



AIRBORNE FORCES

STUART CROXFORD LOST HIS LEG SAILING. SO NOW HE DOES THIS INSTEAD!

Row, row, row, (row) your boat

Blesma Members take the record books by storm after rowing 3000 miles across the Atlantic **p04**



Blesma backs Blue on Blue

The West End play that is about to put one Blesma Member centre stage **p28**



The latest from the world of prosthetics

From socketless sockets to groundbreaking surgery, Blesma's BSO (Prosthetics) keeps you in the know **p12**

Alpha® SmartTemp

Do you have problems with excessive sweating and chaffing on your residual limb?



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OUTLAST®
TECHNOLOGY

Reduce sweating and increase security with the innovative Alpha SmartTemp Liner.

The Smart Temp liner responds to fluctuations in skin temperature. By regulating the heat of the residual limb, the liner delays the onset of sweating, whilst absorbing and releasing the stored heat when necessary.

It's the ideal solution for amputees wanting to keep their residual limb cool, controlled, and comfortable.

The only liner to use Outlast® Technology

- **KEEPS YOU COOL**
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- **ABSORBS HEAT**
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- **CONTROLS SWEATING**
- **RELEASES HEAT WHEN NEEDED**



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WillowWood™

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Stay in touch.



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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Four men, three legs, one record!

Blesma's Row2Recovery Atlantic mission ended in glory in February, when its four-man crew set a world record as the first British all-amputee crew to row across an ocean.

The feat, which had begun in La Gomera in the Canary Islands on 20 December, took 46 days, six hours and 49 minutes to complete. The vessel, nicknamed Legless, finished eighth out of 26 taking part in the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge.

Skipper Cayle Royce, along with Lee Spencer, Paddy Gallagher and Nigel Rogoff were met by a huge crowd at Antigua's

English Harbour, and were given a military salute by soldiers from the local Army as they finally reached land.

"Rowing into harbour was the most incredible experience of my life," said Royal Marine Colour Sergeant Lee Spencer. "For 46 days, we had to deal with sensory deprivation. All we saw was sea and sky. To then suddenly hear all that noise was completely overwhelming. I was humbled by the number of people who had taken time to support and follow us."

The challenge was the third of its kind, but the first to involve a crew made up

entirely of amputees. The Row2Recovery crew, who are all Blesma Members, rowed around the clock in pairs, with each duo taking two-hour shifts. Skipper Cayle Royce, who had been part of the previous challenge in 2014, later told *Blesma Magazine* how this expedition presented new challenges.

"They were two totally different rows. Last time, the conditions were horrific. This time, a couple of storms put us on anchor for a few days, but generally it was easier in terms of the weather," he said. "What was tougher was the fact that we're all amputees. We ran the boat



Life through a lens
Giles Duley on photography (p40)



differently and had to allow for more time getting around. It'd often be a 10-minute epic just to get from one side of the boat to the other. That chewed into our rest time!"

Lee admitted that he faced self-doubt as the crew set off. "The start was very hard for me," he said. "The enormity of what I'd said yes to kicked in. I've been in the Marines for 24 years, and my biggest fear has always been letting my team down. We were so busy in the build-up to the row that I didn't really have time to think about it and then, all of a sudden, we were at sea!

Cayle Royce sets off a flare in celebration as the crew reach Antigua after 46 days at sea

welcome

2016 is well under way and Members have already made their mark on the world; the Row2Recovery crew of Cayle, Lee, Nigel and Paddy achieved a new world record by being the first British all-amputee crew to row the Atlantic (see story, left). This is an amazing achievement and we are pleased they have returned to these shores safely.

Looking ahead, we are getting ready for Blesma Week and we hope you are, too. Please turn to p16 to see how you might get involved. Without strong support, we cannot enable the Association to thrive as it does. Other articles in this issue range from Africa to 'Theatre Land' in the West End of London. We are particularly grateful to Darren Swift, Dan Richards and Giles Duley for sharing their lives and careers – not always an easy thing to do – and it is really good to see their successes. Vincent Horton also tells an amazing story and we are immensely thankful that he has shared his inspiring tale of service.

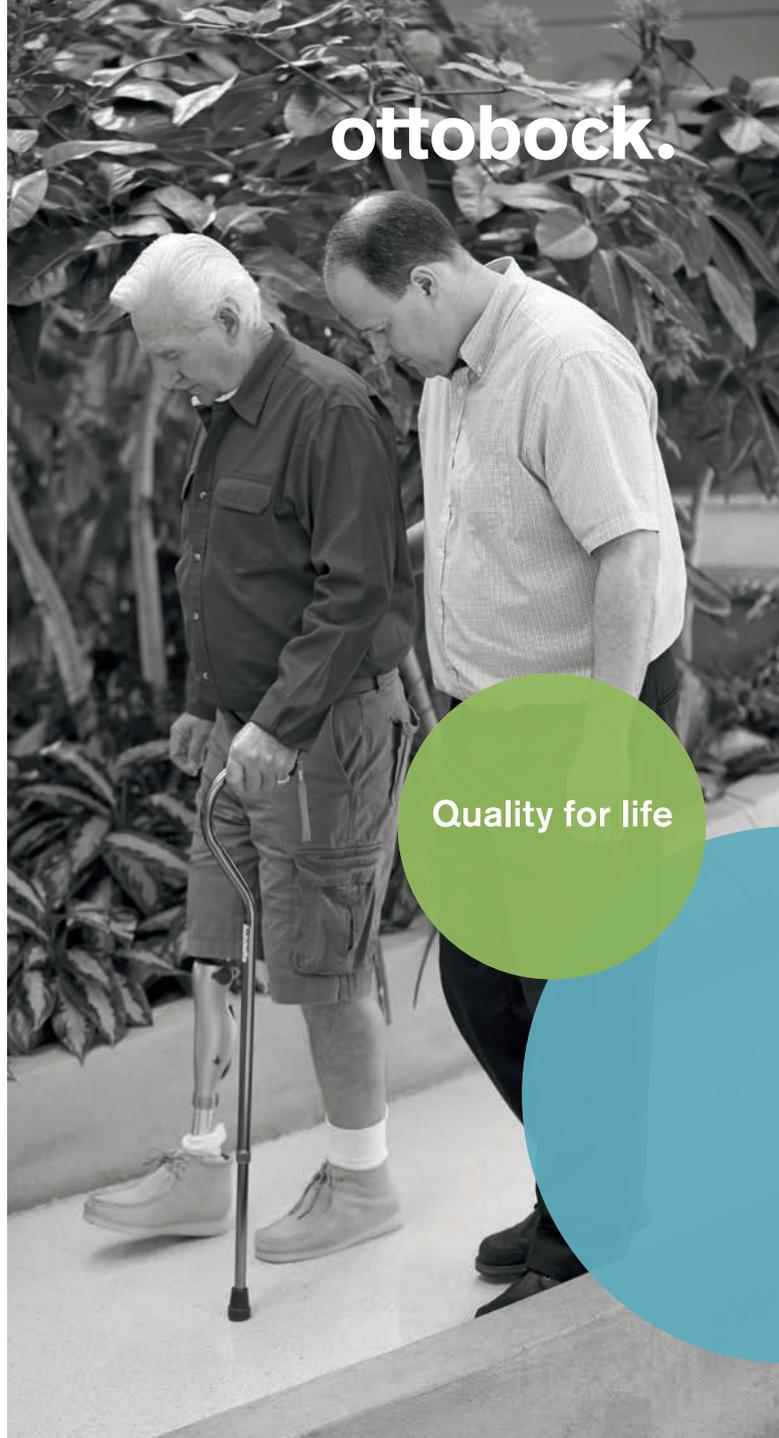
Not reported in this issue, but something that will be in the next Bulletin, is the soon-to-be-opened referral pathway for veterans with complex stump issues to be treated at Headley Court by the Defence Medical Services. It ties in with the bank fine-funded Direct Skeletal Fixation pilot programme that will also be open to veterans. There is an eligibility criteria, based upon clinical need, for entry to this pathway. Broad details are on our website and further enquiries should be directed to Brian Chenier, BSO (Prosthetics), here at Chadwell Heath. The unprecedented move will keep Defence expertise in practice, relieve pressure upon the NHS, and significantly benefit a finite number of Members. Blesma campaigned very hard for this through last year and we are indebted to Jon White and his report, which made national headlines and spurred government departments along to get a result.

We have just received a sizeable grant from the Forces In Mind Trust and The National Lottery Fund to further research the impact of limb loss upon Members' families. We know there is impact and that there are individual coping strategies. We aim for further evidence to back up our experience and convince policy makers to take better account.

By the time you get this issue, our plans for the Members' Weekend on 04-06 June in Kenilworth will be well under way. We are due to have a record turnout. If you cannot make the Weekend then please consider popping in to the Annual General Meeting in Piccadilly, London on 23 June. It will be a 'light touch' meeting and Lisa, on 020 8548 3511, has the details. We would enjoy seeing you.

Barry Le Gry
Chief Executive





Kenevo

Reclaim your sense of security

The Kenevo is the world's first technologically advanced prosthetic knee designed specifically for people with lower mobility levels. This revolutionary micro-processor knee is ideally suited to help those going through rehabilitation and also provides an increased sense of security for people with decreasing mobility levels. The Kenevo is also available for Veteran's via the Veteran's Prosthetic Panel (VPP).





“But my confidence soon came back. I stopped thinking about rowing across the entire Atlantic Ocean, and broke it down into manageable chunks.”

STORIES, STORMS AND STARS

The crew overcame the tedium by telling stories. “I didn’t plug into my iPod once while I was rowing, unlike last time,” said Cayle. “We chatted the whole way across. Lee has quite a string of great stories, I think I heard everything he’s done in his life! It was hugely entertaining. We also saw whales and dolphins, studied the stars and even taught each other poems.”

The crew encountered two periods of real difficulty. “We got pummelled by a storm early on,” said Cayle. “We had 30 knots of wind and 25ft waves! It was grim – our routines broke down, we were wet all the time, and we couldn’t cook – the only thing we could do was sit and take it.”

The worst moment came when the crew thought they were done and dusted, though. “Ten miles out of Antigua, we felt like we’d made it,” said Cayle. “We could see the lights on the island, and jumped into the water to de-stink before coming ashore. But then a set of massive squalls developed. There were terrible headwinds, and we were getting blown south. At one point, I thought we’d miss the island completely and head off for Mexico! The rain was so strong, I couldn’t see a single

metre in front of me. We couldn’t do a proper changeover, so Lee rowed solidly for eight-and-a-half hours to get us in!”

Typical of a Blesma Member, Lee won’t accept hero status, though. “We all dug deep,” he said, modestly. “Cayle also put in an epic shift, hand-steering for 10 hours at one point.”

THE PRIDE OF PLYMOUTH

Not surprisingly, the crew have been acclaimed everywhere they’ve gone since completing the challenge. “When I came home it was almost like I was a minor celebrity,” said Lee. “Cayle and I were stopped in the street in Plymouth about six times. I’ve shaved my beard off now, though, so I’m getting back to normality!”

Row2Recovery might be the charity’s final Atlantic crossing (they’ve raised more than £61,000 so far, which will be split between a number of charities, including Blesma) but the crew are already looking towards their next challenge.

After celebrating with “an egg and bacon sandwich, a cold beer, then falling asleep in the shower,” Cayle is looking into the feasibility of rowing the Pacific Ocean. “It’s more of an idea than a project at the moment,” he said, “but you get back to the UK and think; ‘OK, what’s next?’”

Lee, meanwhile, has got something up his sleeve “for around Autumn time, but I can’t say what, yet.” Watch this space!

The row in numbers

Spending 46 days at sea gives you plenty of time to count!

2.1 million
total calories burned by the crew

43,200
minutes rowed per man

8,000
calories burned per man per day

1,500
freeze dried meals eaten

20%
bodyweight lost over the duration of the row

1,840
litres of fresh water produced

10
litres of water drunk daily per man

3,000
total miles rowed

1.4 million
oar strokes pulled

800
sheets of toilet paper used

7,500
baby wipes used

4
changes of underpants per man

29
the length of the boat in feet
(it was also 6 feet wide)



Community Programme will 'inspire 1,000 pupils'

The Blesma Community Programme gives Members public speaking skills, paid employment and confidence-building techniques. It also aims to inspire and motivate 1,000 pupils across the UK through engaging workshops. Alice Driver, the mastermind behind the project, says the results are staggering.

"Members take part in a six-day training course that teaches them to tell their personal stories in public," said Alice. "Top theatre professionals work with them to focus on techniques such as drama and tension."

Participants then practise their story on a West End stage before taking it into the community as part of a workshop based on the theme of resilience.

"We have delivered the first workshops in schools, to teenage pupils who are close to being excluded because of their behaviour,"

said Alice, "and the results have been better than we could have ever hoped for. During one session, the teacher was nearly in tears because the pupils were so engaged!"

During the workshops, the Members tell their own stories of overcoming adversity before the students have a chance to ask questions. Members then help to lead a workshop in which the students explore the theme of adversity, and how they can become resilient and set themselves goals.

"We have worked hard to develop the best programme, but it's not until you add the Members that it comes alive!" said Alice.

The Summer issue of Blesma Magazine will look at the Community Programme in more detail. Secondary schools that are interested in a free workshop should contact info@driveproject.co.uk

TAKE THE PLUNGE AND JOIN BLESMA'S SCUBA DIVE IN THE MALDIVES

This year's scuba diving expedition will take place from 15-23 October in the Maldives. It will be a great chance to enjoy some of the world's best scuba diving in warm water. Members can either dive simply for fun or work to pick up a number of diving qualifications. Unfortunately, this expedition is not suitable for those who have never dived before.

The application closing date is 06 June and interested Members should contact Emily Mizon on mea@blesma.org or 020 8548 7094



Help Channel Swim team win top award. Vote now!

FOUR BLESMA MEMBERS HAVE been nominated for the People's Choice Award at the 2016 Soldiering On Awards in recognition of their outstanding achievement.

The award was launched by the *Sunday Express* in January, and the winner will be decided by a public vote announced at The Soldiering On Awards ceremony in London at the end of April.

