

Blesma

The magazine for limbless veterans



EAT SLEEP RACE REPEAT

From the Army to Armco; David Birrell is addicted to adrenaline

The Crimean War's limbless veterans

The remarkable photographs of amputees that were taken 160 years ago at the request of Queen Victoria **p38**



DIY SOS builds on great work

Nick Knowles and his team have returned to Canada Street for one last Blesma build **p44**

Team Britannia rules the waves

The Members who are set to make a splash with their powerboating world record attempt **p48**



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NEWS

Welcome

We seem to be going through yet another moment of historical change. This can feel uncomfortable. At such moments, it can help to have some certainty. Blesma has been supporting its Members since shortly after WWI, established nationally in 1932. We have passed through turbulent times before, maintaining continuous service throughout, always there.

Of course, we have changed and adjusted as circumstances required. We have never shirked the responsibility to innovate and make corrections down the years in order to better meet our collective and individual needs. We have done this carefully, thoughtfully as far as possible, with a natural, gradual rhythm, guided by our principles; there for life, Member assisting Member where possible. This is why more than half our Board of Trustees are Members, and the Board in turn encourages the Executive to staff with Members: to ensure that, at all times, things are done knowledgeably, from a basis of first-hand experience.

With this in mind, I would mention our work in support of our older people. Beyond all doubt, most of us prefer to live at home, particularly as we grow older. We have felt the consequences of this over quite a period, evidenced in the ever-declining use of our residential Homes. So, eventually, we made the necessary adjustments. We have responded with practical help to enable people to do as they clearly prefer; stay at home close to their families and amongst their friends. Concurrently, we had to release the Homes. The result is a defined, specifically resourced and sustainable initiative, another example of our careful method of adjustment. In registering this, I also re-state our very deepest appreciation of the work of the Homes down the years, the dedication of their staff has been, at all times, exemplary.

There have been so many advances and achievements this year that I simply cannot mention them all. I would draw attention to some, loosely categorised as 'activities'. The Association sets great store by these, recognising that they can promote all manner of good things. They can open new horizons, get people together, encourage us to take exercise, get us thinking...

Seven of our Members gained a place in the Great Britain Paralympic squad, bringing home a gold and three bronze medals. Elsewhere this year, 40 Members participated at the Invictus Games in Orlando.

Every bit as heartening is the fact that Members are also getting stuck into the Arts. Our photographers are breaking new ground in more ways than one – they plan to go to Iceland next year. Their images are already of exhibition quality, and plans are being made accordingly. The Community Programme is a resounding success, with 17 trained Members reaching nearly 3,000 students in 41 workshops. These are all, in their way, inspirational and are indicative of the Blesma drive. I urge you to keep at it, to push at the limits, to break ever more new ground.

These are challenging times. Blesma remains there, steadily, carefully navigating its way, providing the support for you to get to your goals – and beyond. Just keep pushing at the so-called boundaries.

The very best of fortune and a very Merry Christmas to you all.

Lt Gen Sir Cedric Delves KBE DSO
Chairman



The Crimean War's amputees

The story behind Queen Victoria's photographs (p38)



LEST WE FORGET

On 13 November, 41 Members, staff and supporters of Blesma took part in the annual Remembrance Day Parade at the Cenotaph.

Leading the Association were Jim Chittenden, Allan Jackson and Gam Gurung.

"It was extremely emotional, and the crowds gave a rousing welcome as we passed by," said Blesma's National Volunteer Officer, Frank Garside. A number of Members were aided by electric scooters kindly provided for free by Electric Mobility of Ilchester.

"Our contingent ranged from four weeks to 93 years old, so it was a true family affair," said Frank.

Photographs: Simon Hildrew, Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2016 RCIN 2500189

Picture: Royal Ballet School/Katie Davison



Future ballet dancers learn about Blesma

Blesma Member Simon Harmer has taken the new skills he has learned as part of the Blesma Community Programme to the Royal Ballet School.

In November, Simon gave a talk to pupils at the school about his experiences whilst serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps, during which time he became a double amputee after being caught in an IED blast in Afghanistan. He also spoke to the pupils about how he overcame his injury and told them all about Blesma's work.

"I've given talks in different types of schools; from referral units to secondary schools, and now the Royal Ballet School," said Simon. "It doesn't matter what type of school it is – pupils have similar worries."

After Simon finished giving presentations to several classes, he got the opportunity to see the pupils in action.

"The talks went really well and I thoroughly enjoyed my day. After the talk I got to sit in a classroom and watch the students practise and perform. It was incredible and you could see just how hard they work."

