Joining the Army was a boyhood dream come true for Jonny Holloway. Becoming a soldier transformed his life for the better and then, one day, it tragically changed his life for the worse when the vehicle he was travelling in drove over an Improvised Explosive Device in Afghanistan. Jonny suffered severe head and leg injuries, and after two years battling to try and save his left leg, he opted to amputate it below the knee in 2016.

“Waiting for my twelfth birthday so I could join the Army Cadets felt like forever, but it was definitely worth it. I loved it and five years later, in August 2009, I joined the Army. I was just 17 years old.

“Growing up, I had wanted to be an Infantryman and work on the front line, but I did a Public Service course at college which made me decide to join the Royal Armoured Corps. It was the best of both worlds – I was very hands-on, so working on vehicles and then doing the Infantry side, both on the front line, suited me perfectly.

“Then, in 2013, I deployed on my first tour of Afghanistan. It was one of the last for British Forces and I was tasked with defending other troops who were closing down the camps and bases. I knew it was going to be a busy tour and that I was often going to be at risk.”

### MY LEFT FOOT FELT LIKE IT WAS ON FIRE

“I was injured in March 2014, when the vehicle I was in drove over an Improvised Explosive Device and I was blown 13 feet into the air. As the vehicle landed we came under enemy fire. It makes me feel short of breath just thinking about it now! I remember opening my eyes and thinking; *Oh, that felt like a proper shuffle!*” Then my left foot felt like it was on fire. The force of the explosion had ripped straight through my left leg, shattering everything in its way.

“After an intense fire fight, the guys eventually got me to safety. The blast had mangled my leg and had given me a brain injury which has affected my short-term memory and concentration, and

it damaged my right eye to such an extent that I can no longer see out of it. I found losing my sight extremely difficult to deal with – not just because of the loss of vision, but because I’d wake up every morning feeling sick and dizzy; like I was drunk. It took quite a while to get used to.

“At the same time – and for the next two years – I fought to keep my leg despite doctors wanting to amputate it. I was stubborn and believed it would heal. It was a very dark time for me mentally and physically. I couldn’t put any weight on my leg, and being at home and in pain all the time made me feel like a burden to my girlfriend, Lauren. She was great though – constantly ringing around for support to make sure I wasn’t forgotten about.

“We got married in January 2016, and a few months after that I admitted defeat with my leg and had it amputated below the knee. That was in the June, and a month later I was walking again! It felt as though I had my independence back at the click of a finger! I’m glad I tried everything to keep my leg but suddenly, because of the amputation, I’d got my life back. I was even able to drive again!

“Then, in 2017, we had a baby girl; Amalie. My life is mostly positive now. I still have days when I struggle, but I know I would be in a worse place if it wasn’t for Blesma. My Support Officer has gone above and beyond for me and my family, and was instrumental in helping me try different sports, apply for different jobs, and attend different courses.

“Last Remembrance, I gave a talk at a local school because a teacher friend had told me many pupils didn’t understand why they wore poppies. The head teacher was impressed and asked me if I would volunteer, working with students who have behavioural issues. So now I work as a pastoral mentor at the school – there’s nothing better than the rewarding feeling of helping the kids.

“I do a lot of walking now and after a long day at work, I just want to take off my prosthetic. Blesma is helping me to adapt my house so I can use a wheelchair in the evenings and still help out with Amalie. It will be great once it’s finished!”

“

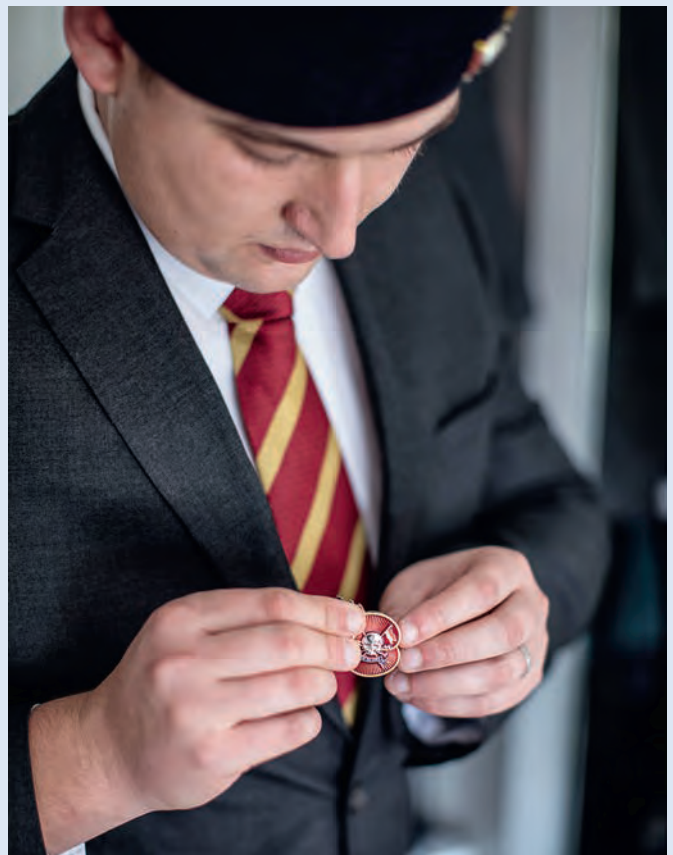
**I’M GLAD THAT I TRIED EVERYTHING TO KEEP MY LEG BUT SUDDENLY, BECAUSE OF THE AMPUTATION, I’D GOT MY LIFE BACK**

”



# Fighting in The Falklands

The memoirs of Blesma's ex-Chairman (p50)



Words: Jessica Mackinnon Photographs: Andy Bate



## ↘ BLESMA BRIEFING

# Getting the balance right

Brian Chenier, BSO (Prosthetics), offers the latest on prosthetics. In this issue; the importance of learning to make compromises and to stay in shape over Winter



### PROMISE TO COMPROMISE

Living with limb loss can, and very often does, require compromise. An amputee will have to learn to overcome many daily challenges that others take for granted. Planning ahead is essential and can be frustrating, time consuming and, put simply, sometimes seemingly too much effort.

Many Members will have had days when it felt easier to stay at home and not go out. So what changed your mind? What motivated you to put on a prosthesis and venture out into the world? By taking time to reflect on those not-so-good days and remembering what got you moving can be useful. Building up a small store of 'motivating memories' might help when difficult days come around again. Likewise, there may have been times when your prosthetic was causing you problems – maybe it hurt or didn't fit well. Maybe the conditions outside left you feeling unsafe or concerned. Ask yourself what you did to change that and keep it in mind for the next time.

Perhaps the one thing that shines through is your ability to compromise; choosing to set aside pain or discomfort to do something you enjoy. Perhaps that is going out with family and friends, knowing that their support and company is worth the effort. How and when you are prepared to compromise are choices you can make, and no doubt have often done. There is a danger though, that overdoing it can lead to complications that leave you no choice. Listen to what your body is telling you and seek expert advice if you feel there is something wrong.

### DON'T FORGET YOUR CORE

Exercise is especially important if you are living with limb loss. The benefits of regular exercise are well known and at some point in your recovery you will have been given exercises to promote core strength and stability, vital for those using lower limb prosthetics.

Having a strong and stable core helps to reduce hip and lower back pain, as well as giving a solid platform to muscle groups that help with walking. Choosing to make a daily effort to be active and mobile can sometimes be difficult, but a few minutes each day working on core strength is a good starting point.



Regular exercise will help your core strength and stability

There are lots of smartphone apps that provide easy-to-follow programmes, for example, including some specific to amputees. Alternatively, videos and advice are available online. If you are unable to access online information, contact your Limb Centre and request a programme that you can follow. Always follow any safety advice when using an exercise programme and, where possible, exercise under supervised conditions, such as in a gym. If exercising alone, it is a good idea to keep your phone within reach in case you need help.

### NHS ENGLAND PROSTHETIC SERVICE REVIEW: AN UPDATE

NHS prosthetics services in England are organised and paid for by Specialised Commissioning at NHS England, which covers upper and lower limb prosthetic care. As part of a review into how these services are commissioned, NHS England invited all patients and carers to take part in a survey from August to October 2018, to share views about how services are working and where they felt improvements could be made.

“  
PERHAPS THE ONE THING THAT SHINES THROUGH IS YOUR ABILITY TO SET ASIDE PAIN OR DISCOMFORT TO DO SOMETHING YOU ENJOY  
”



There was a fantastic response to the survey, with more than 850 people giving feedback either via an online survey or by completing the paper version.

While the majority of people are happy with the care they receive, about a quarter of patients expressed some dissatisfaction. There was some very positive feedback about dedicated, compassionate and experienced staff. However, it was clear that one of the main things people want to see is more clarity and fairness around what is available from NHS services. People reported different experiences of care and varying access to specific limbs and equipment, described by some as a 'postcode lottery'.

Meanwhile, another big issue amongst respondents was getting a comfortable and timely socket fit, with people expressing frustration that this wasn't always something that the service 'got right first time'.

Some of the comments received were more specifically about issues people had with their centre, such as how easy it is to make appointments, run-down facilities or transport problems.

However, it is hoped that many of the concerns will be addressed through the review, which aims to ensure that services are properly funded with money 'following the patient', and to clarify what patients of prosthetics services can expect from the NHS.

Clinicians will be meeting up in the new year to discuss revising the existing service specification and clinical model to take into account patients' comments, and we will be updating people on ways forward and next steps shortly afterwards.

If anyone would like to receive updates about the prosthetics review directly, they are welcome to sign up as a stakeholder for the Rehabilitation & Disability CRG (clinical reference group) on the NHS England website at [www.engage.england.nhs.uk](http://www.engage.england.nhs.uk)

**For more on any prosthetics issues, please contact BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier at Chadwell Heath on 020 8548 7080 or at [bsoprosthetics@blesma.org](mailto:bsoprosthetics@blesma.org), or visit [www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)**



Comfortable and timely socket fit are common issues



## Iceland's raw beauty wows photographers

**B**lesma's keenest photographers headed to Iceland in September with the aim of taking their already impressive skills to the next level. Last year's inaugural Iceland Photography Expedition set out to provide the Association's most experienced photographers with the chance to enhance their landscape photography skills in the unique and beautiful settings Iceland has to offer.

"The activity was a huge success and so this year we wanted to give more photographers the chance to experience the raw beauty of Iceland. The group included two blind veterans and a Widow, and every single person who went got so much out of the trip," said Jess March, Blesma's Activities Manager.

Member Kev Bryant has been taking photographers since he was 21 years old, and was one of the eight Members who travelled to Iceland.

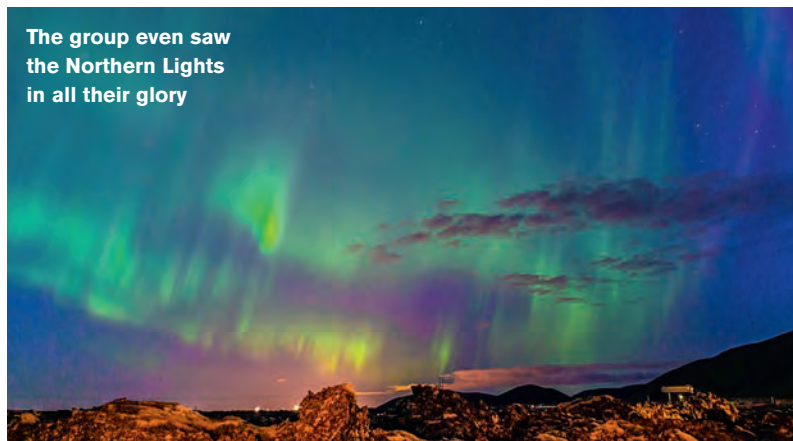
"The country is an absolute must for any landscape photographer," he said. "For me, this year's trip

was all about learning a variety of techniques because I'm not a proficient landscape photographer."

Blesma Widow Jan McLelland thoroughly enjoyed the trip as well. "Iceland wasn't at all what I expected. The landscape was amazing and so interesting, changing all the time," she said. "I loved the trip that we took to the ice fields and icebergs; the icebergs in particular were majestic – their white and blue colours were incredible! The whole trip was amazing, but I think seeing the Northern Lights was my highlight!"

"As always on a Blesma trip, meeting and getting to know other Members was lovely. The sharing of knowledge and experience is always great on photography trips – it doesn't matter how experienced you are, you'll always learn something!"

**Take a look at the Activities Brochure, inserted into this issue, to find out more about Blesma's hugely popular photography courses**



The group even saw the Northern Lights in all their glory

Photographs: Kev Bryant, Sue Wright Uppington





Blesma's Chief Executive Barry Le Gry (centre) listens to Sir Stephen Dalton at the reception

## Everything shipshape for the champagne reception in Jersey

**B**lesma Members on a recent trip to Jersey were welcomed to the island with a visit to Government House. The Members, who crewed a tall ship as part of the Association's WWI commemorations, enjoyed champagne and canapés with the island's Lieutenant-Governor, His Excellency Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Dalton GCB.

