

Blesma

The magazine for
limbless veterans



LIFE AFTER LIMB LOSS

Becky Ormrod talks frankly about the aftermath of amputation – from a partner’s perspective

Members' Weekend **Special Report**

Members share amazing stories

Swimming the Channel, crossing the country and skiing in America; epic expeds are retold **p24**



News, views and opinion

What was the best part of the entire weekend? Members have their say **p30**



Key message: get involved!

Delegates take the plunge as they get a taste for just a few of the activities on offer to all Members **p27**



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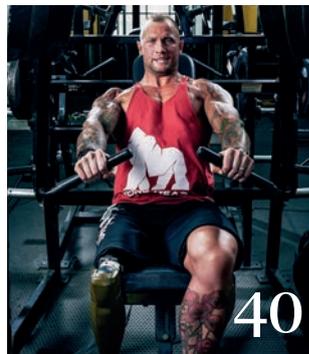
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Photographs: Adrian Myers



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Have you got a great story you'd like to tell? Do you want help publicising an event or expedition that you're planning? Then get in touch with us at editor@blesma.org

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Special thanks to: Lisa Aston, Brian Chenier, Frank Garside, Barry Le Grys, Emily Mizon, Heather Nicholson, 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, Wales & N Ireland 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: Summer 2015. © ScratchCreate 2015.

NEWS

News, views and opinion
from the world of Blesma

Chief Executive Barry
Le Grys completed the
Three Peaks Challenge
during Blesma Week



Blesma Week is bigger than ever

Words: Danny Buckland

From the glorious sunshine of a garden party to icy gales on top of Britain's tallest mountain, the Blesma family has been going the extra mile to fundraise for the charity.

Blesma Week, held from 01-07 June, was a towering success, with more than 100 events taking place across the UK, raising more than £30,000 for the Association.

Activities included cake sales, football games, gruelling sponsored runs and much more. The second annual Blesma Week highlighted the lengths that the public, as well as Members and their friends and families, will go to to support the charity.

"The week acts as a focus for fundraising and support for Blesma, and it gives people the opportunity to get involved at all levels and with all types of activity – be it a cake bake or a larger challenge," said Blesma Chief Executive Barry Le Grys, who took on the Three Peaks Challenge as part of the effort.

"The week is fantastic because it is open to everyone, irrespective of their capacity

or capabilities. It is a big Blesma party, and what really impressed me was the spirit and generosity on display in every event. Blesma Week encapsulates everything that makes Blesma such a great community. On behalf of everyone at Blesma, I'd like to say a big thank you to all who took part."

THE GROBY CHALLENGE

The Groby Challenge was a 24-hour non-stop race around the Leicestershire village of Groby. Organised by veteran fundraiser Jeff Twilton, who spent 24 years in the REME, the event attracted more than 50



runners, including a three year old who completed the final 4.5km loop on a scooter. The family atmosphere played a major part in fundraising, with the event bringing in more than £3,000.

"We had great support from the village and the ex-Service men's club," said Jeff, a services manager with GE Oil and Gas. "It went so well that people in the village are already talking about next year's event."

Former tank commander Paul Swain, who lost an arm in Afghanistan, ran the final lap. "The whole village supported the effort, there was great community spirit and the runners were aged three to 63," said Jeff, who organised 100 runners to raise funds for Blesma at last year's Cheltenham half-marathon. "We had someone on the circuit for the entire 24 hours and some were running with high visibility jackets and torches."

PEDALLING FOR POUNDS

There was another big physical effort from a team of cyclists who took on a 100-mile

Members' Weekend 2015

A front row seat at Blesma's big bash (p22)



route from Exeter to Bristol to raise more than £2,500. The event was organised by Rob Chatfield, Managing Director of OpCare, the largest provider of prosthetic services to the NHS in the UK.

The team, which included colleagues, supporters, Blesma Member Jez Scarratt, and BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier, cycled from the Exeter Mobility Centre to the Bristol Centre of Enablement via Cheddar Gorge.

"The ride itself was tough but pleasant, and it was great to be joined by Jez and be guided by Dereck Cutler, a friend of Blesma," said Rob. "The support that all the riders received throughout the day, both from each other and supporters, was brilliant, and Jez and Dereck kept us at the right pace and on the right route."

Brian Chenier added; "Working for Blesma means that I get to see the difference this kind of fundraising event can make first-hand. I cycle for leisure, so achieving the '100 miles in a day' challenge was a personal goal." »

Above: Team OpCare and supporters cycled 100 miles from Exeter to Bristol – in a day

welcome

I have been in post just over a year and it has flown by. I have not met all the membership yet, but I am pleased to now know a good number. Last month, the Members' Weekend was a 'sell out' and the feedback has been hugely positive, so we will commit to a larger event next year. The date and venue will be in the next magazine and Bulletin; please pencil it in your diary and make a booking. If you are in any doubt, the article on p22 should persuade you.

The impact of limb loss and loss of use of limb upon the family, and the immense value of close family support, featured at the Members' Weekend. We are conducting research with Anglia Ruskin University to gather evidence, including coping strategies, because there is very little documented, and we need to judge if our attention and practical approach to date offers the right support to families. We are sincerely grateful to Becky Ormrod for her honesty and wisdom on p34. Her thoughts will resonate with other partners, providing encouragement.

This edition also focuses on Mark Smith's bodybuilding endeavours. Mark is challenging traditional perceptions in the arena, and winning. Also challenging the norm is film director Paul Katis. I was surprised when he told me *Kajaki* is the only British-made big screen film on the Afghanistan conflict. We put on a screening for Trustees, staff and supporters and I would like to thank Stuart Pearson for joining us with Paul and answering our questions.

Our ambassador Marcus Lyon features on p32 and we wish to thank him for being personally engaged with the ever-growing photography interest group. We also have an article on volunteering and, while Blesma has much experience of volunteers, without whom we would not achieve what we do, we encourage more involvement.

I have now met Mark Lancaster in his role as Minister for Personnel and Veterans. It was an encouraging session. The Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, and its relationship with the War Pension scheme, is up for review and we are consulted. We have already made a preliminary response, highlighting anomalies. We are also working very closely with the Royal British Legion and their manifesto. One item has been achieved and we hope more will be. We are in discussion about the LIBOR mobility support fund. Meanwhile, we welcome Member Paul Findlay as Support Officer for London and Kent.

Very best wishes for an enjoyable summer and please do tell us what you are getting up to.

Barry Le Gry
Chief Executive



NEWS



Clockwise from above: Bolton Wanderers and Nottingham Forest FC present cheques to Chief Executive Barry Le Grys, Members and supporters raise money for Blesma

BLACKPOOL GARDEN PARTY

The annual garden party at the Blesma Blackpool Home was blessed with sunshine, and distinguished guests included the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire, Lord Shuttleworth, and former England and Blackpool footballer-turned-radio commentator Jimmy Armfield.

“More than 200 people attended, including local dignitaries and veterans from all generations,” said the Home’s Manager Jacqui Longden. “This is the North West’s answer to a Buckingham Palace garden party! We had traditional tea and were entertained by the Royal Artillery Volunteers Band, while our staff worked hard to make it a successful event.”

Representatives from Nottingham Forest and Bolton Wanderers Football Clubs were on hand to present generous cheques from their season of fundraising, which added up to more than £30,000.

“It is a traditional event and those who come feel privileged to be here,” said Jacqui. “The residents enjoy it because they can show the Home off to friends and family. The success of the garden party shows the

warmth the public has for Blesma and the Home; so many people come to show their support and it is one of the highlights of the calendar for veterans in the town.”

THREE PEAKS CHALLENGE

Blesma Chief Executive Barry Le Grys found himself in an altogether harsher environment on the Three Peaks Challenge. Participants have to scale the three highest peaks in England, Scotland and Wales in 24 hours. Scaling the first mountain, Ben Nevis, was made difficult by high winds.

“The top of Ben Nevis was under two metres of snow, and the wind chill factor dropped to -15°C,” said Barry. “Conditions slowed us, so we had to go up and down Scafell Pike in the dark! But we completed Snowdon within the allotted 24 hours. It was a fantastic experience and four or five more Blesma Members plan to take on the challenge over the next few months. I set myself a target of raising £550 and I achieved that. We covered 42km in distance, 3,000 metres in height, a lot of miles in a minibus and three peaks in three countries. It was well worth the effort!”

BLESMA WEEK BRIEFS

FUN DAY RAISES £780

Former Corporal David Wild organised a family fun day at the Anchor Hotel in Darwen, Lancashire, that attracted more than 300 locals and raised £780.

“I wanted to give back to Blesma, especially since they have given so much to me,” said David, who lost his left leg below the knee in an operation that went wrong. “I would also like to pass on a special thanks to Lance and Mel, the landlord and landlady of The Anchor Hotel, for allowing us to use their pub for the day.”

QUARTERMASTER MAKES £500

Rob Holland was put through his paces at the Army Cadet Force National Athletics Championships as he completed 50 laps of the Meres Stadium track interspersed with 1,000 sit-ups and press-ups.

“Every five laps, I did 100 press-ups and 100 sit-ups. My family acted as judges and they didn’t let me get away with anything!” joked 59-year-old Rob, a retired Royal Artillery Major, who is now Quartermaster for Lincolnshire ACF.

Rob was inspired to take on the 20km challenge (raising £500 in the process) after learning of Ben Parkinson’s efforts during his rehabilitation after sustaining devastating injuries in Afghanistan.

“Blesma is a cracking charity and it’s great to be able to support the men and women who need help,” he added.



COOKING UP A STORM

A barbecue hosted by former Worcester and Sherwood Foresters Private, and current Blesma Welfare Officer, Steven Beasley at the Nag’s Head in Hulland Ward, Derbyshire, raised £625.

“I wanted to give back to Blesma after they helped me following my life-changing incident,” said Steve, who lost his left leg above the knee following a road traffic accident in 2005. “This was a way of getting others involved and having a good time while raising money for a great cause. I know this money will go towards helping veterans rebuild their lives after injury.”

A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

The fantastic efforts of Members, family, friends and the public were backed by the generous support from a loyal group of sponsors; Centro, Irwin Mitchell solicitors, OpCare, BAE Systems, Markbank Construction, Hampden, Steeper and Olympus KeyMed





Reg takes part in VE Day parade

World War II veteran and Blesma Member Reg Haynes attended the 70th anniversary VE Day Service and celebrations in May. Reg served in the Royal Armoured Corps in Egypt as a Sherman Tank driver and, after recovering from injury, was posted to the Warwickshire Yeomanry in northern Italy, where he was injured a second time and repatriated for surgery.

"How exciting to put my war medals on show once more," said Reg, who turned 93 soon after the celebrations. "The day started with a moving service in Westminster Abbey attended by the Queen, members of the Royal Family and surviving heroes of World War II.

"Afterwards, we paraded down Whitehall with the marching bands. The crowds were very uplifting, and their shouts of 'Thank You' and 'Well Done' were really appreciated. I was proud to salute Prince Charles before sitting down to a picnic lunch. What a treasured memory."

Photograph: Danny E. Martindale/Getty Images

NEWS BRIEFS



NEW BSO FOR NEW AREA

Blesma Member Paul Findlay has become the BSO for the newly established London and Kent Area. Paul, a Member since 2009, took up post on 06 May from a role in the private sector working for Barclays.

"My grand plan was always to work for a military charity but I wanted to get some experience in the commercial world first," said Paul. "It's early days in my new role as a Blesma Support Officer but being able to do a job which allows me to help other people already feels fantastic. I go to work every day knowing that I can make a difference to other people's lives."

Paul has spent the first two months in his new role doing as much research as he can and learning the ropes from the other BSOs. "I think one of the most important attributes for a BSO is the ability to listen and understand the needs of a Member. I intend to do a lot of listening!" he said. "Nobody wants sympathy but there's a lot to be said for empathy. I really missed the feeling of camaraderie and the military sense of humour while I worked in the private sector, and it's great to work with military people again."

MBE FOR ATLANTIC ROWER

Congratulations to Member Cayle Royce who has been awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list. Cayle rowed across the Atlantic Ocean in 2014 as part of the Row2Recovery crew.

FAMILY PAY TRIBUTE TO THEIR HERO AND D-DAY RUN FOUNDER

The family of a military hero made an emotional D-Day anniversary pilgrimage to run in the charity race that claimed his life.

Lieutenant Colonel Mike McErlain's three young children and his wife, Jo, ran part of the 44-mile challenge in France that he helped to devise.

The 45-year-old Army surgeon, who operated at Camp Bastion in Afghanistan on several tours of duty, died on the annual D-Day Run in 2013 after suffering heart difficulties two miles into the race.

His sons Paris, 11, and Lucius, nine, and 10-year-old daughter Venezia (pictured) completed a 13-mile section of the course, which



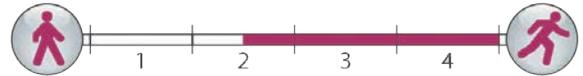
starts on the cliff edges in Normandy, and finishes at Pegasus Bridge. The run has already raised more than £100,000 for Blesma.

"It was typical of Mike to come up with the idea. He saved so many lives in Afghanistan but wanted to do more by supporting Blesma," said his wife, Jo. Mike, who was a competent skier and climber, died as a result of an undiagnosed heart condition

caused by narrowing arteries.

"Mike worked tirelessly to set up the D-Day Run and I want to keep it going for his spirit and memory," Jo said. "I don't want Mike – or what he stood for – to be forgotten."

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Blesma needs *YOU* to fall for the fallen!

Have you got what it takes to take on a 13,500ft tandem skydive in aid of Blesma? Fall for the Fallen is the Association's annual skydive event, where every jump will symbolise a life lost in conflict. Taking place from 28-30 August 2015 at Netheravon, Wiltshire, you can reserve your place for as little as £50. Friends and family are

welcome to join you on the day, and as well as the thrill of falling through the air there will also be entertainment and a barbecue.