Karen Davies, Academic & Pastoral Principal at the Royal Ballet School said: "Our thanks to Simon and the team at Blesma for visiting the school and offering our students an insight into the life of a limbless veteran. It greatly enhanced our students' understanding of the sacrifices our Service men and women make on our behalf, and it gave a new perspective to our teaching around Remembrance Sunday."

If you would like to take part in 2017's Blesma Community Programme contact Tuesday Critchfield on bcp@blesma.org or by calling 07946 309103

HUNTED GEAR FOR SOUVENIR HUNTERS

The winners of TV's hit show *Hunted* have auctioned some of the kit they used on the show to raise money for Blesma.

After being inspired by Blesma Members Kirk Bowett and Jez Scarratt, who took part in the Channel 4 programme, winners Nick Cummings and Ayo Adesina decided that fellow fugitives should help raise further funds for the Association by auctioning off clothes and items used whilst on the hunt.

"When Ayo mentioned the idea I thought it was fantastic. Kirk and Jez had been really supportive on social media whilst the show was being aired. I only hoped that I could be of some help for a great cause," said Nick, who lives in Taunton.

Kirk and Jez both took part in the TV programme, in which people have to avoid capture by a team of specialist 'hunters' for 30 days, to raise money for, and awareness of, the Association.

Jez (left) and Kirk getting ready to go on the run



MEMBER TO FILM HIS LIFE FOR FRANK DOCUMENTARY

TRIPLE AMPUTEE MARK ORMROD IS making a documentary about his life. The project, which will take a year to fund, film and produce, will give an insight into his family life and business ventures, as well as day-to-day life as a triple amputee.

The idea for the project came because Mark receives thousands of messages every day from people explaining how his social media posts have motivated or helped them.

"For years, I didn't think anyone would care about my life, but I've finally realised that it's not people caring about my life, but how what I've been through can help others," he said. "If I'd seen a video or documentary



when I first became a triple amputee, it would have made things a lot easier."

Mark doesn't plan to pull any punches with the "warts and all" documentary, in which he will talk frankly about the ups and downs he has experienced in his life.

In order to make the documentary, which Mark hopes will be finished by December 2017, he needs to raise £20,000 and will soon be launching a Kickstarter crowdfunding page to raise funds.

For more information on the documentary, and to keep up to date with Mark's plans, visit www.markormrod.com

Martin Hewitt (far right) on the recent training exercise



Picture: Roger Allen Words: Danny Buckland

The top of the world beckons for Martin

The attempt by a Blesma Member to become the first wounded veteran to achieve the Adaptive Grand Slam – climbing the tallest peaks on each continent as well as trekking to both the North and South Poles – has taken a huge step forward.

A team of ex-Service men were put through their paces by expedition leader and Blesma Member Martin Hewitt on a recent training week in the Alps as they prepare for their next mountain assault.

Martin, a former captain in 3 Para, along with expert guides, tutored six hopefuls for

the Spring 2017 climb of Mount Aconcagua in Argentina. The training camp, based in Chamonix, included rock face climbing, techniques to navigate ice fields and crevasses, and equipment familiarisation.

“We probably have one fully-functioning body between us,” joked the 32 year old, who was hit by a Taliban bullet which paralysed his right arm. “But this is about showing what you can do with training and determination. We have limitations but you can adapt if you put your mind to it. We won’t let what happened to us hold us back.”

To successfully complete the Adaptive Grand Slam, Martin will have to complete a combined climb of almost 27 miles, as well as a 730-mile trek to the South Pole.

Martin, who took part in the Walking With the Wounded expedition to the North Pole with Prince Harry, knows courage will need to be matched by intense training and meticulous planning. The team will also need patience and commitment as climbs are often thwarted by extreme weather.

“This is a long-term commitment and we’ve already had to turn back on Everest and Aconcagua because of the weather,” added Martin. “You have to suck up the frustration and try again. Each step we take will help others cope with their injuries and disabilities. Inspiring people to stay independent and live a full life is as big a prize as completing the challenge.”

SUN, SAND AND SOME SERIOUS SLOGGING!

Somei Back (right) and James Yeardley will take on the gruelling Marathon des Sables for Blesma in 2017. Somei, who only ran her first marathon in 2014, decided to fundraise for Blesma after she visited her husband Trevor during Blesma’s Soldier Ride UK in the Summer. There, she met Members and became inspired by their attitude.

The pair are training hard for the six-day, 254km challenge across the Sahara Desert. As part of her preparation, Somei recently ran 10 marathons in 10 days!