Steve White, Jamie Gillespie, Conrad Thorpe and Craig Howorth entered the record books when they became the first British all-amputee team to swim the English Channel in September 2014, raising thousands for Blesma.



The team completed the swim in 12 hours and 14 minutes, and had to stick to the Official Channel Swimming Association rules which included not being allowed to wear wetsuits.

"Conrad, Craig, Jamie and Steve battled a rough sea, seasickness and dehydration, shipping lanes, severe cold and all the challenges of limb loss to be the first British all-amputee team to swim the English Channel," said Blesma's Chief Executive Barry Le Grys. "Their inspiration to others makes their nomination for the People's Choice Award deserved. Please vote for them."

Voting closes on 08 April. To vote for the team, go to www.soldieringon.org/peoples-choice-award-2



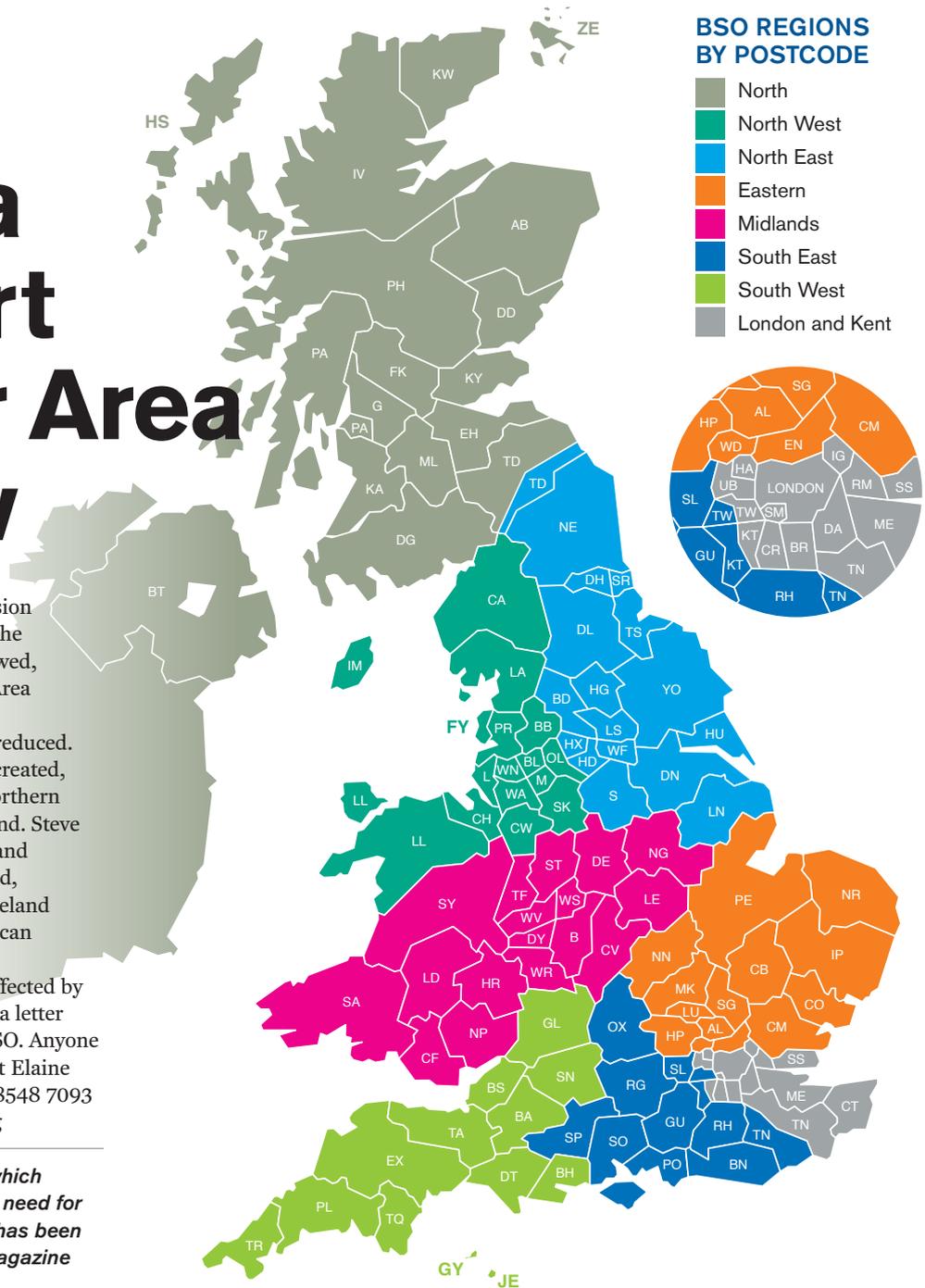
The Blesma Support Officer Area Review

Following the Trustees' decision to invest in the BSO team, the BSO Areas have been reviewed, and a number of boundary and Area changes made as the size of the individual geographical areas is reduced.

A new Area, 'North', has been created, which encompasses Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Steve Burton is the new BSO (North), and succeeds Peter Shields in Scotland, and Mike Downes in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. You can read more about Steve on p11.

All Members who have been affected by these changes will have received a letter confirming the details of their BSO. Anyone who is still unsure should contact Elaine in Membership Services on 020 8548 7093 or at memberadmin@blesma.org

An updated Blesma Directory, which has all the contact details you'll need for people across the Association, has been inserted into this issue of the magazine



CONTACT YOUR BSO

Have you got a question or need advice? Don't hesitate to get in touch with the Blesma Support Officer in your area

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MIKE DOWNES

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In the spotlight

CHRIS JONES



“

THE NEXT THING I KNEW, THE LAND ROVER LANDED DRIVER'S SIDE DOWN ON TOP OF ME. I CAN'T DESCRIBE THE PAIN

”

The 50th anniversary of the loss of my right leg passed on 12 January. When the incident happened I was 17 years old, driving a Land Rover line layer. We were doing some line training by a quarry about three miles from Catterick camp with three other Land Rovers and a three-tonner.

“It was a freezing cold day, with the snow packed hard with icy patches. I was driving the last vehicle and was going downhill towards a cattle grid at about 15mph when I got into difficulties. The Land Rover drifted into a depression to the left and the front end started to spiral up to the right. Not being allowed to have the door belts fitted, I fell out and hit the deck.

“The next thing I knew, the Land Rover landed driver's side down on top of me and, apart from my right leg, I was surrounded by the door space. It was the angle iron of the pole-carrying superstructure that crashed into my shin and severed my right leg. When I hit the deck I was dazed, but I soon came to in a state of shock! I can't describe the pain and anguish, but it was horrendous.

“The petrol tanks were under the seats and I'd filled them that morning. Now, the petrol was pouring all over me. As I was driving the last vehicle I was on my own for a while. I had the presence of mind to grab hold of the steering wheel, pull myself up to a sitting position, stretch my left hand to the ignition switch and flick the key off. It was then that I looked down at the mess; blood and muscle saturating the snow. I just lay backwards then, waiting for my pals to get to me.

“When they came back, they rocked the Land Rover sufficiently but I was too weak to move myself. A fist grabbed my collar and I was dragged backwards. My khaki tie was removed and used as a tourniquet to stem the flow of blood.

“After about 20 minutes, a civilian ambulance came. The crew got out and looked at me, and I heard one of them say; ‘He'll be dead in half an hour, we're leaving him, the Army can pick him up.' And off they went.

“When the RAMC arrived, the Staff Sergeant gave me a morphine injection. You may have heard it said that when someone's life ebbs away, their life flashes before their eyes. It's true, I've been there! I can best describe it as though holding a pack of cards and flicking the corners back, watching the images appear in a flash. When I was lifted onto the stretcher my leg stayed on the snow and was lifted separately. From the start I knew that my leg was off, there wouldn't be any need for a gentle chat to tell me the bad news.

“When I arrived at the hospital, a medical team was waiting for me. I was in theatre for six hours as they tried to put the shattered bones back together. The next day, and after gas-gangrene (rapid deterioration of tissue) had set in, the leg was amputated just below the knee. During my three weeks in the Recovery Ward, I received five blood transfusions plus saline drips. They were the ones I was aware of, at least. I always thought I must have had another transfusion that I wasn't aware of.

“About eight years ago, a member of a Royal Signals website made contact and told me that her sister was the WRAC ambulance driver that day. Even more amazingly, her blood group is compatible with all others. She was laid down next to me and the medics performed a person-to-person transfusion, thus enabling sufficient time for more blood supplies to arrive. That immediate transfusion, along with the skill of the RAMC and QARANC, saved my life. I was medically discharged on 13 September 1966.

“I was a below-knee amputee for 24 years when, in 1990, the knee was amputated after the bone fractured, resulting in massive infection. I asked the surgeon for a section of the femur, and made a penholder from it with my Jimmy cap badge mounted on the front.”

Chris Jones has been actively involved with Blesma for more than 30 years, and has been the Gloucestershire Welfare Rep since 2004



Blesma welcomes its newest Support Officer



Former Lieutenant Colonel, Steve Burton, is settling into his new role as BSO North, Blesma's biggest region, which covers Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The 52 year old, who served for 36 years in the Royal Corps of Transport and the Adjutant General's Corps, is a former commanding officer of the West Midlands Personnel Recovery Unit.

"I was very aware of Blesma's work from my military career, having seen how they supported the wounded, injured and sick

service personnel after transition from the Army into civilian life," said Steve.

"What has always impressed me about Blesma is its support for Members and their spouses for the duration of their lives. When an individual loses a limb or the use of a limb, they sometimes see it as a barrier and assume their opportunities are restricted. One of my challenges is to convince them that is not the case and encourage them to prove it to themselves."

Steve, who has served three tours in Bosnia, and one in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, and was Garrison Commander at Episkopi in Cyprus, added; "My role is very clear. It is to support Blesma Members and help them live independent and fulfilling lives, ensuring that they are receiving everything they are entitled to."

Steve is a former star rugby player, having played for the Army before becoming director of Army Rugby. He has also played in international tournaments for Hong Kong when he came up against England stars Matt Dawson and Lawrence Dallaglio.

He currently lives in Edinburgh with his wife Diane, a fashion stylist. The couple have a 30-year-old daughter who is just completing a doctorate in psychology and a 28-year-old son who works as an engineer in the oil industry in Aberdeen.

"I am absolutely delighted to be part of the great Blesma team and look forward to meeting, and helping, Members," Steve said.

NEWS BRIEFS

ANYONE FOR BADMINTON?

England Badminton Players Association for Disabled is looking for new players – both amputees and wheelchair users – no matter how experienced. Badminton is a great way to get active and meet new people. There are clubs across the country and opportunities to enter competitions. **For more information, and to find your nearest club, go to www.ebad.org.uk or email info@ebad.org.uk**



SO YOU WANT TO BE A SKIPPER?

The Gwennili Trust is running two Day Skipper/Competent Crew courses in the Solent for anyone interested in learning how to sail. The courses will run from 18-23 July and 04-10 September.

The courses cost £30 a day, but grants from Blesma may be provided on an individual basis. If you are interested in a grant, please speak to your BSO.

Anyone interested in the course should contact the Trust, mentioning their Blesma membership. Contact details can be found at www.gwennili.org.uk

70-YEAR MARRIAGE IS A WALK (AND SIT!) IN THE PARK

KENNETH AND BARBARA PICKARD, WHO FIRST MET IN Trowbridge Park in Wiltshire on VE Day in 1945, now have a spot to call their very own after the Friends of Trowbridge Park unveiled a new bench and floral border to honour them.

Kenneth, 92, (who became an above-knee amputee in Normandy in 1944) and Barbara, 89, attended the opening ceremony with Mayor Roger Andrews last November.

"Everyone was so happy all those years ago because of the end of the war and I spoke to Kenneth because we both went to the celebrations on our own – it was pure chance, you could say, and we took it from there," remembered Barbara.

"I was only 17 or 18 at the time and I was quite quiet, but I felt that I had to go and join in with the celebrations because my brothers were serving in the Forces at the time."

The couple married 18 months later at St James' Church while Kenneth was an apprentice at the Wiltshire Times.

Nearly 70 years on, the couple have said shared interests, such as gardening, have kept their relationship strong, and they hope the new edition to the park will bring other couples as much happiness as it has to them.



Words and picture courtesy of The Wiltshire Times

How to get a square peg into a round hole

Brian Chenier, BSO (Prosthetics), offers the latest on prosthetics. This issue; the recent advances in socket technology, and surgery that does away with sockets completely...



How do you get a square peg into a round hole? Prosthetists and amputees ask this on a daily basis. The problems of trying to fit soft tissue into a rigid socket are numerous, and forcing one into the other is never going to be a long-term solution.

For many years, significant investment has been made into prosthetic components, but there hasn't been as much development of sockets. This is changing, however, and a number of organisations are looking at ways to improve how limbs are attached.

There have been attempts to improve the way in which sockets are manufactured. The result is typically a replication of the residual limb over which various materials are moulded or laminated. For a few years, futuristic looking sockets with missing or adjustable panels have surfaced, which claim to hold the limb firmly in place. The reality is that a socket is bespoke and, while it is a fixed shape and rigid, any change in the residual limb will have an impact. Suction may be lost, grip may reduce, sinking and pistoning may occur... all of which can be dangerous for the wearer. Similarly, stump volume can change regularly over hours, days or weeks. So what can be done?

Two companies believe they have the answer. The Infinite socket by LIM Innovations and the Socket-less Socket by Martin Bionics are modular and allow for adjustments to be made during and after fitting. Anyone wishing to discuss these systems should speak with their prosthetist as they may not be available via the NHS and there are many ways that traditional sockets can be tailored to better support function. However, these two products show that real investment is being made in answering the original question. How do you get a square peg into a round hole? It would appear that you make the hole more easily adjustable.

DIRECT SKELETAL FIXATION (DSF)

DSF is a term used by the NHS in England to describe the surgical procedure to implant a titanium rod into the shaft of a bone, from which part is exposed through the skin so an external prosthetic can be attached.

In his Autumn Statement, the Chancellor announced £2 million to fund a programme led by an MoD team to provide this surgery to up to 20 serving military or veteran patients over two-and-a-half years from April.