Got what it takes? Contact Laura in the Blesma Fundraising Team at commevents@blesma.org for more information

Get your ducks in a row for the Great Amesbury Duck Race

One thousand plastic ducks will race on the River Avon on Monday 31 August, in support of Blesma. Organised by Blesma Member Andy Derry (pictured with two of the competitors), the annual Great Amesbury Duck Race is a major fundraising event in the Blesma calendar, and is set to be a great day out for all of the family.

"The event is open to the public and is free to attend. It will only cost £3 to sponsor a duck in the race and there are some fantastic prizes up for grabs!" says Andy. To sponsor a duck, send



a cheque made payable to Blesma (£3 per duck) along with your name and contact number to The Duck Race, Blesma Fundraising Team, 185-187 High Road, Chadwell Heath, Essex RM6 6NA. The first duck to cross the finish line will win a cash prize, and winners will be announced on the day. The event is held on the River Avon in Amesbury, Wiltshire, and ducks will 'set sail' at 3pm.

For more information, please contact Laura in the Fundraising Team on 020 8548 7089

MAN UTD SUPPORTED THE BLACKPOOL HOME

Manchester United, under legendary manager Sir Matt Busby, helped to establish the Blackpool Home with a string of donations. Busby, who joined United from a World War II role as an Army Physical Training Instructor, was the manager when a number of donations were authorised by the United board.

Records at the Home, and at Old Trafford's museum, reveal at least eight substantial gifts were made between 1948 and 1957.

"Manchester United were among the first to donate and they kept that going for a long time, so it must have been very important to the club," said Jacqui Longden, manager of Blesma Blackpool. "The records don't indicate why they were so supportive, but we can speculate that Sir Matt Busby may have been involved in rehabilitating wounded soldiers in his role as a PT specialist."

In the spotlight

ANDY GRANT



“
THINGS HAPPEN FOR A REASON, BUT IT'S HOW WE REACT TO THEM THAT DEFINES US. FOR ME NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE. THE WORD DOESN'T EXIST
”

Blesma Member and former Royal Marine Andy Grant lost his right leg after being severely injured in Afghanistan. His femoral right artery was severed and he lost a chunk of his thigh after activating a trip wire which set off bomb blasts. After almost 30 operations, Andy's leg was amputated – and that could have been the end of an active life.

“Strangely, I am more able-bodied since becoming ‘disabled,’” says Andy. “I run half marathons and 10Ks, I compete in triathlons, and I've learned to ski, surf and skydive since I had my leg amputated. If someone offered me my leg back now I wouldn't take it. I feel like I'm the luckiest guy in the world and I get to take part in all sorts of amazing challenges.”

It is now six years since Andy suffered his injuries after joining the Commandos when he was 17 years old. He initially served in Iraq for a year before deploying to Afghanistan in 2008.

“I had a feeling before I went that something was going to happen to me,” Andy recalls. “And I was injured in 2009, which was the Marines' deadliest year. We lost 109 guys in that year alone.”

Andy, 26, had his leg amputated after it had been left virtually useless because of extensive nerve damage. During his rehabilitation he was introduced to veterans with prosthetic limbs who were doing things he couldn't. “That's when I told the surgeon I wanted to have my leg amputated,” he says.

Since then, life has turned around for Andy, who refuses to let his injuries get him down. Instead, he relishes every new experience, and has carved out a career as a motivational speaker after first being asked to talk to pupils at his old school's Prize Day.

“People seem to be interested in me because of the challenges I have set myself, especially since I won gold in the 400m and 1,500m, and bronze in the 4x100m relay at the Invictus Games,” he says. “People seem to be genuinely affected by my story – mine is a real lesson that you only live once, so you have to make the most of it. I'm so fortunate in the

things I have done and the people I have met since the injury.” Following on from his success at Invictus, Andy has recently been awarded a place on the Great Britain team for the Warrior Games (the American version of the Invictus Games) and is also currently training for the 2016 Paralympics.

“The only downside with the Paralympics is that my favourite distance is 10K – I hold the 10K world record for a single leg amputee – but the longest distance in the Paralympics is 400m. Coming from the Marines I'm more used to stamina and endurance than sprinting, but we'll see how I get on.”

You would think all of this would keep Andy busy enough, but he is also one of 11 men hoping to take their place in the record books by rowing across the Atlantic Ocean in December.

“Row2Recovery aims to be the first all-amputee team to row across the Atlantic. Setting off from Gran Canaria, and arriving in Antigua about 50 days later, the four-man team will have to row in pairs for two hours before sleeping for four,” says Andy. “It will be tough for whoever makes the team, but experts say it's 20 per cent physical ability and 80 per cent mental attitude. And to say you were part of the first all-amputee team to row the Atlantic would be something no-one could ever take away from you. I would really love to be a part of that.”

So what exactly drives Andy on to push himself to his limits and achieve so much?

“I push myself because I survived Afghanistan,” he says. “I came home when so many others didn't and I owe it to them to live my life to the full. Just sitting around would be disrespectful to everyone who didn't make it. I have low moments, of course, but there are two lines in the poem *Invictus* which sum everything up for me; *I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.*”

“Things happen for a reason, but it's how we react to them that defines us. For me, nothing is impossible. The word just doesn't exist.”



Photographs: Simon Hildrew

LIKE TO PUSH YOURSELF? GIVE PARA TRI A TRY

Do you enjoy a light jog every now and then? How about a gentle few lengths in the pool? Perhaps a cycle at the weekend? Then why not knock it up a notch and enter the Para Tri?

The UK's first ever mass-participation sports event dedicated to people with disabilities will take place on 09 August. You'll be able to take part in one of seven triathlons (ranging in difficulty from rookie to elite) all held at Dorney Lake in Windsor – the venue for the London 2012 rowing and canoeing events.

As well as four individual competitions there will be the choice of entering three relay races so you can take part with your friends, family and colleagues.



"Para Tri is the realisation of a long-held dream that was inspired by taking part in many mass-participation events over the years," says the event's founder, Paralympian Sophia Warner. "This is an exciting opportunity to make sport as fun as I know it can be for everyone."

More events, including a Para Swim and a Para Run/Push, are planned for 2016.

For more information on the event, including how to register to take part, visit www.paratri.com

HELP US TO IMPROVE YOUR MAGAZINE

What do you think of this issue of Blesma Magazine? What subjects would you like to see covered in the next issue? Write to us at editor@blesma.org and let us know so that we can constantly improve your magazine.

Former Gurkha to send aid to quake-torn Nepal

Former Corporal in the Royal Gurkha Rifles has been battling to send aid to earthquake-torn Nepal as it tries to recover from two lethal tremors.

Blesma Member Hari Budha-Magar (above), who served for 15 years with the 1st Battalion, is coordinating a relief project for his homeland, which has suffered more than 8,000 deaths from the earthquakes.

"It is very scary for the people out there and it took me more than three hours to contact my family after the second earthquake," Hari said. "I have my parents, brothers, sisters and nieces in Kathmandu, and they have been very close to the tragedy.

"It was very good to speak to them and to know that they are alright, but there are many others who need help desperately. There are big buildings falling down and the people need help." Hari, who lost both his legs

above the knee in an Afghan bomb blast in 2010, has joined forces with a group of fire fighters who are planning a relief mission.

"It is being organised by a group called Tunnel2Towers and they have the skills to both rescue and rebuild," said the 35 year old, who served in Kosovo, Bosnia and Afghanistan before retiring from the Army last year.

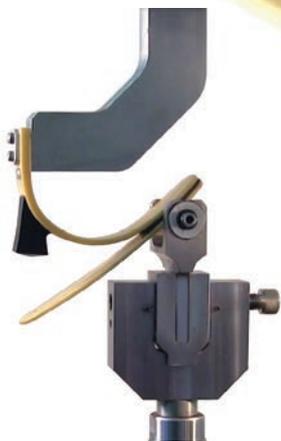
"There are about 100 people ready to go who have the building skills that will be important to make temporary shelters, restore water and construct new homes and schools.

"But it is difficult to get the permission to go out there because of the chaos caused by the earthquakes and there is a lot of bureaucracy to go through."

Hari, who has three children and lives in Canterbury, has been raising money while his wife, Urmila, has been collecting clothes that will be sent out to Nepal by the Red Cross.



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RED CORD CAMPAIGN PULLS IN SUPPORT

Euan's Guide, a disabled access reviews website, has launched its Red Cord Campaign. The site found that one of the most common complaints among its reviewers is that, in accessible toilets, the emergency cord is often tied up or doesn't reach the floor. This can prevent a disabled person from being able to use it to call for assistance.

To get the message across, Euan's Guide has designed cards that can be attached to any emergency cord to remind people how important it is that they hang correctly.



The card reads: "This red emergency cord must hang freely all the way to the floor. If it does not, it may prevent a disabled person from asking for help."

So far, several thousand cards have been requested by venues and reviewers across the country, while more than 20 members of the Scottish Parliament have expressed their support for the campaign. **Red Cord Cards are free to order by emailing hello@euansguide.com or by visiting www.EuansGuide.com/RedCord**



Blesma Member will Race Across America

It's further than the Tour de France, hits a highest point of 17,500 feet above sea level, offers no rest days whatsoever... and Davie Timmins can't wait for it to start!

The 34-year-old Blesma Member and former bomb disposal Corporal in the Royal Logistic Corps hits the road in June for the ultimate road trip/cycling challenge.

Davie is part of the 14-strong Felix RAAM team, led by Major Pete Graham, who are joining thousands of riders in a bid to complete a 3,000-mile coast-to-coast adventure across 12 states in nine days in Race Across America.

"It's going to be some race," said Davie, from Neilston, Renfrewshire, Scotland, who suffered devastating injuries after being caught in a booby-trapped bomb blast in Helmand Province, in 2009. "I'm blind in one eye, so my balance isn't that good, which is why I'm hoping we don't get bogged down in traffic, as that's where it will be difficult for me. I'll be fine along the open road though, and I'm really looking forward to it."

Davie was awarded the Queen's Gallantry Medal for helping to save the life of a fellow soldier who lost both his legs and his right arm 10 days before he was injured himself. He got the cycling bug after completing a 1,000-mile Land's End to John O'Groats

fundraising trip that raised £42,000 for Blesma in 2010. "Major Graham organised that as part of our rehabilitation as well as to prove what had happened wasn't the end but just the beginning," said Davie. "It was a real success, and great to raise the money because Blesma does so much for its Members and their families."

Davie, who is married with two children aged six and five, will be in a team of eight cycling in two-hour shifts across America. Every time he'll get on his bike it will have to be 'best effort'.

The team will cycle from dawn to dusk, covering between 350 and 500 miles a day, and must complete the course, which runs from Oceanside, California, to Annapolis, Maryland, in nine days. They will be supported by a six-strong team driving support vehicles, organising supplies and dealing with any injuries.

"People keep telling me I must be crazy – and my wife keeps telling she's glad we have life insurance!" added Davie, who works for Scottish Veterans Residences, "but it will all have been worth it if we can beat that £42,000 from 2010."

The team will raise funds for Blesma and the Wounded Warrior Project in the USA. To support the team visit www.felixraam

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

Blesma

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Team cycles across England for Blesma

Five Blesma Members, along with a group of friends, completed a gruelling 140-mile cycle ride from the west coast of England to the east coast in May, raising more than £10,000 for Blesma along the way.

The team set off from Morecambe Bay, and passed through Ingleton, Hawes, Redmire, Leyburn, Thirsk and Malton before finishing at Filey seafront.

The challenge came about after a group of Members completed the Battlefield Cycle Ride and Soldier Ride last Autumn. “We all got so much out of the events that we wanted to put something back in,” said ride coordinator and Blesma Member Jonathan



Bell. “We all trained hard; I did three rides a week for four months leading up to the event, and the ride itself took three days, with us covering about 50 miles a day.

“We set out with two clear goals: to raise money and awareness for Blesma – and we have achieved both,” said Jonathan. “What was so special about the ride was that everyone involved – from family members and support staff, to riders and mechanics

– all pulled together in what was a fantastic team effort. Thank you to all involved.”

There is still time to make a donation at www.justgiving.com/C2CFORBLESMA

OCTOGENARIAN HITS NEW HEIGHTS

Eighty-year-old Blesma Member David Bland has abseiled 328 feet down the Spinnaker Tower in Portsmouth. David organised the hair-raising stunt, and was joined by 10 other daredevils, raising more than £1,200 for Blesma in the process.

“I have been a Blesma Member since 1956, and although losing an eye does not get as much attention as the loss of one’s arms and legs, Blesma has always been there for me,” said David. “My motivation to raise money for Blesma is to try to ensure that those who have suffered serious injuries will continue to receive support. I feel safe under the Blesma umbrella and I am trying to think up new ways of raising money for this fantastic cause!”



Got a head for heights? To take part in next year’s Spinnaker Tower abseil challenge, which will take place in May, email communityevents@blesma.org or call 020 8590 1124

NEWS BRIEFS

HI-TECH PROSTHETIC LEG CAN ‘FEEL’ WHAT IT IS WALKING ON

Researchers in Vienna have unveiled a cutting-edge prosthetic leg that allows the wearer to ‘feel’ what he or she is walking on. Surgeons made the breakthrough by rewiring remaining foot nerve endings in a patient’s stump to healthy tissue in the thigh.

Six sensors were then fitted to the sole of the prosthesis and linked to stimulators inside the shaft where the stump sits. So, when the wearer takes a step, the sensors send a signal to the brain, so the patient can tell if he is walking on different surfaces such as grass, concrete or sand.