"The reception was lovely and very welcoming," said Mick Foulds. "We didn't have too long there as we had to be off early the next morning, but it was an experience."

Other Members enjoyed being in a grand residence that has hosted HM The Queen and other visiting dignitaries over the years.

"Jersey was an absolute scream," said Mark Dustin. "We enjoyed the champagne, and the Lieutenant-Governor was a fantastic bloke. We had a lot of fun." Others were interested in their host's background. "He's ex-Air Force, and I was Search and Rescue, 202 Squadron, and then a recruiter for the RAF," said Mark Sidwells. "We are outnumbered by the Army in Blesma, so it was good to chat to another Airman."



The Lieutenant-Governor is appointed by Her Majesty The Queen for a five-year term. He is an impartial adviser to The Queen and represents the interests of the Crown.

Sir Stephen joined the RAF in 1976 and flew Jaguar fighter planes, before later commanding the RAF's Jaguar force and eventually becoming the Chief of the Air Staff from 2009 to 2013.

*To find out how the Members who crewed the tall ship SV Tenacious to Jersey got on this Autumn, turn to p36*



Words: Nick Moore Photographs: Andy Bate





## NEWS BRIEFS

### LANCASHIRE STUDENTS HONOUR THEIR HEROES

Pupils from Witton Park Academy have made 3,117 clay poppies over the course of 2018 – one for every soldier who came from Blackburn and Darwen, and who died during World War I.

Students from the secondary school in Blackburn have been busy making and painting the poppies since February. They eventually went on display in the school grounds as part of the school's Centenary Remembrance event.

"On 09 November, we stood together to reflect and remember the 3,117 men from our community who did not come home in 1918," said Humanities teacher Laura Elliott. "I wanted to create the same number of poppies as soldiers who died from Blackburn and Darwen because I wanted our students to understand how many men our towns lost. In history, we often talk about the number of troops who died in battles, but it is difficult for students to picture what that actually means."

The ambitious project was funded, in part, by BAE Systems, and it is hoped all the poppies will be sold, with the proceeds going to Blesma.

## EMAIL BUDDIES

Still not receiving email updates from the Association? You're missing out! If you don't have an email address but have someone who could accept them on your behalf, please ask them to email [memberadmin@blesma.org](mailto:memberadmin@blesma.org)

# Armed Forces honoured in Scottish exhibition

An exhibition showcasing paintings of serving and ex-serving soldiers has been unveiled in Glasgow to mark the centenary of the end of WWI.

Clydebank Museum in Glasgow is currently hosting *Soldiers*, an exhibition created by artist Tom McKendrick, that includes portraits of men and women who have served their country. The subjects range from a centenarian who served at Dunkirk to a 13-year-old female Sea Cadet whose dream is to join the Royal Navy.

Portraits of five Blesma Members; Andy Mudd, David Timmins, James Smith, Mick McConnell and Stuart Gallacher, as well as BSO Pete Shields, are part of the exhibition.

"I was proud and humbled to be asked by Tom to participate in his *Soldiers* project," said Pete. "It is a great honour to know you have contributed to an exhibition that will

be seen by many people. It will remind people of actions and deeds that the Armed Forces have been involved in as well as the sacrifices that have been made.

"Seeing it for the first time was poignant and emotional as it evoked memories of a time long gone. Tom is a tremendous artist."

Tom McKendrick painted more than 60 portraits for the project and selected his favourite 33 to be displayed in the exhibition and in a limited-edition book entitled *33 Soldiers*.

"I painted quite a few seriously injured people but never found anyone who had any bitterness," said Tom. "Everyone had enormous pride in having served their country and said they had no regrets."

The exhibition will be on display at the museum until 12 January 2019 before moving to Stirling Castle.

## BIDS FOR BUST RAISES BIG BUCKS FOR BLESMA

A sculpture of Mark Ormrod, the UK's first triple amputee from the Afghanistan War, has been sold for £38,000 at auction. *Undefeated*, a sculpture of Mark's torso, was created by sculptor Ben Dearnley, who approached Mark in 2016 about the project. It was auctioned at The Royal Marines Charity Commando Dinner in London in November, with the proceeds going to The Royal Marines Charity and Blesma.

"I'm not arty, but when Ben explained his idea for the project, along with how it would be auctioned, I thought it was perfect as The Royal Marines and Blesma are both close to my heart," said Mark. "Ben explained that the grey through the middle of the marble torso would represent the shrapnel that had torn through my body. I think it's awesome!"



Words: Jessica MacKinnon



## Find your new favourite thing with Blesma

Getting involved in Blesma's activities can be beneficial in so many ways. And they're absolutely free! Do something different in 2019...



This year has been another extremely successful one for the Activities Team, with a total of 44 activities – ranging from skydiving to painting – being run, as well as an additional 15 local activities having taken place across the UK. More than 430 Members took part in this year's activities, with 16 per cent of those having never tried a Blesma activity before.

Highlights from this year include cycling in Mallorca, an art course in Somerset and adapted fly fishing in the Peak District. All three of these activities were run for the first time – and were led by Members.

The Seniors' and Widows' Weeks took place in new locations, and both proved to be very popular having been based at prestigious Warner hotels in different parts of the country. The aim was to make the

**“WE ARE LOOKING FOR IDEAS FOR LOCAL ACTIVITIES, SO IF YOU HAVE A HOBBY OR AN INTEREST THAT YOU THINK OTHERS MIGHT LIKE, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH”**

weeks accessible to everyone – something the team will continue to prioritise next year, and another two Warner hotels have been booked for 2019.

More Members' families engaged with the Association than ever before in 2018 through activities such as the all-new

Families Activities Week, the Summer's Family Glamping event, and the two city breaks for couples in London and Bruges (Belgium). Member Mike Keating attended the Families Activities Week with his wife, Katrina, and two children.

“I completed activities I hadn't tried in a long time and really enjoyed the mental exhilaration, all of which was made even more enjoyable as I was able to share the experience with both my own and other Blesma families,” he said of the event.

### **KEEP IT IN THE FAMILY**

These activities have cemented the importance of the family support unit within the Activities Programme, and next year will see more family activities than ever before. If this sounds like something your

To apply for a place email [meo@blesma.org](mailto:meo@blesma.org), call 020 8548 7094, or apply online at [www.blesma.org/activities](http://www.blesma.org/activities)





## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU APPLY

*Found something you'd like to have a go at? So how do you apply and what happens next? The process is simple...*

**1**

Members apply for their chosen activity or activities by phone, email, or application form.

**2**

Once the deadline has passed, the Activities Team, in consultation with the relevant BSOs, will select the participants based on:

- Need
- Whether the Member has taken part in an activity with Blesma before, how long it has been since they've done anything with the Association, and whether they have done anything this year.

**3**

Once the selection has been made (usually three months before the start date), Members are notified as to whether they have either been selected or put on the reserve list.

**4**

If a Member drops out for whatever reason, the reserve list is looked at using the same process as the initial selection process.

**5**

Members should be aware that drop outs can happen at any time, so if you are on the reserve list it may not be possible to give you a great deal of notice in advance of an activity.

family would enjoy, be sure to sign up for the events in 2019. Details of how can be found in the Activities Brochure inserted into this issue of the magazine.

2018 saw a larger uptake in the organising of local activities by Members, and this has spread via word of mouth and social media. This has meant that Members have been able to take full advantage of their local community and contacts, taking part in something that perhaps wasn't already on the calendar.

For example, Alex Krol shared his love of flying in April, while Mick McConnell took Members for an enjoyable day at the Royal International Air Tattoo in July. "I saw that Blesma was running a scheme in which Members could pitch an activity, so I went for it. I think I put across a good case and the team at Chadwell Heath were keen," Alex said. "Blesma has invested time, support and money into this, and that's fantastic!"

### NEW FOR 2019

Brand new activities to apply for in 2019 include mountain biking in Canada, a tour of some of the major WWI battlefields in Belgium, adapted scuba diving (suitable for wheelchair users) and regional golf tuition across the UK. There will also be



some variations on activities from 2018, such as golfing in Florida, as well as Blesma staples like the Winter sports and Iceland photography expeditions.

The Activities Team is looking for more ideas for local activities, so if you have a hobby or an interest, or there's an event happening near you that you think other Members might like, please get in touch with the team.

Make sure to check out the 2019 Activities Brochure, which is included in this issue, for more information on all the activities being run next year. Please note the mobility/accessibility, and any other restrictions (such as passport expiry) as stated for each activity. Please also remember to keep an eye out on social media (add Blesma Activities as a friend on Facebook) and look out for the monthly Activities Update email to find out about local activities and extra opportunities that have come our way.





Arthur Bomber (centre) with Bryan Phillips to his left and Fiona Morrison to his right

sold all 100 wreaths,” said Bryan, who lost both his legs while serving in Afghanistan. “I’d mentioned to BSO Steve Burton and Fiona Morrison (Outreach Officer for Northern Ireland) that I wanted to find someone who was close to 100 years old to lay a wreath, and they suggested Arthur Bomber. The day Arthur laid the wreath was unbelievable – it is one that will live with me for a very long time.”

Arthur was serving in Burma during WWII when his left leg was badly wounded. Two years later, his wounds led to the amputation of his leg below the knee.

“It really was a fantastic day; everything went right and it didn’t rain!” said Arthur. “Bryan is a great lad. After I laid the wreath we went for a cup of tea and a bun, where we had a long chat about our different prosthetic legs.”

## Bryan hits century for WWI commemoration

**A** 99-year-old WWII veteran has lent a helping hand to an Afghanistan veteran’s fundraising mission to lay 100 wreaths at 100 war memorials.

To mark the centenary of the end of WWI, former Irish Guardsman Bryan Phillips set himself the challenge of laying 100 wreaths at memorials across Northern Ireland. He called upon local businesses, organisations

and groups to sponsor the wreaths, with the proceeds going to the Poppy Appeal and the Irish Guards Benevolent Fund.

In November, Bryan presented a wreath to fellow Blesma Member Arthur Bomber, who proudly laid it at Greyabbey Church War Memorial on behalf of the Association.

“The challenge got a huge response. So many people jumped on board and I’ve now



## WOMEN’S TEAM SET TO TACKLE USA ENDURANCE RACE

THE FIRST ALL-FEMALE BRITISH TEAM of wounded, injured and sick personnel is preparing to take on one of the toughest endurance cycling races in the world.

The team of eight, which includes Blesma Member Nerys Pearce, will take on the Race Across America in June 2019, cycling more than 3,000 miles between the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. The riders will take it in turns to ride, and will travel across 12 states, cycle over the Rockies and Appalachian mountain ranges, and pass through deserts where temperatures can soar to 45°C.

“There’s something special about a group of women coming together to take on this challenge,” said Nerys. “It will be about teamwork and trust, so rather than splitting the miles equally between us, we will be looking to each other’s strengths so we can ride across America in the quickest time.”

**AHM Installations**  
SPECIALISTS IN BATHROOM ADAPTATIONS

**FREE**  
Georgia toilet & basin with every bathroom order ONLY WITH THIS ADVERT

**Bathing a problem? – we can help**

**Simple affordable solutions for bathing needs**

- Wet rooms • Walk in showers and baths • Waterproof wall panelling
- Slip resistant safety flooring • Grab rails, shower seats & raised toilets
- Established family business • Zero VAT on disabled bathrooms

Discounts for over 60’s SSAFA and Ex Service personnel

Showrooms nationwide  
Call now to arrange a **FREE** survey and quote  
info@ahminstallations.co.uk

**0800 7316495**  
www.ahminstallations.co.uk

Member of  
**Checkatrade.com**  
www.checkatrade.com

APPROVED CODE





This year, 19 people climbed Italy's highest mountain; Gran Paradiso

# AGS have Everest in their sights

**F**ear of a fatal avalanche put a halt to Martin Hewitt and the Adaptive Grand Slam (AGS) team's attempt to summit Italy's highest mountain, the Gran Paradiso, in the Autumn.

The climb is a regular on the training calendar as the team works towards the goal of summiting the highest peak on each of the seven continents, as well as walking unsupported to the North and South Poles.

"It's always disappointing when you don't summit a mountain, but for this trip getting to the top was only a bonus," said Martin, founder of the AGS and a former captain in the Parachute Regiment, whose right arm was paralysed when he was

shot in the chest on his third tour of Afghanistan. "The main purpose of the trip was for the more experienced team members to use it as a stepping stone for the Everest summit attempt, which we have planned for 2019, and for the new members of the team to get an introduction to glacier mountaineering. From those perspectives, we achieved what we wanted."



Nineteen people took on the challenge, including Blesma Member Craig Howorth.

"It was really tough; we were walking for up to five hours a day in crampons, which were really heavy for my prosthetic leg," said Craig, who was part of the Blesma team to swim the English Channel in 2014. "But it was an amazing experience. Being so high up in the mountains was a first!"

The Adaptive Grand Slam team is now halfway through its notorious challenge, with big plans for next year, which include an attempt on Mount Everest in April and possibly Carstensz Pyramid later in the year.