POWERFUL START TO 2017 FOR NERYS

AFTER COMPETING AT THE INVICTUS Games this year, Nerys Pearce has been selected to represent the Welsh National Para Powerlifting Squad at two World Cup events. The first will be held in Dubai in February and the second in Hungary in May. The events will give Nerys the chance to qualify for 2018’s Commonwealth Games.

“It’s been an absolutely crazy year,” said Nerys. “The Invictus Games were life changing and opened a lot of doors for me.” Next year will be busy for Nerys as she also plans to swim the Channel in the Summer.

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Blesma study to find the impact on families

Blesma is therefore working with the Veterans & Families Institute (VFI) at Anglia Ruskin University on a research project to gather evidence from Members and their families about their experiences of living with limb loss.

This evidence will not only improve our understanding of the challenges Members face and help us to provide the support they need, but it will also help us influence other charities and statutory bodies that provide health and social care services.

We are now recruiting, and are looking for 15 families to participate in the project. We would love to hear from you if your limb loss is attributable to your military service but is NOT associated with Operations Telic or Herrick; if your limb loss occurred during service but NOT as a result of a combat injury; or if your limb loss occurred after transition out of the military.

If you are interested in being part of this project, we will invite you to identify four members of your family who would be willing to be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes each. Interviews will be held before March 2017, either at your home or a venue of your choosing. Blesma will meet travel and overnight accommodation costs.

If you are interested in being part of this project, please contact the senior researcher in charge of the study, Dr Hilary Engward, on 07787 226525 (please leave a message) or send an email to hilary.engward@anglia.ac.uk



Blesma focuses on meeting the needs of its Members, but we know from our work that living with limb loss affects Members' families, too.

You may be surprised to learn that, in the UK, there is no research into the impact on the families of veterans living with limb

loss. However, we know from research conducted in other countries, that the active participation of families in the recovery process of veterans dealing with a range of injuries or health conditions leads to very real improvements in their lives and the lives of their families.

VETERAN COMPLETES GRUELLING MUD RUN WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM FRIENDS

Andy Bracey took part in a Nuclear Races taster day in October to show fellow paraplegics just how much is achievable despite their injuries. Andy was helped around the course by a team made of friends, family, and serving soldiers. As well as getting over a range of obstacles, Andy crawled through mud and swam through several parts of the course during the day.

"It was a real challenge and very tiring! Swimming was the hardest bit because I can't swim without a life jacket," said Andy, who served in the Royal Artillery for 17 years, completing tours of Northern Ireland and Iraq. He was forced to use a wheelchair after a motorcycle accident in 2005.

Despite his injuries, Andy hasn't shied away from a challenge. This Summer, he won two silver and two bronze medals at the Invictus Games, and took to the stage at the Brentwood Festival to tell thousands of people about how Blesma have supported him. "I wanted to show my appreciation to Blesma and give back to a charity that has helped me so much," he said.

Andy will take part in the event again next May. If you would like to be part of his support team please contact Jess at Chadwell Heath on 020 8548 3514



A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXEC



BLESMA'S CHIEF EXECUTIVE BARRY Le Grys has recorded his second annual video message in which he looks back at some of the year's successes. Blesma Week, Soldier Ride, and the Community Programme were among the key events.

"Next year will see more investment in helping people in their communities," Barry said. "Meanwhile, the more engaged our Members are the more we can adjust and cater for them. Dialogue is really important, so let's all keep talking!"

Watch the video at www.blesma.org

In the spotlight

Allan Jackson



Sergeant Allan Jackson served in The Parachute Regiment from 1999 until 2015. In February 2011 he stood on an IED in Afghanistan whilst trying to recover a dead comrade. His right leg had to be amputated through the knee. Allan led this year's Remembrance Day parade at the Cenotaph for Blesma.

As anyone who has taken part in the Remembrance Day parade knows, the sheer scale of the event can take you by surprise if it's your first time. "You can't tell from watching it on television just how amazing it really is," said Allan after leading Blesma's contingent on this year's parade. "The crowds were 10 deep in places. We all met up at Horseguards, then went on to Whitehall where members of the Royal Family laid wreaths. I was right at the front of the Blesma group, and spent a lot of time chatting to Jim Chittenden, a Blesma Member and WWII Para. The whole day was very interesting, and very poignant."

PRIVATE MOMENTS IN THE PUBLIC'S GAZE

Everyone remembers different comrades on the day. For Allan, it was Colin 'Tom' Beckett who he thought of during the quieter moments. "When I was hit by the IED, I was recovering Tom's body," Allan said, "so I always think of him. He was my Company Sergeant Major. He had triggered an IED and died, and I was woken in the early hours of the morning to recover him. I triggered a secondary device."