INFORMATION LEAFLETS FOR NEW AND EXISTING MEMBERS

Blesma has produced a series of leaflets aimed at new and existing Members, as well as their families and friends. The leaflets offer advice and information on a range of subjects from amputation and prosthetics to the NHS Limb Service, stump car and wellbeing. Printed leaflets can be ordered from Chadwell Heath and are also available to download at www.blesma.org/leaflets

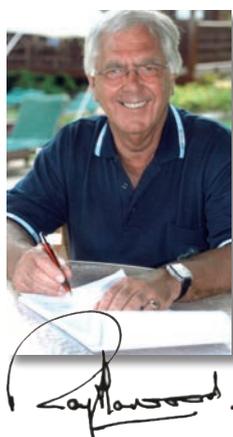


SANTANDER GRANT WILL HELP VETERANS ACROSS THE UK

The Santander Foundation, which offers grants to UK registered charities for projects that help disadvantaged people in local communities, has donated £5,000 to Blesma. The grant will ensure Blesma can continue to provide grass roots welfare programmes to veterans across the UK.

“Blesma is tremendously thankful for the donation from the Santander Foundation; a community initiative. Our aim at Blesma is to promote independence and fulfilment for our veterans suffering limb loss, within their local communities. This donation will go a long way to help us achieve that,” said Blesma’s Chief Executive Barry Le Grys.

Ray Harwood and Centro Plc proud supporters of Blesma



Chairman and Managing Director of Centro Plc, Ray Harwood, is dedicated to supporting Blesma and sets the Blesma members and supporters a challenge...

Ray Harwood says: “Intentionally, we are encouraging members and friends to accept an unusual form of marathon – to plough through reading not far short of one million words – a six book fictional journey called Sardana Series”.

A proportion of the royalties will be donated to Blesma. To learn more about the books visit www.rayharwood-sardanaseries.co.uk

In addition, as a long established property company, based in Sutton, Surrey their enthusiastic team is committed to raising funds for Blesma. To learn more about Centro Plc visit www.centro.plc.uk

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BLESMA BRIEFING

Support grows for all Members

Brian Chenier, BSO (Prosthetics) gave those attending the recent Members' Weekend an update on the work Blesma is doing in the field of prosthetics. Here are his key points

At the Members' Weekend in May I gave an update on Blesma's recent work on Members Supported, Visits to Limb Centres, Committees and Meetings, the Limb Centre Survey and Looking Forward. A summary of each is below...

MEMBERS SUPPORTED

Between April 2014 and May 2015, 135 Members were supported in their dealings with the NHS Limb Service. This support ranged from advice about how to seek a prescription review or a second opinion, to information about specific prosthetic components. A number of referrals related to funding via the Veterans Prosthetic Panel and required input to support the application process at Limb Centre level. In addition, almost a quarter of Members required some form of support attending an appointment at a Limb Centre.

LIMB CENTRE VISITS

Since taking up post in 2013 I have visited 30 Limb Centres, and I plan to visit the remaining Centres in the coming months. This will include visits to Centres in Scotland and to Musgrave Park Hospital in Northern Ireland. These visits play an important part in the continued relationship building which helps Blesma support its Members.

COMMITTEES AND MEETINGS

Blesma continues to be represented on a large number of committees and at meetings, primarily to make sure the interests of the Membership are taken into account and are voiced where appropriate. The groups include the NHS, All Party (Parliamentary) Limb Loss Groups and prosthetic and mobility groups. We are also working hard to foster closer and more practical working links with partner charities such as The Limbless Association and Spinal Injuries Association.

LIMB CENTRE SURVEY

In March, Blesma amputee Members were sent a survey asking for feedback on their experiences of the NHS Limb Service and, specifically, how they felt their prosthetic needs were being met. Some 1,600 surveys were sent out and more than 350 were returned, which enabled some broad analysis. Overwhelmingly, the

respondents were over 50 years of age (many were over 70). Just over half had amputations caused by military service and Limb Centres across the UK were represented.

Between 70 and 75 per cent rated their Limb Centre as 'Good' or 'Very Good', and a slightly smaller percentage rated the limb or limbs they received as 'Adequate' to 'Very Good'. The survey will now be sent out via social media and email to encourage a broader response, with a focus on younger and newer Members.

LOOKING FORWARD

A number of Blesma information leaflets have recently been published and are also available to download from the Blesma website at www.blesma.org/leaflets. The leaflets cover a range of topics, from general information on Blesma to more specific advice on amputation, the NHS Limb Service and prosthetics, stump care, phantom limb pain and wellbeing.

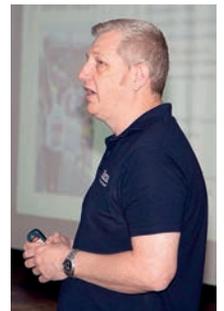
OTHER NEWS

In May, the Limb Centre at Stanmore opened its new Legacy Room. The room, which was formerly an archive store, has been refurbished and equipped with items funded by grant monies as part of the investment in veterans' prosthetic care.

The plaque outside the room reads; 'The Legacy Room – In honour of our War Veterans and their Service to this country, along with our commitment to rehabilitate them to their best potential, and to extend the service to the civilian population with limb loss and deficiency'.

The Legacy Room is just one example of how funds allocated to support veterans' prosthetic rehabilitation in England are benefitting all patients who use those nine particular centres. In addition, it was reported last year that some investment had been made to the remaining England Limb Centres. For example, in Colchester, using grant monies and fundraising locally, the Limb Centre that is part of Colchester Hospital is about to officially open its new outdoor walking area for prosthetic and wheelchair patients.

For support or advice on prosthetics, orthotics or wheelchairs please contact Brian on 020 8548 7080 or email him at bsoprosthetics@blesma.org



WE WORK VERY HARD TO FOSTER CLOSER AND MORE PRACTICAL WORKING LINKS WITH PARTNER CHARITIES



INBOX

Word from our inbox. Get in touch at editor@blesma.org

A FOOTLOOSE LIFE

IN 1945, A NEW LIFE BEGAN FOR ME with a below-knee prosthesis. In the 70 years since, the prosthesis has had its ups and downs. In the 1970s, in Hong Kong, whilst I was approaching the Star Ferry wharf, the foot broke off, forcing me to hop down the gangplank onto the ferry and, at the Kowloon end, hop 50 metres up the gangplank, across the concourse and into a taxi to the limb fitting centre in Kowloon hospital for repairs. Obviously, I must have been quite fit in those days!

On a later occasion, at the entrance to the Strand Palace hotel in London, a strap broke and the prosthesis started to come off. Holding it on with one hand, and carrying my suitcase in the other, I checked in at reception and just reached my room before the leg came off completely. Happily, I had already made it a rule never to travel without a spare leg in the suitcase.

On another occasion, whilst bird watching at the RSPB reserve at Minsmere in Suffolk, a buckle broke and I walked a mile back to my car (and spare leg), stooping all the way to hold the leg on.

On a recent visit to Hong Kong, I had arranged to meet an old colleague whom I had not seen for many years. Earlier that morning, in my hotel room, a rivet securing a strap had popped out so I replaced the leg with the spare one which lacked its cosmetic covering; a bare metal bar ran from the socket to the foot.

My friend and I sat facing each other. My trouser leg had inevitably risen slightly as I sat and, in ordinary circumstances, would have exposed no more than a short stretch of sock-covered ankle. But, in this case, with nothing to grip on to, the sock had collapsed, exposing the metal bar. At one point my friend suddenly stopped, staring in horror at my leg. After years of separation, he had obviously forgotten my condition.

"What happened?" he gasped.

"Oh," I replied, glancing down at the leg, "I know I've been losing weight lately, but I didn't realise I'd lost that much!"

Brian Wilson

Brian was wounded in 1944 in Holland in the course of Operation Market Garden. He worked for years in Hong Kong and now lives in Western Australia. He has been a Blesma Member since 1945.

Basil takes to the slopes on a recent ski trip to Sölden, Austria



Member is sold on Sölden

I AM WRITING TO PUT ON RECORD my enormous appreciation of the Blesma Sölden Week [a skiing and winter sports event run by Blesma]. Every single person on the event was extremely solicitous and helpful. This applies especially to the instructors who, in addition, were unbelievably patient.

For example, it took two of them a whole morning to get me down the mountain because I kept falling over. Fortunately for all of us, they were both big and strong!

If you would like to let Brendan [West] and the others know how grateful I am for all they did for a very old novice, please do. I must say that I found ski bobbing much harder than I had expected, and I don't think that my years of skiing were much help!

This is a drop in the ocean but, nevertheless, I want to express my real appreciation of all that was done by Blesma to help me, so I enclose a cheque for £200 to Blesma's funds.

Basil Payne

Memories from the Home Front in WWII

I WAS BORN IN LONDON IN NOVEMBER 1926. My parents were Charles and Catherine Martin. My father was English and my mother French. I had a very happy childhood and attended St Augustine's Convent School in West Ealing, London.

Then, in 1939, my best friend, Heather, and I were evacuated. The scene was exactly as is shown on TV – hundreds of children carrying gas masks and belongings, boarding trains for unknown destinations.

We arrived in Dorchester and were taken to a hall. People chose who they would take into their homes, and Heather and I went to the same place. The landlady did not want us hanging around the house, and school hadn't yet started, so there was nothing to do but wander around and try (unsuccessfully) to go to the cinema. We were underage and they were very strict!

My father drove down to Dorchester with my mother and Heather's mother. Someone said that evacuees were running around and meeting up with boys. That didn't apply to us! However, our parents weren't too keen on the set up and, later on, Heather and I were told we were going to be boarders in a convent school in Weymouth.

We were pleased about that and thought it would be rather nice, having read fiction about boarding schools and secret midnight feasts. How naïve we were! Nobody could go out alone or visit the shops, no talking was allowed in the dormitories and letters sent and received from home were censored.

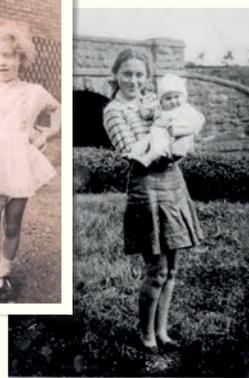
I was moved again, but this time with joy in my heart as my parents thought I'd better come home. I was over the moon at the news, as I was very homesick.

The evening of 11 December 1940 was a frosty night with a starlit sky, but I have no recollection of hearing the air raid warning going off. We sat in the sitting room in front of a glowing coal fire, listening to the radio. My dad was already in bed when I went to say good night, and I clambered over to kiss him.

When I reached the sitting room again, I sat on the sofa and, suddenly, I leapt to my feet as the whole house erupted. I was buried under the debris, unable to move in any direction, my right leg lodged on top of the hot coals from the fire.

I tried shouting but there was nowhere for the sound to go. I don't know how long

it was until I heard voices. It took a long time to get to me – they had to saw through some beams first but, as soon as they were close, someone managed to give me an injection. One of the most blessed events of my life was being lifted out of the debris, seeing the stars and feeling the sharp air. I was amazed at being carried across debris of neighbours' houses to another road where an ambulance was waiting.



I was in Acton Cottage Hospital for four months, and I was treated so kindly but the pain was unbearable when the nurses changed my dressings every day.

It was a mixed ward. Near the door were two ladies who had been badly injured in air raids. One of them became a life-long friend of mine. The male patients, one of whom was a soldier, were nice and cheery. In the bed nearest to me was a young man who had worked on the railway. Sometimes, when I was in a lot of pain, he'd hop over and hold my hand.

Then the day came when I was told that I was to have a below-knee amputation.

I was very upset. I seem to recall the ward was pretty quiet at that time.

So, eventually, I was introduced to a pair of crutches. I was delighted to be able to get around again and could eventually swing from one step to the other on stairs without fear. I had a big send-off from the ward as I headed off to my future to go and live with my dad's brother and his wife in Hove. After living with them for a while, I moved to Northern Ireland to live with my grandmother.

I began working at the Ministry of Pensions in Belfast in 1942, when I was 16 years old. My first job was as switchboard telephone operator for the department. Another of my jobs was as clerk to the N.I. War Pensions Committees. There were 25 members representing various organisations associated with ex-Service men. The WPCs weren't allowed

to make decisions but could make recommendations to the Ministry which were given full attention and which were often successful. It was my job to send notices to the members, write the minutes, follow up on recommendations and let people know the results at their next meeting.

My next job was in the medical section which was concerned with arranging appointments for ex-Service men and women

who were being medically assessed.

My favourite work was in the welfare and children's sections where we dealt with war pensioners, war widows and war orphans. I was given the opportunity, as time went by, to go out visiting them in their homes.

In 1964, I transferred to the War Pensioners' Welfare Service in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, and was able to continue with the work I loved so much.

My husband, James Heggie, worked in the War Pensioners' Welfare Department when he left the Army after the war. He ended up as manager but, after many years, had to retire early because of the effects of his war disability. I am not only a war disabled pensioner but also a war widow, as my dear husband Jim died as a result of his war injury.

Rosemarie Heggie

In the first in a new series of features on Blesma women, Becky Ormrod gives a frank account of how she learned of, and came to terms with, her husband's injuries. Read it on p34

Five-star rating for brilliant Blesma Home

I WOULD LIKE TO SAY THANK YOU TO the staff at Blesma who, ever since my first contact with them, have helped and guided me through my medical discharge from the Army, and who are still by my side today.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to my Welfare Officer, Pete Shields.

I recently spent some time at the Elizabeth Frankland Moore Blesma Home on a holiday that was organised at short notice by Pete and Head Office. It was generously paid for by Blesma, for which I am most grateful, and I will do my utmost to pay back this wonderful gift. For some years I was a client

of Combat Stress and visited their Audley Court home for treatment on numerous occasions. More recently, I have stayed at



the R.B.L. Bridlington with Combat Stress on a five-day break.

This has been my first visit to the Elizabeth Frankland Moore Blesma Home but it definitely won't be my last! The staff were all absolutely superb and helped to make my stay the best week away from home for as long as I can remember. Five-star does not come anywhere near being a rating for this establishment – I would give it 100-star and more!