*If you would like to get involved with the Adaptive Grand Slam team, please contact [info@adaptivegrandslam.com](mailto:info@adaptivegrandslam.com)*

## Members learn media skills on a new course dedicated to Service personnel

THE FORCES MEDIA ACADEMY HAS opened its doors for the second academic year, with two Blesma Members having embarked on the institution's year-long course in Creative Media Production.

Kirk Bowett and Derek Derenalagi are among 15 people who are studying the course, which is only offered at the Academy to Service leavers, veterans and Reservists, and which offers students a Higher National Certificate in Creative Media Production.

"I reached a stage where I wanted to challenge myself," said Kirk. "I use social media to raise awareness of veterans' causes; everything from limbless veterans' issues to homelessness and mental health. It's given me a real interest in the media

industry, so when I heard about the Forces Media Academy, I thought this would give me broad training across the industry and a better understanding of how I might be able to improve what I do."

The course covers a wide range of digital media platforms including television, radio and social media. Students use professional equipment, are taught by qualified media professionals at the Services Sound & Vision Corporation (SSVC), and are able to study and practise in a live media environment alongside media professionals.

In the Autumn, the students even worked on radio adverts that were used as part of the Royal British Legion's Thank You 100 campaign to mark the end of WWI.



**And Action:** Kirk Bowett on assignment



Up the O2



## Which Blesma team are you?

Do something incredible next year and raise money for the Association at the same time – there really is something for everyone. Take a look...

**T**eam Blesma will take part in more events than ever before in 2019. There is sure to be something for everyone, so why not get involved, pick a challenge, and we'll be right by your side to cheer you on! Blesma teams will be walking, running, cycling, climbing and zipping their way through some amazing events to raise money for the Association throughout 2019. Each of our fundraisers will receive a Team Blesma top and useful fundraising pack. Our helpful and dedicated

Fundraising Team will be supporting everyone along the way, and no doubt taking on their own challenges, too.

Here are some of the highlights for 2019, you can see more in the Events Calendar included in this issue, or log on to [www.blesma.org/events](http://www.blesma.org/events) for a full list of events.

**01-26 May**  
**BOOTS ON FOR BLESMA – 10K IN MAY**  
Nationwide virtual event  
Challenge yourself as well as your friends,

family and colleagues with this 10K in May. You can walk, jog, run, cycle, swim or wheel your way through the month to support Blesma. You can cover the 10K in one go or break it up into more manageable distances over the whole month – this is your challenge done your way.

**25 May**  
**UP THE O2**  
Greenwich, London

There's no lift, no escalator, and no-one to carry you. This is an experience that will get your blood pumping and your head in the clouds. As one of our intrepid explorers, you'll ascend all the way to the top of The O2 via a walkway suspended 52m above ground level.

**25-26 May**  
**EDINBURGH MARATHON FESTIVAL**  
Edinburgh

With distances ranging from 5km to a marathon, there is a run for everyone at the



## Set sail for adventure

The tall ship with the all-Blesma crew (p36)



### The Great North Run

commemorations. Runners will start at Pointe Du Hoc and walkers will join the route at Arramanches on 06 June. Both will finish at the historic Pegasus Bridge on the same day.

### 27-28 July

#### THE AJ BELL LONDON TRIATHLON Docklands, London

If one challenge is not enough for you, then why not try a triathlon? Combine swimming, cycling and running, and join the Blesma Triathlon Team. This is the largest triathlon in the world, with more than 13,000 participants taking part. World-class athletes will compete alongside amateurs and first timers – this is a real all-round challenge. With distances from Super Sprint to Olympic you can take the plunge with the challenge of your choice.

**Save the Date**  
**20-26 May**  
**BLESMA WEEK**  
Our annual week of fundraising returns with lots of ways to get involved in raising funds and awareness.

#### 04 August PRUDENTIAL RIDE LONDON-SURREY 46 & 100

**London to Surrey**  
For the first time, Blesma can offer places in both the 46-mile and 100-mile RideLondon events. So if you like cycling, why not apply now and join Team Blesma on this truly spectacular bike ride.



### Ride London



### The D-Day 44 Challenge

### 08 September

#### GREAT NORTH RUN HALF MARATHON Newcastle

This is the largest and most famous half marathon in the UK – and it's on the telly! The Great North Run is your chance to join Team Blesma and be part of an amazing atmosphere, so lace up your trainers and get, well, training!

iconic Edinburgh Marathon Festival. This is a true celebration of running, with the vibrant city coming together to cheer on the runners over the weekend.

### 05-07 June D-DAY 44 CHALLENGE

In 2009, Lieutenant Colonel Mike McErlain set up the D-Day 44 Challenge with his wife, Jo. Sadly, Mike died whilst taking part in the run on 06 June 2013. But with Jo's blessing, the event will return in 2019 to mark the 75th anniversary of the D-Day Landings. A limited number of places are available for runners to take on the 44-mile challenge and for walkers to complete the 22-mile challenge. The route, which hugs the Normandy coastline, will take in villages, fields, beaches and D-Day



## Or you can always do your own thing

You don't have to take part in a challenge event to be part of Team Blesma. Whether you want to organise a collection or your own fundraising event, we would love to welcome you to the team. Simply get in touch to let us know what sort of activity you would like to organise, and we will be able to provide all the support and materials to help.

To join Team Blesma at any of our 2019 events, contact the Fundraising Team at [fundraising@blesma.org](mailto:fundraising@blesma.org) or call 020 8548 7089



## NEWS ANALYSIS

# Looking back on a successful 2018 for our Members

2018 has been an incredibly busy year for Blesma. Here's a taste of what the Association and some of its Members have achieved during the last 12 months

### January

#### ROWING INTO THE RECORD BOOKS

The year started off with Jordan Beecher rowing into the record books as he became one half of the fastest pair to row non-stop across the Atlantic Ocean (above right). It took Jordan, along with his close friend Jon Armstrong, just 37 days to row from the Canary Islands to Antigua for Row2Recovery in the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge.

local communities. They are out on the ground much of the time, engaging with Members and communities, representing Blesma at events and meetings, and running their own events to bring Members together.

#### HOW OUR OUTREACH OFFICERS HELP

- Supporting Members, connecting them to each other and to Blesma by organising and attending local events with Members and their families, engaging Members with community groups and providing access to technology and training
- Carrying out visits to Members in their homes, in hospitals and in residential care
- Delivering practical and emotional support to those who care for Members
- Promoting the Blesma 'offer' to potential Members through local engagement
- Reinforcing links with the non-military population, building on existing networks and establishing new partnerships
- Representing Blesma at events, enhancing the community profile and supporting fundraising
- Recruiting and supporting volunteers

### March

#### THE PARALYMPIC GAMES

Owen Pick had his right leg amputated below the knee 18 months after standing on an IED in Afghanistan in 2010 when he was just 18 years old. Almost eight years after that fateful day, he lined up to represent Great Britain in the Snowboard Cross and Banked Slalom events at the 2018 Winter Paralympic Games.

Owen was bitten by the boarding bug whilst on a Blesma activity a number of years ago, and was even chosen as the flag bearer for the opening ceremony in South Korea. "It was full-on! In one interview, I'd said that I'd fought for this flag and now I was going to get to carry it. That meant a lot to me," said Owen. "Blesma has been with me from the start; for all my major competitions, helping with flights and equipment. It's been a great relationship!"



### May / June

#### BLESMA WEEK WORKS WONDERS

No challenge was too big as Members, supporters and volunteers all went the extra mile (or 100!) to support the fifth annual Blesma Week. From London to the Vale of York, the Association's week of fundraising and awareness raising sparked a range of events from running and cycling to cake baking and soul dancing.

"The week was more meaningful than ever because this year marks the centenary of the end of WWI," said Blesma's Chief Executive, Barry Le Gry about

“  
WATCHING  
PEOPLE  
REGAIN  
THEIR SELF-  
ESTEEM AND  
DO THINGS  
THEY HAD  
NEVER  
DREAMT  
OF WAS  
HUGELY  
REWARDING





Jordan Beecher (right) rowed into the record books in January 2018



the event, which this year ran from 28 May to 03 June. “Besides raising funds, Blesma Week brought the Association and its supporters together.” Collections at London Underground stations, cycling events and even a Blesma Bake Off brought in more than £60,000!

### June GROUNDBREAKING RESEARCH

Following on from research commissioned in 2016, Blesma published a report in June that looked at the impact that living with limb loss has on the family. The study interviewed Blesma Members and their families, and the findings have been published in a report entitled *Caring and Coping: The Family*

**Above: Outreach Officers are already making a difference by bringing Members together locally**

*Perspective on Living with Limb Loss*, which will feed into Blesma’s working practices. A *Living With Limb Loss Support Model* will also enable civilian and military services to provide better support to families.

### August THIS IS NOT FOR YOU IS FOR YOU!

A partnership with the Graeae Theatre Company was one of several ways in which Blesma commemorated the centenary of the end of WWI. Twenty four Members received standing ovations for their performances in *This Is Not For You*; a moving production that paid homage to those injured in The Great War.

*See p54 for an in-depth look at the production from the point of view of the Members who took part.*

### ADVENTURE AHOY!

Elsewhere, an all-Blesma crew sailed an adapted tall ship to Jersey and France in August on a rewarding adventure for Members and their families that forged strong bonds and built confidence.

*Turn to p36 to read about the adventure and to find out how Members enjoyed life on the high seas.*

### October INVICTUS SUCCESS

Team UK topped the medals table at the fourth Invictus Games in October thanks, in part, to Blesma Members. Held in Australia, competitors from 18 nations took part in 11 sports in the Games that were created for injured, wounded and sick Armed Service veterans by Prince Harry in 2014. “Watching people regain their self-esteem and confidence, and do things they’d never



Making Generation R has serious ambitions for the next 12 months



dreamt of was hugely rewarding,” said Blesma Member and Team UK vice captain Spencer Bull. “It was special for me that my family came out. My kids had never seen me compete before, so I was able to be a role model to them in a way I couldn’t have been a few years ago.”

Mark Ormrod, who lost three limbs to an IED attack in 2007, won eight medals. “I’ve seen this event change lives, even save lives,” he said. “It gives you motivation and focus; the things you can lose when you’re injured. It can get you out of a dark place!”

See p04 for a full report on this year’s Invictus Games.

## November REMEMBERING THE END OF WWI

This year was one of the most poignant Remembrance Sundays ever. It marked a century since the cessation of WWI’s hostilities, and at the Cenotaph in central London the crowds fell silent with respect. Everyone was alone with their thoughts; of battles in the distant past and of conflicts more recent. Among them were 29 Blesma Members, alongside Widows, family members and carers. This Weekend is a huge part of what it means to be Blesma; mutual respect and shared loss are amplified at events such as this.

See p28 for more on this year’s Remembrance Parade.

## December MAKING GENERATION R

Young people increasingly struggle with feelings of anxiety, low self-esteem and a lack of confidence. Making Generation R, the successor to the Blesma Community Programme, trains injured veterans to take their powerful and inspiring life stories about

overcoming adversity into schools to help teach pupils about everyday resilience, enabling them to better cope with bullying, exam pressure or even feelings of anxiety.

The programme aims to reach 30,000 students by the end of 2019, and raise awareness of the need to teach resilience differently after research found that 78% of teachers say they have seen a pupil struggle with mental health in the past year.

Find out more at [www.blesma.org/making-generation-r](http://www.blesma.org/making-generation-r)

## 2019 WE’LL BE HERE FOR OUR MEMBERS

Blesma does a great deal to safeguard the interests of injured veterans. The Association has set out to support its Members for life and will continue to invest in key areas like the Activities Programme to ensure Members lead ever-more independent and fulfilling lives in 2019.

Next year, for example, the Association plans to encourage more families and partners than ever before to get involved in activities. Meanwhile, the Outreach Pilot will keep gathering momentum as Members continue to take up the reins.

## NOW WATCH THE VIDEO

As a top graduate of Blesma’s successful Making Generation R programme, Member Ken Bellringer certainly knows how to tell a story. He kindly gave his time to narrate this year’s Blesma 2018 Review. Watch the full video at [www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)

“  
NEXT YEAR,  
BLESMA  
PLANS TO  
ENCOURAGE  
EVEN MORE  
FAMILIES  
AND  
PARTNERS  
TO GET  
INVOLVED IN  
ACTIVITIES  
”



Lee, before his first successful Atlantic crossing in 2016



## Atlantic row record holder wants to do it on his own

BLESMA MEMBER AND FORMER ROYAL Marine Lee Spencer has set off on an epic attempt to become the first single-leg amputee to row solo across the Atlantic Ocean.

Lee will battle the elements, as well as months of sleep deprivation and solitude, to row 3,500 miles from Gibraltar to Venezuela.

"I will have my sights set on two world records," said Lee, who lost his right leg in 2014. "The first is to be the first physically disabled person to row from Europe to South America solo and unsupported. The second is to beat the record of 96 days, 12 hours and 45 minutes, set in 2002."

If he's successful, this won't be the first time Lee's name has appeared in the record books. In 2016, he was part of the all-Blesma Row2Recovery crew that successfully rowed across the Atlantic Ocean in 47 days.