Blesma campaigned hard for this programme to go ahead as the surgery does away with the need for traditional prosthetic sockets, which are a source of severe complications for some.

Although potentially life changing, DSF is not suitable for every serving or veteran amputee. The full referral pathway is yet to be confirmed but, for veterans, this will be via their NHS Limb Centre and will be based on clinical need. Below is a list of Key Facts, provided by the MoD team leading this programme.

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for referral to DMRC Headley Court, veterans must have previously been treated by the prosthetics service at DMRC and be in receipt of the AFCS or War Pension.

CLINICAL CRITERIA

- 1 Through- or above-knee amputee. Through-knee requires conversion to above-knee during implant fitting surgery
- 2 Primarily a wheelchair user
- 3 On-going socket fit issues – unable to obtain adequate sockets through NHS and/or MoD prosthetic services
- 4 Non-smoker
- 5 No active infections or osteomyelitis
- 6 Non-diabetic
- 7 Must be able to commit to at least two six-week periods of rehabilitation at DMRC
- 8 Able to mentally tolerate protruding metal devices from the residual limb – psychology assessment prior to surgery

RESTRICTIONS

- 1 Must remain a non-smoker
- 2 Must be aware that DSF implants are not considered safe for running, whatever prosthetic devices are used distally

RISKS

- 1 Surgical risks from orthopaedic operation
- 2 Infection – potentially leading to implant removal, further stump revision or bone resection
- 3 Long-term cancer risk requiring (at least) an annual review

For information, help or advice on these, or any other prosthetic matters, please contact Brian Chenier at Chadwell Heath on 020 8548 7080 or by email at bsoprosthetics@blesma.org

“
HOW DO YOU GET A SQUARE PEG INTO A ROUND HOLE? IT SEEMS YOU MAKE THE HOLE MORE EASILY ADJUSTABLE
”



BOOK NOW!

Members' Weekend 2016

04-06 June

The Members' Weekend is back for 2016 and will be bigger and better than ever. The event will be held at the Chesford Grange Hotel in Kenilworth, Warwick. Members will be able to...

- * Share their stories
- * Debate what's important to Blesma
- * Try new activities
- * Learn what's been going on in the Association
- * Catch up with old friends and make new ones

The Weekend is free for Ordinary and Associate Members, as well as their spouses/carers, and those Honorary Members who hold Branch office.

There are only 150 spaces, which will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Make sure you don't miss out. Book your place today by contacting Sue Stokes at Chadwell Heath on officeexec@blesma.org or 020 8548 7091

NEWS ANALYSIS

Helping an entire continent get back on its feet

The charity Legs4Africa takes unwanted prosthetics from the UK and gives them to amputees in Africa. They're looking for your help to change even more lives...



Salifu's story is typical of the transformations that Bristol-based charity Legs4Africa helps to bring about. As a young man in Gambia, he lost a limb above the knee when a cow crushed him and the injury became infected. After his amputation, Salifu used a heavy resin prosthetic, without a knee joint, for the next 15 years. But now, thanks to a jointed leg (donated by an amputee in Nottingham) his life has been transformed. He's finally free of back pain, and his job as a farmer is much easier. "It gives me the courage to walk long distances," he says.

The charity that has helped Salifu, and an estimated 1,500 other African amputees so far, was established four years ago by Tom Williams. He had the idea after befriending an amputee, Paul, in Gambia and realised that Africa was in dire need of prosthetics, while the UK discards hundreds every year.

"There's no real access to prosthetics for amputees in Africa, unless you're part of the elite who can afford them," says Phil Tunstall, who now runs the charity alongside Tom. "Prosthetic limbs can't be re-used within the EU due to health and safety regulation, so perfectly good ones get thrown away every day. We decided to take something that can't be used here and give it real value somewhere else."

CHANGING LIVES ONE LIMB AT A TIME

An initial funding exercise meant that a leg could be found and altered for Paul. "We got in touch with a prosthetist in Portsmouth who adapted it to fit Paul's measurements, and Tom took it out to him," explains Phil. "Paul was so emotional when he spoke about how it would change his life that we decided to try to do more." Soon afterwards, another 17 limbs were heading to Africa. "We went around the hospitals in Gambia

and found a mobility centre that would carry out the adaptations that were required to fit the prosthetics," says Phil. "Seventeen was the most they'd ever had in one go, but we started to collect more and more. Soon the spare room at Tom's parents' house was full. The next time we went out, we had 500 legs!"

The charity, still overseen by the duo, with Phil as the sole full-time member of staff, has had to get over a very steep learning curve. "How we work is always evolving and improving," says Phil. "Those 500 legs were driven out by a friend in an old van that was about to run out of its MOT. It cost quite a lot in the end, because of border crossings and problems with the van's engine. Now we're more cost-effective. We send legs in containers, shared with other charities, who are providing medical or school equipment."

Since it was established, Legs4Africa has also expanded its list of recipient countries. "Gambia was



“

WE DECIDED TO TAKE SOMETHING THAT CAN'T BE USED HERE AND GIVE IT REAL VALUE

”



good because we already had contacts in the country, a lot of UK charities work there, and it's very easy to deal with – the flights are cheap and everyone speaks English,” says Phil. “Next we moved into Zambia. We knew a doctor who had worked there, and he found a prosthetics centre for us. We have a checklist when we set up a new place, because we need to make sure they have the right equipment and methodology to adapt the legs properly. They are made to fit one individual, so the socket always needs to be remoulded and adapted.”

Another 500 legs were sent to Zambia in October, and the charity is also working in Senegal, Ghana and Guinea-Bissau. “I drove around Britain just before Christmas and collected two vanloads of legs – about 400 in all – from 23 hospitals across England and Wales,” says Phil. “They’re going to Ghana, sharing

a container with items from another charity. Our network is growing all the time.”

And that’s where Blesma Members can help out; Legs4Africa needs your donations. Whether it’s an old prosthetic limb or a spare part, chances are the charity will be able to use it. “We work on a small budget so we’d love Blesma Members to donate anything they’ve got,” says Phil. “Knee joints are especially welcome as they’re expensive compared to other parts. A lot of above-knee amputees in Africa are stuck with straight legs. Their reaction when we help them is fantastic.”

Find out more at www.legs4africa.org, or to help, you can get in touch directly by calling 0116 318 0484 or emailing hello@legs4africa.org. To donate money, visit www.legs4africa.org/mobilise

Just a few of the people who have had their lives transformed by Legs4Africa

The charity in numbers

1,500+

The number of prosthetics the charity has delivered to Africa in the last two years

5,000

the number of prosthetic limbs that are disposed of in the UK every year. Often at a cost to the NHS

£25

the average cost of collecting, shipping and fitting one prosthetic leg for Africa

3,000

the number of prosthetics the charity wants to send to Africa every year by 2017

NEWS

Blesma Week 6-12 June 2016

Blesma Week is sponsored by *Niche* Communications
www.nichecom.co.uk



Blesma Week is a national week of fundraising and awareness raising, and will take place from 06 to 12 June. Now in its third year, Blesma Week is set to be bigger and better than ever, with every penny raised from events and activities benefitting Blesma Members, young and old. There are lots of ways to get involved:

GRAND PRIZE DRAW

Enter our Grand Prize Draw or sell tickets for the chance to win some fantastic prizes, including £1,000 sponsored by Centro PLC, and a stunning Focus Raven Mountain Bike kindly donated by Blesma Member Carole King. Tickets are £1 each, with the draw closing on 17 July. Tickets are included in this issue of the magazine and if you require more, please contact the Fundraising Team at fundraising@blesma.org.

BUNGEE JUMP AT THE O2 ARENA

10-12 June

Tick an item off your bucket list and support our wounded veterans as you jump from a crane 160ft above the ground. You'll have magnificent views of the River Thames, Canary Wharf, the O2 Arena and Central London (other locations are available).



Sponsorship: Registration fee of £30 plus a minimum fundraising target of £300

Self-funding: Registration fee of £75 plus a suggested fundraising target of £150

CLIMB THE YORKSHIRE THREE PEAKS

10-12 June

Get your boots on and join Blesma Chief Executive, Barry Le Grys (left) for a great adventure in the stunning Yorkshire Dales. Tackle the challenging but rewarding 26-mile walk over the three highest peaks in Yorkshire. If you'd rather cheer from the sidelines you can sponsor Barry at www.justgiving.com/Barry-Le-Grys1

Sponsorship: Registration fee of £99 plus £300 minimum sponsorship

Self-funding: £199 plus a suggested fundraising target of £100



BLESMA 100 RIDE

04 June

A team of 65 riders made up of Blesma Members and their friends and families, are taking part in the 'Flat 'n' Fast 100' cycle ride to raise money for the Association. The team will cycle the 100-mile course, which starts and ends in Thorne near Doncaster, in a day. The riders have already raised close to £7,000 in donations before anyone has even had a chance to don their lycra!

BBQ

Are you a 'natural born griller'? Then host your very own Blesma BBQ. Stick the barbie on, invite a few mates over, play a few games and fundraise whatever you can. We'll provide you with a BBQ fundraising pack to make sure you're a real champ!



Thanks to all our Silver Sponsors

BAE SYSTEMS



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Blesma's leading man

Darren Swift is about to take centre stage (p28)



THE PATRON'S LUNCH

12 June

HM Queen Elizabeth II will celebrate her 90th birthday on 21 April with the Patron's Lunch on The Mall. To commemorate this milestone, why not hold your own Patron's Lunch to celebrate and fundraise for Blesma at the same time?

HOLD A COLLECTION

We're looking for individuals to support us with our collections throughout the UK during Blesma Week. If you can spare a few hours or would like to hold a collection at your local supermarket, please get in touch.

DO YOUR OWN THING!

Whether at work or at home, there are lots of things you can do to fundraise. Be inspired with fundraising tips and ideas by contacting us at events@blesma.org

REQUEST YOUR BLESMA WEEK PACK

The Blesma Week Pack is full of great ideas to help you organise your own activities. It includes posters, banners, sponsorship forms and collection boxes. Plus, we'll send you a certificate of achievement that you can display on completion of your activity.

A BIG THANK YOU

Thanks to all our generous sponsors.

Silver Sponsors: Marbank Construction, BAE Systems, Ottobock, Centro PLC and Military Mutual

Follow the conversation online using

#ForOurWounded

For more information on Blesma Week contact the Fundraising Team on 020 8548 7089 or email events@blesma.org

FALL FOR THE FALLEN

Commemorating the centenary of the Battle of the Somme:

Saturday 02 July

Fall for the Fallen is Blesma's annual tandem skydiving event, where each jump represents a life lost in conflict and raises funds to support our limbless veterans.

This year, the event will mark the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, one of the largest battles of World War I, in which more than 1,000,000 men were wounded or lost their lives.

This year, the event will take place on 02 July across three jump sites:

- Netheravon, Wiltshire
- Hibaldstow, North Lincolnshire
- Peterborough, Cambridgeshire

Friends and family are invited to join skydivers on the day. You can secure your place today with a deposit of just £50 and a pledge to raise an additional £350! All Fall for the Fallen skydivers will receive the following:



- A fundraising pack and support from the Blesma team
- An exclusive Blesma t-shirt
- An option to have your jump photographed/filmed

For more information, please contact the Fundraising Team on 020 8548 7089 or email events@blesma.org



Are you ready for the Rush?

Have you got what it takes to take on a gritty, muddy, cross-country obstacle race? For the second year, Blesma is partnering with the Nuclear Races team for Nuclear Rush, which takes place on 14 May in a 'secret' nuclear bunker in Brentwood, Essex.

Join the Team Blesma wave at 12:30, (Password 'BLES16') and conquer the 50 man-made obstacles. For every entry in that wave, Nuclear Races will donate £5 to Blesma. This is the perfect chance to support Blesma with friends and family, or

on your own. Last year, Blesma raised more than £12,000 at the Nuclear Rush event, and this year the Association aims to raise even more. Fundraising is optional, but if you do choose to raise money, Blesma suggests a minimum target of £50.

To enter a team, contact Zanika at events@blesma.org or on 020 8548 7089. To enter as an individual, sign up for the 12:30 wave using password BLES16 at www.nuclear-races.co.uk

INBOX

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

Skiing has had a positive influence

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THE opportunity to go skiing in Colorado earlier in the year. It meant so much to me; it felt so good to be in the company of others who understood me and didn't judge me because I am different and have a disability.

It was also good to be pushed by the instructors and other members of the group who encouraged me to go outside my comfort zone, do things that I wouldn't normally do, and talk to different people.

The skiing was superb, but it wasn't just about the skiing for me, it was about feeling free and alive again after what hasn't been a great year for me. It allowed me to escape the everyday things that get to me and concentrate on something different for a while, to let me feel like I could still achieve things, that life could still be fun and that I could still get about in the outdoor environment; which I am passionate about. It's given me the motivation I need to get through



Above and left: Blesma skiers take to the slopes in Colorado

the next few months of my life when everything is going to change again, with finally getting somewhere to live.

The people I met on the skiing trip, and the experience I had, have given me a lot to think about with respect to how I want to go forward and

start achieving things again with my life rather than just being swept along not really making much of an effort.

I fully appreciate how fortunate I was to have had such an amazing experience and I would very much like to thank everyone who was involved in organising the trip, for allowing me to have such a rewarding time.

Ann Lewis

Calne Cub Pack thanks Pat

I'M WRITING TO HIGHLIGHT A VISIT MADE TO US BY PAT Provis last October. He was recommended to me by a friend as someone who would be willing to give up his time to drive from his home in Wales to Calne to talk to my Cub Pack for an hour.

As part of our programme, we were covering the many types of disability prevalent in our society today. We'd covered some of the less visible disabilities and when it came to physical disability, I asked my friend if he would speak. Dave has lost a leg, which would have been difficult to show to young people, so he suggested asking Pat, who has lost part of his hand and one arm, and uses a hi-tech prosthetic arm.

Pat and I hit it off very quickly as I'm an ex-Service man (12 years in the RAF) and have two children serving. Pat was very willing to demonstrate how he manages the day-to-day activities that we non-amputees take so much for granted. So, on behalf of all the young people involved with 1st Calne Cubs (Bears), I would like to thank Pat and Dave for giving up their time.