I had a smashing time and once again may I say many, many thanks from the bottom of my heart.

Shaun Brennan

Those we have lost

Alice Binnie

09 December 1919 - 17 April 2015

ALICE BINNIE PASSED AWAY on 17 April. She was very active within the Members Wives Group and chaired their meetings at Blesma's Annual General Meeting for some years.

Alice's late husband, Harry, who passed away in 1999, was a very prominent Member in Manchester. He was heavily involved with the Manchester Branch and was also on the Executive Council (Board of Trustees) for several years immediately prior to his demise.

Alice was a great support both to Harry and the Association, and was a regular attendee at AGMs following Harry's passing. She will be missed.



Alice, standing, in the floral print dress

Those who have passed away

Others who have passed away. March 2015 – May 2015. May they rest in peace.

Bailey F	Dorset	HQ (Woolwich)	22/04/2015
Bissell J	RASC	HQ	Early 2015
Blakey A	RTR	HQ	18/04/2015
Bowen A	Royal Norfolk	HQ	19/05/2015
Bracegirdle C	REME	HQ	24/03/2015
Cauldley D	Mercian	HQ	12/03/2015
Cooper M	REME	Portsmouth	24/05/2015
Douglas A	RE	Crieff Home	04/03/2015
Fisher Mrs J	WRAC	HQ	Early 2015
Flintoff K	RN	HQ	01/04/2015
Goodhead R	Sth Staffs/Cheshire	HQ	12/03/2015
Irving T	RA	HQ	05/03/2015
King B	RN	HQ	Early 2015
Long M	RN	Portsmouth	16/05/2015
McGregor J	Merchant Navy	HQ	12/03/2015
McLachlan R	Royal Army Pay Corps	HQ (Fife)	05/03/2015
Ransome J	Green Howards	HQ (Teesside)	Early 2015
Riley M	RCT	HQ	18/05/2015
Scott A	RA	HQ (E.Berks)	10/03/2015
Shenton D	RN	HQ	07/04/2015
Sims Mrs E	Civilian Casualty	HQ (Orpington)	07/04/2015
Welch B	Scots Guards	HQ	03/03/2015
Wheldale J	RN	HQ (Bridlington)	08/04/2015

NEWS BRIEFS

RIGHT TIME FOR WHEELCHAIR LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE

In January, the Wheelchair Leadership Alliance held its inaugural meeting chaired by Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson.

The group is focused on building the Right Chair Right Time Right Now campaign, creating a wheelchair charter and calling for concerted action by the different stakeholder groups across England to make a difference to the experience of people who use wheelchairs.

You can get involved in the work and share your ideas by emailing the Alliance at wheelchairs@nhsiq.nhs.uk You can also follow them on Twitter @rightwheelchair or @Tanni_GT using #MyWheelchair



CAMBRIDGE RESIDENT GIVES BLESMA NEW SET OF WHEELS

A pensioner has donated his late wife's mobility scooter to Blesma – because he doesn't want to mow anyone down by accident. Ron Wells, 81, recently handed over the 8mph scooter to Tom Ormiston, Blesma Support Officer for the Eastern Area. The scooter belonged to Ron's wife Pamela, who passed away aged 75 nearly two years ago.

"I do not feel safe riding it and I have no desire to knock anyone down, so rather than it taking up garage space I thought I should give it away," said the Cherry Hinton resident, who was in the Army.

"I have always been interested in helping those who went to war. They did something I never did. I never saw conflict, but I saw the after-effects.

"My wish is to help someone who needs the help and these people from Blesma seem to be very good at it."

FOLLOW BLESMA ON TWITTER

For all the latest news, views and activities taking place across the Association, follow Blesma on Twitter. Search @Blesma



Nick Hart, third from left, with his team



Blesma's supporters take on the ultimate challenge

On Saturday 16 May, 200 supporters took on Nuclear Rush; an extreme off-road obstacle course in the Essex countryside, and raised an estimated £10,000 in aid of Blesma.

The 'Blesma Wave' was made up of military and civilian teams, including local boot camps, businesses, and a team of male and female models from the Always With A Smile Foundation. Competitors took on more than 80 obstacles, including the 'Gator Pit' and the 'Death Slide', while raising sponsorship to support Blesma's vital work. The organisers of Nuclear Races also made a generous donation of £5 for every entrant registered in the 'Blesma Wave'.

Local business owner, Nick Hart, whose team (pictured top) raised £5,500 in sponsorship said; "My wife and daughter

completed the Nuclear Race last year with our neighbours Julie and Rob Rusz. Rob mentioned what a great idea it would be to try and get a Blesma team together. He organised the troops and, all together, more than 190 people ran in our rush, raising much needed funds. Everyone we contacted agreed what a great cause it was and donated generously. Now we are looking forward to next year – I think!"

Blesma would like to thank Race Director James Parrish and the team at Nuclear Races for their support, along with Blesma supporters Rob Rusz and Nathan Jenner for all their help to make the event possible.

Interested in joining 'Team Blesma' at the 2016 Nuclear Rush? Contact Laura in Fundraising at commevents@blesma.org

REVIEW

Members' Weekend 2015

With a packed itinerary and more attendees than ever before, there was something for everyone at this year's Members' Weekend. Some people even brought their trunks...

It's official! The new-look Members' Weekend was a roaring success. More Members than ever before attended the event in May, and were treated to a packed programme of inspirational talks, exciting activities, great food and marvellous company.

From a Gazelle helicopter landing in the hotel grounds to Members' tales of derring do, and from a respectful Remembrance Service to a spot of scuba diving in the hotel pool, the weekend crammed all manner of activities into an extended programme. No wonder the event had been sold out for months!

"The aim of the Weekend was to bring Members together to engender a fellowship of shared experience, to find out what each other has been up to in the last 12 months, to debate what's important to us as individuals and to Blesma as a whole, to build on our independent, fulfilling lives, and to discuss how Blesma should move forward," said Blesma's Chief Executive, Barry Le Grys, after the event. "I'm pleased to say that we succeeded in meeting all of those aims."

The Members' Weekend was held from Saturday 16 to Monday 18 May at the Daventry Court Hotel near Northampton. It began with a flying visit from the Gazelle Military Helicopter Trust, which was set up to restore Gazelles that have been retired from active service and use them to teach veterans how to restore

and fly the aircraft. The project is the brainchild of Marc Le Gresley, the civilian Chief Flying Instructor of The Army Flying Association, who previously served in the Army Air Corps as a pilot and is now the Display Team Leader of the Gazelle Squadron Display Team.

A FITTING START TO THE WEEKEND

The formal proceedings got underway a little later in the day with a respectful Service of Dedication and Remembrance led by The Reverend Dr Philip McCormack. The evening meal that followed gave Members the chance to relax, meet new friends and catch up with old ones. Many then chose to retire to the bar to swap stories until the early hours!

The following day's itinerary opened with updates from Blesma's Chairman, Lt Gen Sir Cedric Delves, and Chief Executive, Barry Le Grys, on the key themes from the past 12 months and the current state of the Association. BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier and Head of Fundraising Barbara Warner gave updates on their areas of expertise before the floor was opened to several Members to share news of their recent adventures.

"The new format of the Weekend was a big success," said Barry. "For me, some of the highlights were hearing people speaking from the heart about what Blesma, and fellow Members, have done for them. Seeing the Gazelle,



complete with a Blesma crew that included Andy Phillips and his son, John, was great, too. I am happy that the Weekend was very well attended, more than doubling in size from last year's event.

"We had 140 people for dinner and all of our allocated 100 rooms were sold out," said Barry, "and all generations were represented, including the recently born!"

On Sunday afternoon, following talks from several Members (see story right) delegates took part in a number of taster activities; either scuba diving in the hotel pool, fishing in a nearby lake, photography in the hotel, or a trip to Althorp House.

"The important message, when it comes to activities, is that there is something for everyone," says Activities Manager, Dave Coulton. "It's important to just get stuck in and have a go. So many Members say the real benefit is not necessarily the activity itself but the fact that it allows them to get together with other people and have a chat. That's why we wanted to showcase some of our activities this weekend."

"The plan is to set our sights higher still for next year, making the event bigger and even better than 2015"

Barry agrees; "The Activities Programme has doubled since 2010, but we are raising the standard of what we deliver across the board. We have more Support Officers in the field offering much closer contact with our Members, and we collaborate as much as ever with local charities for Members' needs. There is now more on offer when it comes to being a Member than ever before – there is a whole platform of activities that Members should look at and make use of"

One such offer is this event; the revamped Members' Weekend. Stories were swapped into the early hours, plans were made for the future (both for Blesma as a whole and for individuals), new friends were made and old ones reacquainted with. It was a busy weekend and a huge success, but it can only continue to grow in strength if Members stay involved and engaged.

"The plan is to set our sights higher still for next year, making the event bigger and even better than this one. But it relies on the participation of Members to make it a success. We'll be announcing the date and venue in September, and I would encourage Members to make sure they get the date in their diary and try as hard as they can to come along."

Wheels, waves and wipeouts; Members share their highlights

From swimming the Channel to paddling for days without rest, Members took part in some incredible adventures last year. Several shared their life-changing and life-affirming experiences...



STEPHEN WHITE AND JAMIE GILLESPIE
ENGLISH CHANNEL SWIM

Last September, four intrepid Blesma Members became the first all-amputee team to successfully swim the English Channel. Craig Howorth, Stephen White, Jamie Gillespie and Conrad Thorpe swim without wearing their prosthetics to abide by the official Channel Swimming Association rules, which don't make any special dispensations for amputees.

"Open swimming is a fantastic sport," says Jamie. "It's all inclusive, all you need is a wet suit and some goggles, then you just take your prosthesis off, leave it on the side, and off you go."

The inspirational team completed the relay swim in 12 hours and 14 minutes.

"It's a distance of 21.4 miles in a direct line from Shakespeare Beach, just south of Dover Harbour, to Cap Gris Nez in France," says Stephen. "But because of the currents and tides we had to swim just over 28 miles – with each of us swimming for an hour at a time."



MARTIN KETTRICK
CYCLING

Some 30 years ago, when serving in the Royal Marines, Martin Kettrick was injured whilst abseiling, resulting in him being paralysed from the chest down.

"A few years ago I fell into a rut – it was a bad time for me and I knew I needed a new challenge," says Martin. "I met John Francis and he put me on to Blesma. That's when I got my first hand cycle."

"I went on the 'Introduction to Cycling' course in Blackpool. The people were terrific, we had a great laugh and I just seemed to fit in." Martin then took part in last year's Battlefield Ride in Belgium and Soldier Ride UK before completing a coast to coast cycling challenge that raised more than £10,000 for Blesma (see story on p15).

"I would like to say thanks to Blesma for giving me these opportunities. Cycling has benefitted me health-wise, the camaraderie is fantastic, and I now look at the things I can do rather than concentrating on the things I can't. Being involved in Blesma has made me a better person."

“We’re all searching for something; a focus or a distraction, that sense of self-identity”



NERYS PEARCE
SKIING

The Hartford Ski Spectacular, held every December in Colorado, is one of the largest disabled skiing events in the world. Nerys Pearce went on the most recent event.

“This time last year I was in a very self-destructive cycle, isolating myself at home and not asking for help,” says Nerys. “One of the most difficult things to do when you don’t feel as if you’re worth anything is to pick up the phone and ask to go on a trip like this.” But Nerys is so glad she did.

“At first, I found it difficult to interact with other Members. I was quiet and my self-esteem was awful, but the staff set up a non-pressured environment that allowed me to build my confidence. After Day One, I felt happy for the first time in ages. The trip was amazing and the people so inspiring. Since then, I’ve had the confidence to look into competitive sport again and I’ve started volunteering with children with behavioural needs, it has really sparked me back into life and shown me that there’s a way forward no matter how bad you think your situation is.”



BRENDAN WEST
PHOTOGRAPHY

Art, in its various different guises, has seen a real growth and development within the Association over the last few years. Photography, for example, is going from strength to strength, with many Members having gone on one of a number of the courses that were originally put together and run by Charley Streather.

“Photography can be art, recording life, taking selfies or snaps, and everyone has an individual perspective,” says Brendan West. “Blesma offers a number of courses that cater for everyone from complete beginners to those who are interested in improving their wildlife, city or portrait photography.”

But perhaps the best thing about taking up photography is that it gives people a tool to change their lives. Some love the artistic side, some get into the technical aspect of it, but they all share the camaraderie. Blesma Members all share disability, and now they can share a different view of the world.

“So come and see us, get some advice and book yourself on a course,” says Brendan.



NICK BEIGHTON
BEELINE BRITAIN

Many people have journeyed from Land’s End to John O’Groats for charity, but no-one had ever tried to do it as the crow flies – until last May.

“I got a call from a friend of a friend of a friend who said they were looking for some volunteers for a trip,” says Nick Beighton. “His opening gambit was; ‘We’re looking for someone who’s a bit mad and who doesn’t have any legs’. I thought I’d give it a go.”

Beeline Britain saw a team of four attempt to travel in a straight line between the UK’s most distant points by kayak and bike, as well as having to hike over several mountainous regions. The team achieved their goal, earned a place in the record books, and even received a congratulatory phone call from Prince Harry.

“There’s a reason for doing these activities. We’re all searching for something; a focus, a distraction, we’re trying to regain that sense of identity. For me that was paramount – it was about who I was, how I viewed myself and how the world viewed me,” says Nick.

An update from the Board

Chief Executive Barry Le Grys and Chairman Sir Cedric Delves spoke of change; for Members and for Blesma as a whole

"This year's Members' Weekend has a slightly different format, being run over two nights, and it seems to have been met very favourably," Barry told the audience. "This event is twice as big as last year's Weekend, and has a much greater emphasis on Members talking rather than listening."