"I feel Row2Recovery changed my life as fundamentally as losing my leg, but in a positive way. It made me realise I could still be the person I had been when I was serving. I wouldn't be human if I wasn't nervous because I know what to expect, but I've got the best possible chance of success."

Lee set off on 12 December and is hoping to raise more than £100,000 for charity.

## RECORD BREAKERS ARE FLYING HIGH

Several Blesma Members heaved their way into the record books in November as part of a 98-person team that pulled a 129-tonne Boeing 787 Dreamliner for 100 metres.

The group broke the Guinness World Record for the heaviest aircraft pulled 100 metres by a team of wheelchair users. The previous record was set in Belgium in 2011 by a team that pulled a 67-tonne aircraft for 102m.

"The challenge was a little easier than I thought it was going to be, but it was still hard work," said Luke Delahunty. "Getting the plane moving in the first place was the hardest part, then we just had to keep up the momentum." The event at Heathrow Airport was in support of Aerobility, a charity that offers people with disabilities the opportunity to learn to fly planes.



## NEWS BRIEFS



### ON THE ROAD AGAIN THANKS TO OTTOBOCK PARTNERSHIP

Blesma has teamed up with Ottobock to give Member Lloyd Bull a Wolturnus handbike. Lloyd lost both legs above the knee, as well as some fingers on his right hand, in an explosion in Afghanistan in 2010. Following recent osseointegration surgery Lloyd now regularly visits the gym and goes fishing, but he really wanted to get back to cardiovascular exercise. "The bike is absolutely brilliant. I really want to get my heart pumping and break into a proper sweat, so I'm definitely going to give it everything I've got," said Lloyd.



### ADVICE ON EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND EDUCATION

There is a new section on the Blesma website dedicated to opportunities and organisations that can assist with getting you back into employment, whether in a voluntary capacity or as a career. There is also information about training opportunities. You can find the information at [www.blesma.org/employment](http://www.blesma.org/employment)

## GOT A STORY? GET IN TOUCH!

Have you got a great story you'd like to tell? Want some help publicising an event or expedition you're planning? It's easy to put your story in the magazine – just get in touch at [editor@blesma.org](mailto:editor@blesma.org)



# OBITUARIES

## Those we have lost

### William Nicholson Sharples

06 February 1924 - 07 October 2018

BILL SHARPLES SADLY PASSED AWAY earlier this year, aged 94. Bill was born in Preston in 1924 and grew up wanting to be a vet. In 1941, he qualified for the Liverpool Veterinary School but when war broke out he decided he should sign up. Bill's father and two uncles had served in WWI; one of his uncles was killed and the other lost an arm.

Bill joined the Royal Artillery in November 1942. Primary training took place in Aberdeen and was followed by more detailed training in Kent, and then Officer Training in Yorkshire. He passed out in 1943 and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant.

Recalling his WWII days, Bill wrote: *"As a Troop Commander I was leading my men on patrol at 5am on the 26 June 1944. A sniper was giving us trouble and we needed to find him. However, we got hit by heavy shelling. The next thing I knew I was down. I tried to get up but couldn't. I had been shot in the right leg, losing the leg above the knee, while my left leg and right shoulder were penetrated by shrapnel. I remember my Corporal coming over and I was put on a stretcher, into a jeep and taken to a medical tent near Bayeux where they amputated my right leg, which was still inside my trouser uniform, and sorted my other wounds."*

Bill was transported home and taken to a hospital in Leeds where he stayed for five months. The doctors discovered that his left leg, which had also been damaged badly, was giving him as much trouble as his right one; a lot of muscle had been lost and his shoulder and hand were also injured. He was fitted with a tin leg.

Bill was discharged in May 1946 and bought an old mill with his father, later writing: *"I never took handouts or drew the dole. We produced corn and oatmeal, I'd drive up to Scotland to pick up huge, heavy bags of oats – it was very physical work but I could do it all despite the injuries, and I was keen to stay active."*

Bill met and married Eleanor in 1954 and went on to have seven children; five boys and two girls. Later, the family



moved to Churchtown where Bill ran the Post Office and shop, and worked for the brewery as a travelling sales rep.

When their sixth child was born with autism, Bill became very interested in the condition. This led to him retraining as a teacher in a special needs school at the age of 50, which he did until he retired. Sadly, Bill's beloved Eleanor passed away around the same time – in January 1985.

*"I've enjoyed my life immensely. I'm grateful that I can still see and hear and move about and think. I'm not bothered about the things I can't do any more, I'm grateful for the things I can do,"* he wrote.

Bill moved into the Blesma Blackpool Home in 2014. He wrote of Blesma: *"They have been fantastic to me all my life. They helped so much with my leg and as I got older I always thought that if I got to the point where I couldn't be independent I would come to Blackpool. It's a wonderful place and I cannot speak highly enough of the staff, who are caring and helpful."*

During the family's search for a new care home, they discovered the old mill Bill had bought decades ago had been converted into a care home. His family will continue to pass on the story of this remarkable man.

### Phil Eccleston

14 May 1937 - 07 August 2018

PHIL ECCLESTON, THE HONORARY Secretary of the Bournemouth Branch, passed away in August. It was Phil's last wish that the only person to be present at his final farewell would be his wife, Gay.

Having undergone a leg amputation in 2009, Phil was encouraged to attend the Blesma Branch in Christchurch. He joined in May 2010 and, accompanied by his wife Gay, he became a stalwart of the Aldershot Branch. Despite the 160-mile round trip from their home near Bournemouth, they rarely missed a Branch meeting or any of the reunion weekends that were held all around the country.

Phil enlisted into the Corps of Royal Engineers in 1955 and served initially on transport and military engineering. He served two tours with 9 Indep Para Sqn; 1959-1964 and again from 1969-1973. During the latter part of his second tour he was appointed 1 Troop SSgt and commanded the troop during a Northern Ireland tour, and later in Kenya for the Ramisi Bridge construction project.

In 1973, on departure from the squadron, he worked in the RE Sales & Development department in Chattenden. On completing his 22 years of military service, Phil took on civilian employment as Overhead Transmission Line Supervisor for Kennedy & Donkin International Consulting Engineers in North Yemen. He was once warned that the local militia had placed a price on his head!

He later took on similar project work in Botswana, Papua New Guinea and with the gold mining industry in Western Australia.





## Gareth Dunn

**23 August 1991 - 29 October 2018**

AFTER A COURAGEOUS BATTLE WITH cancer, Gareth Dunn sadly passed away on 29 October 2018, aged just 27.

After graduating from university with a degree in History, followed by a Masters in European Politics, his ambition was to join the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) as a diplomatic officer, but not before serving in the Army, for which he was accepted for officer training at Sandhurst.

Almost immediately after selection, he was diagnosed with Sarcoma – a rare and very aggressive form of cancer – in his foot. His right leg was amputated within weeks of the diagnosis and he was given a 50 per cent chance of contracting a secondary cancer.

Then only 23, Gareth was determined not to let this inhibit him. He applied to join the UK Paralympics Team and was accepted to train in five disciplines in preparation for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. However, in January 2017, Gareth sadly contracted secondary cancer of the lungs and was



given just 18 months to live. Shortly after that, the FCO offered him a position as a trainee diplomat, an opportunity he was sadly unable to accept.

None of this was going to stop Gareth in his next objective. He embarked on a cancer awareness programme to raise £100,000 for Cancer Research UK as his legacy. He reached this incredibly high target in just 14 months and, despite his deteriorating health, Gareth managed to take part in Blesma's expedition to the

Bahamas in 2017 and even completed this year's London Marathon. These were truly astonishing achievements!

Gareth was a bright, intelligent and highly motivated individual who was always extremely polite and courteous, with such a loving and positive attitude to life, even in the face of adversity, which he lived with for so long.

Words cannot express how deeply his loss will be felt by everyone who knew him, both personally or otherwise.

## Those who have passed away

**June - October 2018. May they rest in peace.**

<b>Baltzer A</b>	RE	HQ	25/08/2018
<b>Bird B</b>	RMP	HQ	27/10/2018
<b>Britcher J</b>	RA	HQ	10/06/2018
<b>Brown P</b>	RAF	HQ	31/07/2018
<b>Brydon R</b>	KOSB	HQ	05/10/2018
<b>Calderwood R</b>	RAMC	HQ	01/08/2018
<b>Calvert K</b>	Loyals (Nth Lancashire)	HQ	29/10/2018
<b>Dunn G</b>	Army	HQ	Oct 2018
<b>Fakley D</b>	RAF	HQ (Hastings)	18/09/2018
<b>Ford J</b>	RA	HQ	06/07/2018
<b>Foster H</b>	RAF	HQ (Wolverhampton)	26/06/2018
<b>Griffiths G</b>	RN	HQ	08/10/2018
<b>Kilmartin J</b>	Sherwood Foresters	HQ (Wiltshire)	21/09/2018
<b>Leary M</b>	Grenadier Guards	HQ	11/07/2018
<b>Lethaby A</b>	Coldstream Guards	HQ	22/07/2018
<b>Macaulay-Brown J</b>	RAF	HQ	04/09/2018
<b>McDonald J</b>	Cheshire	HQ	June 2018
<b>Moor D</b>	RN	HQ (Bridlington)	23/09/2018
<b>Rayner A</b>	RAC	HQ	05/06/2018
<b>Sharples W</b>	RA	HQ	07/10/2018
<b>Smith J</b>	RN	Portsmouth	August 2018
<b>Stewart Mrs P</b>	WRAF/WRAC	Portsmouth	07/07/2018
<b>Swinton J</b>	Scots Guards	HQ	04/10/2018
<b>Thomas G</b>	RAF	HQ	July 2018
<b>Thraves K</b>	RAF	HQ	Oct 2018
<b>Thurlow A</b>	Cameronians/Gordon Highlanders	HQ	30/09/2018
<b>Towns S</b>	Royal West Kents	HQ	30/10/2018
<b>Watkins P</b>	RAF	HQ (Reading)	17/09/2018



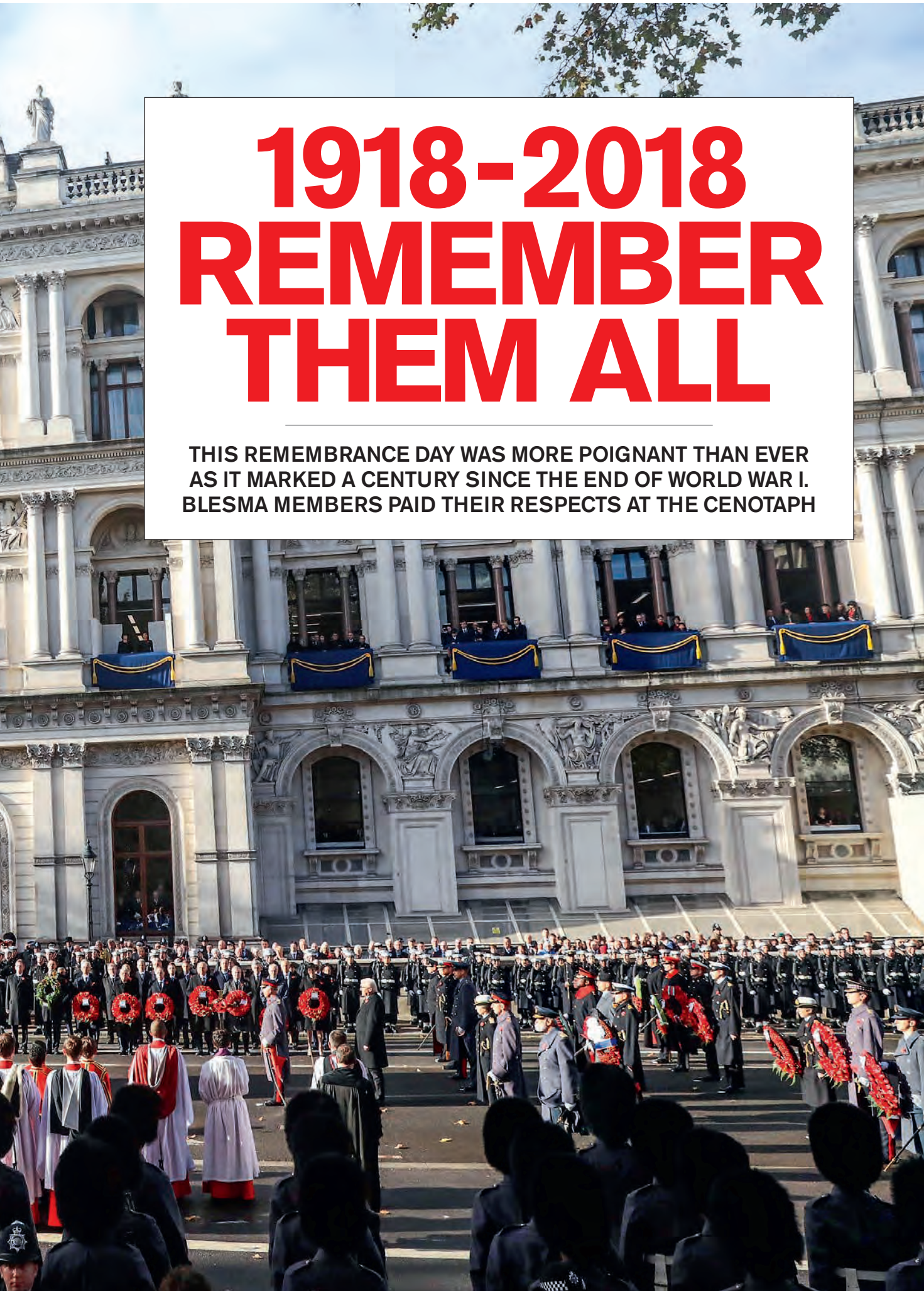


Photography: 2018 Getty Images/Jack Taylor



# 1918-2018 REMEMBER THEM ALL

THIS REMEMBRANCE DAY WAS MORE POIGNANT THAN EVER AS IT MARKED A CENTURY SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR I. BLESMA MEMBERS PAID THEIR RESPECTS AT THE CENOTAPH





## REMEMBRANCE

This was undoubtedly one of the most poignant Remembrance Sunday services ever. One century since the cessation of hostilities in World War I, crowds at the Cenotaph in central London fell silent, hushed with respect. Each person who attended was alone with their thoughts: of bloody battles from history, and of conflicts more recent.