Allan considers himself lucky though. "I was fortunate for a number of reasons," he said. "Firstly, because I survived. I stood on 9kg of explosives but was lucky that only 5kg went off! Much more damage could have been done. I was also very lucky that a helicopter was already running in Bastion, so I was on the operating table within eight minutes of the blast!"

It was still touch and go though: Allan had lost his right foot, 60 per cent of his right forearm, and 20 per cent of his left calf, as well as a huge amount of blood. "The surgeon who operated on me says that I bled out after three minutes," he said. "I died twice on the table. They filled me with blood again and resuscitated me. Both my lungs collapsed at the end of five hours of surgery. It was sketchy for a while!"

But after managing to initially pull through, Allan's positivity continued into his rehabilitation. "I think

the circumstances of how my injuries happened – trying to help somebody else – helped me mentally," he said. "I'd also seen myself lose the foot, so it wasn't a shock when I woke up. At Headley Court, I made progress quickly, too. I was walking nine weeks after the injury, much to the annoyance of the medical staff who wanted me to go at a slower pace! But I'm sure that all assisted me as I bounced back."

FROM SIERRA LEONE TO THE CENOTAPH

Allan later had his leg amputated through the knee, but stayed in the Paras, heading up their recruiting team until 2015. Since leaving he's spent time with his children; Olivia, eight, and Francis, one, and recently started working as an off-road driving instructor for the Land Rover Experience at Rockingham Castle.

He reflects happily on his life as a Para. "I enjoyed it so much, right from the start," he says. "My first deployment was to Sierra Leone, rescuing Royal Irish hostages who'd been captured by the militia. We were supporting the SAS. As a young lad, working with the Special Forces, getting ready to launch an attack on a rebel camp... I never thought I'd do anything like that."

"The Paras have a great spirit. If you want something shooting up or blowing up, you call them! And we moved to becoming more of a Special Forces support group around 2005."

Allan did several tours of Iraq and Afghanistan. "Iraq was chaotic and the country changed so much. At first, in 2001, we got to know many locals, it was very friendly. I rode around the villages on a quad bike, but four years later you could only move around the town in a tank."

"And we achieved a lot in Afghanistan – helping communities that had been terrorised, opening schools... General Petraeus wrote our unit a letter afterwards, thanking us for our work. We were in places that a lot of other companies were reluctant to go into, rooting out the Taliban."

Allan and his Blesma compatriots were also thanked for their service by the crowds on Remembrance Day. "It was great to feel that support from the public for the work the Armed Forces have done," he added. "To be able to salute the Cenotaph and the Queen on the day was very special."

“

I BLEED OUT AFTER THREE MINUTES, AND I DIED TWICE ON THE TABLE. MY LUNGS COLLAPSED AFTER FIVE HOURS OF SURGERY. IT WAS SKETCHY!

”

Members making waves

Preparing to take on the world's oceans (p48)



Allan talks to fellow Para, and 92-year-old Blesma Member, Jim Chittenden



Photography: Simon Hildrew

The new Veterans Trauma Network was given the go-ahead in November



the veterans to them,” said Mr Hettiaratchy, who is the clinical lead on the Veterans Trauma Network. “The plan is to make that connection – and as simply as possible.

“It is important to connect personnel who have been injured in Iraq and Afghanistan to doctors, nurses and therapists who can treat them appropriately, give them the right answers immediately, and not bounce them around the system. Establishing this has been a team effort and I’ve had great support from Blesma and its Members.”

The service only applies to NHS England, and allows veterans to access the centres through a GP referral. Normal cross border

“WE HAVE THE RIGHT EXPERTS WITHIN THE NHS BUT THE CHALLENGE HAS BEEN GETTING THE VETERANS TO THEM”



health travel policies apply therefore, and those who feel they may need access to the trauma specialists in England should discuss this with their GP. It is important to stress that this is not an establishment of something new, but a way to ensure a current network is available to veterans who need it following traumatic injury – particularly those injured on operations.

“Many veterans experience a disconnect with their treatment once they have been discharged from military service,” said Brian Chenier, Blesma’s Prosthetics Support Officer. “The civilian pathway is not used to dealing with them and therefore they can suffer delays, appointments with the wrong experts, and misunderstandings over the medical needs that come from complex injuries that require multiple operations. This can lead to sub-standard treatment, pain and suffering for veterans.

“We have been campaigning for this sort of scheme because it will improve the treatment of veterans, it will spare them pain and inconvenience and, in the long run, it will save the NHS money.”