But, as Barry explained, the Weekend is far from the only aspect of Blesma that is seeing change. "The Association is going in a different direction to the rest of the military charity network," he told Members. "Others are focusing on centralisation and call centres, but we believe a personal call, a cup of tea in someone's home, the 'take as long as it takes' approach is far more important."

"When it comes to individual grants, our approach is also a bit different. We don't have a policy book, but instead treat every case individually. That means

things can be done differently for different people and I believe that is an advantage." Elsewhere, the Activities Programme has doubled in size since 2010 and continues to see investment. "We held a good session this weekend with Members who help to deliver the Activities Programme to discuss how the current offer can be improved."

"The key is to get more people involved. We are making strides to ensure that is the case over the next few years. It is the people who don't engage who would really benefit from the programme."

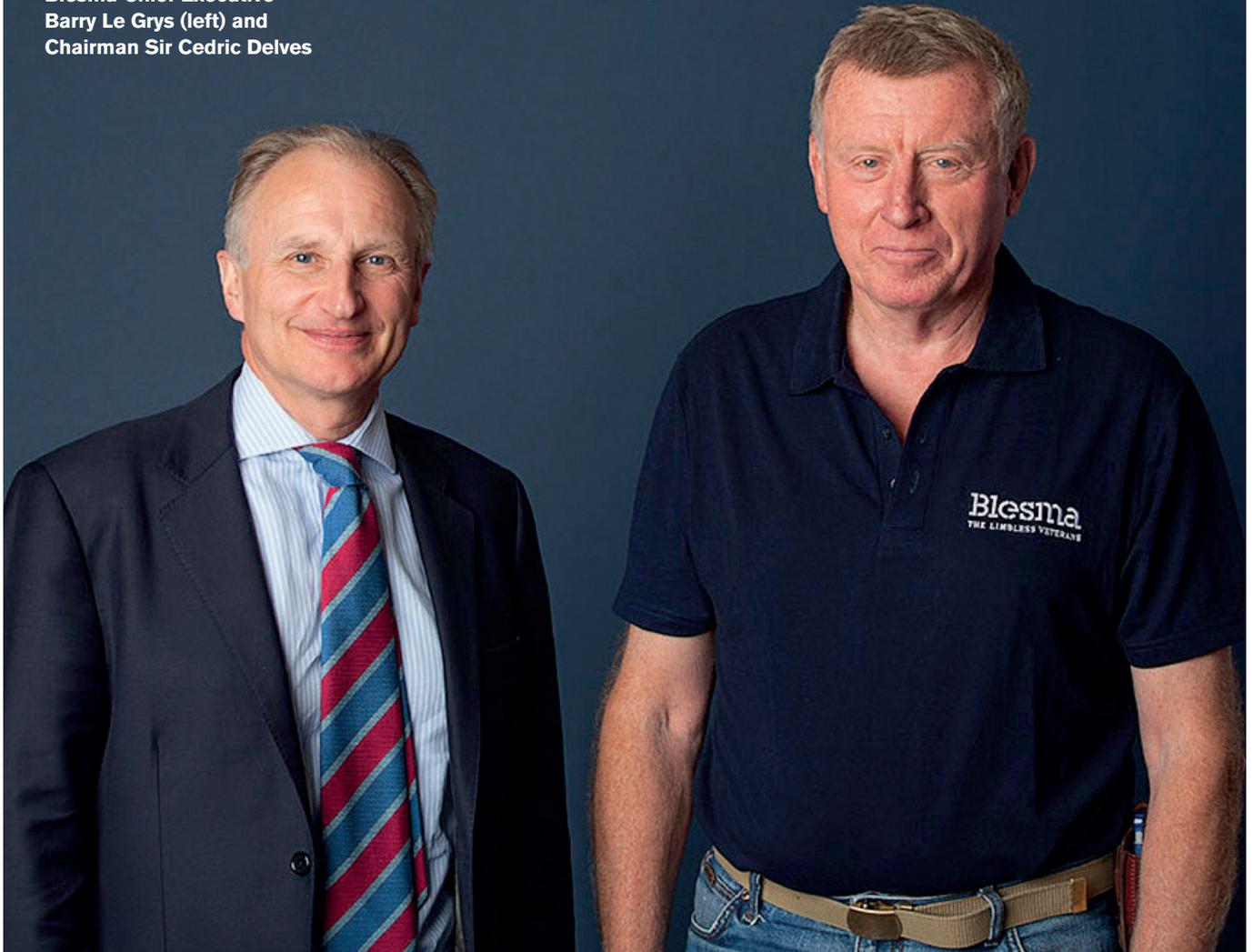
Barry touched on other areas that are going through, or have gone through, changes: this magazine and the Members' Bulletin, for example; and fundraising, which has grown more sophisticated and, as a result, has seen voluntary donations increase; and the fact that Blesma has attracted more than 10,000

new supporters in the last 12 months.

Blesma's Chairman Sir Cedric Delves also spoke of the changes Blesma is going through. "The five-year Strategic Plan is constantly kept under review and is really helping define what we can aspire to," said Cedric. "That foresight has allowed us to invest in Support Officers, for example. We are recruiting an additional BSO and reducing the size of the existing areas to give the current BSOs more chance to get out there and connect with Members."

"Blesma is a pretty distinctive charity, probably more an Association than charity in the orthodox sense. As an Association, we are about Member helping Member, we are about fellowship and shared experience, that is where our activities, prosthetics information and general advice comes in. We are trying to do an awful lot in Blesma."

Blesma Chief Executive Barry Le Grys (left) and Chairman Sir Cedric Delves



Matthew Webb

“There’s no chaffing or rubbing, you’re weightless and you don’t need to wear your prosthetics”



In at the shallow end

From paddling in a pool to searching sunken wrecks, you can go from learner diver to shark spotter with Blesma’s training

Scuba diving is becoming increasingly popular amongst Members perhaps, in part, due to an annual dive expedition to Egypt.

“We took 15 Members to Egypt in 2009 and now we’re up to 24,” says Bob Monkhouse. “The entire expedition is funded by Blesma; we fly into Egypt, get straight onto a boat, and live at sea for a week.”

Blesma diving, and the expedition to Egypt, are open to almost any Member, regardless of age, disability and experience. After a training weekend in Poole to learn basic skills, the group heads out to Egypt. Once there, the first stop is in shallow water so that everyone can complete the three dives needed to legally dive

in open water. After that, Members can decide whether to progress to the next level, Advanced Open Water, to experience even more freedom.

“We have three instructors on board all week, and it’s up to the Members how far they want to push themselves. We’re up at 5.30am for the first dive and try to complete three or four dives a day, normally finishing by 6.30pm,” says Bob, who learned to dive after he lost his leg 10 years ago, and estimates that he has completed about 1,200 dives since.

“When you’re diving you’re weightless and you don’t need prosthetics on. It builds your confidence and self-esteem, and it’s open to anyone – we take novice divers, and last year

a triple amputee joined us for the first time.”

One Member who took part in the taster was Allan Jackson, an ex-Para and Blesma Trustee who was injured four years ago.

“This was brilliant and all the instructors were really accommodating,” says Allan. “I was a bit worried about hitting my stump on the bottom of the pool, so I was quite wary but it was a good experience. I’d love to go on a dive now. My wife is due in a few weeks though, so if I don’t manage it this year then possibly next!”

For more information on Blesma activities email Emily Mizon on mea@blesma.org or call her on 020 8548 7094



The Weekend in pictures

- A** Paul Goodall (left) and Tom Rivenberg
- B** Laura Hyde, Community Events Manager
- C** Matthew Webb
- D** Brendan West (left) and Colin Whitworth
- E** Lance Corporal Claire Howard
- F** Bryony Stevens, Media and Communications Assistant (left) and Emily Mizon, Membership Engagement Assistant
- G** Jonathan Bell
- H** Matt Goodwin (centre) and Charley Streater
- I** Arnold Pickup (back) and Robert Dawson
- J** Neil Rowbottom
- K** Jamie Gillespie (left) and Steve White
- L** Nerys Pearce





Vox Pops



ALLAN JACKSON

"This year, the Members' Weekend was really good. It was really well attended and benefitted from the hotel having great facilities like a swimming pool and a lake.

"The numbers were pretty much doubled from last year and the activities seemed much more varied. For me, the scuba diving taster was the best bit – especially because my six-year-old daughter got to have a go too!"



RON BRIGHT

"The best bit was the contact with Members. People at the top of an organisation can be a little bit remote, but that doesn't happen with Blesma – it's quite exceptional really. I don't think it was quite as good as last year, though. The Military Wives Choir sang after the meal last year, for example, and that was fantastic."



DAVE LEWAN (RIGHT)

"Awesome, fantastic, inspirational, I've loved every minute of it. It was better organised this year, more informal, more relaxed, and, most importantly, it was focused on the Members – and that's what Blesma is all about.

"The best bit for me was hearing the Members' stories. We've never really had that before, it's always been the bosses speaking."



SUE WRIGHT

"I enjoyed the Weekend, although I found it quite tiring because there was so much to do. The best bit was finding out what Blesma has done for other Members, and hearing how those people started to realise that they were able to start living again.

"The talks made me shiver – it was really good to listen to them because I have been in that position myself."

What did you think of the Members' Weekend?

Views, thoughts and opinion from across the Association. Come along next year and have your say



CAROLE MCNAGHTEN

"I loved meeting all the other Members, old and new. I live in Devon so it was great to get together with lots of other Blesma people. It was definitely worth the long journey – you never know who you're going to meet or what you're going to get up to. I thought the event was confidence building too – I'd recommend it to anyone."



NEIL ROWBOTTOM

"I thought the whole Weekend was really good – the change in how the Weekend was structured was really interesting. I thought the presentations were excellent – far better than they've been before. I had a go at fishing, and really enjoyed that too, although I didn't catch anything.

"All in all it was a fantastic experience. If the Weekend carries on in the same direction it will get more and more popular because there was so much going on."



PAUL GOODALL

"I've really enjoyed it, it's been good. I liked the different format, and the talks were enjoyable. I knew a bit about them already because Blesma is a community, we catch up on Facebook.

"I don't see some Members from one year to the next but when we meet up it's like we've been together the whole year. I've seen a lot of new faces this weekend too, but we're all in the same boat and have the same outlook – having a laugh is the main thing."



MICK FOULDS

"It was a lovely weekend, it's always nice catching up with old friends. You can always improve on everything, but I can't think of anything off the top of my head that would have made the Members' Weekend better."

Go(ne) fishing

During the weekend, Members were given the chance to try one of several activities from the Association's popular Activities Programme...

"Blesma fishing attracts a really competitive but close group of like-minded people who meet up all over the country to have fun together," says Charley Streater, a BSO and Blesma's top angler (or so he would have you believe!) "Take sea fishing, for example. We charter a boat from Bridlington and go hunting for mackerel and dab. We combine it with a bit of photography in Bempton the day before and a bit of drinking in the evening to celebrate me winning!" (See what we mean?)

Blesma organises four fishing events throughout the year; the sea fishing in Bridlington, a coarse fishing competition in the Midlands, and a few more besides.

"Activities like fishing can really boost Members' confidence and feelings of independence and self-esteem, but the main sell is the lovely company," says Charley. "Very few people here today have fished before but they're giving it a go. I can guarantee they'll be hooked. It's the camaraderie that drags people in, that and the fact that anyone can do it – it's all inclusive, as with most of Blesma's activities."

Activities Manager, Dave Coulton, agrees. "We have offered Members the chance to try scuba diving, fishing and photography taster courses this weekend," he says. "That gives a pretty wide idea of the activities we offer; from the adventurous, to the competitive, to the artistic. But the most important aspect of any activity is the social element. So many people this weekend have said that it is not necessarily about the activity but, more importantly, it's about getting together to spend time with others."

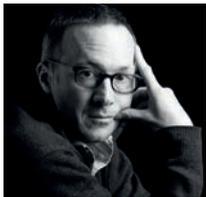
For more on Blesma activities email Emily Mizon on mea@blesma.org or call her on 020 8548 7094

Sam Fitzgerald



“I WANT TO BE A STRONG PILLAR OF SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS”

Internationally acclaimed photographer Marcus Lyon has agreed to become Blesma’s latest high profile ambassador. We meet him...



MARCUS LYON IS a British artist and photographer of international renown. He has taken portraits of HM the Queen and the last four British Prime Ministers, as well as some of the poorest people on earth in slums and ghettos worldwide. His work is held in collections from the Art Institute of Chicago to the Arts Council of Great Britain, and he is founder of the award-winning multidisciplinary art studio, Glassworks. Marcus recently became a Blesma ambassador, and plans to help Members increase their enjoyment of, and ability in, photography. He explains how...

What does photography mean to you?

The truly fabulous thing about life as a photographer is that you’re given a red carpet into whatever field you’re interested in. If you want to take woodland pictures, people in that world will invite you in. If you’re fascinated by disability sport, you can find connections and get access. It’s one of those golden careers that lets you follow the passions that resonate with you emotionally, intellectually and spiritually.

What are you working on now?

I’m engaged in three big themes. One is the continuation of the work I’ve done in three projects – *Brics*, *Exodus* and *TIMEOUT* – which explore global mass behaviours [see pictures, right]. I am also stretching what I do as an artist by building collaborations with third parties, like Rambert dance. The third is a project exploring Brazilian national identity through portrait, DNA and sound.

How did you get involved with Blesma?

I’ve had experience photographing disability sport, and been to the last five Paralympics. My family has a military connection, so I was familiar with Blesma. I have also

had the great fortune to become friends with [Blesma Chairman] Sir Cedric Delves, and that led me to the inner team of the charity.

What attracted you to getting involved?

I’ve always been attracted to people who are, in some way, disadvantaged or who have not been dealt the best cards. Watching people overcome problems is incredibly inspiring.

What are you aiming to do for Blesma?