Among them was a proud contingent of 29 Blesma Members, many with Widows, family members or carers alongside them. The Remembrance Weekend is a massive part of what the Association is all about: the shining qualities of mutual respect and helping each other out are amplified at events such as this. That spirit was also reflected in the fact that, once again, scooter company Electric Mobility provided vehicles free of charge for Members who weren't able to walk on the day. It's the 15th year of a special partnership.

The event itself was different, too: this year 10,000 additional marchers formed a 'People's Procession', chosen by ballot, who had the opportunity to pay their respects to those who served in WWI, and give thanks on behalf of Great Britain to the generations who survived more recent conflicts, as well as those who never returned.

As is the case every year, the Blesma Members who took part in the parade experienced different thoughts and emotions on the day. Remembrance is as unique as the individual. We spoke to a number of them to find out what Remembrance Day means to them, and how this most historic of weekends unfolded.



### Tony Lloyd

*Tony was Blesma's wreath bearer on this emotional day*

Tony Lloyd is a veteran not just of the Armed Forces, but of Remembrance Sunday at the Cenotaph – he's been to five. Which is why his favourite part is seeing the faces of debutants as they encounter the wall of noise along The Mall.

"It's fun to see how amazed they are by the sheer scale of it all," he laughs. "You wait at Horse Guards, then go through the archway, turn right and line up. Then, later, when they see the Cenotaph, they are awestruck. That's the only word for it!"

Tony, 73, from Shropshire, didn't think he was going to take part this year, but was asked to help out by Blesma. "There were a lot of new people this year and Blesma that I'd be useful when it came to helping show them the ropes and what was going to happen on the day. That's very much part of the Blesma spirit.

"I had to lead from the front though, because I was the Association's wreath bearer. That was a very great honour. I had to parade with the wreath for a while and then it was taken from me by another wreath bearer, who went and laid it for me."

Tony was injured in a traffic accident in Germany in 1975 which resulted in the amputation of his right leg above the knee. He completed five tours of Northern Ireland and says that honouring "the lads and lasses who didn't come home" dominates his thoughts on Remembrance Sunday.

But the weekend is also about fun, he says. "The camaraderie between all the Blesma Members – and all the cap badges – is a great part of the weekend. On the day, the crowds are simply overwhelming and the atmosphere is fantastic, and that carries on into the social side of the weekend. We all really enjoyed having a few beers on the Saturday, for example. It's all part of a special weekend."



Words: Nick Moore Photography: Simon Hildrew





## Vicky Parrett

*This was Vicky's first time being able to parade on foot*

**T**his was the third successive Remembrance Day at the Cenotaph for Vicky Parrett, but 18 months after her left leg was amputated, it was the first time she'd paraded on foot. "I've been using a wheelchair since getting injured in 2008, so to be able to walk for Remembrance was really nice," she says. "There was an incredible atmosphere this year, but I'm always amazed by the two minutes' silence. It's so strange being in London, surrounded by thousands of people, and it being silent!"

The event was also special for Vicky after the death of her grandad. "We lost him in August, so my thoughts were about him on the day," she says. "He was a captain in the Royal Artillery, so I wore his medals. He was always super-proud of everything I've ever done in the military. He's the reason I joined up, so I reflected on him, and on a couple of friends I've lost in action."

Vicky also enjoyed the social aspect of the weekend. "I arrived at the hotel the day before and thought I'd be the first to get there, but the bar was already full of Blesma Members. We had a fantastic time, the meal was nice, and it was late when we eventually left the bar. Thankfully, nobody's leg fell off as we made our way to our rooms this time, which made a nice change!"

**"I HAVE BEEN USING A WHEELCHAIR SINCE I WAS INJURED IN 2008, SO TO WALK FOR THE REMEMBRANCE PARADE WAS VERY SPECIAL"**



## Richard Chang

*Richard uncovered a piece of history for Remembrance Day*

**R**ichard Chang's uniform for Remembrance Day was more than six months in the making. "I looked everywhere for a WWI cap badge of the Royal Army Dental Corps, who I served with," he laughs, "and eventually I tracked one down to a flea market in Newcastle. I also managed to get the Tam O'Shanter of my old unit in Scotland, so I was very proud to wear them both on the day because I'd put so much effort in!"

Having a keen interest in WWI, Richard found the 100th anniversary particularly special. "At 11am, I was thinking about all the soldiers from that conflict because it was real carnage. We can't forget it because the shelling was just terrible. Pretty much every town and village in the UK lost somebody."

Richard was injured 35 years ago in Northern Ireland, but it wasn't until 2014 that his injury began to really affect him. "I got shrapnel in my foot during an explosion, but I could still run and carry things so I stayed in the Army," he says. "But in 2014, I woke up and my leg was suddenly useless. It had to be amputated quickly."

Paying tribute to those who didn't make it back from conflict motivates Richard when Remembrance comes around. "It was a great honour to be at the Cenotaph to pay my respects to the soldiers who died," he says. "I was honoured to be a part of the day – it is vital that we keep the tradition going. And I love the fact that you meet all sorts of people on the day – I've spoken to WWII veterans at the Cenotaph, and there aren't many to talk to nowadays. Last year, I met a veteran who had won the Victoria Cross in Korea. He died this year. They are all part of our history, so it's important to keep going and remember them on the day."





## Charmaine Healy

*Charmaine overcame her fear of crowds to take part*

Attending the parade caused something of a dilemma for Charmaine Healy: she struggles to cope with crowds due to her PTSD, and it's not exactly quiet on the streets of London on Remembrance Sunday. But with mental toughness and help from her fellow Members, she enjoyed the day.

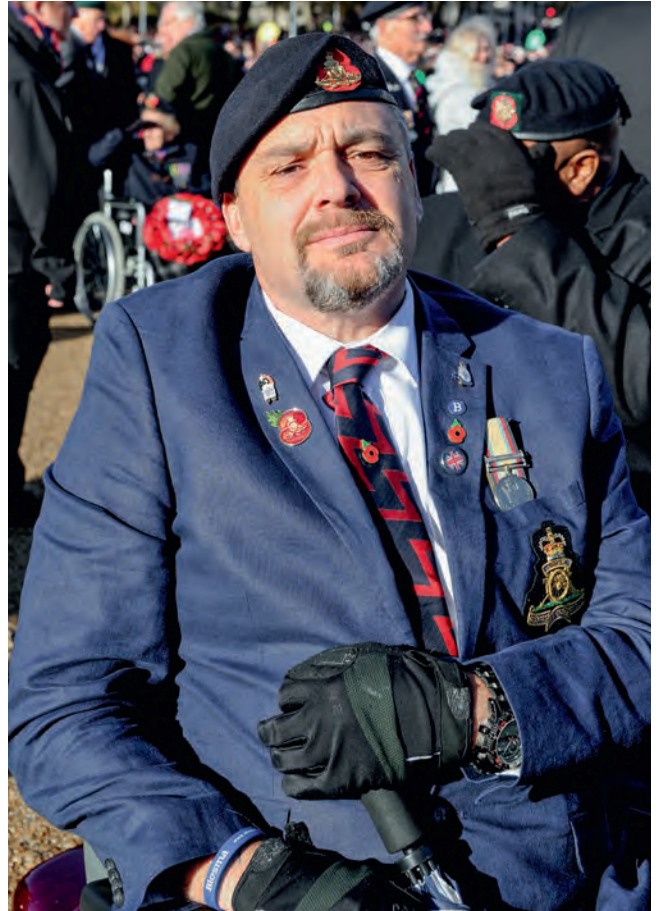
"It was tough for me," says Charmaine. "I find big groups of people difficult, they make me uncomfortable, but I got into the middle ranks during the parade, so I had people on either side of me, and that really helped. I appreciated why everyone had come out to cheer, and it was amazing."

"I took part in the Battlefield Bike Ride in 2016 and saw the huge cemeteries from the World Wars," she says. "The number of people killed was staggering. We went to the museums, saw the trenches and the kind of conditions the troops lived and fought in. It's unimaginable how hard that must have been."

Charmaine completed tours of Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Iraq before she was injured in Afghanistan in 2010 when grenade shrapnel hit her left leg, which was amputated three years later. "When it's time to fall silent, I think of all the people I've served with and have known who have been killed."

Being part of the Blesma contingent made a difference, she says. "I liked how inclusive it was. I felt part of a team – all the Members together, representing something bigger than us as individuals. We were a unit and everyone understood what each other was going through."

"The way Blesma does things is really good. I only knew two people when I arrived, but everyone was so welcoming. Blesma events are among my favourite because everyone just says it how it is. It's inclusive."



## David Gardner

*David always feels incredibly humbled by his fellow veterans*

Most veterans find Remembrance a highly emotional occasion and David Gardner is no exception. "When people fall silent, it brings up all kind of feelings."

I remember mates; it's soon going to be the 25th anniversary of a friend's funeral – he was killed in Northern Ireland, a good mate, like a brother. I think about him every year," says David. "Remembrance is a focal point on the Blesma calendar, and the 100th anniversary was something special. We're giving something back to the people who gave their lives!"

"This time around was pretty much perfect. As soon as we got on the coaches, the sun came out. And then we were among the crowds and everyone was clapping so much. I looked at all the other veterans parading and it was very humbling."

David's own struggles are on-going. Having survived his vehicle being blown up in Kuwait, he was later injured by a freak scorpion bite in Canada. The complications meant two amputations in quick succession, 30 years later. "I'm hopefully getting a prosthetic leg soon and will be walking again," he says, "but I don't think about myself at this time – it's all about remembering others."

**"REMEMBRANCE IS A FOCAL POINT ON THE CALENDAR. WE'RE GIVING SOMETHING BACK TO THE PEOPLE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES!"**





## Roy and Diane Townsend

*Roy Townsend, a former Grenadier Guard, and his wife Diane travelled from South Wales to attend*

**D**iane Townsend perhaps sums up the honour of being part of such a major commemoration as well as any Blesma Member. “We felt part of history,” she reflects on the Remembrance parade she took part in with husband Roy. “It’s such a huge occasion – in some ways exciting, thrilling, loud, and incredible to watch. But then it’s also really humbling. There’s the pride and pageantry of the occasion, but underneath it all is the sacrifice.”

For Roy, 82, who has watched the event on television for “donkey’s years”, it was also an eye-opener. “I’d never realised the amount of applause you get all the way around the route,” he says. “It brought tears to my eyes. It was a wonderful moment when Princess Anne gave the salute, too. I did an ‘Eyes Right’ and looked straight at her!”

Roy, who served in the 1950s, thinks back to less fortunate members of his own family when the eleventh hour strikes. “I had a great uncle

who died in WWI and a second cousin who was killed in WWII, so we’ve got a military tradition in the family,” he says. “I honour and think about them. I’ll never forget their sacrifice.”

The couple also commented on how welcome spouses, friends, carers and family members were made to feel on the weekend. “It was really very nice,” says Diane. “I love being in a military environment because Roy is so comfortable.”

Roy lost his right leg in 2011 after picking up an infection in an operating theatre. “It really knocked him,” adds Diane. “He’s a proud man, and wouldn’t go out or use a scooter for a while. But he feels part of a community with Blesma. It means I’ll also relax. Speaking to other carers is great, too, because you realise you’re not alone. Blesma has made a huge difference to the quality of our lives.”

The parade also proves how many people still care for veterans, Diane says. “It’s a big deal, something truly amazing. You can’t quite believe it!”