The service is based on clinical need and does not result in any extra costs for the NHS. Neither does it give a veteran priority treatment. The 10 centres are in Plymouth, Oxford, Birmingham, Nottingham, Leeds, Middlesbrough and Liverpool, while there are also three in London.

Veterans to benefit from Trauma Network

Wounded veterans in England are to benefit from improved medical treatments for their complex injuries thanks to campaigning by Blesma.

The Veterans Trauma Network was officially given the go-ahead to improve continuing treatment for discharged military personnel in November. It will provide access to a network of 10 NHS Veterans Trauma Centres where teams of NHS and military trauma experts can provide targeted clinical plans to patients.

Veterans often have complex injuries

sustained in blasts from IEDs which require multiple operations and expert care after they have left Service, but many report fragmented delivery and delays. The new Network, championed by NHS consultant and Army Reservist Shehan Hettiaratchy at St Mary’s Hospital in London, will help hundreds of veterans such as Blesma Member and former Royal Engineer Matt Weston, who has had 50 operations since he was injured in a bomb blast in 2009.

“We have the right experts within the NHS but the challenge has been getting



Gaz Golightly (second from right) with his new trailer

Trailer is slam dunk for Blesma's baller

Friends of basketball playing Blesma Member Gaz Golightly have raised funds so his family can cheer him on. Gaz, who returned from this Summer's Invictus Games with a silver medal, plays for the Newcastle Eagles Wheelchair Basketball team, and also competes in hand cycling and archery competitions.

His friends raised £700 for him before the Invicta Foundation donated £1,400. The money was used to buy a trailer for Gaz's equipment so his family could fit in the car and travel with him to matches.

"It's made a huge difference," said Gaz. "I was putting the car's back seats down to get all my equipment in, which meant the kids and Dee couldn't join me. Now, they run on with my water bottle during games."

In 2002, Gaz was serving in the Royal Logistic Corps when he was involved in a road traffic accident. As a result, his right leg was amputated and he suffered severe nerve damage to his left leg.

"Having my family with me during matches and competitions gives me such a boost of confidence. I really appreciate all the help and support I have been given – I just hope that I can now compete to the best of my ability," said Gaz.

Gaz's wife, Dee, is also grateful for the support. "The trailer has really helped me as I used to worry when Gaz went away. It's given us more time as a family!"

Gaz is now turning his attention to selection for the 2017 Invictus Games and the Tokyo Paralympics in 2020.

NEWS BRIEFS

TRI, TRI AND TRI AGAIN!

Former Paratrooper Stephen Kinsella was inspired to take on three gruelling triathlons this year after watching the film *Kajaki*. The film recounts the true story of one fateful day in Afghanistan for 3 Para when Blesma Members Stuart Pearson, Stuart Hale and Andy Barlow were severely injured. A fellow paratrooper, Mark Wright, sadly died from his injuries. When Stephen (below) learned of the events of that day he set out to raise £1,000 for Blesma by competing in the Cannes, Liverpool and Antibes triathlons.



"I met Mark's mum at a friend's wedding and she talked proudly about her son and his plans. I found it humbling to watch the film and so sad that Mark never made it home," said Stephen. "Many of these men and women, as we know, never made it back and many more continue to battle with the remaining fallout of those situations, either physically or psychologically, every day of their lives. I decided to do this in memory of Mark and his buddies from that fateful day."

BLESMA TOP OF THE CLASS AT ARIZONA COWBOY COLLEGE

In November, six Blesma Members got the opportunity to learn how to be genuine cowboys in America's Wild West.

The Members travelled to the Arizona Cowboy College in America, where they learned how to ride horses and herd cattle. They were also taught essential cowboy skills such as roping and team penning.

"It was a fantastic experience. I've never been confident around horses but we got to learn all about them, which helped. Thanks Blesma!" said Andrew Stockton.

It was Michael Clough's first activity with Blesma. "I'm a relatively new amputee so I was nervous at first, but it was brilliant," he said. "It gave me such a confidence boost as an amputee that I've just joined Manchester City's amputee football team!"

GET ACTIVE WITH BLESMA IN 2017

BLESMA'S ACTIVITIES PROGRAMME for 2017 is bigger and better than ever!

The activities on offer cater for every level and ability, from beginner to serious adventurer. There's something on offer for every age group and all interests too, so if you think Blesma's activities are just for adrenaline junkies, think again.

Artistic pursuits such as painting and photography are becoming increasingly popular. We've listened to the feedback from this year's Activities Survey too, and as a result have included more family-friendly activities.