As much as I can. My role is undefined. It’s about finding meaningful ways for us to engage, but I want to be a strong pillar of support for Members who wish to pursue photography – whether as art, reportage, portraiture or landscape. I can support them through mentoring and being present for an exchange of ideas, as well as being on hand for competitions and exhibitions.

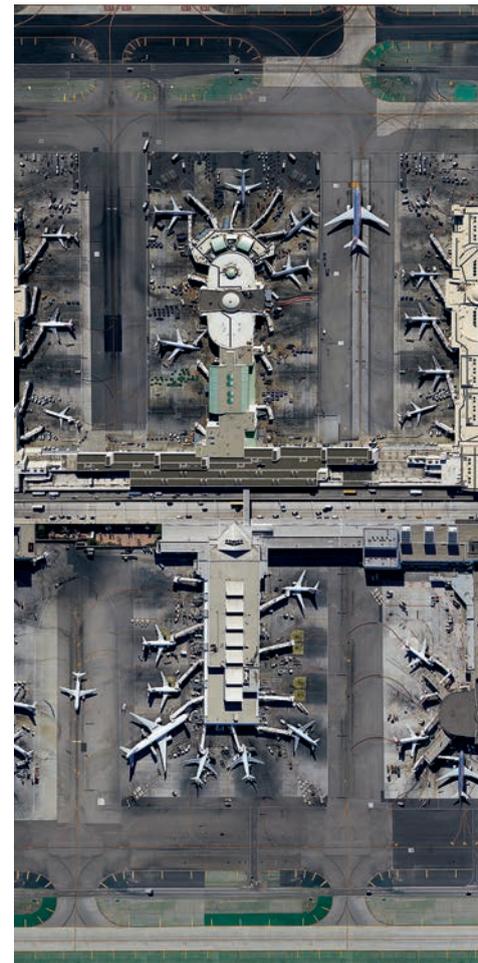
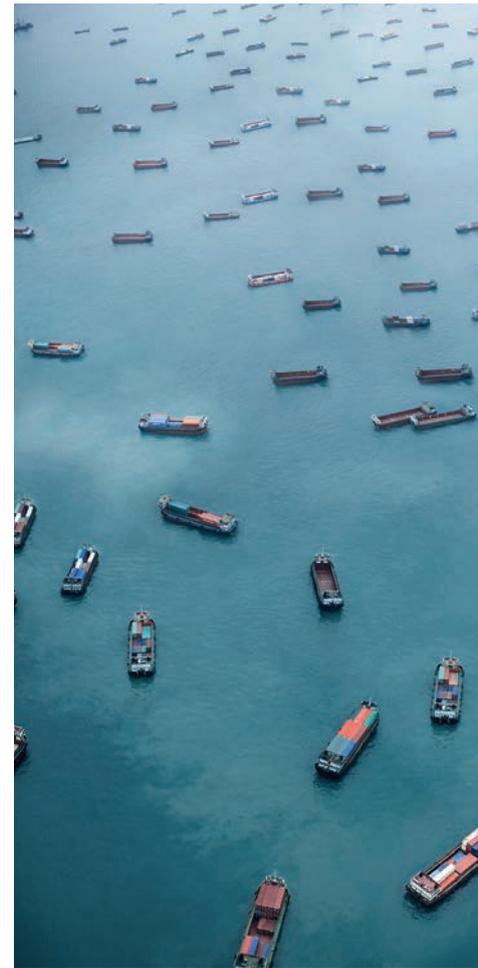
Can Members’ experiences give them a unique perspective as photographers?

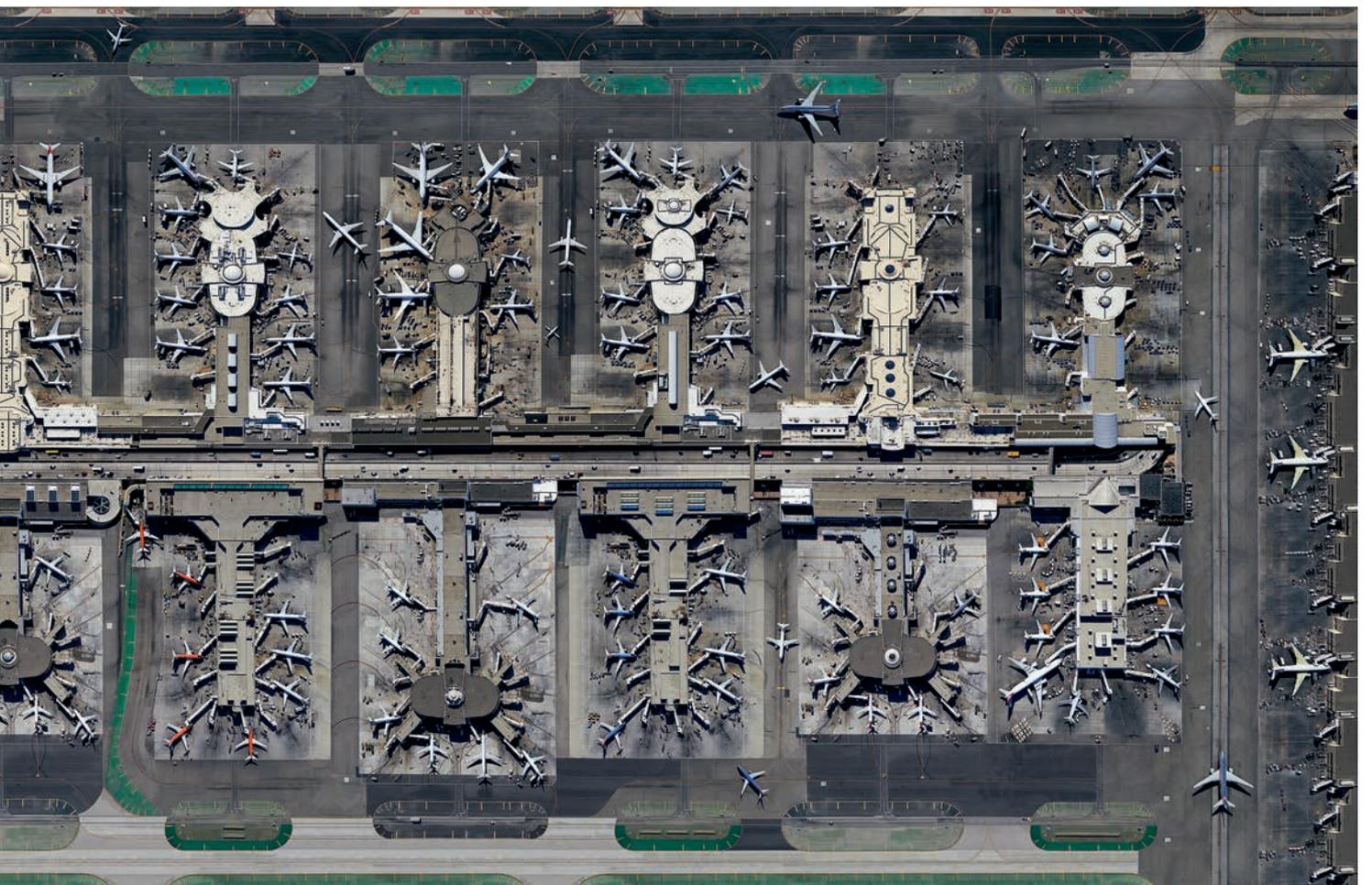
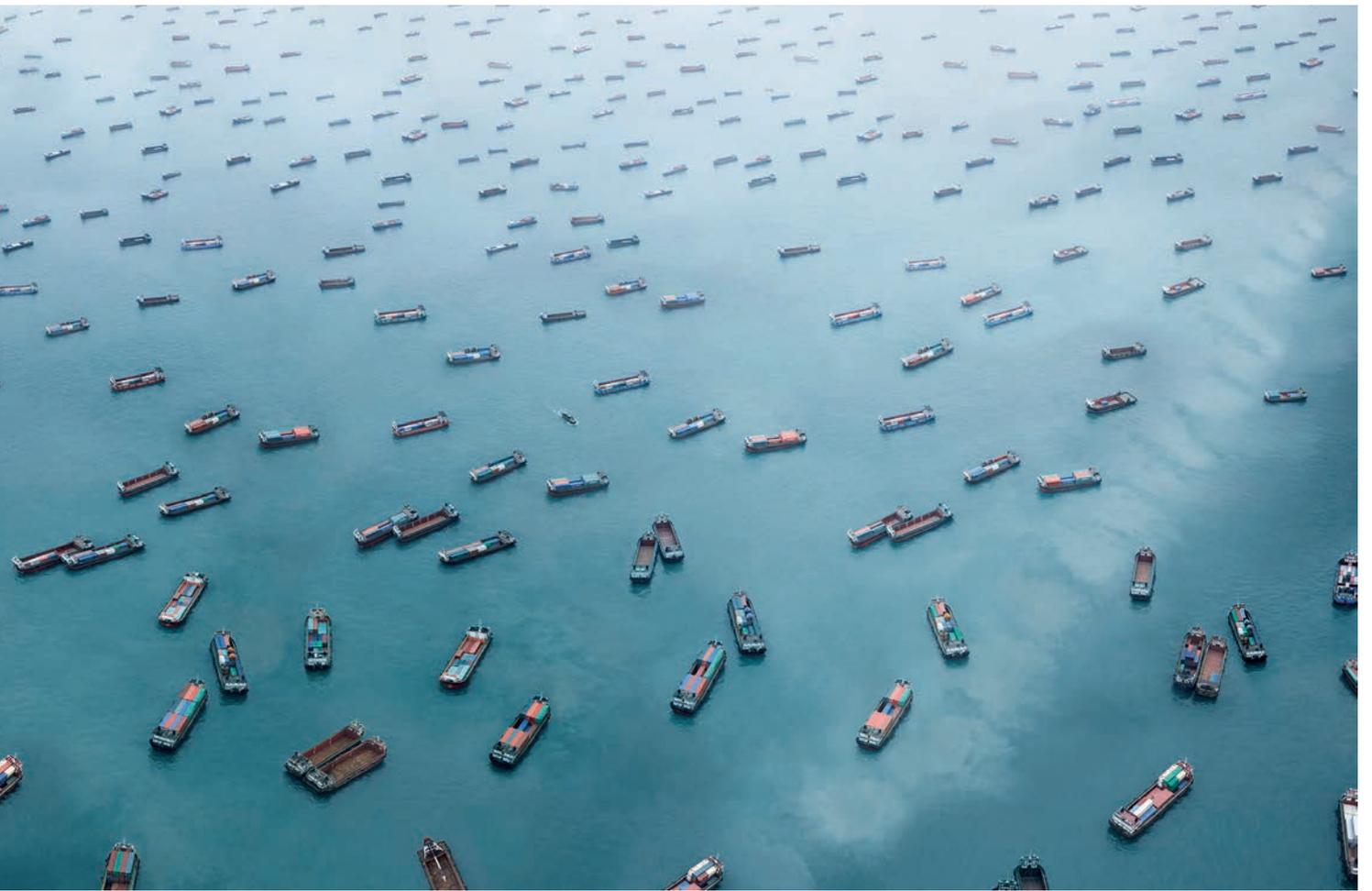
I think so. A military background sits very comfortably with photography; both involve endless hours of getting your kit right before going into action. The patience of military process also crosses over, and the experiences Members have been through offer a different perspective. Photography is all about finding a new way of saying something that has already been said before. I want to support Members in finding their own voices.

What inspires you about Blesma Members?

I relate a little. It’s not at all comparable, but I was a relatively decent sportsman, and I had to stop because of injury. Then I saw some disabled sport. I wasn’t even a tenth as affected as these guys, but they were outperforming me by a million miles. It made me want to photograph people with disabilities doing amazing things.

Find out more about Marcus, his work and his career at www.marcuslyon.com







Becky Ormrod

In the first in a series of features about women in Blesma, Becky Ormrod discusses amputation from a partner's point of view

It is the one phone call that every relative dreads when their loved ones are on operations. For Becky Ormrod, it came on Christmas Eve, 2007. "I was with my family in Surrey, wrapping presents, when I got a call from Mark's sister," she says. "Mark was due back on R&R in a couple of days, and I had presumed that he was already back safe in Camp Bastion before flying out. His sister told me that two officers from the Marines were with her. It didn't hit me at first. She told me that Mark had been in an accident. I couldn't listen to any more. I had to hand the phone to my dad to take the call."

Becky had been dating Royal Marine Mark Ormrod for a year before he suffered the loss of both his legs and an arm after standing on an IED in Afghanistan.

"I'd moved to Plymouth to do my top up-degree at university in 2006, and at the time Mark was working as a doorman at a nightclub," she remembers. "He kept asking for my number and I kept refusing to give it to him, but he eventually told me that he'd ban me from the club unless I did! He was funny. We went out. He'd taken a year out from the Marines, but he went back in the following May. I knew it'd make him happy to go back, so I supported him."

TRYING NOT TO THINK THE UNTHINKABLE

Becky had always tried hard to push any worries about Mark's safety to the back of her mind. "You try not to think too hard about the obvious risks when they are on operations. Instead, you just try to get on with your normal routine. Mark was really good at staying in touch – I got lots of e-blueys. We wrote at least once

a week and he called as often as he could. It was very much in my head that nothing would happen to him. I just thought we'd be OK.

"You didn't really see guys on the news getting injured, it only made the news when someone died. I didn't watch too much on TV anyway because you can get obsessed. I had a friend whose boyfriend was in Afghanistan and she was a real worrier, she couldn't sleep. I didn't want to be affected like that."

As is often the case, Becky met the initial news with denial. "First, we were told he'd lost one leg," she says. "A few hours later, we found out it was both legs. Then a few hours after that, we were told about the arm. I was stunned, in total disbelief. I thought it was a mistake. But Mark was flown home on Christmas Day and my dad drove me to the hospital in Birmingham.