# Faith in the face of conflict

Having spent two decades as an Army padre, Reverend Philip McCormack has had to come to terms with all aspects of conflict. Blesma's chaplain discusses belief, bereavement and being there for soldiers

**T**he 18-year-old soldier patrolling the tense streets of Belfast could never have imagined the role he would play in the British Army. As an Ulster Defence Regiment recruit, Philip McCormack was tasked with keeping a fragile peace in the face of hostile sectarianism. He would go on to become a senior Army chaplain and later, as Blesma's chaplain, a key part of Members' Weekend. "Blesma's work is critical in transforming the lives of ex-Service men and women, so I am always humbled and honoured to be part of the Association," says Reverend McCormack. "I see incredible evidence of courage, fortitude and resilience in Service personnel and also in their families, because when you see someone with a row of medals there is often a family behind them who know the cost involved in those medals."

## MAKING SENSE OF CONFLICT

Five years spent on active duty in Northern Ireland, as well as multiple operational tours including Afghanistan in 2009, have challenged Rev McCormack to make sense of all aspects of conflict. The constant that runs through that complex landscape, he believes, is the British soldier's spirit and connection with the padre.

"Commanding Officers have said to me; *'I don't share your faith but I want you there for my boys.'* Very few officers will go to war without a chaplain," says Rev McCormack, who served for 20 years with the Army Chaplaincy before recently becoming the head of Spurgeon's College, a leading UK theological institute based in London.

Reverend McCormack left the UDR as a Second Lieutenant and worked in the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast before attending theological college. It was whilst serving as the pastor of a Baptist

church near Belfast that he sensed a calling to Army chaplaincy. "I joined the UDR just after the hunger strikes and it was a tense time in Belfast. I was young but I enjoyed being a soldier on patrol, doing my bit for the community," he says. "Becoming a chaplain was a very different prospect. We don't carry executive rank and are there as ministers in uniform. Our role is to bring the love of God to soldiers, to face what they face, to go where they go – except we don't carry firearms. In places like Afghanistan, where soldiers were heavily armed, it could be a surprise when the chaplain turned up with just body armour and a rucksack."

As Task Force Helmand's senior chaplain with 19 Light Brigade, Reverend McCormack spent a lot of time with the Light Dragoons Battlegroup during Operation Panther's Claw and visited forward sentry posts.

"I think the chaplain in that environment offers something very different; a different reference point and way of thinking. From a soldier's perspective, the chaplain offers the chance to talk about the things that are occupying his or her mind. They want to talk about family, relationships, hopes and fears – in an environment of confidentiality.

"I remember speaking with one soldier who was the sharp end of the spear, not another British soldier in front of him,

and we simply talked about the things that mattered to him. It wasn't about God or the Bible – but it was an opportunity for him to just talk. If a soldier wanted to talk about football, we'd talk about football!

"Some of the soldiers were respectful but ultimately dismissive because they had no faith, but I built relationships with the troops and, in doing that, they respected my faith because the result of that meant I cared enough to take an interest in them."

## A TIME TO PAUSE AND REFLECT

"Everyone who served in Afghanistan lost friends there; people you had a conversation with in the morning and who were dead in the afternoon. That was very hard!

"During my time in Afghanistan, the Brigade lost far too many soldiers and we carried out far too many services. Whether those who attended had faith or not, a dignity was brought to the bereavement process and it was part of the healing. A drop in the bucket, maybe, but it helped to mark the passing, and gave people a chance to reflect and hear tributes to a person who was part of their lives. It also gave the Brigade time to pause, to reflect, and then to get on with the job."

Reverend McCormack may have moved away from the military, but he will continue to be part of Members' Weekend. "A lot of ex-Service men and women connect with their military past when they see a padre. They have banter with me just like they'd have had with their padres, and it is special for me to go from being the head of a higher education establishment to a padre again.

"I find my role with Blesma humbling, encouraging, inspiring and challenging in equal measure, but I am delighted to be part of the Association – it is made up of a great bunch of men and women."



Rev McCormack leads Members in prayer



**“EVERYONE  
WHO SERVED IN  
AFGHANISTAN LOST  
FRIENDS THERE;  
PEOPLE YOU HAD A  
CONVERSATION WITH  
IN THE MORNING AND  
WHO WERE DEAD IN  
THE AFTERNOON.  
THAT WAS HARD!”**





“  
**WHEN  
THE  
WAVES  
ARE  
CRASHING  
IT'S  
UTTERLY  
EXHILARATING!**  
”

**TO COMMEMORATE THE CENTENARY OF THE END OF WWI,  
BLESMA CHARTERED THE JUBILEE SAILING TRUST'S SHIP  
SV TENACIOUS TO GIVE MEMBERS A REAL ADVENTURE**







Philip Bailey is in his element as he braves the elements



## ACTIVITIES



**P**hilip Bailey is clinging on for dear life. His vessel, the tall ship *SV Tenacious*, is right in the middle of the English Channel en route to Jersey and has caught the end of a tropical storm. The waves are crashing against the ship's bow and the spray is making it difficult even to see. On a slippery deck, as a double amputee, it's not an easy situation to deal with but, along with the rest of his 10-person watch, the 73 year old is busy hoisting ropes and manning the helm, as well as trying to stay on an even keel and not disappear overboard.

"It's fantastic! Amazing!" he booms over the squall. "I'm one of Blesma's keen sailors, but I've never been on a ship like *Tenacious* before. It's pretty rough, and quite a few people are getting sick. Being thrown around, you quickly learn to cling on! The ship moves around quite a lot, and I can't grip with my feet – because I don't have any! So it takes a lot of effort, but when the waves are crashing it's utterly exhilarating."

### THIS IS NO PLEASURE CRUISE

The former Infantry Major, who lost his legs to a rare flesh-eating bug in 2012, is part of one of the most ambitious activities Blesma has perhaps ever offered. A group of injured veterans, accompanied by family members, friends and carers, have set sail in a fully adapted tall ship as part of a unique joint venture with the Jubilee Sailing Trust.

Held in August as part of the World War I centenary commemorations, their week-long mission was unique. *Tenacious* is specially designed to be accessible for all, making it ideal for wheelchair users and amputees. The voyage began in Southampton and negotiated the Channel Islands and the French coast, including a stop at the Lieutenant-Governor of Jersey's mansion for a champagne reception. [See p14 for more.]

The adventure certainly proved enjoyable but this was no pleasure cruise. All Members had a role in the smooth running of the vessel, immersing themselves on watches and in the galley, generally contributing to the daily working routine on board. They set the sails, went aloft, helmed the wheel and operated the keeping systems. "It's a totally different sailing experience to other things I've done, like the Blesma trips to the Greek islands," reflects Philip when he is back on terra firma. "I couldn't get enough if it!

"What was fascinating was that it gave an insight into how the sailors of old got around. The complexity of the thing is mind-boggling! I know the principles of sailing, but this was totally different – there was quite a time lag between turning the rudder and anything actually happening. And there's something like 10 miles of rope on *Tenacious*. The crew know how

**This page: Members and their families come aboard and receive a briefing on what the voyage might have in store**

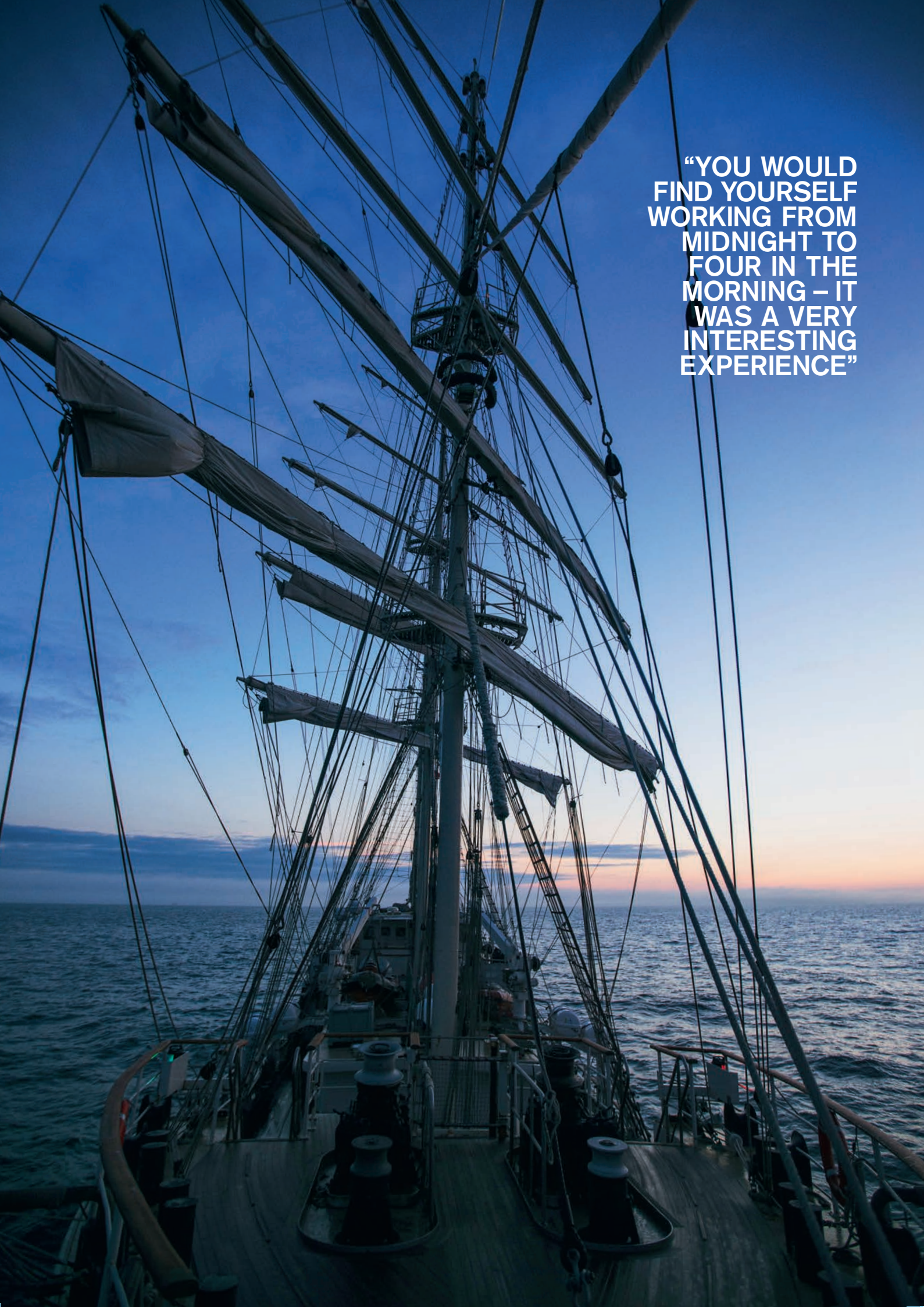
**Right: Then it was time for everyone to get to know the ropes. Literally!**









A tall-masted sailing ship, likely a three-masted schooner, is shown from a low angle on the deck, looking up towards the sky. The ship's complex rigging, including masts, yards, and ropes, is silhouetted against a bright, hazy sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm glow and casting long shadows. The sea is visible in the background, with gentle waves. The overall atmosphere is serene and majestic.

**“YOU WOULD  
FIND YOURSELF  
WORKING FROM  
MIDNIGHT TO  
FOUR IN THE  
MORNING – IT  
WAS A VERY  
INTERESTING  
EXPERIENCE”**



to make it all work, but the sheer muscle power involved was impressive – there’d be 10 of us heaving on a rope and we’d be struggling to make any impact.

“The power of the boat is immense too – on the narrow channel between the French coast and Alderney, when the tide is running at a hell of a rate, you can’t sail against it, you have to go with it. That’s a challenge because the tidal changes are enormous.”

As a former Royal Navy submariner, 73-year-old Bill Arscott has been all over the world, but was just as impressed with the voyage. “It was great! The permanent crew were excellent, and it was fantastic doing it as Blesma *en masse* because crewing a ship is very much a group activity, and Blesma people always blend together really well,” says Bill.

Still a keen sailor in his native Plymouth, Bill is well aware of the benefits of the activity to Members. “I love the fact that sailing builds teams, and it makes people realise that you’ve got to be aware on the water because otherwise someone could get injured.

“There was some brilliant seamanship on board. We started and stopped by sail, and everyone on the trip – from those using wheelchairs to those wearing prosthetics – was involved. The crew said there were

18km of rope on the ship, and we must have pulled 17.5km of them! And I liked the way the ship levelled the playing field. Everyone did time in the galley, regardless of rank. There was a retired Lieutenant Colonel in there, doing as much graft as the rest of us! The hierarchy all went out the window.”

**ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL**

The amount of cooperation to make the ship function was remarkable, adds Philip. “We had four teams of 10 sailing on a 24-hour basis, so you would find yourself up and working from midnight to four in the morning – it was a very interesting experience.”

A key part of the trip, and something that Blesma is keen to develop and build upon in the coming months and years, was the involvement of families, friends and carers. “It was really nice to be invited along,” says Sue Foulds, the wife of member Mick.

“I’ve been along to a few Blesma events informally in the past, after there have been cancellations, for example, but to feel fully part of the activity was great. Mick has taken part in a number of activities with Blesma over the years, and it is fantastic to be given the opportunity to participate in an event along with him

**Left: a rare moment of calm in what was a truly action-packed adventure**

**Below: rough seas made for some serious sailing during the voyage**





## ACTIVITIES

and be appreciated as part of the team. I did get pretty seasick during the rough spell though, but apart from that, it was a really good experience.”