And remember, whatever the event on offer, Members help each other, work together

and share experiences – you don't have to be an expert to enjoy yourself!

All the activities are free, Members just need to pay for their transport to and from the meeting point. Blesma will often also pay for accommodation the night before to allow you to travel at your own pace.

The 2017 Activities Brochure is in this issue. Apply now using the application form, by calling Emily on 020 8548 7094, or by emailing her at mea@blesma.org

THIS IS A FACT-FINDING MISSION, BUT SHORT TERM WE ARE IMPROVING LIVES ALREADY

A thorough study will monitor injured veterans for 20 years to improve treatment for future generations. But it is already making a difference to people's lives...

The ADVANCE Study, established earlier this year, is a world-first piece of medical research that aims to help Armed Forces personnel who were injured in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014. Involving 600 injured Service men, and a control group of 600 non-injured Service personnel of similar ages, ranks and operational experience, it aims to achieve improved long-term medical and social care, and a sustained transition into civilian life for battlefield casualties.

"We are looking at the similarities and the differences between these groups, with the goal of identifying areas that can help improve people's recoveries and ensure future generations of injured Service personnel get the best treatment," explains Simon Harmer, a healthcare, recruitment and marketing assistant working on the study. Simon served as a medical technician and lost both legs in an IED strike in Afghanistan in 2009.

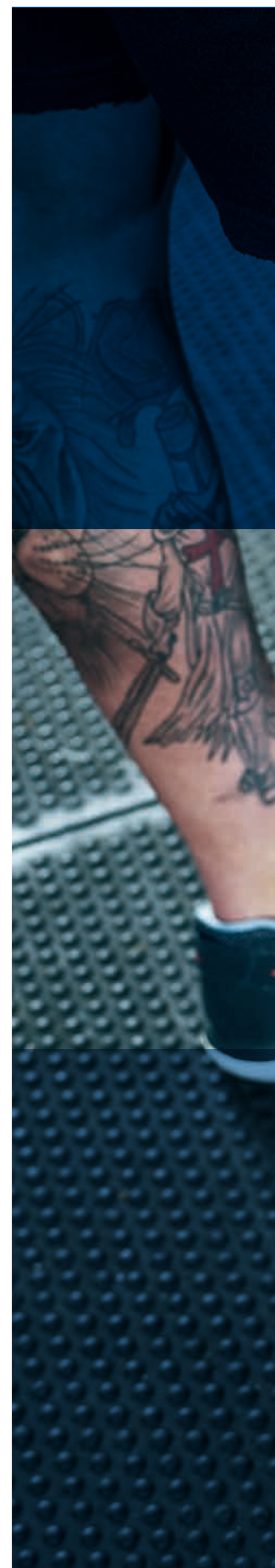
"This is a fact-finding mission. We are measuring all manner of things. We take blood, test cholesterol,

perform a hearing test and a walk test. We also carry out a DEXA scan, which looks at body composition – bone density, body fat index and muscle composition. We look at lung function and there's a questionnaire to fill in, too, so we touch on elements of mental health. For amputees, we also look at how they are getting on with their prosthetics."

THE START OF A 20-YEAR STUDY

The long-term project will test volunteers now as well as in three, five, 10, 15 and 20 years' time, but the study is already playing a positive role, changing outcomes and helping individuals. "Long term, we want to work solutions into people's recoveries, but short term we are already improving their lives," says Simon.

Commissioned by the Ministry of Defence, and part-funded by Help for Heroes and the Libor Fund, the study's founders eventually want to identify major trends: high-level evidence of Service men's long-term cardiovascular, musculoskeletal and other physical,





mental health, and psychosocial related issues. The study was born out of the recognition that injured soldiers' stories don't end when they leave hospital or Headley Court: there are on-going challenges in various spheres of life. While the long-term health of veterans from conflicts like Vietnam and WWII have been widely reported, current military casualties tend to have more severe injuries than from previous campaigns. As a result, it is harder to gauge how injury will affect veterans' lives in the long term.

"We hope there will be lots of positive outcomes and not just one specific thing," says Simon. "If we pinpoint something now that needs medical attention, then the individual is notified right away. If they're still

servicing, this information goes back to their medical officer, and if not, we feed it back to the NHS. Hopefully, it will help a lot of people receive better treatment."

“

WE WANT TO IDENTIFY AREAS THAT CAN HELP IMPROVE RECOVERY AND ENSURE INJURED SERVICE PERSONNEL GET THE VERY BEST TREATMENT

”

Blesma Members are, and will continue to be, involved but it's not quite as simple as just volunteering – the 'study group' (injured men aged between 18 and 50 at the time of injury, with battlefield trauma suffered on deployment with aero-medical evacuation and direct UK hospital admission) must match the control group – those Service men who were deployed in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014 who were not injured.