Neal Mansell



Could Chadwell Heath do more to help with work?

FOR SOME TIME, BLESMA AND ITS publications have given prominence to activities as a means of restoring self-confidence in amputees who may have thought of themselves as disabled and no longer capable of physical effort.

This is excellent therapy, but an outsider might well say; 'Don't these people ever do anything else? How do they pay the bills? They don't ever seem to work?' There's no mention of Blesma helping amputees to find suitable jobs. A disabled person needs a paid occupation just as much as physical activities.

I'm not suggesting that Blesma should become a job agency, but I do suggest that Blesma should point its Members towards suitable work and let them know where those openings are. Blesma could specialise in knowing which fields of work might suit different categories of amputees. It's no



See what drives Dan Richards on p36

good leaving the matter entirely to Support Officers. They are on the ground and in a position to know the individual concerns of Members, but Chadwell Heath needs to lay down policy and drive it too, emphasising that an amputee needs a gainful occupation and a livelihood.

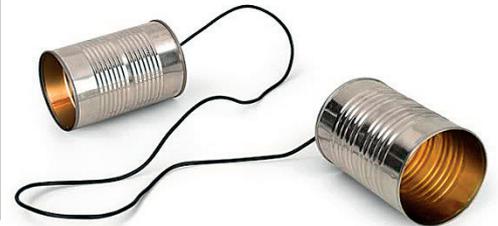
Brian Wilson

Walkie-talkies are something to shout about

AS TIME MOVES ON, MORE AND MORE things cease to work as well as they did in the past! Hearing was my problem. If the better half and myself were in different rooms, shouting was the only solution, and that annoyed the neighbours and made the dogs bark!

Walkie-talkies can provide a cheap and simple answer. I have only used one make, a Binatone. It's small, has a good range and, if left to charge overnight, will last through the following day.

Ken Dobbs



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Visit www.ottobock.co.uk/axis to join or call the Axis team on 01784 744 900

Move More



OBITUARIES

Those we have lost

Mervyn Auty MBE

11 Sept 1926 – 22 January 2016

MERVYN AUTY (RIGHT) PASSED AWAY on 22 January 2016. Having lost a leg below the knee and receiving damage to his other foot in Palestine during National Service, he became an active member of Blesma, spending more than 40 years as a Welfare Officer in South Yorkshire.

Mervyn was recognised for his work in the 1998 New Year's Honours list, when HM The Queen awarded him an MBE for his services to Blesma. This was one of his proudest moments.

After retiring from work as an editor on the South Yorkshire Post, and then from his Blesma duties, he continued to take an active interest in the charity. He spent many happy times at the homes in Crieff with his wife Betty and, after her death in 2000, in Blackpool with his new wife, Ena. Whilst at Crieff, he helped create and plant a garden in memory of his first wife, Betty, for the residents to enjoy.

He will be sadly missed by his wife, daughter, grandchildren and family.

Mervyn Auty MBE



Bill Madeley MBE

15 July 1933 – 03 January 2016

BILL MADELEY MBE PASSED AWAY on 03 January 2016. Bill was a 'people person' who was never happier than when he was helping those in need.

He was elected to Walsall Council in 1971, was elected Mayor of Walsall in 1988, Deputy Leader of the Council in 1997 and, finally, Leader of the Council in 1999. Bill was awarded the MBE in 2006 for his service to the local community, and was admitted as an Honorary Freeman of the Borough in 2010.

Bill became involved with the Walsall Branch of Blesma in the 1960s. He was elected Vice President of the Branch in 1990, became President of the Branch on the retirement of Bert Smith, and became Branch Treasurer in 2013.

Bill was diagnosed with cancer towards the end of 2015 and passed away peacefully at home, with his devoted wife, Debbie, by his side. He is greatly missed and the Branch won't be the same without him; a gentleman and a true friend of Blesma.

Those who have passed away

December 2015 to February 2016. May they rest in peace.

Auty M	Royal Scots	HQ (Doncaster)	22/01/2016
Bamford A	Lancashire Fusiliers	Blackpool Home (Manchester)	11/12/2015
Chenier D	RMP	HQ	01/02/2016
Cramer G	RA	HQ (Lewisham)	26/01/2016
Davis G	Royal Dragoons	HQ	22/01/2016
Dunn M	DLI	HQ (Tyneside)	02/12/2015
Durose G	REME	Walsall	25/12/2015
Hallas M	RAMC	HQ (Huddersfield)	Dec 2015
Haslam T	Civilian Casualty	Blackpool	10/02/2016
Hayes L	KOYLI	HQ	Feb 2016
Hayles C	Royal Signals	Southampton	10/01/2016
Hughes E	Royal Welch Fusiliers	HQ (Lincoln & Grimsby)	Feb 2016
Jagger A	RAF	HQ (Bridlington)	Jan 2016
Jones R K	Welsh Guards	HQ	28/01/2016
Lawrey W	RTR	HQ (Exeter)	27/01/2016
Mainwaring D	RASC	HQ	10/01/2016
Marsden Mrs G	ATS & WRAC	Blackpool Home (Wolverhampton/Birm/Walsall)	04/12/2015
Rose P	RN	HQ	21/02/2016
Squirell W	DLI	HQ	09/02/2016
Swinford R	DLI	HQ (Glos & Cheltenham)	05/01/2016
Tytherleigh C	Sussex	HQ	10/12/2015
Warrilow R	Royal Warwickshire	HQ (Birmingham)	11/12/2015
Watling B	RAF	HQ	27/02/2016



Martin Kettrick (front) hits the slopes for the first time in 30 years

Adapted skiing trip turns out all white

Blesma's inaugural Adapted Skiing trip took place in Austria at the beginning of February. The week-long activity was specifically designed for a small group of Blesma's most severely injured Members to hit the slopes.

"This was the first time I had been skiing since I was in the Royal Marines more than 30 years ago, when I used to take part in arctic warfare training," said Martin Kettrick (pictured above and right). "The entire week was absolutely fantastic. It was, without doubt, one of the most exhilarating



experiences I have had since I've been using a wheelchair."

During the first few days, Members were taught the basics of sit-skiing before they were let loose on the mountains.

"The only way I can describe it is like sitting in a small wheelbarrow with skis underneath it," said Martin. "Initially, I was a bit unsure, but I'd wanted to try it for ages so I just kept reminding myself that this was the chance of a lifetime. I took a few tumbles during the week, but I expected that. I just brushed myself down and got on with it – and it certainly didn't put me off!"

By the end of the week, Martin had left the nursery slopes in the distance and was hurtling down extreme runs from the very top of the mountain.

"I took to it straight away and kept getting higher and higher up the mountain as the week went on. The instructors were superb and kept encouraging us to stretch ourselves. Some sections were very steep and challenging – and we must have been going at least 40mph through them! At one point, I stopped halfway down the mountain, looked back up and thought; 'Crikey, I've just come down that!' I got such a huge sense of accomplishment and freedom. I felt like a kid!"

Anyone who knows Martin will be aware that he has a passion for cycling. So will this take the place of his beloved pastime?

"It's a totally different experience, so it's difficult to compare, but I had an amazing time. The Members and instructors got on really well, and there was lots of banter. I'm so pleased I went!"

You can find out more about a host of other exciting activities that have been planned for 2016 in the Activities Brochure

POWERBOAT LOVERS THROWN IN AT THE COLD END

Six Blesma Members took to the River Thames in January to learn the basics of navigating a powerboat. Several Members had some previous experience on the water, either sailing or kayaking, but none had experienced being in charge of a powerboat before.

The first part of the day saw instructors Chris, Andi and Pippa take the Members through a quick but important safety briefing that covered proper conduct on the water and avoiding collisions. Then the Members took to the boats to learn some basic skills with the instructors.

After lunch, the group set off up the River Thames to see Tower Bridge from a unique

viewpoint. On completing the course, the Members were awarded the RYA Powerboat Level 1 qualification.

"I found the powerboating satisfying and fulfilling," said Troy Conner, after what was his first activity with Blesma. "I quickly made friends with the other Members and the staff. I was made to feel really welcome and I feel positive about the future. The staff at Westminster Boating Base were fantastic – they were hospitable and excellent at what they did."

Blesma would like to thank Chris, Andi, Pippa, and everyone at Westminster Boating Base for providing such a great opportunity for the Members.





THIS IS WHAT

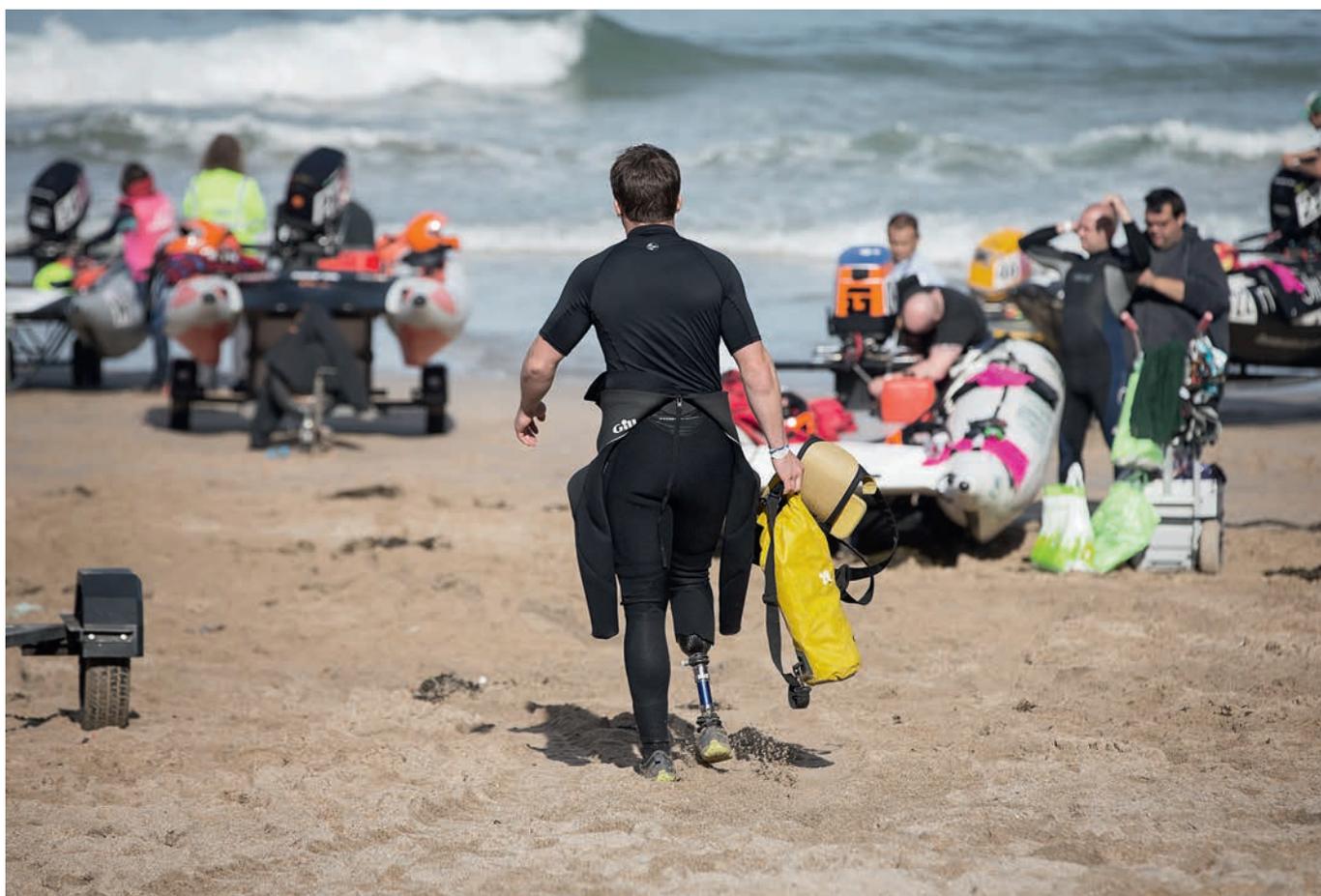
THUN

LOOKS LIKE



WATER

If racing across the water – and flying through the air – at 60mph is your thing, you need to get yourself to the beach!



The British have a thing for beaches – we really will do anything on them. We’ll leap off boats and swim through machine gun fire to fight on them. We’ll sit, freezing and near-naked on them, whether they’re made of sand or pebbles, and convince ourselves it’s Summer. Some people will even race on them. Or very, very close to them at least.

Which is why all the sun-seekers on Newquay’s Tolcarne Beach on this Saturday morning at the end of August have ditched their buckets and spades, and snubbed their half-built sandcastles, to gawp in amazement at the speedboats thundering past them.

This is not a common sight: with a driver at the back wrestling a hand tiller, and a co-pilot strapped in at the front, both using their bodies as ballast as they leap waves at dramatic heights (occasionally resulting in an unplanned swim!) ThunderCat racing is seriously spectacular stuff.

What’s less evident for the spectators enjoying the overtaking thrills and regular spills, is that a couple of those involved are injured ex-Service men. Foremost among them is Stuart Croxford, an amputee, Blesma Member, and Project Manager of Team Endeavour Racing, who is leading the charge into this adrenaline-fuelled activity for those who’ve been hurt in combat.

“The only real negative is getting in and out of the boat, which can be tricky with one leg,” says Stuart, who is adamant that this is the perfect pastime for amputees. “But once I’m in the boat, there’s absolutely no difference between me and any other competitor. It’s great, because it’s a physical sport that demands good fitness levels, but an amputee can compete with everyone else on a level playing field.”

Once more unto the beach: Stuart gets ready to do battle in Newquay

Stuart, a Captain in the Duke of Lancaster’s Regiment, was discharged from the Army in December 2015. Having joined in 2007, he was injured in Afghanistan in 2012 when an IED blew up his Jackal armoured vehicle, shattering his heels. After months of reconstructive surgery he tried sailing “because it didn’t require me to be on my feet,” but a freak accident in which his right leg was snapped by a sheet line caused further complications. “I developed Compartment Syndrome,” he says. “After nine operations to try to save the leg, I had the choice of a club foot or amputation. I told them to take it off, and it was removed below the knee in October 2014.”