As ever with Blesma, the social side got lively. The crew couldn't go wild in the ship's bar as they were expected to be on duty, and were often up at 4am for their rotas, but each watch spent some time in Saint-Malo, France, enjoying a meal and a few drinks, and the invite to Jersey for an audience with His Excellency Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Dalton, the island's Lieutenant-Governor, was a highlight.

“Jersey believes very strongly in supporting the British Armed Forces and always welcomes visiting units and personnel,” commented the Air Chief Marshal. “We are conscious that military duty demands commitment and sacrifice, and that some personnel suffer as a consequence. That is why we, here in Jersey, wanted to say thank you for that service.”

The Members certainly enjoyed themselves. “The social side was great, and it's always interesting to find out how other people cope with their amputations,” says double amputee Mark Sidwells. “It's that typical Blesma thing of mixing in and getting advice on all sorts of issues, but because we were in the very close

environment of the ship, you couldn't hide. Amputees can sometimes shut themselves away, but everyone had to come out of their shell here. That was healthy!

“Everyone had to adapt, so we all learned a lot too. I picked up ideas and tips, and met people who I'd heard about but not been lucky enough to meet. And I enjoyed the fact that the Lieutenant-Governor was ex-Air Force. There aren't many of us in Blesma!”

Of those involved, many are keen to get back out on the waves again soon. Philip Bailey is foremost among them. “I'm trying to rack up as much sea time as I can, and I would like to take another step up the skipper qualification ladder, too,” he says. “For the sailors among us, spending time on *Tenacious* put us way outside of our comfort zone, and it was the chance to try something we wouldn't normally get the opportunity to do. It's given me, and many others, a real appetite to do more.”

Bill Arscott agrees. “When I lost my leg, I took to sailing and it has made such a difference,” he says. “I'm involved in sailing in Plymouth, taking mentally and physically disabled people sailing, and I get so much out of it. I love the sea. Hopefully, a trip like this will help give that to other people.”

**Below: from scrubbing the decks to hoisting the sails, everyone had a job to do**

**Opposite page: David Rowe enjoying life on the ocean waves**





















## MARK SIDWELLS, 55

*Mark served in the RAF. He was injured post-Service after an accident carrying furniture*

### **What impressed you the most about *Tenacious*?**

Setting the sails – all 20 or so of them – into the wind correctly was a huge job. It was so different from sailing a yacht, and the sheer number of people it took to do it was just amazing. Oddly though, once it was away, it was easier to sail than a smaller yacht. The vastness of it was incredible, and if you were in a wheelchair those sails could pull you over, so we all had to be careful.

### **Was it tough work?**

I did find it hard, especially at the start of the voyage when the seas were choppy. But that was all worthwhile because it stretched us. It took us out of our comfort zone!

### **Tell us about your injury, and how Blesma has helped...**

I dropped a wardrobe on my foot a couple of years ago, and it took the side of my foot off. I was in a coma for six months, on life support, I couldn't fight the infection. I lost my left leg, and a week later, my right one. But the amputations saved my life, so I can't complain. I walk using prosthetics, and my legs aren't going to grow back, so let's just get on with it! Blesma has been great. They gave me a hand cycle, which I use to keep fit (I love going out riding with my son!) and I enjoy Members' Weekend.

### **How do you feel now you're back on dry land?**

I've actually been looking into doing some more sailing. The fact that *Tenacious* goes all around the world – as far as Australia – is interesting. That might be something I'd like to do. Although, of course, the problem with that is that I wouldn't be able to get off if I changed my mind!



## GEORGE BUTTON, 84

*George was injured in a motor accident in 1964*

### **You were one of the older Members on board. How did you find the trip?**

I really enjoyed it – it was like a schoolboy's adventure! I got involved in everything – setting the rigging, pulling ropes, and getting up at 4am for the watch. Being in a wheelchair was a bit difficult, and it took me a few days to recover when I got back home, but I would do it all again.

### **What were the views like out at sea?**

Amazing! The one that impressed me the most was when we were below deck. With the waves washing over the portholes, it was like being inside a washing machine. Things were sliding around all over the place, but we got used to watching out for any potential difficulties and really made the most of it.

### **What did you learn?**

A lot of new skills that I won't use much on a daily basis, that's for sure! I sailed to Kenya for the Mau Mau Uprising when I was a soldier, but that was in the 1950s. I found this trip fascinating: the things you have to check when you're on anchor watch, or how to navigate to a compass, or taking readings. You can't help but think about the guys doing it 200 years ago. It must have been something else!

### **You also won a lot of fans by climbing to the top of the rigging...**

Yes. My upper body is pretty fit and strong, even though I'm 84. I got up the rope using a sliding attachment. I was determined to do it because everyone else had managed it. The view from the top was great.





## MARK DUSTIN, 48

*Mark served in the Territorial Army and was injured in 2006*

### **Did you see a transformation in yourself and others on this trip?**

Absolutely. I thought it was amazing. On the first day I shuffled over the gangplank like an old man, but when I walked off that ship I was like a soldier again; standing tall. That was the experience I wanted.

### **And a lot of bonding took place...**

Yes. The highlight for me was being back among the guys. Everyone was included in everything, which pulled people together. I made friends I will never lose, some of the nicest people you could meet. When Ali Grant found out my wife has fibromyalgia, for example, she donated her a wheelchair!

### **What was your main role on board?**

I was the ship's doctor! I used to be a doctor, so I took care of medical matters on board.

But we all did anything and everything, and that's what made it unique. The atmosphere and the military spirit were out in full force, but the civilian crew were also constantly helping and encouraging us. I'd have had them in my platoon any day of the week!

### **And you're now looking to build on the experience...**

Definitely. After the trip, the Jubilee Sailing Trust got in touch with me and asked if I would like to become a watch leader, which I was so pleased about. As a leader, you make sure all the necessary things are in the right place and everything is being done at the right time. Mainly, you're keeping an eye on matters, so I definitely think I will be doing more trips like this. I can't wait!

## MICK FOULDS, 66

*Mick served with the Royal Engineers and was injured post-Service while working on the railways in 2007*

### **You and your wife, Sue, both took part in the trip...**

We did, and that made it a great experience – being able to bring Sue along really added to it. Apart from the first day, when she was seasick, we had a great time. But it was no cruise! We were worked hard, and I liked that. We all mucked in and followed a roster, doing watches in the day and at night, or helping out with the meals in the galley.

### **What were your personal highlights of the trip?**

You've got to be in awe of a ship like this when it is under sail. It's a truly exciting thing, and seeing a ship like this is rare nowadays. The fact that it has been adapted for disabled people is pretty special. The accommodation was a bit basic, perhaps not ideal for amputees, but we made it work. And as with all Blesma events, the best part was the people.

### **Although there wasn't much of a chance for a jolly...**

The reception in Jersey was great; lovely wine and canapés, and the Lieutenant-Governor was very welcoming. But we had to be up at silly o'clock the next morning to catch the tide!

### **Blesma has been a huge help to you, hasn't it?**

Yes, it has been absolutely brilliant – it has changed my life. I don't know what I'd have done without the Association, and that's no exaggeration! They came to see me after my injury and did my paperwork, and since then, the practical assistance they've given me has been invaluable. Blesma gives you the chance to do things that you wouldn't do otherwise. And I love the fact that Blesma Members are a varied lot. That definitely makes life interesting!



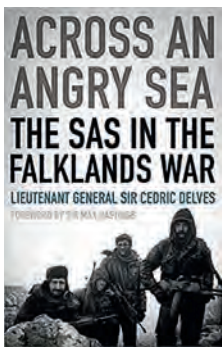


**“YOU’VE GOT TO BE IN AWE OF A SHIP LIKE THIS – IT’S A TRULY EXCITING THING. THE FACT THAT IT HAS BEEN ADAPTED FOR DISABLED PEOPLE IS PRETTY SPECIAL”**



“It seemed to write itself. I started at the left and ended up on the right,” Blesma’s former national chairman, Sir Cedric Delves, modestly says of his memoir about commanding SAS troops during The Falklands War

# ACROSS AN ANGRY SEA



Few people know more about The Falklands War than Blesma’s former chairman Lieutenant General Sir Cedric Delves. He commanded D Squadron 22 SAS in the South Atlantic where his men waged a tactical war against invading Argentinian forces for 100 days. In his characteristically direct style, his book *Across an Angry Sea* delivers a searing first-hand

account of The Regiment’s crucial role in liberating the Falklands in 1982, a campaign peppered with bravery, military skill and tragedy.

In his book Sir Cedric, who was Blesma’s national chairman for seven years until 2017, reveals how the SAS, with its gaze at the time firmly fixed on the Cold War threat from Russia, had to refocus attentions 7,864 miles south to a distant dependent group of islands.

Hurriedly assembled and scrounging transport from Royal Navy and Fleet Auxiliary vessels along with helicopter rides, the then 35-year-old Major landed on neighbouring South Georgia to trigger the start of a tough battle to regain control of the islands.

D Squadron 22 SAS had the distinction of destroying 11 Argentine aircraft on Pebble Island and took part in attacks and diversionary actions fighting alongside Regular regiments of the British Army. The honours were tempered by tragedies, including The Regiment’s heaviest loss of life when 20 members were killed as a Sea King helicopter plunged into the freezing seas on 19 May 1982.

Sir Cedric took time out of his busy schedule to discuss writing a book, commanding troops in warfare, and why he is intensely proud to have been Blesma’s chairman, and to remain a Blesma Member...

#### How did you come to write the book?

There have been a lot of things written about the SAS since the Iranian Embassy siege in 1980 – and some of it pretty inventive, painting a picture of a regiment I didn’t fully recognise. We are all normal-ish people. Of course, there is a selection process that requires certain physical and psychological abilities. We are not a lot different from others, yet we are put up on this pedestal with people writing such nonsense about us. I wanted to put that straight. I also wanted to write something that might serve as a tribute to all those who sailed south in the Squadron many years ago.

#### Are you lifting the lid on the inner workings of the SAS?

No. I wouldn’t do that. It is worth reminding ourselves that the SAS is not a secret intelligence service. We are soldiers who, in conflict, must operate openly and in accordance with the rules and conventions of war. In this respect, it is right that the public knows what we have been doing and how we have been doing it.

You cannot reveal this very often, for obvious security and operational reasons. The Falklands War is a rare exception; not only did it take place a long time ago now, but it was fought by us openly, alongside our conventional colleagues and friends. The book covers only events already publicised in Sir Lawrence Freedman’s government-commissioned official history of the conflict. I believe we did it well in the Falklands, with decency. The troops never once lost sight of our shared





Sir Cedric Delves,  
photographed in 2017  
at Members' Weekend







Photograph: IWM/Getty Images Peter Holdgate



humanity. The way the British fight is bloody hard, with determination and imagination, and we are notable for our humanity and decency, particularly when we come out on top. We know when to stop. It is as well to reassure people on that score – we fight to our national values. It's an important point.

**In 1982, the UK was going through a tough time economically and socially. Did you feel that the country was united behind the campaign?**

At the time, the country didn't feel to be in a good place; there was something fractious about it. The Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was unpopular and we seemed to be on our national uppers. Then, blow me, some South American military junta takes it upon itself to invade us! Most of us might not have known where the Falklands were at the time. We might have been somewhat down, but we weren't out. The country was galvanised and came together. There were some dissenting voices, but 90 per cent of the nation was united in wanting to put things right.

**You were among the first British troops to land in the Falklands. What conditions did you face?**

We were full of vim and vigour at the beginning; it is not every day you go on operations, and we counted ourselves fortunate. We went off with enthusiasm, down to South Georgia in the first instance. It was not a good place to start any war. It is a harsh, volatile place that can catch you out. It caught us out. It exposed our weaknesses. The weather was the biggest surprise; that and the sea. But we got the measure of it, learning to give it our utmost respect. In a way, we grew up on South Georgia. Certainly, by the time the rest of the Task Force arrived, we had a feel for things: how the Navy worked, the weather, the sea, even our enemy. In a way, we were getting the measure of our new circumstances – a developed feel for this particular war.

**What actions were the Squadron involved in?**

Mainly what we call offensive action. G Squadron, our sister squadron, was working surveillance, information gathering, the SBS beach recce and such. There were challenges, and one shouldn't expect a lot of spontaneity.

The SAS almost always fights at a numerical and physical disadvantage. You have to mitigate that, if not exploit it, through careful reconnaissance and precision so as to strike an enemy where and when they least expect it. That can take time. A previous Commanding Officer at the time of the Cold War likened it to 'driving a needle into the eye of the bear' – you can do a lot of damage if you get it right.

Our final night was a good case in point, when we were introduced late into proceedings to provide a diversion for 2 Para. They were to attack Wireless Ridge overlooking the capital, Port Stanley. Our part was to mount a diversion employing Royal Marine rigid raiders. There was no time for prior reconnaissance or any other detailed preparation. We ran into trouble – big time! It wasn't my finest hour but we got away

with it because of the skill of the troops – suffering two non life-changing injuries, mercifully. By then, the Squadron had been at it for 100 days or so. The 'Merry Men' really knew their business. Our efforts did draw some attention away from 2 Para, a lot of artillery fire came down on ourselves – tricky. We had no helmets and there was no body armour back in those days.