"We are happy for people to volunteer to see if they fit

the criteria, but unfortunately it can't be guaranteed," says Simon, who joined the study in May and is a natural choice to work on the programme. He served as a medical technician in the Royal Army Medical Corps, and was on patrol attached to the Coldstream Guards, around 40km south of Camp Bastion, when he was injured.

"It was early in the morning and we were heading out on a three-to-four day operation," he remembers. "I triggered an IED around 150 metres outside the base. It took my right leg off straight away and the left one had to be amputated later."

He has since become a medical trainer, equipping individuals with life-saving medical skills and training that allows them to operate in hostile or remote areas. Simon is also actively involved with Blesma.

For more on the ADVANCE Study, call 01372 384467, email study.team@advancestudymrc.org.uk or visit www.advancestudymrc.org.uk. Testing takes a day and all information given is kept confidential. Volunteers can withdraw at any time. Participation will not interfere with the standard of care you receive elsewhere.

↘ BLESMA BRIEFING

Coping with grief after limb loss

Brian Chenier, BSO (Prosthetics), offers the latest on prosthetics. This issue; help is out there for anyone trying to come to terms with the grief of losing their mobility



Grief is the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. It is a natural response to loss, and the more significant the loss, the more intense the grief will be. You may associate grief with the death of a loved one, which is often the cause of the most intense type of grief, but any loss – including limb loss – can cause grief.

It is important to understand that losing a limb or limbs, or your mobility and independence, can cause grief. Most people accept that grief following the death of a loved one is natural and that there is a ‘grieving process’; sometimes referred to as the five stages of grief. People will mourn a loss in their own way, but it is generally accepted that the following feelings and emotional responses will occur:

- DENIAL:** “This can’t be happening to me.”
- ANGER:** “Why is this happening? Who is to blame?”
- BARGAINING:** “Make this not happen, and in return I will...”
- DEPRESSION:** “I’m too sad to do anything.”
- ACCEPTANCE:** “I’m at peace with what happened.”

If you have suffered loss and have experienced, or are experiencing, any of the above feelings, it may help to know that this is perfectly natural and that you will heal in time. Not everyone will go through all of these emotions and there is no hard and fast rule that says you must experience all of them (or in a certain order) to heal. Being able to see this process written down can be helpful in coming to terms with your loss. It may also be helpful to understand that your loss can impact on those around you as they experience their own sense of grief for your loss.

Exposure to others who have gone through similar experiences can help. Seeing what is possible and how others cope can be beneficial in framing your own thoughts and feelings while helping you to set your own recovery goals. Blesma can help with this through peer support, giving you access to activities or events, visits from your BSO or a welfare volunteer, and by helping you access other services or organisations. The Association can help and support those around you, too. We can put you and your family members in touch with organisations like The Ripple Pond, who offer a peer-led self-help group.



Any loss – including limb loss – can cause grief

If you are feeling stuck or overwhelmed by grief, or feel that you may need some help in dealing with any emotional issues, you can speak to your BSO or myself. Help may also be available at your Limb Centre or you may wish to contact the counselling services below.

BLESMA MEMBERS AGED 65 OR OVER

You can contact your local Blesma Support Officer and ask him to apply on your behalf. You can also go online at www.agedveteranscounselling.org.uk to complete an application form, or call 0300 0120 247 and your application can be taken over the phone. Finally, an application form can be posted to you. This service is funded by a grant from the MoD’s Aged Veterans Fund.

MEMBERS UNDER 65 AND BLESMA WIDOWS

You can contact your local Blesma Support Officer and ask him to apply on your behalf, or call 0300 0120 369 and your application can be taken over the phone. If you prefer, an application form can be posted to you. This service is funded by Blesma. If you would like to learn more, please speak to your local BSO or call Liz in Membership Services on 020 8548 3516.

For more information on any of the above issues, visit the Blesma website (www.blesma.org) or contact Brian at Chadwell Heath on 020 8548 7080 or at bsoprosthetics@blesma.org

“
YOU MAY ASSOCIATE GRIEF WITH THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE BUT ANY LOSS, INCLUDING LIMB LOSS, CAN CAUSE GRIEF
 ”



RECORD-BREAKING SKYDIVE SET FOR 2017

TEAM BLESMA WILL BE REACHING for the skies again in 2017 in honour of those who have fallen for us.