BAPTISM OF FIRE. WELL... WATER, REALLY!

Within months Stuart was skiing, but his heart was set on the sea. “I’d seen a picture of ThunderCats in 2008 and had always wanted to get involved, but my military commitments kept me too busy,” he explains. “But in 2014, while I was still in a wheelchair, I went to watch a race and told the organisers I was going to compete the following season. They gave me a ‘*What The Hell?*’ kind of look!”

Stuart was undeterred. He completed the Powerboat Level 2 course, bought a second-hand catamaran for £5,000, and competed in his first race in 2014. “I flipped it twice, and the rest of the racers probably thought I wasn’t coming back,” he says. “I was all over the place – but I loved it! It was a shock to the system, but I’ve improved steadily. It’s helped me to get my motivation back, and running the team looks great on my CV.”

Thanks to a £10,000 grant from Blesma and donations from several other sponsors, Team Endeavour



**STUART
CROXFORD**

An amputee, Blesma Member, and Project Manager of Team Endeavour Racing, who is leading the charge into this adrenaline-fuelled activity for those who've been hurt in combat



“IT CAN BE DANGEROUS. YOU SEE ACHING BODIES, BRUISED RIBS, WHIPLASH... BUT IT’S AN EXTREME SPORT, AND YOU COME OFF THE WATER BUZZING. THE LESS FEAR YOU HAVE, THE BETTER YOU’LL BE”

are now kitted out with two state-of-the-art boats and a Blesma-branded gazebo to prepare the machines under on the beach.

Mark Lloyd from Cardiff is living proof of how Stuart's team, which also includes able-bodied civilian volunteers, is empowering people. A former Para who sustained a back injury under fire in Afghanistan in 2011, he spent last season piloting the team's second boat.

"It's great to be around blokes who have that military mentality," he says. "But it's also brilliant to compete against injury-free people. In other sports, you have to accept that you're not going to be as competitive after an injury. But we're ranked 12th in the UK, and we're off to the World Championships soon. That's not bad for a team that's only been doing this a year."

They're certainly impressive out in the surf. After scrutineering at 8am, during which the boats and kit are given a thorough examination by the race organisers, the boats (more than a dozen today, although there are sometimes twice as many) are allowed some practice laps before the six heats begin; one of which is delayed by the appearance of a seal.

Teams are awarded points depending on where they finish; those with the most get the best starting position in the final – an inside line around a box-shaped course with 500m sides, marked by inflatable buoys.

Sea-savvy, daring, and the ability to blast your way through a myriad of race variables are the key skills required to be competitive in ThunderCat racing, says Stuart. "You never know what the sea is going to be like, which makes it really interesting. It's not a racing circuit where every corner's the same – it's very unpredictable. You've got big waves, wind, and the tide affecting things. The best racers understand this. We're inexperienced, so that's something we need to catch up on."

FROM HELP TO HELL FOR LEATHER

The boats were initially developed for rescuing surfers. They weigh about 80kg and have engines capable of 50bhp, so are perfect for rescues in choppy seas. But it didn't take long to figure out that with a higher power-to-weight ratio than F1 cars, it might be quite good fun to race them. Now the sport is just over two decades old, having originated in South Africa, and is one of the fastest-growing sports in the powerboating world.

Racing the boats requires a similar technique to racing a sidecar. "The co-pilot at the front focuses on weight distribution," says Stuart. "As the boats corner, they're pulling 2Gs and are trying not to barrel roll. I find co-piloting more difficult with my missing leg, but I can do it. It's quite calm on the sea today, which means the better-tuned boats will go faster than us. I quite like it when it's rough, because that slows the favourites down. It can be dangerous, though. You see aching bodies, bruised ribs, whiplash. But it's an extreme sport, and you come off the water buzzing. Having a screw loose helps! The less fear you have, the better you'll be."

The robustness of the gear is also a plus. "If you wanted to take part in motorsport, you could be looking at £500,000 just to get your car right and enter a series – then you might write it off on the first lap! With this, we can crash the boat and, 10 minutes later, we're back out on the water."

Today, Team Endeavour race valiantly and impress the Newquay crowds despite the fact that it's their first season. The experience of the top racers means that

BECOME THE TOP CAT WHEN IT COMES TO THUNDERCATS

THE BOATS

Known as Zapcats, or ThunderCats, these are inflatable catamarans with four air chambers. Shapes vary – but all of them have 90° turning capability.

WEIGHT

Including the engine (the heaviest part), the vessels weigh about 80kg and can easily be lifted by two crew members. The lighter the crew, the quicker the craft...

SPEED

The two-stroke Tohatsu or Yamaha 50bhp short-shaft outboard motors can push the boats to speeds of 60mph.

CONTROL

Done by a hand tiller at the back (it's all in the wrist!) and the co-pilot's weight distribution at the front.

COST

Second-hand boats are £3,500 or a new set up is £8,500. A season's racing costs £1,700, which covers race licence, entry fee, fuel, kit etc.

EXERTION

"It's physical, but I find it mentally draining," says Stuart. "You've got to be so alert to calculate the waves."

TRAINING

"I do plenty of fitness, mostly cycling and running, to stay in shape for racing," says Stuart, "but you really can't beat time in the boat."



Walking... on air: it's a drag to get the boats to the water's edge but it's a blast from there on!

it's a bit like go-karting against Lewis Hamilton. Both Endeavour entrants find themselves scrapping it out towards the rear of the pack, but they have undoubtedly made huge progress over the course of the season.

"We are feeling our way into it," says Stuart. "At the start of last year we were getting lapped, but now that isn't happening. We're getting quicker. My first season has been crazy because, as the team manager, I've been getting started, learning the logistics, and also racing. This year, all the structure is now in place, and we'll be able to concentrate on going faster."

It's certainly going to be a busy 2016 for Stuart. As well as trying to recruit more Blesma Members onto the team, he's also preparing to assist powerboat racing legend Alan Priddy's bid to complete the fastest ever circumnavigation of the globe in a powerboat. The bid will begin in November from Gibraltar, but before then wounded Service men and women will be put through a series of rigorous tests in a selection process developed by Team Endeavour. One thing's for sure: Stuart is going to be spending a lot of time in 2016 hovering just above the water. People across the UK will be abandoning their sandcastles wherever he goes!

For more on ThunderCat racing, and how to get involved with Team Endeavour Racing, contact Stuart at stuart@teamendeavourracing.com





Break a leg? You've not heard the half of it...

Blesma is supporting a hard-hitting play that's due to open in London's West End. Oh, and a Member has the starring role...

There are some surprising parallels between being in the Armed Forces and starring in a play. Sure, the former is a lot more dangerous, but the levels of adrenaline involved in both can be curiously similar. "There's a lot of waiting around, interspersed with short periods of extreme activity," says Darren 'Swift' Swift, a Blesma Member who was blown up in 1991 while serving in the British Army. "And the nerves you get before a show are like being on ops. Once you go out, there's no going back!"

Swift is about to star in *Blue on Blue*, a play about a double amputee written by Chips Hardy, the dad of Hollywood star Tom Hardy, and funded mainly by The Skullcap Collective. *Blesma Magazine* spoke to those involved about why this is a production every Blesma Member should see...

Blue on Blue runs at the Tristan Bates Theatre in Covent Garden, London from 19 April to 14 May. For tickets visit www.tristanbates theatre.co.uk

DARREN SWIFT PLAYS THE PART OF MOSS



"I really like this play, there's lots of rapid-fire conversation, and it's my biggest role to date. I got into acting as an extra – I'd often crop up if a show needed an amputee. I'd say to any Blesma Member thinking

about acting to give it a go. Start with a bit of am-dram and see if it's your cup of tea. I've never had any formal training, but I would recommend it. I have struggled a bit with understanding elements of direction and what certain things mean in theatre.

"A military background helped me to act. I was used to speaking to a group, and there's an inner confidence that many soldiers have. But it also works in reverse; getting injured is a huge shock that can knock your confidence. Acting – standing up and talking in front of people – has been a great way for me to rebuild that.

"You need to be put yourself out there and take some knocks as an actor. I've definitely failed at more auditions than I've succeeded at. And on stage, there's no safety net. That's what makes it exciting."



CHIPS HARDY
WRITER



“I originally wrote *Blue on Blue* for my son Tom and his friends, who put it on with their theatre company. I wanted to give a voice to people who’d had a cruel blow of fate. The main character,

Moss, is a double amputee living with his nephew, Carver, who’s a burglar. People with tough lives often have an incredible sense of humour, and that’s also true in the Services. My mum was in a wheelchair, so I understand some of the banalities of disability. The play had to be a comedy.

“I’d certainly encourage Blesma Members to think about writing their own stories. They have a unique perspective. And there are great opportunities to get plays staged. The Arts Council is very supportive, and there are lots of great companies who, if you write to them with good material, will do their best to put a piece on. If you’ve got an idea, go for it. One bit of advice is to write judiciously. If you don’t have too many cast members, or too big a set, it’s easier to get a play staged.”

DANIEL GENTELY
PRODUCER, PLAYS THE PART OF CARVER



“Getting a play to the stage can be a long process. I first spoke to Chips two years ago. I tried to get various fringe theatres interested in *Blue on Blue*, but despite getting positive responses,

we never quite managed to get the funding there. Eventually, Blesma decided to get involved. It’s a really good way to keep the charity in the public eye. Funding for the show was not going to stop me getting it on stage. I love the play and was wholly determined to find a home for it.

“The first time I met Ian Waller from Blesma, he said; ‘I know the perfect guy for the lead role!’ I raised my eyebrows, but when I met Swifty, it was obvious he was made for this. I didn’t want to cast an actor with a blanket over his legs!

“We’re trying to reach out to people who don’t come to the theatre often. It’s going to be on in central London, it’s not too long, and we’ve got discussions with the cast and Blesma afterwards. The challenge for us is to do a great play justice.”

HARRY BURTON
DIRECTOR



“I like a play to transport me to another world – I want to come away feeling like I’ve been given an insight and taken on a journey, using characters who are fully realised through good acting, directing and design. This play is a great example of that, and the audience is going to have an intense experience.

“Swifty is the best actor possible to play the part of Moss. His character is going through some things that Blesma Members will understand. He’s an ex-squaddie who has lost two limbs, and he’s facing some problems. Into the middle of this, we have a diligent, female, Hungarian carer, and there are consequences.

“One of the challenges of putting on a play is standing out – there are 250 theatres in London! There is much talk about people with disabilities not having their stories told, but for us, this isn’t a play about ‘issues’. We intend it to be a brilliant production about characters in adversity.”

Words: Nick Moore Pictures: Andy Bate

THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF VINCENT HORTON

Royal Marines Commando Vincent Horton was bombed, shot at, shelled and captured (twice!) during WWII. His mother was informed he was Missing In Action in 1942 but, 73 years later, he is still going strong at the age of 94

Most of Vincent Horton's stories (as a WWII veteran who escaped from a Nazi POW camp and took part in the D-Day Landings, he's got plenty) involve a vast amount of walking. As a child growing up in Essex, Yorkshire and Hampshire, he got used to travelling across the country on foot.

"Mum and dad were always on the move, and they wouldn't spend a ha'penny on transport, so we had to walk everywhere," says Vincent. "The whole family walked from Yorkshire to Essex to find work during the Great Depression – it was tough!"

Later, Vincent found himself completing countless marches as part of his Royal Marines training. Then, in 1941, he yomped for miles through the Egyptian desert, and in 1943 he took part in an astonishing crossing of Crete, having snuck out of German custody. But shortly after D-Day, his mobility was cruelly cut short. Blown up by a landmine, he lost both legs, and had to fight for survival. Showing remarkable character, he soon came to terms with his terrible injuries, bouncing back to start a family and a new career.

It's the kind of tale that's remarkable even amongst Blesma's hardy Members. Born in March 1921, Vincent remembers the years between the two World Wars as an innocent era.

"My dad was a wounded WWI veteran and received a pension, but we all had to work," he remembers. "From the age of 12, I was milking cows on a farm near Basingstoke. Later, my brother Jim and I worked at Marconi in Chelmsford. That was when war broke out. I decided to become a Royal Marine because a mate of mine had joined. He told me it was lovely; you got to visit lots of interesting countries and meet different nationalities. It sounded great!"