**How was the process of writing the book?**

It seemed to write itself. I started at the left and ended up on the right. Fortunately, we had kept a diary of the principal events, along with dates. It proved very accurate. I spoke to people in the Squadron. Of course, the memory does cloud and distort things over time; take an incident involving five people, ask them what happened, and you will get six different answers! Obviously, I took into account what people said. It is our story, very much as I recall it. It won't be as everyone remembers. Nevertheless, I hope the overall impression rings true for us all. The process of writing the book took about two years and I rather miss it, but I won't be writing another.

**What has been the reaction to the book?**

Okay, so far.

**What are your memories of The Falklands War?**

We were hurt quite badly. The Regiment suffered great loss. A helicopter went down with 20 of our people. It was terrible. We are close, friends as much as comrades. It was a hard war, but I wouldn't have missed it, the opportunity to serve like that alongside such close companions. Unsettlingly in a way, life was never quite the same after the Falklands. I think most of us must feel that way; amongst the tragedies, perhaps from them, something shines out. But I do miss the people we lost. Lawrence, my Sergeant Major, was such a good natured, optimistic person. I really hope the book can serve as a tribute to them all – indeed everyone who sailed south in the Squadron Group.

**How was your time at Blesma?**

It was a real privilege to be chairman – really enjoyable, so much passion. Blesma maybe a registered charity but it seems more like a club. One might not wish to meet the entry criteria, but if eligible, it's one helluva thing to be part of. There is something very special about a Blesma Member. Some have such appalling injuries, even so they simply get on with life, often 'over-achieving', if you follow me. It's inspiring. I saw Adrian Bradshaw, my successor as chairman, recently and he is loving it, too. Blesma is infectious. Of course, I haven't left Blesma. I'm still very proud to be a Member and look forward to catching up with other Members and hearing about what they are doing.

**“THE WAY THE BRITISH FIGHT IS BLOODY HARD, AND WE ARE NOTABLE FOR OUR HUMANITY – WE KNOW WHEN TO STOP – AND WE FIGHT TO OUR NATIONAL VALUES”**

---

*Sir Cedric's book **Across An Angry Sea: The SAS In The Falklands War** is published by Hurst Publishers. The hardback edition costs £20 and can be ordered online from [www.hurstpublishers.com](http://www.hurstpublishers.com)*





Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Alison Baskerville



# WHEN THEY REALISE *THIS IS NOT FOR YOU* IS FOR THEM

This Summer, Blesma Members joined forces with the Graeae Theatre Company to put on a production commemorating 100 years since the end of WWI. Everyone from theatre goers to newspaper critics gave *This Is Not For You* rave reviews...

**B**lesma Members are certainly accustomed to challenges, but 24 volunteers went way beyond their comfort zones this Summer when they performed a piece of theatre that explored perceptions of war and its lasting impact on society and families. They learnt circus skills on trapezes and how to suspend themselves from rings for the production of *This Is Not For You*; an innovative blend of physical performance, acting and singing that captivated audiences across the country.

The show, created by the Graeae Theatre Company and co-commissioned by Blesma and 14-18 NOW, won rave reviews from critics and audiences who attended the open air performances earlier this year. The Graeae team, which champions diversity in the arts, worked with Blesma Members, as well as a professional cast and a community choir to stage the provocative scenes of conflict and its aftermath.

The production, which was also signed for deaf people, took six months to develop and incorporated circus skills sessions, song coaching and performance training to create a haunting WWI tribute which *The Guardian* described as “defiant and open hearted”.

The newspaper’s positive review concluded: “Though a moving experience for an audience, the real value of this piece is that it offers these veterans a chance to be seen and heard.”

Jenny Sealey, the artistic director of Graeae and the director of *This Is Not For You*, said: “Working on the production was a learning experience for everyone involved, but I’m so proud of what we all achieved. Everyone gave 100 per cent to make this monumental piece of theatre possible. I just hope it can be seen by a wider audience as it’s such an important story.”

We caught up with two of the performers; Troy Conner, a 39-year-old former Parachute Regiment Lance Corporal who suffered a broken back and brain damage from an IED blast before being shot in the leg in Afghanistan, and Susi Rogers-Hartley, who suffered devastating spinal injuries in a training accident while serving in the Royal Navy and who is now an accomplished horse rider and trainer...

#### How did you get involved with the production?

**Troy:** I took part in the Making Generation R training and after that I was asked if I wanted to get involved in the production. I’ve never performed before but giving the talks to students has given me a voice and the confidence to get up and talk in front of people, so I thought ‘*Why not?*’ When I heard there would be other Blesma Members in it, I signed up like a shot.

**Susi:** I was contacted about it and asked if I wanted to take part. It was definitely a leap into the unknown for me, but that’s what I like doing the most!





**24 Members took part in the open air productions of *This Is Not For You***

**What were your first impressions of being involved in the production, and how was the training?**

**Troy:** I don't think any of us knew what to expect beforehand, but the training was great. We went to a circus in Sheffield to learn the trapeze, the rings and floor gymnastics, which built up our confidence. We got much fitter doing all that work and then it was on to London to rehearse.

**Susi:** We were told we could either take part in the role of storytellers or aerialists. I decided I would rather keep quiet, so I went for aerialist. Mind you, I had no idea what an aerialist was! The first session was at the National Centre for Circus Arts and when I saw the trapeze and stilts I thought; *'This is crazy!'*

**What was the best part of the training?**

**Susi:** For me, it was discovering how my body could work under such extreme conditions. The trainers were brilliant, constantly thinking outside the box. There was none of this; *'Oh, perhaps you shouldn't be doing this because you're disabled.'* It was more like; *'Come on, let's get on with it!'* That was really refreshing.

**Troy:** For me, the best bit was being given the initial opportunity. When you're serving in the Forces, you're used to doing something all encompassing with a big purpose, and for quite a long time after I left the Army I felt that I'd lost that. Taking part in the production

gave me a sense of purpose again, and it was great to be on that journey with other Blesma Members. I believe in Blesma 100 per cent – it has been a really important part of my journey.

**How did the production come together?**

**Susi:** Some of us have arms or legs missing, or limbs we are not able to use, but we were all involved – no-one was left out. There were moments that tested us as we transitioned from training as aerialists to rehearsing for the actual production. I certainly wondered what I had let myself in for! But I suppose Jenny [*Sealey, the director*] could see what we couldn't. When we got to the technical run through and the performance I could see it, that's when I got it!

**Troy:** It was a slow development and, at times, it was a bit frustrating because we all wanted to progress. But the entire process was great and I totally enjoyed it.

**Were you nervous on the performance days?**

**Troy:** I thrived off that! I loved it and it gave me a great sense of wellbeing and being present in something special. I'm a humble guy but I like the opportunity to have a bit of the stage and, if anything, I would have liked a bigger part! I was involved in shifting the metalwork and cuboids around, the trenches and PTSD scenes, and we all got involved in all the songs.





**Susi:** I was a bit nervous, particularly when we started doing the rehearsals, because that was when I realised that we were all going to be involved in the *entire* production. I enjoyed it though! I've never sung in public in my life, but we had voice coaching and I discovered I was a soprano. I was so nervous as we were lining up to march on for the first couple of performances, and I really thought I was going to forget something. But it was a lovely experience. We had a great deal of support from the audiences, which helped with the nerves.

**What have you learnt and how have you benefitted from the experience?**

**Troy:** I'm really glad that I signed up to take part in the first place. Being involved in the production allowed me to learn new skills and make new friends, and it has given me a taste for wanting to get on stage and perform more. If Graeae rang me tomorrow with another production I wouldn't think twice!

**Susi:** I definitely developed emotionally throughout the rehearsals and performances, and the whole experience has given me confidence. I'm quite a quiet person, but I was thrown in at the deep end with this and it was great to work as a team with a group of Blesma Members. I thoroughly enjoyed it and made sure I savoured every second of every day!

**Why is it important to you that we mark the centenary of the end of WWI?**

**Susi:** Because our lives are so free now, I think people can easily forget how that freedom came about, so it is really important to remember and reflect.

**Troy:** It is massively important, particularly for the younger generations, that we remember the loss and sacrifice of our young soldiers; those who gave their lives and those who came back as heroes or different in one way or another. It is a huge part of our history and we should remember and reflect on it whilst also being proud of it.

**What are your lasting memories from being involved in the production?**

**Troy:** It is definitely the singing! I didn't realise it was going to be part of the production when I agreed to be involved, and I felt a bit self-conscious at first – I think a lot of us did. But if you are singing with other people, they are feeling the same as you, and your confidence grows. By the end of the rehearsals, I couldn't wait for the next song. At the beginning, a lot of people said things along the lines of; *'You'll not get me singing!'* Watching everyone change their attitudes and develop was awesome.

**Susi:** I will treasure it, all of it, and would love to be picked for something like that in the future.

**“THERE WAS NO; ‘YOU SHOULDN'T BE DOING THIS BECAUSE YOU'RE DISABLED! IT WAS MORE LIKE; ‘COME ON, LET'S GET ON WITH IT!’ THAT WAS REFRESHING”**



## VANESSA LUCAS

*As the new Outreach Officer for the Midlands Area, Vanessa plays a key role in bringing Members together. She explains what life is like five months into the job*

**Before I applied for the Blesma Outreach Officer role** for the Midlands, I knew a little bit about the Association and the military lifestyle because my husband is serving with the Royal Signals. I had been looking to work in the charity sector for some time and when the job came up it was everything I had been looking for.

**My background is in Human Resources and community work**, but I've done a lot of voluntary work, too. I'm very much a people person, and through my voluntary and previous work roles, I had a good idea of what would be involved as an Outreach Officer. I love that this is a brand new role, so I can really make it my own.

**Sam [Wileman, BSO Midlands] and I have a great working relationship.** It was clear right from the start that I shared her vision of what she wants for her area and her Members. Our main vision is to work with Members and their families to conquer social isolation and help Members remain independent.

**The first five months in the role have been great.** No working day is ever the same. Some days, I'll be engaging local volunteers and organisations, accessing community programmes and promoting Blesma to wider networks. Other days, I'll be in direct contact with our Members, planning and organising an event, or even attending one.

**“OUR VISION IS TO WORK WITH MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES TO CONQUER SOCIAL ISOLATION AND HELP THEM REMAIN INDEPENDENT”**

**My very first local event involved organising Blesma brunches** in each of the counties in the Midlands Area. Sometimes, people can't or don't want to travel too far to take part in an activity, or they feel a bit overwhelmed about attending a big event. So, holding something more relaxed makes it accessible to a wider demographic of Members. The brunches were a great success and we've had lovely feedback from lots of people who took part.

**We've also held others events; a family day at Drayton Manor**, a model aircraft flying day for Members who have an interest in flying and drones, and most recently we held an Adrenaline Jungle activity day, which brought together a double amputee, a 67-year-old Widow, and some of our younger Members. There was such a mix of Members, and everyone put everything they had into the event.



**By working at a local level, we have the time to speak** to Members a bit more and find out what impact we're making. Members have gone on to meet up for coffee after attending a local event together, and Members are really proud of their achievements, especially when they try something new. It's about giving people the opportunity to do something out of their comfort zone.

**I want to promote peer-to-peer support amongst the membership**, so I ask the Members if they can give each other a lift to events, for example. In some cases, Members would not have been able to attend had it not been for another Member's help. New friendships have been built, especially amongst some of our most vulnerable Members. It's been brilliant to see the difference it has made to their lives.

**I've always been open minded, but this job has already taught me a great deal.** I'm definitely thinking more about the needs of Members and have more of an understanding of what our Members have had to overcome and achieve to be where they are today.

**I'm already thinking about 2019; seasonal activities that** are based on the weather, making sure we can fit events around people and their busy lives, as well as continuing to network, recruit volunteers and promote Blesma. It's hard work but it's great fun!



# Exceptional Safety

This unique combination of integrated stance support and hydraulic technology enhances confidence and increases independence.



## The Multi-Award Winning Integrated Limb System

Enjoy a walking experience that is closer to nature than ever before.



MacRobert Award  
Winner 2016



Follow Blatchford:  
@BlatchfordGrp  
/BlatchfordGrp

blatchford.co.uk  
+44 (0) 1256 316600  
customer.service@blatchford.co.uk



blatchford





# Re-Flex Shock™

## Direct Socket TT

### Iceross® Synergy Liner

As worn by Jim Bonney,  
former Royal Marines Officer and  
Adventure Rehabilitation Specialist

---

When people say to me 'you seem to thrive having to think outside the box', my reply is simple... 'what box?'

#lifewithoutlimitations

Jim Bonney uses Re-Flex Shock, Direct Socket and Iceross Synergy Liner by Össur.



[WWW.OSSUR.CO.UK](http://WWW.OSSUR.CO.UK)