"I walked into the hospital room and Mark was unconscious, with lots of wires coming out of him. There was a horrible smell of rotting flesh and blood. But it was clearly Mark. Before I saw him I'd thought; 'If he has three limbs missing, he'll be a right mess,' but he wasn't – his face was completely untouched, he was covered in a sheet but it was clearly him."

As with any amputation, it is not just the life of the victim that suddenly changes drastically – it is the lives of entire families. For Becky, like all Blesma wives, partners, children, siblings and parents, dealing with the psychological and physical aftermath of amputation was now a daily reality. Despite everything, Becky stayed extremely positive.

"It sounds weird, but at no point did I think he wasn't going to make it," she says. "I thought; 'He's





Becky and Mark married in 2009 and have two children, Mason and Evelyn, together

home, he's got three limbs missing, but it'll be fine.' Him not being OK didn't even cross my mind.

"Mark was in and out of consciousness at first, but a couple of days later he woke up – and proposed to me. I wasn't quite sure what he was saying. He had an oxygen mask on and was high on morphine! I kept saying; 'I can't understand you', so he had to ask about nine times before it clicked. Finally I said; 'Did you just ask me to marry you?' He was relieved when I understood, and accepted. Although now he keeps blaming the morphine for asking me!"

The couple, who live in Plymouth, got married in 2009, and now have two children, Mason and Evelyn, together. But, as is the case for many Blesma Members, things got worse before they got better.

"The surgeries and all the rehab proved to be a bit of a roller coaster," says Becky. "I stayed at the hospital with Mark for ages, I was there with him first thing in the morning and wouldn't leave until he was asleep. They were long days. I'd help change the bedding and the dressings just to feel like I was being useful.

"But Mark got very frustrated. He struggled just to sit up in bed – it could take him an hour just to do that at first, and it would make him so upset. The physio would say; 'That's really good, Mark' but he'd just break down. He'd rage that he couldn't do it, it took so much energy. He thought that was his life now. He couldn't imagine doing that every day, and he didn't want to be a burden on me.

"There was another occasion I clearly remember when we tried to get him into a flat near the hospital in the wheelchair. We couldn't get inside and we both sat in the hallway crying. That was our worst day. I said; 'It'll get easier', but at the time it was hideous."

Things, however, did get easier.

"Lots of things amaze me about Mark," says Becky. "He had bad days, but in general he was just so upbeat. 'This has happened, let's deal with it,' was his attitude. When we moved to Headley Court, he was the first triple amputee of the Afghan war, so he was very much

a guinea pig. But he was often three steps ahead of the therapists, and sometimes he felt he was being held back. It was great to see his determination."

LIFE AFTER LIMB LOSS

Mark was soon working again, for the Royal Marines Association, and doing motivational speaking and coaching. "He had another dip when he was medically discharged from the Marines, but his character got him through," says Becky. "He was always going to succeed. Day to day, Mark can do almost anything. OK, he can't cook, but then, he never could! And sometimes, I'll do the little things just because they're easier for me to do – I'll nip upstairs if he's forgotten something, for example, and while he can change nappies it's much easier for me, so I do most of them."

Mark's children, including an older daughter, Kezia, from a previous relationship, have also adapted well. "Kezia was only three years old when Mark was injured, and she just asked; 'What happened to daddy's legs?' She was told that a big bomb went boom, and that was fine for her. Now she asks her daddy to visit her school to give talks. And our two children have never known any different. They think daddy is cool because he has legs like a superhero!"

Becky, meanwhile, offers some simple but wise advice for any partners of recent amputees. "I'd say that the main thing is not to take any frustration that they may project onto you too personally. In life, when you're the closest person to someone and things go wrong, you're going to get the backlash. That's just the way it is. But Mark knows that, and when he gets frustrated he always apologises afterwards.

"I'd also recommend trying to find a network of people that you can talk to. I didn't really have anyone like that in the early days, there was no support, but later on I found a lot of people, and there are wives and girlfriends out there who can lend their support.

"Don't ever be afraid to ask for help. Nobody will ever think any less of you."



“For Becky, like all Blesma wives, partners, children, siblings and parents, dealing with the psychological and physical aftermath of amputation was now a daily reality”

HOW TO...

Volunteer

Blesma relies on its band of dedicated volunteers now more than ever. From rattling tins to rowing the Atlantic, here's how you can get involved...

Blesma was founded on a 'Branch' structure and, at its peak, there were 124 regional Branches, each supported by a network of local volunteers and groups made up of Members and wider supporters of the Association.

As the years have passed, and the Branch structure has faded, a nationally coordinated strategy for volunteers has come into place – although the focus is still on getting people to help out in their local area.

According to Frank Garside, Blesma's first National Volunteer Officer, the Association relies on the essential and invaluable work of its dedicated volunteers now as much as ever. "Volunteers bring a fresh perspective and add value to the

Association whilst gaining new skills and experiences," says Frank. "They are the life blood of Blesma and, as such, we are always on the look out for more."

So, if you have ever thought about lending your support, now could be the time. You don't need any previous experience, just some enthusiasm and a 'can do' attitude. And giving up your time can benefit you just as much as it benefits others. Here are the top tips for helping out...

1 BE ENTHUSIASTIC

Are you concerned that you don't think you have any relevant or applicable skills that can help Blesma? Don't be! The key asset for any volunteer is a willingness to help, in as small or large a way as you are able. "You really don't have to bring anything with you except enthusiasm and commitment," says Frank. "And the amount of time you are able to give is completely up to you, there is absolutely no pressure. It can be as much or as little as you like."



2 THINK OF THE BENEFITS

One of the greatest things about volunteering is that it not only benefits the Association – it is also hugely rewarding in all sorts of ways for the volunteer. "It looks good on your CV and can lead to work, it can increase your confidence, you can gain new skills, and you can even challenge your fears," says Frank. It's maybe not the most altruistic way of thinking, but it's worth bearing in mind how volunteering could help further your own goals.



3 BE IMAGINATIVE

Blesma is always changing, and so is always open to new ideas. "Who would have thought that, 10 years ago, we'd have had a flourishing Photography Programme?" says Frank, "and now we have nationally renowned photographers giving up their time to help." The lesson? Volunteers can often bring all sorts of fresh



Forces Day – this year we’re participating in 15 events across the UK, from Weymouth to Edinburgh.” From yelling your lungs out in a cheer squad to putting on a coffee morning, there’s a role to suit everyone at all sorts of events up and down the country.

6 SPREAD THE WORD

Volunteering isn’t just about raising money. “A huge part of our volunteering now involves getting the word out about what Blesma is and does,” says Frank. “We want to make as many people as possible aware of our work in the hope that they’ll become interested and eventually assist us. Our volunteer membership hasn’t been coordinated before – we’ve always been reactive – but now we’re becoming much more proactive.”

7 GET ONLINE

Want to ponder your next steps as a possible Blesma volunteer? Get online. There are lots of ways to get involved in Blesma volunteering – including via the websites www.doittrust.org and LinkedIn, but the easiest route is via www.blesma.org/get-involved/volunteer-your-time. Or just give Frank Garside a call on 020 8548 3510 and have a chat.

8 READ THE HANDBOOK

The Blesma volunteer handbook explains everything you need to know – from the benefits of volunteering to the codes of conduct. Download a copy from www.blesma.org or get in touch with Frank using the details below. “We’re grateful to all volunteers. They make a big difference and are very highly valued, so if you’re thinking about joining us, read the handbook and get in touch,” says Frank.

For more information on volunteering, or to offer your services, get in touch with Frank Garside, Blesma’s dedicated National Volunteer Officer, on 020 8548 3510 or email him at nvo@blesma.org

perspectives, ideas and brand new ways of doing things. So if there is something – anything – that you think you can offer, get in touch and discuss your ideas.

4 KEEP IT GENERAL

If you don’t know what you’d like to do to help, that’s fine. “For Blesma Members who just want to help generally, the old adages of ‘bums on seats’ and ‘all hands to the tiller,’ work for us,” says Frank. “For example, a Blesma Widow comes into Headquarters two days a week to help out with mailing and admin work, and that’s enormously helpful.” But, if you think you can be of most benefit to the Association as a driver, a scuba diving instructor, or by organising coach trips to Europe, for example, specify what you’d like to do.

5 GET TO AN EVENT

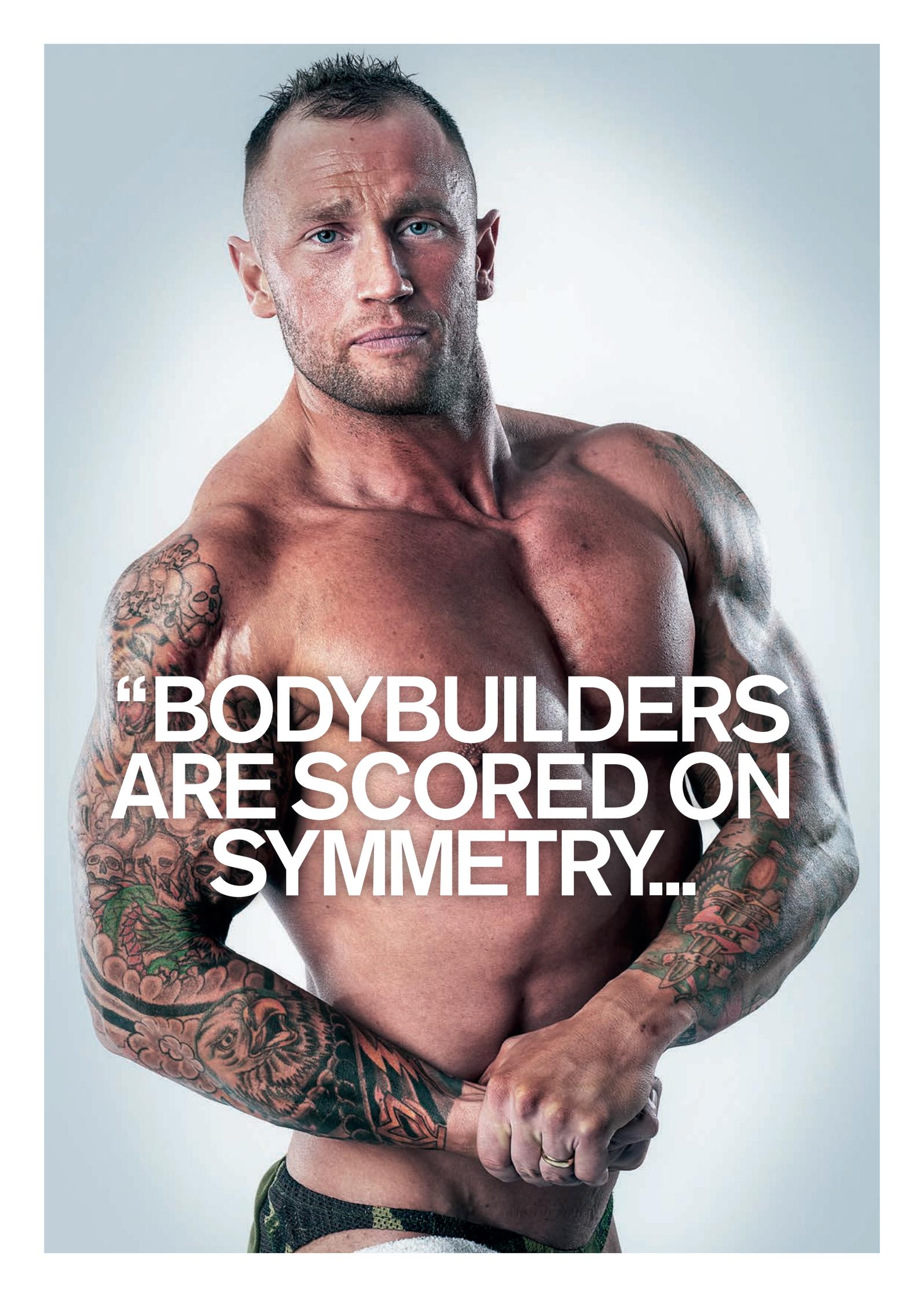
If you’d enjoy running a fundraising event, Blesma is full of experienced people who can guide you in the right direction. “Get along to a Blesma event and see how it all works,” says Frank. “We need people to look after the stalls and carry out admin at events like Armed



MAKE A DIFFERENCE WITH BLESMA

Fancy lending your support? Here are just a few ways you could help

- **Event volunteering** Play a vital role in making events a success by cheering participants on or promoting a local event in your area
- **Community events** Support Members in your area by organising social events such as day trips, coffee mornings, luncheons or afternoon teas
- **Fundraising** Organise your own event. For every pound you raise 83p goes directly to helping Members. The other 17p goes towards raising the next £1
- **Administration support** Work alongside staff answering phone calls, maintaining records, inputting data, and helping with mail outs and event packs
- **Do something different** These are just a few ways to help as a volunteer. You may have ideas of your own and Blesma welcomes any suggestions

A photograph of a very muscular man with a short, spiky haircut and blue eyes. He has extensive tattoos on both arms, including a large eagle on his left forearm and various designs on his right arm. He is wearing a gold ring on his left hand. The background is a plain, light blue-grey color. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

**“BODYBUILDERS
ARE SCORED ON
SYMMETRY...”**

A full-body photograph of a man, Mark Smith, posing in a bodybuilding style. He is shirtless, wearing green briefs, and has extensive tattoos on his arms and legs. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. He has a prosthetic left leg. The background is a plain, light-colored studio backdrop.

AND I'VE GOT A LEG MISSING!"

Amputation changed Mark Smith's body forever.
Then he decided to change it even more

Pictures: Adrian Myers Words: Nick Moore

Mark Smith lost his right leg above the knee after an accident during a live firing exercise in Canada. Since being discharged from the Grenadier Guards, he has gone on to become a trailblazing bodybuilder. He has already won a national competition and is now wholly focused on becoming the top disabled competitor in the world. Mark talks us through his Army career, his injury, and how an obsession with pumping iron has super-sized his life...