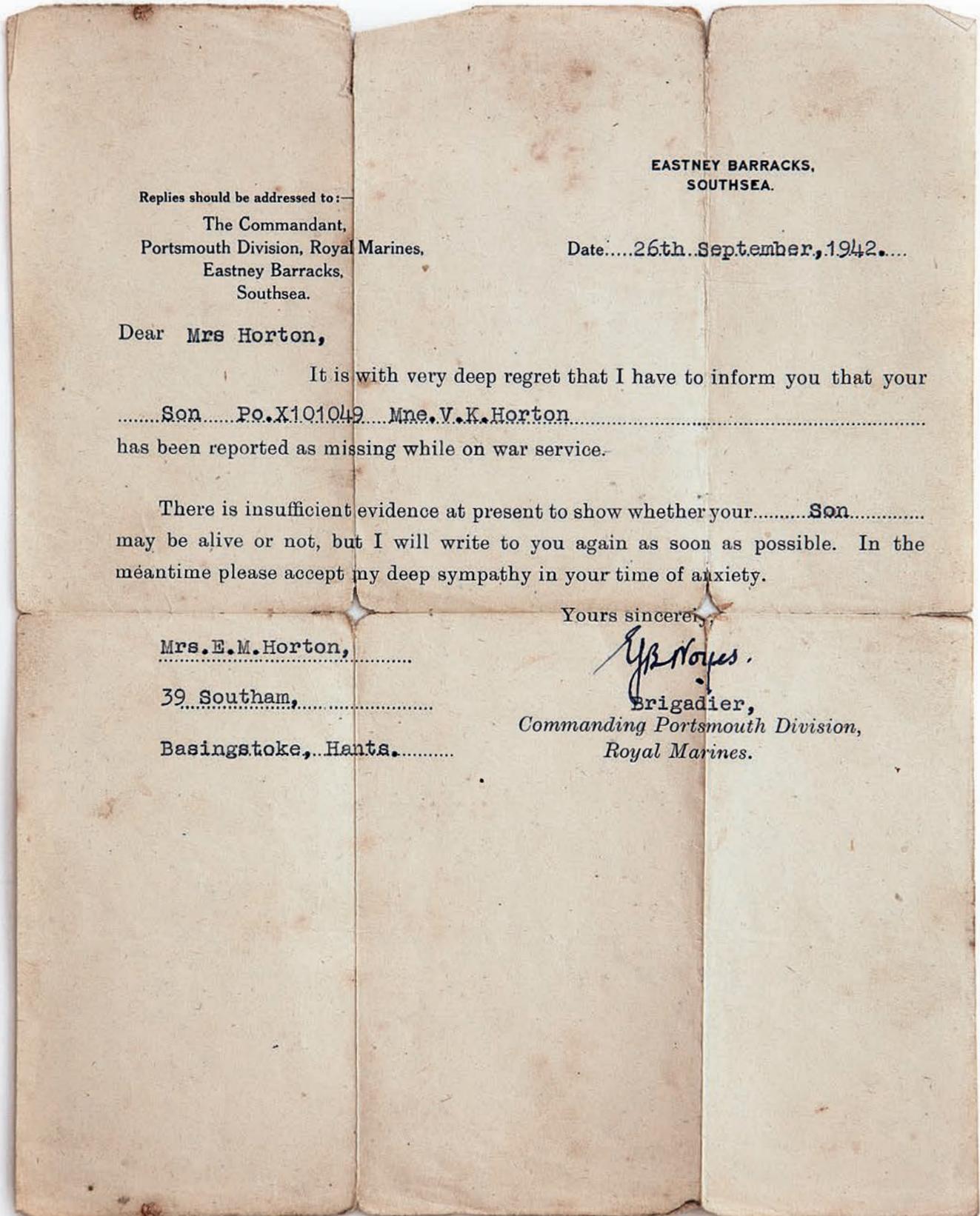
LIFE AS A ROYAL MARINES COMMANDO

Vincent enlisted in 1939 and completed his training in Devon and Scotland, where he learned munitions skills and hand-to-hand combat – alongside having to complete those relentless Commando marches.

"Eventually, I became a spotter and joined the 11th Searchlight Brigade," he says. "In January 1941, we got shipped off to Alexandria. At first, we just did a lot of cementing in the British camp. I have fond memories of the Fleet Club [famous for its belly dancers and entertainment]. But we were just in time for the action in Tobruk where we fought troops who had been pushed out of Italy, Albania and Greece. We had no field guns, so we used anti-aircraft guns. It was slaughter."

A year later – in between a lot more marching and further engagement in the desert – Vincent and his unit





EASTNEY BARRACKS,
SOUTHSEA.

Replies should be addressed to:-
The Commandant,
Portsmouth Division, Royal Marines,
Eastney Barracks,
Southsea.

Date.....26th..September, 1942.....

Dear Mrs Horton,

It is with very deep regret that I have to inform you that your
..... Son Po. X101049 Mne. V. K. Horton
has been reported as missing while on war service.

There is insufficient evidence at present to show whether your..... Son.....
may be alive or not, but I will write to you again as soon as possible. In the
meantime please accept my deep sympathy in your time of anxiety.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. E.M. Horton,
39 Southam,
Basingstoke, Hants.

G. H. Hayes
Brigadier,
Commanding Portsmouth Division,
Royal Marines.

Above: Vincent's mother received this letter in 1942 informing her that her son was Missing In Action. He's still going strong 73 years later



RED CROSS AND ORDER OF ST. JOHN
WAR ORGANISATION
COUNTY OF HAMPSHIRE



President :
THE COUNTESS OF MALMESBURY, C.B.E.

County Director and Secretary :
A. MORAY WILLIAMS, O.B.E.

President :
THE LADY LOUIS MOUNTBATTEN D. ST. J.

County Commissioner :
MAJOR A. TENNYSON SMITH, O. ST. J.

BASINGSTOKE PRISONER-OF-WAR ENQUIRY BUREAU

ARCHER LODGE,
CHEQUERS ROAD.

June 23rd.

Dear Mrs. Horton,

We are very glad indeed to hear that your son has been repatriated, and hope that you will find him in good health and that his experiences have not been too terrible. We shall be much interested to hear.

Yours very truly,

found themselves on a boat heading through the Mediterranean. “We landed in Crete and were tasked with defending Souda Bay, a Royal Artillery gun site,” he says. “We knew a German and Italian attack was coming, and they soon started bombing us.

“Then, one morning, all hell broke loose. German Paratroopers killed more than 100 unarmed Royal Artillery soldiers on one part of the island, but elsewhere, we mopped them up. We captured an Austrian lad who told us we’d soon be his prisoner!”

The Austrian, it soon turned out, was right. With fresh waves of Axis assaults expected, the Marines and Artillery soldiers on Crete thought they would be evacuated. But no boats came, and after they found themselves outnumbered, they were told by their officers to capitulate and be taken prisoner.

“We had a two-day march to the prison camp that June,” remembers Vincent. “After a while in there, this chap from Liverpool said to me; ‘How about escaping?’ I told him they’d shoot us if we did, but he said; ‘They won’t catch us – we’ll be up that mountain.’

“We’d realised that the Germans weren’t counting people in and out of the camp very well – they used to let us out briefly each day for a drink and a wash – so one day, we just went for it. It was very exciting.”

More than 100 prisoners eventually escaped. The troops, including Australians and New Zealanders, soon found allies up in the mountains. “The Cretan shepherds helped us,” says Vincent. “They gave us lovely meals – goat’s cheese and warm bread. I even learned to milk

with storming the Atlantic Wall at Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer. Of the 550 men from his regiment who left England, only 220 would return.

“People were getting blown up as soon as we got out of the boat. It was extremely hectic for 10 days,” Vincent recalls. “It wasn’t a case of *if* you were going to catch it, but *when*. I worked as a driver and would take the officers’ messages. One day, I had to deliver a leather map case and came under fire. I jumped into a ditch and split my eye open with my gun. When I arrived, I got quizzed about the shrapnel hole in the map.”

On 15 June, 1944, Vincent – having dodged bombs and bullets across half of Europe and much of Africa – finally ran out of luck. “I was sent with a message for A Troop, around Sallenelles. The Germans started to shell me, so I switched routes – and that’s when I was blown up by a landmine and lost both my legs. I don’t remember much about it, although I do vividly recall that I thought I was going to die.

“I was picked up by some Naval observers and given morphine. I was taken out to a boat where there were nurses who applied tourniquets and cream. I had a blood transfusion, two pints in total. I woke up two days later and was told I had gangrene. My left arm was also in a bad way. We got held up by bad weather, and it took 10 days to get us back to hospital in Southampton, but the nurses on the boat were fantastic.”

Vincent’s rehab was a lengthy and difficult process, and it took his mother’s interference to stop medics amputating his arm. He was taken to Winchester

“PEOPLE WERE GETTING BLOWN UP AS THEY STEPPED OUT OF THE BOAT. IT WASN’T A CASE OF IF YOU WERE GOING TO CATCH IT, BUT WHEN!”

a goat! We split up into smaller groups to try to evade capture, and we’d take it in turns to go into the villages to try to get food. Eventually, I ended up on my own, and walked right across Crete.”

In one incident, which sounds as if it has come straight from the pages of the *Boys’ Own Paper*, Vincent happened across a British agent who had disguised himself as a Greek Orthodox priest. He helped Vincent get onto a submarine and back to the relative safety of Egypt. There, Vincent rejoined a group of Marines. “It was great. We were in a camp with nice food and even some beer.” But more action was just around the corner.

In 1942, Vincent boarded HMS Zulu to help cover a Commando raid on Tobruk. “I was a Bren gunner, but the boat was sunk by Italian fighter bombers,” he says. “We managed to get ashore in our landing craft, but once again we were taken prisoner.” This time there was no escaping. Vincent spent seven months in a camp before being released as part of a prisoner exchange in 1943. It was a time of heartbreak for his mother, who received a letter informing her that her son was Missing In Action (see p32). Once back in Egypt, however, Vincent managed to tell her that he was, in fact, alive and well.

His unit soon headed home (a very long way around, via Sierra Leone and South Africa), but Vincent and his fellow Marines knew the war’s endgame was looming. After joining 48 Commando in 1944, and training for beach assaults in Devon, the unit boarded a boat near Southampton for the D-Day Landings. They were tasked

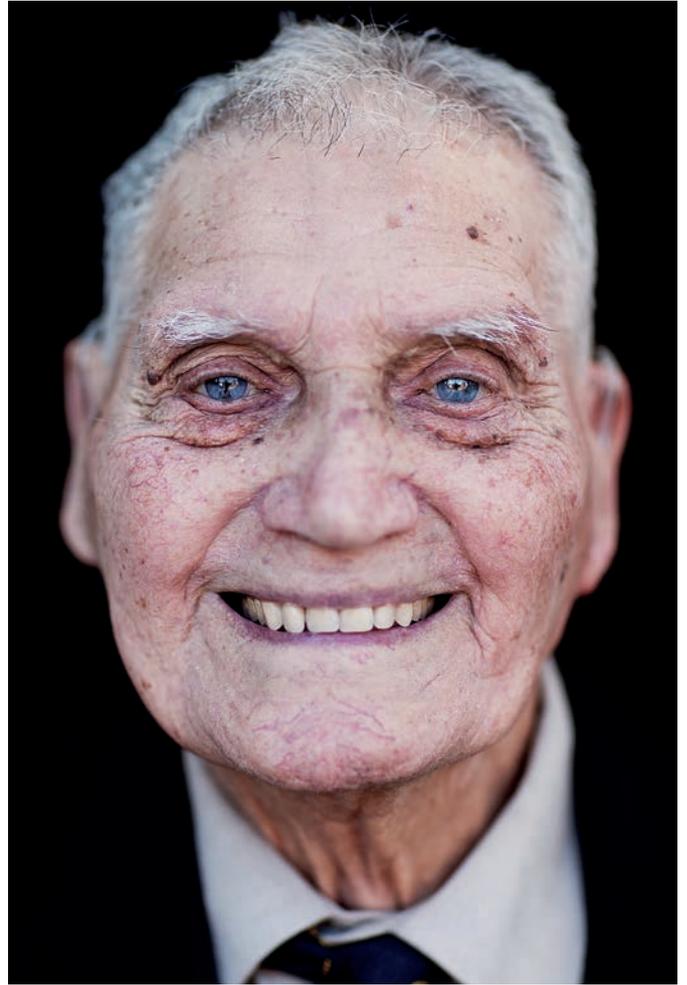
Hospital, but it got bombed. Eventually, operations in Bradford and Roehampton stabilised his legs, and 19 months after his injury, he was fitted with prosthetics.

As with all those wounded in WWII, however, there was little time for self pity. “They trained me up as a cobbler, but there wasn’t much work on that front, and eventually a WWI veteran from my Limb Fitting Centre got me a job working in telephony for the Postal Service,” he says. “I did that until I retired at 60.”

Vincent married his carer in 1946. “She was billeted with my family and would wheel me around everywhere. After a year she said; ‘I guess we should get married’” Two children followed, and Vincent led a normal, happy life, getting involved in the GPO Union and Blesma, becoming Portsmouth Branch Secretary. “Blesma has been great to me, and I’ve made so many friends and been on so many trips through the charity,” he says.

And there’s one last remarkable story left; 58 years after D-Day, Vincent discovered that one of his best friends in the Marines, Trefor Ireland – who he had been told had been killed in the assault on the Atlantic Wall – was still alive. Trefor, meanwhile, had been misinformed that Vincent had perished on D-Day.

“When I heard Trefor was dead I didn’t question it, but after another comrade’s funeral, we both realised the other was alive. He rang me up and said; ‘This is the ghost of Trefor Ireland!’ To see him out of the blue was wonderful. We’d been through a lot, but I just thought myself lucky. I picked myself up and got on with life.” And what a life...



Pictures: Andy Bate Words: Nick Moore

**Royal Marines
Commando and
WWII veteran
Vincent Horton**



Pictures: Steve Orino Words: Nick Moore



When Dan Richards lost his right arm in a motorcycle accident, the last thing he wanted to do was get behind the wheel of a car. Until he became a chauffeur...

DRIVEN

If there's one man who could be forgiven for never wanting to set eyes on the open road again, it's Dan Richards. Eight years ago, he was involved in a motorbike accident so horrific it even reduced medical staff to tears. "I survived Afghanistan, then lost my arm and shoulder on the A41," he says. The crash was devastating, and because Dan was right handed, he had to relearn skills using his left hand. His dreams of progressing through the ranks were thwarted. The lack of career opportunities would later send him into a very deep depression.

But Dan, a self-described "ball of morale", has made a remarkable recovery. Most impressively, instead of deciding that his driving days were over, he's now working as one of the top chauffeurs in the country – and is even back on a motorbike. He has recently been voted the QSi Professional Driver of the Year, and it's not hard to see why; he's impeccably dressed, courteous, and incredibly professional. Dan works for Capstar, a firm for exclusive clients, that was set up by former Army officers who employ

ex-military personnel, and he is quick to admit that the job "saved my life."

Dan's dad was a driver in the Army and, from the age of eight, growing up in Germany and Tidworth, he knew he wanted to be a military man, too. "It gave me direction. At 15, I went straight to the Army Recruitment Office and joined the King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery. I thought it'd be great to train as a farrier and decided that, when I finally left the Army, I'd work with horses." He did a tour of Afghanistan in 2007/08. "I worked in a team that dealt with interpreters," Dan says. "It was really interesting and I saw a lot of the country. After the tour, I trekked the Himalayas. But nine months after I got back, I had the accident."

Always a keen biker, Dan had been out riding with a friend and was returning to barracks when he came off the bike. The details remain sketchy. "I have no memory of it," he says. "From the road markings, the police determined that I'd slammed my brakes on. I hit the fence where the panels meet – solid steel. If that hadn't been there,



THE CAPSTAR SERVICE

Capstar Chauffeurs was set up in 2013 by ex-Army officers Charlie Bowmont and Rob Bassett Cross. The two successful businessmen wanted to give something back to troops struggling to find employment. Henry Newton, who served 25 years in the Household Cavalry, is now a director; Dan Richards was the second driver he employed.

"We have 20 drivers now, and we're passionate about offering a career path to guys who've been discharged from the military," explains Henry. "We've seen soldiers come out who are struggling to find work. It can be difficult, especially for guys who are injured or have PTSD. But we see their qualities. They all have core military values. With that, you're 90% of the way to being a great employee."

Dan is a typical example. "He's excelled since he's been with us," says Henry, "and it's all been down to his hard work. He should be proud. We've helped him, but this is not a charity, it's a business. We get our drivers to look at it that way. There are opportunities for promotion if they want them. We forge careers."

The firm has since expanded into America, employs US veterans, and offers aviation and close protection services when required, meaning Capstar can give a truly bespoke service. It's something that Henry encourages Blesma Members to consider. "The key word in our mission statement is *opportunity*," he says.

Interested in working for Capstar? Find out more about them at capstarchauffeurs.com



In the driving seat: chauffeur Dan Richards lost his right arm at the shoulder following a motorbike accident

"I'd have been into the other lane... dead!" A severed internal jugular was the most immediate problem. "My friend stopped the bleeding and I was airlifted to hospital in Whitechapel. I went into cardiac arrest for five minutes. They had the defibrillator out, and were ready to call it, but on the final try they got a small pulse back.

"I remember speaking to the doctor and saying; 'Did I die?' I'm not religious, but I saw something – I had a vision that I was speaking to my granddad, who'd died in 1994. He threw me a tennis ball. The next thing I knew, I woke up in the hospital. I was confused about why my mum and dad were standing over me."

Dan had a snapped collar bone, severed brachial plexus, and numerous fractures to his left arm and ankles. After more than six

hours of surgery, his right arm and shoulder were removed. "The doctor told me I'd had a horrific accident," he says. "I asked if I was going to walk again, and he welled up. He had to walk out. Time slowed down when they told me about my arm, and I turned to where my shoulder should have been..."

After a few minutes of being upset, and listening to his parents sobbing, Dan had a breakthrough. "I just thought – there are people worse off. My arm isn't going to grow back, so let's just get on with it."

A military sense of humour ("morbid, sick, an acquired taste,") helped, says Dan. "My Commanding Officer came to see me and I said; 'Good afternoon, Sir. I'd shake your hand, but I'm in a slight predicament and I can't see it changing in the foreseeable future.' The military attitude got me through."

Rather than moaning, Dan set about re-learning. "Straight away, I was working out how to write, tie my laces, get dressed. I was proactive. My writing is better than ever! I've learned to rock climb and scuba dive since my injury, and I even got back on a motorbike again wearing a prosthetic arm, but I almost came off it recently and that made me finally think enough's enough."

Dan was soon using a bionic hand, too. "My limb surgeon at Roehampton, Nick Irvine, is a godsend. I met him through Blesma's BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier, and Blesma have helped me all the way with everything," he says. "I'm the only person in the country with my level of amputation who wears a bionic prosthetic. It's been instrumental in my recovery. It's so good for little things, like holding a plate at a buffet!"



The most testing time was yet to come, though. Having dealt with his amputation, Dan became deeply unhappy about his inability to find work. "I was discharged three years after the accident and, in one year, applied for 327 jobs but heard nothing back. My savings dwindled. I was applying for anything – I just wanted to contribute, and I felt like a waster. I thought; 'If this is life after the Army, I don't want a part of it.' So I tried to hang myself."

His suicide attempt failed and, shortly afterwards, he was introduced to Capstar ("I was unkempt, but they listened and saw something in me,") who offered him a role on the spot. He began work on Armistice Day 2013, and hasn't looked back. "I love this job to bits," he says. "It's given me new skills, I've learned corporate etiquette,

I drive beautiful cars, I've been all over the country, I've met incredible people and, later this year, I'll be debt-free.

"I'm so grateful for the opportunity that the guys at Capstar have given me. There's a great military atmosphere, they can joke about my arm and that's fine, I don't want any special treatment. I drive an automatic – I'll never drive a manual again, but I'll never juggle either, so that doesn't matter!"

Dan is now looking forward. Fiercely ambitious, he recently got down to the last five for the Row2Recovery crew and, as a keen cyclist, he's hoping to take part in several charity rides. "In a way, losing my arm has been the best thing that's happened to me," he says. "The people I've met, the opportunities I've had... it changes your mindset. Now, I always try to see the upside."



“
**I CONCENTRATED
ON STAYING ALIVE
FOR 10 MINUTES**
”

THE SELFIE, 2011

“I needed to turn the camera on myself after my injury to empower myself and reclaim my story. My friend, Simon, broke me out of hospital and we went to his studio – via the pub! I’ve always thought that this picture is a bit like looking at an old statue – you don’t miss the bits that aren’t there.”

This is the story of humanitarian photographer Giles Duley, one of the few Blesma Members to have never been in the military

“ I CONCENTRATED ON STAYING ALIVE FOR 10 MINUTES ”

GILES DULEY WAS AN ACCLAIMED FASHION AND music photographer before he changed direction to focus on documenting humanitarian projects and disasters around the world. Then, in 2011, whilst on patrol with the US Army in Afghanistan, he stood on an IED, losing both legs and an arm. Giles, who is one of the very few non-military Members of Blesma, has since returned to the work he loves, taking pictures in troubled countries across the globe. We caught up with him on the phone while he was working in Lebanon to find out more about his remarkable story...

How did you initially become a photographer?

When I was 18, I was involved in a car accident and smashed my knees up. While I was recuperating in hospital, my godfather passed away. His widow came to see me and gave me two things he'd bought the week he died; an Olympus camera and a book by the war photographer Don McCullin. It was full of black and white images from places like Biafra and Bangladesh, and I was incredibly moved by them. I resolved to work in photography, and immediately started practising by photographing the doctors and (mainly) the nurses!

And you became a well-known music photographer...

I had friends in bands, so I took pictures of them. Before I knew it, I was travelling the world, hanging out with musicians and models in Miami and LA. I thought I was great, and war suddenly seemed a lot less interesting. I did that for about 10 years, but became disillusioned

and couldn't shake the feeling that I could be doing something more worthwhile. I stopped taking pictures and became a carer for an autistic boy called Nick.

How did being a carer lead you to humanitarian work?

Nick had trouble getting people to understand how bad he sometimes felt. He would self-harm and, after a while, I started taking pictures of him, including when he hurt himself. In a small way, that helped the medics understand Nick more deeply, and so got him better care. I suddenly saw that, through my images, I could become an advocate for someone else.

So you decided to head to the world's war zones?

Yes. I went to Angola first, took some nice-looking images, managed to get them published... They were acclaimed, but after a while I came to realise that there hadn't been much point to them. I resolved to talk to NGOs and find out which stories they thought needed to be told more effectively. I went to Bangladesh and South Sudan. I saw some difficult things that made me question whether I could do the job. I remember being in the same room as a dying boy soldier at one point. I didn't know if I could – or even should – photograph him, but an Australian doctor who was working in the hospital told me the reason he did aid work in Africa was because he had been inspired by photographs in *National Geographic* when he was growing up. I then realised that, even though I couldn't change the world, I might be able to influence someone who would.

And you eventually travelled to Afghanistan...

I wanted to document what war meant. I was drawn to what caused all this destruction. I was in Kandahar, close to the epicentre of it all, embedded with the 75th Cavalry Regiment. We were on patrol when I stepped on an IED. I remember lying on my side and feeling an intense heat. My legs were gone. I'd seen people with far lesser injuries succumb, but I thought; 'I'm not dying in Afghanistan.' I concentrated on staying alive for 10 minutes, until I got to hospital, then I went into a coma. I'd used up everything my body had to stay alive.

The whole thing was filmed, too...

The Canadian medics who evacuated me in the Chinook were wearing helmet cameras. I didn't know they were filming at the time, though – I had other things on my mind! I have watched the footage. Seeing the moment when you think you're going to die is very strange. I must admit though, that when I saw the still images from inside the Medevac helicopter, my first thought was; 'I would have cropped that image differently.'

Tell us about your recovery...

I spent 46 days in intensive care. Nobody thought I'd pull through. The doctors called my family to my bedside twice to say goodbye. I was eventually discharged, but I was told I'd never live independently, walk or even work again. At first I was disgusted by how I looked. I wished I hadn't made it! But then my stubbornness kicked in. I thought; 'I've spent my career photographing people like me, empowering them.' Now I had to do it to myself. The biggest thing I learned from the experience was how much photography meant to me. From Day One, I resolved to return to the work I loved. If I could do that, nothing else would matter.

And you returned to Afghanistan...

By that time I'd had 37 operations, I'd learned to walk again, I'd learned to hold a camera again... I wanted to document civilian injury so, 18 months after I was blown up, I was back in Kabul taking pictures. There was a real irony that I'd set out to do this story and had now gone through the same thing myself. It gave me a new insight. Who better was there to tell it?

What have you learned about the power of photography from your experiences?

You shouldn't take the pictures people want to see. Often, people are laughing in my photos – you don't have to show that life is awful if you're photographing a drug addict or a refugee camp. I got a letter recently from someone who said he had used one of my photos as inspiration when he felt like giving up on his studies. Now he is in medical school. That made me feel like I'd achieved my goal; to help just one person who might one day make a very real difference.

And you're a non-military Member of Blesma...

Because I was injured with soldiers, in a war zone, I was accepted into Headley Court. It was there that I learned to walk again, and where I met the Blesma guys. Photography can be a powerful recovery tool, it certainly was for me, so I'm hoping to do some photography with Blesma Members at some point.

Giles' book, *One Second Of Light*, is available from www.ew-agency.com and Amazon, priced £30

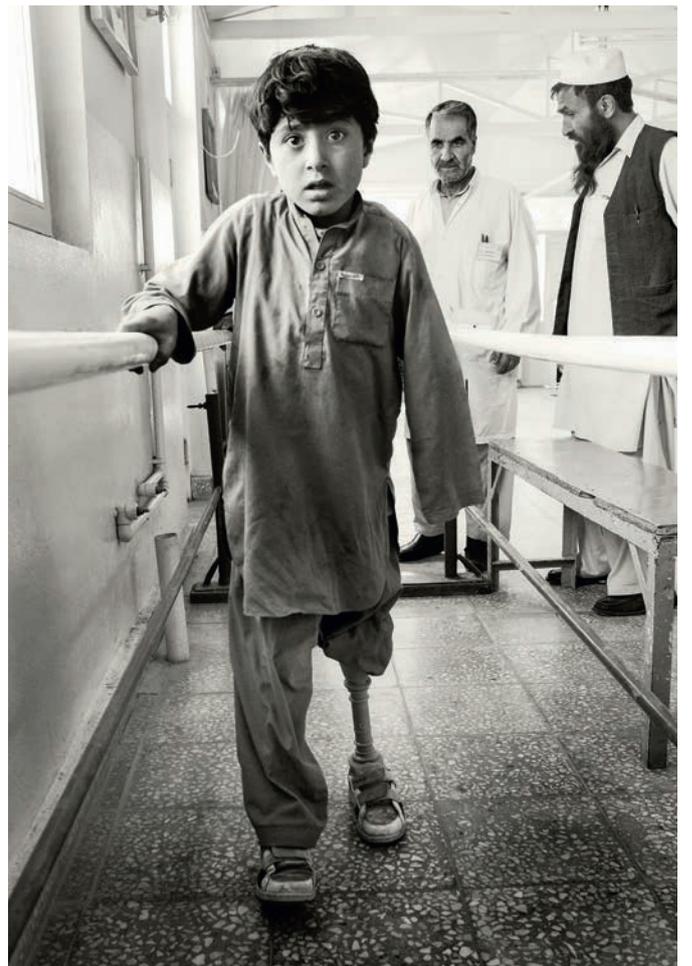


SUDAN, 2010

"Weddy (4) and Eunice (5) were Kenyan orphans who had both received life saving heart surgery. Three years later I visited Eunice. I hardly recognised her, she'd grown so much. Her illness was a thing of the past and she was flourishing at school."



MEMBERS' STORIES



**OPPOSITE PAGE
(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP)**

SOUTH SUDAN, 2009

"The Murle Tribe at Lekwongole. A few weeks before, the village had been attacked by Nuer, resulting in more than 450 Murle being killed."

KABUL, 2013

"Atollah is a seven year old from Kabul who stood on a landmine while walking to school. It's one of the few photographs that genuinely upset me to take. Why should a young boy be in such pain?"

ANGOLA, 2007

"Children attending their first day of school. The school had just been built and this was the first day it opened. The desire to learn was etched all over the pupils' faces."



ANGOLA, 2008

"Widows from the civil war find shelter and companionship in the abandoned buildings of a catholic mission. They had lost everything; their husbands, homes and, often, their children, yet the smoke-blackened rooms still echoed with laughter and song."