Tell us about your Army days...

I'd always wanted to be in the Forces and so I joined up when I was 18. I joined the Grenadier Guards and did six months of ceremonial duties in London before going to Bosnia where we were involved in a lot of house searches and dealing with human trafficking. I went to Baghdad and Basra in 2006, which I enjoyed. I also deployed to Jamaica, the Falklands and Kenya. I did well, completed my Corporal's course, got promoted, and went to Afghanistan in 2009.

How was that?

Full on. We saw lots of action, but I must admit, I enjoyed it – the adrenaline that flows through you during a contact is unbelievable. After the tour I did my Section Commanders' course. My wife was nine months pregnant at the time, and I had to rush back after a sleep deprivation exercise and stay up one more day to see my son being born! Life was good, but then I went to Canada in 2011 on Pre-Deployment Training. That's when I got injured.

Tell us about your accident...

Ironically, I was working as safety staff for the Yorkshire Regiment during a live firing exercise. As soldiers were going through their drills clearing temporary buildings I was shot through a wall. The rounds went through my leg and shoulder. One hit an artery, which meant I only had a couple of minutes before I'd bleed out.

So how come you're still here?

The lads on the ground were mega. Blood was squirting six feet in the air, but they were on the case straight away. The only reason I'm still alive is because one of the lads had seen the film *Black Hawk Down*. In that, someone gets shot in a similar place, and they clamp off his artery. That's what the lads did to me. I was in a state of complete shock. When they cut my shirt off there was a huge hole. I was pale, my eyes were rolling, but I'd just become a dad and there was no way I was piling in that day. One lad punched me in the face to wake me up, and they also trapped my testicles in the tourniquet (by accident!) just to add to the pain!

What happened next?

I was flown to Calgary and spent two weeks in intensive care. I died and was resuscitated six times over the next week. My wife and dad flew out. I had 30 wires coming out of me. When I woke up, a doctor was standing over me with a consent form to sign saying it was ok to remove my leg. They said if they didn't take it, I wouldn't see out the day.

So they amputated?

I begged them to take it below the knee, but it had to be above. Several more operations took it higher and higher. I was flown back to Birmingham and rehab was fine at first. The lads came to visit and I was pleased to be alive – the leg didn't matter. I took inspiration from the guy in the bed opposite. He was a triple amputee and was up and about in a wheelchair within a few days.

But your Army days were finished...

Initially I thought; 'I'm going to walk better than any other amputee and I'll become a Sergeant.' But it soon became apparent that wouldn't happen. When the pain stopped I had time to think, and I got depressed.

“THE GYM WAS THE ONLY PLACE I WOULDN'T DWELL ON MY INJURY. IT WAS AN ESCAPE. I FOUND PEACE IN LIFTING WEIGHTS, I FELT LIKE I'D DISCOVERED MYSELF AGAIN”

My wife was struggling with the baby. I was seeing lads leave hospital ahead of me, and thought; 'When is it my turn?' That's when I went to Headley and discovered that I found some peace from working out in the gym. During rehab the gym was the only place I wouldn't dwell on my injury – it was an escape from it, and that helped me a lot. I found a sort of peace in lifting weights, like I'd discovered myself again.

Is that when you got into bodybuilding?

No. I was in the gym every day but I was also trying lots of sports. I didn't like being in a wheelchair – I got the classic thing of people asking my wife; 'How is he?' I tried amputee football but got frustrated because I couldn't do what I used to. I did football and boxing coaching courses, and I became a personal trainer, but I got frustrated when my clients' enthusiasm didn't match mine. Then I read about a lad who'd competed in the first disabled bodybuilding competition.

And you wanted to find out more...

It really appealed to me, so I joined the Atlas Gym in Milton Keynes. There are a lot of bodybuilders here, which is ideal. I first looked into competitions back in November 2013 and one, Pure Elite, was scheduled for the following May. I asked my trainer if it was possible to get to competition standard by then and he said yes. I was so excited.

What was your training like?

We sorted out my diet and started a specific training regime. The more I saw my body begin to change, the more I got into it. I became addicted. By the time I came out of the Army I was a bit chubby. My diet was ok, but I ate a lot. When I started training I got my body fat down from 17.5% to 8%. My competition weight is 13 stone, so I had to drop from 15.5. I was in the gym six days a week for up to two hours at a time. Three months before the competition I got really strict with my diet, and with six weeks to go I added in cardio sessions to shed the fat.

What were the biggest challenges of training with one leg?

The cardio. I can't run very well, so I needed to find my own way. I tried jumping on the kids' trampoline in loads of layers of clothing, but that took its toll on my left leg. I eventually took to walking morning and night, 45 minutes at a time, on my crutches. I have an exit wound in my groin and still suffer from problems with the skin breaking down, but the crutches work. Most days you can find me hopping about at 5.45am.

Do the weight machines pose problems?

It's trial and error. I've tried most machines with the leg on and off, and generally it's more comfy with it off. And I can't do pull-ups with my leg on because it falls off! That's why I'm always in shorts – it's more dignified for getting it back on quickly!

What was the competition like?

It was amazing. I must admit, backstage in a pair of posing trunks, I thought; 'What the hell am I doing?' But I'd spent the last three years craving a serious adrenaline rush and the moment I stepped on stage in front of 800 people and struck my first pose I knew I could finally move on from Army. The reception I got gave me closure. That was the first time since leaving the Army I realised I wasn't going to miss it any more.

How important is bodybuilding to you now?

It's massive. It has helped me move on with my life. I missed the Army like mad for a long time and I was always monitoring what my military mates were doing – seeing their promotions and knowing I'd have the same if I was still in. It was hard not to get upset about that. Bodybuilding is the first thing I've done that has made me stop



Bodybuilding has helped Mark move on with his life since leaving the Army



missing the Army. I'm finally happy with what I'm doing and that's been great for me and for my family. My wife has noticed a real difference in me.

And you won that competition...

Yes. It was all over so quickly – I'd trained for six months just to pose for five minutes. But when they called my name out all the hard work seemed worthwhile. My wife said it was the happiest she'd seen me since leaving the Army. It was an amazing feeling. I'm very happy with the lifestyle now, and I get to spend lots of time with my two boys.

What's next for you?

I'd like to get bigger and bigger, but as long as I see an improvement every time I compete I'll be pleased. I'm now leaner than I was a year ago, and I'm constantly pushing my boundaries. I think I stayed in my comfort zone for that first competition because I was conscious of damaging my left leg.

“BODYBUILDING WAS A TURNING POINT. I'VE FOUND SOMETHING THAT STOPS ME MISSING THE ARMY”

But now I'm going all out for it every time I'm in the gym. I'm even doing exercises like single leg squats now!

And you've recently come back from competing in America, too...

Yeah, I was invited over to Houston to take part in a competition. The standard is good out there – I looked like a Twiglet next to some of the really experienced able-bodied blokes – but I want to get my name about. I won my category, the Adaptive Division, in that event, and in September there's

Mr England. I really, really want that title! My aim is to be the best disabled bodybuilder in England and, after that, the world! I've been getting a bit of press recently and now it's down to me to back that up on stage. I like that pressure.

Would you like to see more Blesma Members get into the sport?

Definitely. Some Blesma lads have already been in touch to get some information and advice, and a few guys are planning to compete in Mr England. That's all great, I'm definitely not trying to hog all the limelight! Bodybuilding has been a turning point for me – I've finally found something that allows me to stop missing being in the Army. Lots of lads struggle after amputation and some get overweight, but doing this can help them turn that around. Lifting weights suits the discipline of Army lads. I certainly don't see it as my domain and I'd encourage anyone else to get involved.



Thanks to Atlas Gym in Milton Keynes

MARK'S TIPS TO BUILDING A BETTER YOU

OK, so you might not want to be a bodybuilder, but hitting the gym can boost your self-esteem as well as your biceps

1 Have a goal
"You need something that will encourage you to train. For me, it's the fact that only one amputee has ever been invited to pose on the Mr Olympia stage. That's as big as it gets for bodybuilding. I want to be the second! I also want to compete against the top able-bodied guys, but I'm not sure how I'd do because bodybuilders are scored on symmetry – and I've got a leg missing!" says Mark.

2 Get a good guide
"I've got this far by having a good trainer. There's a science to fitness, so you need someone with experience to help you with your workout and diet.

As a bodybuilder I have to think about things like dehydrating myself before a competition to make my muscles stand out as much as possible. You don't have to go to such extremes, but eating and drinking the right things will really make a difference."

3 Get the ironing board out
"I find it tough to be strict with my diet. I have to have a low carb day, then a medium, then a high carb day. I get so hungry I start raiding the cupboards, so I ask my wife for chores to keep me busy. I decorate, iron, clean the house – all while wearing loads of layers to sweat as much as possible. The house has never been so clean!"

4 Turn away the takeaway
"Discipline is crucial. My trainer will know right away if I've had so much as a single biscuit. I have to weigh my food and eat it at certain times – eight small meals a day. Morning until night, everything I do is geared towards competition. My wife says the sport is anti-social – I can't really go out to restaurants, and I hate it when she gets a Chinese – but they're sacrifices I have to make."

5 Think about your prosthetic
"When you put on weight and then lose it, your prosthetic is obviously going to be affected, so you need to work with your limb clinic to make adaptations where

necessary. I'm not sure how much bigger I can get because my leg won't be able to bear the load of me lifting much more weight. It's something I'll have to figure out."

6 Think big, lift small
"Bodybuilders are looking to get their muscles as big, but as defined, as possible. Learning to pose is crucial and it's harder than it looks. On stage, I have to squeeze and tighten all my muscles, so in the gym I aim to keep my body under tension for as long as possible. You can do the same by using lighter weights and doing the exercises more slowly to replicate what it's like when a bodybuilder poses."



KAJA

THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN FILLED OUR NEWS PROGRAMMES EVERY DAY FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, BUT NO BRITISH FILM HAS BEEN MADE ABOUT THE CONFLICT. UNTIL NOW. MEET THE DIRECTOR OF WHAT SOME CRITICS CALL 'MAYBE THE BEST WAR FILM EVER MADE'

Kajaki is the kind of film you have to watch through the gaps between your fingers. As the extraordinary true story of Paratroopers who become trapped in a Taliban minefield in Helmand Province unfolds, you know something bad is coming – you just don't know when. From *Psycho* to *Alien*, filmmakers refer to this as the 'monster in the house' genre.

"*Jaws* is the perfect example of this," says the film's director Paul Katis, "and *Kajaki* has more in common with *Jaws* than most war films. A landmine is a hidden enemy, below the surface, it can strike at any moment. That gives the story great drama."

Paul Katis is an experienced director and producer who set out to tell the kind of story that will be familiar to many Blesma Members, if largely ignored by the media.

"We've had *Sniper*, *The Hurt Locker* and *Zero Dark Thirty* from America, but until this film, the Afghanistan conflict hadn't produced a film with a British voice. We've had great documentaries, but no films to let you really identify with the characters," says Paul. "I had the idea while I was doing some work with young soldiers for the MOD. One lad, who was just 18 years old, was flying out to Afghanistan three weeks later. I thought; 'He's so young – why don't I know more about this war?' I realised not enough had been produced about it,





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TOM ORMISTON

After a long and distinguished military career, Tom Ormiston has worked as Blesma's Support Officer for the Eastern Area since 2007

After I left school in Edinburgh I worked in an office job for two years, but got really bored. Many of my family had served in the Scots Guards, so I decided to join up and see the world. I loved it straight away.

I went to Northern Ireland after training in 1971. I was shot at, bombs were going off all the time, five guys in the battalion were killed and a lot of our men were seriously injured. I didn't know about Blesma at the time, but the close shaves made you think about your future!

After nine years in the Scots Guards I transferred to the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. I commissioned in 1990 and worked as an Admin Officer, then an Army Schools Liaison Officer and commanded a couple of units. I ended my service as a Major, overseeing a £500m defence contract.

I applied to become a Blesma Support Officer in 2007. It seemed perfect for me because it was working in the military field with military people. I knew it wouldn't feel too different from the Army. I enjoyed the role right away.

Being a Blesma Support Officer is all about fighting our Members' corner. I do all sorts. I had a WWII veteran who couldn't get into Norwich on the bus with his electric wheelchair. I battled with the bus company for a long time and eventually adapted buses began to do runs into Norwich. Successes like that, which make a big difference to someone's quality of life, are very satisfying.

The sense of humour among the Members is second to none. Another WWII veteran told me a story about jumping out of a tank on D-Day straight onto a land mine and saying to his commanding officer; "I shouldn't have done that, should I?" He was so understated. From the old to the young, there's a great spirit among our people.

The job has become more complicated over the years. When I started, it was mainly War Pensioners. Now, there can be lots of legal complications with younger Members, different prosthetics, benefits and so on. But the job is

the same – getting the Members what they need as quickly as possible to live as normal a life as possible. If the NHS can't help, we find a way to.

As a Support Officer I visit people at their lowest ebb. Their limb loss may be recent and they might be struggling mentally. I introduce

them to the right people to get things done, so they can see real improvements and realise things can get better.

I'd do this job for free! No-one's really doing it for the money, and Blesma truly is a family. You make so many friends and get very close to the Members you help. I've got two years left before I retire, and it gives me great satisfaction to know I have helped to make a difference.

I won't get bored when I retire! I'm still involved in the Scots Guards and I'm chairman of an indoor bowls club – and I'll stay involved with Blesma one way or another!

"I'D DO THIS JOB FOR FREE! NO-ONE IS REALLY DOING IT FOR THE MONEY, AND BLESMA TRULY IS A FAMILY"

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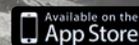


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