WIZARDS WITH A MAGIC TOUCH



Pictures: Rob Whitrow Words: Nick Moore

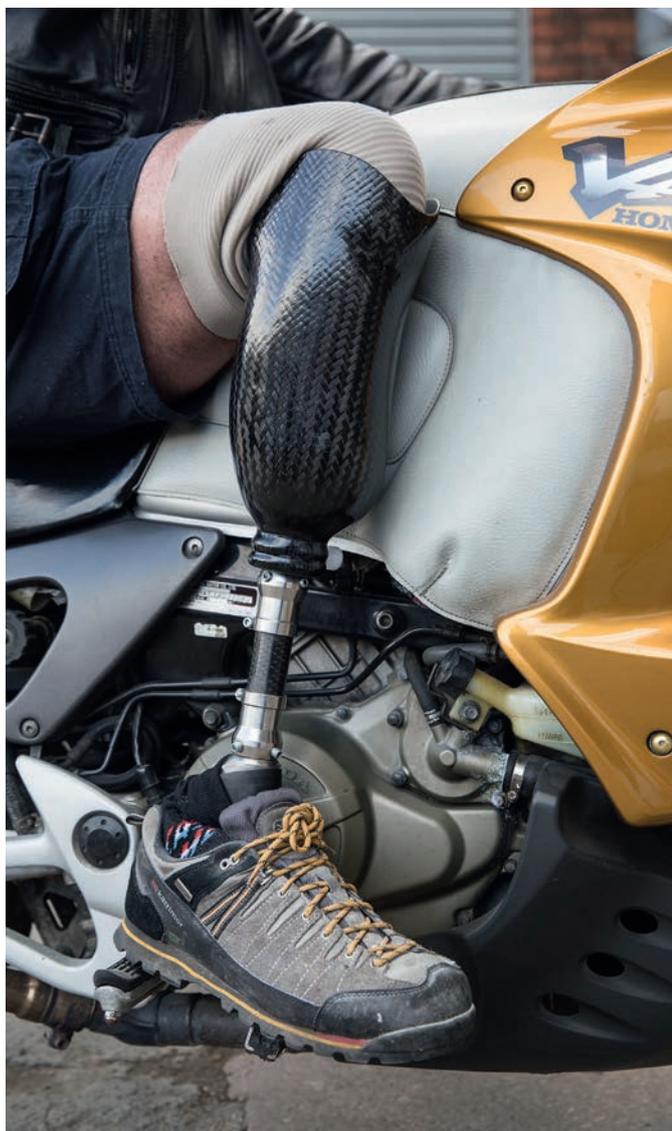


Last year, the Road Wizards Motorcycle Club raised a whopping £10,000 for Blesma. We meet the bikers who go the extra mile for the Association

Sons of Anarchy has got a hell of a lot to answer for. The TV programme, and many others like it, don't always present bikers in the most flattering of lights. "When we started raising money for charity, a lot of people screwed their eyebrows as if to say; 'Why are those bikers doing that?'" explains Sharon McDaid, who helped to set up the Road Wizards Motorcycle Club in Saddleworth, near Oldham, nine years ago. "But now, we've got an excellent reputation among the local community. Bikers are actually very generous people, and we've proved that."

When Sharon met Major Bernie Broad – a double amputee, Blesma Member and enthusiastic biker – the two quickly realised they had a lot in common. Since then, the Road Wizards have chosen to support Blesma, raising considerable sums for the Association over the last few years. Sharon's husband, Ozzy, even helped Bernie back onto a motorbike when his workshop, SDS Motorcycles, customised Bernie's bike after he thought he would never ride again.

Sharon explains why the Wizards decided to wave their money-making wands in the direction of Blesma...



I was having a difficult time accepting that I had this condition when I met Bernie Broad. Ozzy runs a bike shop, SDS Motorcycles, and Bernie had a bike that he wanted adapting so he could ride it again as an amputee. We had a long chat and I found him inspirational. He told me all about Blesma. Around that time, the Road Wizards were looking for a new charity and I told the members all about Bernie. We did some research on the charity and everyone really loved it.

What appealed in particular?

We've got some ex-military guys in the club, so they wanted to do something in that area. They liked the fact that the vast majority of the money that we would raise would go directly to benefitting Members. We also liked the fact that Blesma helped people who had been injured as far back as WWII – and that they support Members for their whole lives, not just as a one off.

How do you raise money?

We do a couple of regular things. There's an annual bike show, then there's Yanks Weekend, which is an event based around the film *Yanks*, which was shot in Saddleworth. Every year, there's a military meeting based on that, and everyone dresses up. We sell burgers, brews and cakes, and it's got bigger every year. Our members work around the clock for two days, and we sell Blesma merchandise, and do a tombola for them, too.

How much have you raised?

In our first year we made £2,100, in the second year we raised £4,350, and last year, we raised a massive £10,000. That was a huge achievement for us thanks to a Blesma day with a lot of different stalls, a great Yanks Weekend, a Halloween Party... and a member called Chopper who did a 10k run.

In the end, we were only £450 short of £10,000, so we made the rest up out of club funds. We've set the bar high for 2016, and we've chosen Blesma as our charity again.

How did the Road Wizards get involved in fundraising?

My husband Ozzy started the club with a group of friends almost 10 years ago. We now have 21 members who ride all sorts of bikes. After we'd been going a while, a local scooter club asked us to join them on a run for a children's charity. We decided to put on some charity events

ourselves, so we held fundraisers to buy sleeping bags for the homeless, and raised £5,000 to buy a guide dog. Without the members' dedication and hard work we wouldn't have been able to do any of this.

How did you start helping Blesma?

I was diagnosed with gastroparesis and have to use a feeding tube 18 hours a day.

'The Wizards' magic fundraising tips

BE ORGANISED

"You have to know what everyone is doing and plan it precisely," says Sharon. "We started quite small and have become more ambitious year on year. That's the best way to get going."

MAKE IT FUN

"You need to enjoy the fundraising otherwise it's not going to work. We work hard at it, but it's enjoyable. Choose something that will get you

enthusiastic, and it will shine through," says Sharon.

INVOLVE EVERYONE

"The more people you get helping out, the more people they will affect directly, and the more you'll raise. Even if it's something small like shaking a bucket for an hour, it makes a difference."

BE FORWARD

"I try to talk to as many people as possible about what we

do," says Sharon. "We took a group of pensioners out for a meal, and a businessman was so impressed he paid for the food himself!"

FIND SOMEONE WHO INSPIRES YOU

"Bernie Broad's story and friendship have pushed me on to think of ways to raise money," says Sharon. "Being inspired by someone from the charity you're helping motivates you to raise more."

Bernie Broad gets back on his bike

The motorbike-loving Major thought his riding days were behind him... until he met the Road Wizards



If it wasn't for the soldier in me, I'd grow my hair long, buy a chopper and become a Road Wizard!" says Bernie Broad. The former Grenadier Guards Major chuckles at the thought of a short-back-and-sides military man, who twice Trooped the Colour, getting into his leathers and growing a huge beard. "They're such nice people, and they've helped me so much. I can't speak highly enough of them."

Bernie, who joined the Army in 1981, was blown up by an IED in Afghanistan in 2009. "The lorry I was travelling in was hit and the blast broke a lot of my bones," he says. "When I got back to the UK, I still had my arms and legs, but due to the nature of the injuries, I lost my left leg below the knee within six months, and my right leg below the knee two-and-a-half years later."

Bernie was a keen biker before his injuries but thought his riding days were over after his amputations.

"The funny thing was, my wife wouldn't let me get rid of my bike," he says. "I'd had a mid-life crisis at 30, bought it for my birthday, and I'd loved it. I liked not getting stuck in traffic and I loved the fresh air... it was my equivalent of a sports car. My wife said to me that the last thing she remembered before my injury was me riding off to barracks to go out to Afghanistan."

A move to Glossop led to a chance meeting that would change his life. "It was a nice summer and I played golf at a course next to a bike garage. I kept

thinking; 'I really should get it sorted out, I wonder if I can get it adapted so I can ride it again?'

"I made a few phone calls and that's when I met Sharon. I was in awe as she told me about the Road Wizards and all the charity events they'd put on. It was very impressive. And her husband Steve, aka Ozzy, was an absolute hero. He came up with suggestions as to what I could do to get riding comfortably again."

Ozzy and Dave from SDS Motorcycles added a piston to the gear lever to create a semi-automatic way of changing gear ("I obviously can't do it with my leg,") while on the other side of the bike, Ozzy extended Bernie's back brake. "Ozzy also meticulously worked out the seat setting and so on," says Bernie. "He even put in a light that warns me if I'm accidentally touching the brake without realising. It's great. I'm riding totally legally, and it is 100% functional and comfortable."

But what about growing that ZZ Top beard and getting himself 'patched'?

"The Road Wizards keep inviting me out for a ride. I haven't done it yet due to a few medical issues, but this year it is definitely going to happen," he laughs. "I've been ordered to do it! They're utter stars and there's not a nasty bone between them."

"I'm going to go riding with them and help raise some money for Blesma, but I don't think I'm ready for the black leather yet. I'm not cool enough!"

"IF IT WASN'T FOR THE SOLDIER IN ME, I'D GROW MY HAIR LONG, BUY A CHOPPER AND BECOME A ROAD WIZARD!"



STEVE GILL

Blesma Member Steve Gill is hoping to be selected for Great Britain's archery team at the Paralympic Games in Rio later this year

I lost both my legs and an eye in a terrorist bomb attack while I was stationed in Belfast in May 1989. At the time, I was a 19-year-old Private serving with 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment (The Poachers).

The pressure is building for the Rio Olympics but I'm injured at the moment. I fell out of bed, would you believe, and landed on my ribs, which means I can't take part in the European Championships in April. I really wanted to compete there but it shouldn't affect my chances of going to Rio, though.

I've only been shooting for two-and-a-half years. I'm up against two guys who have been doing it for 20 years, but I'm not that far behind them! We won't know who has made the team until the end of April.

I used to play wheelchair basketball and thought archery was boring when I first tried it about 15 years ago. Then, a few years back, I was at a basketball session and people were trying archery in the next hall. I thought I'd give it another go, and banged a few good shots in! Having been in the Army, shooting is second nature.

Anyone who thinks archery is easy should give it a try. When I'm practising for a competition, I shoot as many as 260 arrows a day. Drawing back a bow with 52lbs of pressure is a workout in itself!

I train either five or six days a week. It is a massive commitment and every aspect of my training is planned meticulously. It's like a full-time job. It's a 70-mile round trip to my training centre in Donington, and I also train at the National Sports Centre at Lilleshall two days a week, so I don't see the kids as much as I'd like.

Archery is about mind and body working together. If you don't have a clear mind, it doesn't matter how well set up you are, you can easily mess up. Hover over the Gold and, if you are lined up, mind and body together, chances are it will go in the middle. If you squint and tense up, your arrows will be all over the place.

There is a lot of mind work involved, and the coaches have us doing all sorts of weird and wonderful things. There are four distinct phases in taking every single shot, and you have to break each one down and have different thoughts leading up to the moment you shoot.

I couldn't do this without Blesma, their support has been fantastic. They help fund my training and travel. Their help is second to none.

I was a Blesma Welfare Rep for many years and have done loads of events with the Association. Blesma has been a great part of my rehabilitation. It's brilliant for getting like-minded people together.

“I THOUGHT I'D GIVE ARCHERY ANOTHER GO, AND BANGED A FEW GOOD SHOTS IN!”

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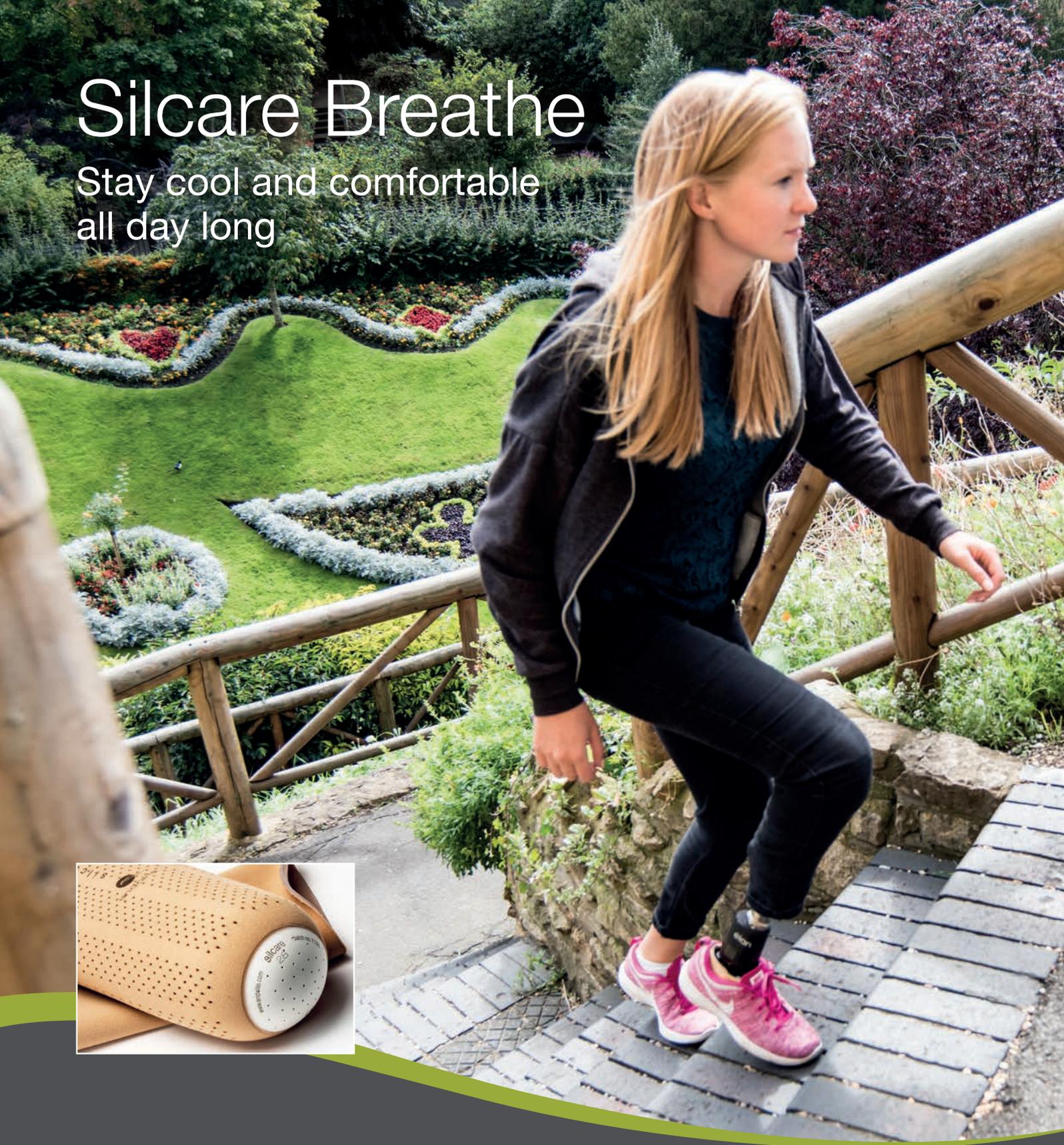


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