Next year will be the Association's biggest Fall for the Fallen event to date, as an anticipated 500 budding jumpers will head to GoSkydive in Salisbury on 12 and 13 August to raise an estimated £100,000 for Blesma.

"It is so exciting to be working to make 2017 a record breaking year for Blesma," said Trans4mers Instructor and creator of Fall for the Fallen, Dave Pacey. "We have managed to attract big numbers in the past but nothing comes close to our target for this year."



Vicky Parrett took part in last year's event

Achieving this incredible feat won't be possible without the support of Blesma's buddies, so tell your friends, family, neighbours, teachers, boss, co-workers, and even the guy who delivers your groceries about Fall for the Fallen!

Family and friends can come and watch, and there'll be something for everyone with food, bouncy castles and games on the day.

Registration is £50 with a pledge to raise £400. To book your place call 020 8548 7089 or email fundraising@blesma.org

AXIS

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Experience the latest news, tips, tricks, events and activities with inspirational people within the disabled and adaptive sports community.

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

Move More



A great year for Blesma corporate relationships

The Association acknowledges the generosity, hard work, and support of companies across the country

This year has been a fantastic one for Blesma, not least in terms of creating and nurturing some new corporate relationships. Corporate engagement is reaching new heights as the Association strengthens its on-going partnerships and strikes up new ones. The range of corporate involvement has varied from one-off events to Charity of the Year and fundraising activities, which included everything from baking for Blesma to jumping out of planes.

Corporate supporters have played a vital role in Blesma's fundraising success this year, and the Association would like to say a huge thank you to all the companies that have supported Blesma as their chosen Charity of the Year, and as Blesma Week and Grand Prize Draw sponsors. Here are just a few of the highlights from 2016...

OTTOBOCK

Corporate support for Blesma Week 2016 was bigger and better than ever, enabling the Association to raise almost £80,000 for Members. Ottobock put on a week of fundraising events, with all their employees participating. Activities included 'guess the number of Blesma balloons in the car' and a Baking for Blesma competition, with prizes for the best prosthetic-shaped cake. In addition, Ottobock sponsored Blesma's abseil of the Spinnaker Tower earlier in the year, and the Association is grateful to have been their chosen Charity of the Year.

CENTRO PLC

Grand Prize Draw and Blesma Week sponsors Centro PLC have supported Blesma for the past two years. Managing Director Ray Harwood also supports the Association with sales from his Sardana series of books. Centro PLC have pledged their continued support in 2017 and Blesma looks forward to continuing the partnership.

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

The partnership with TfL has blossomed. Thanks to the support of Robert Varney, Customer & Services Strategy Manager, the Association raised more than £16,000 during Blesma Week at some of London's busiest underground stations. A further £8,000 has been raised since and similar



A fundraising and awareness raising day at Aquila HQ

successes are planned for 2017. By giving Blesma this opportunity, TfL has not only helped raise much-needed funds, but it has also provided an amazing chance to engage with the public and raise awareness.

HSBC

An intrepid team of 16 HSBC employees conquered the National 3 Peaks Challenge in 24 hours, raising more than £13,000. More joint ventures with HSBC are planned for 2017. "We were incredibly fortunate to be joined by Blesma Member Kirk Bowett," said Global Head of Academies and HSBC 3 Peaks team leader Nick Crussell. "It was an amazing weekend that provided stories and friendships that will last long after this challenge. Our team comprised of a number of ex-Service personnel, so Blesma is very close to our hearts and it was a pleasure to raise money for such an amazing charity."

THANK YOU!

Once again, Blesma would like to say a huge thank you to all corporate partners for their hard work, enthusiasm, and generosity in 2016. Here's to them and to a wonderful 2017!

WEST HAM UNITED

Blesma is delighted to be one of West Ham United's charity partners for the 2016/17 season. The last match day collection raised more than £600, and the Association's next awareness raising day will take place at the Olympic Stadium on 08 April.

AGILITY LOGISTICS

Agility Logistics have hosted an annual golf day for Blesma since 2013, and have raised more than £23,000 for Blesma to date. "This year, we were honoured to invite two Members as well as current and ex-Service personnel from 29 Regiment Royal Logistic Corps," said Simon Kirby Director of Agility GRMS. Vital funds were raised for Blesma on a fantastic day organised by Mick Cornish.

AQUILA ATMS

Aquila ATMS supported Blesma this year with employees doing an amazing job of fundraising. Staff cycled around their UK sites and jumped out of planes for the Association, raising more than £4,000 in the process.

CARILLION

Carillion's busking, car washes, sponsored walks and more helped to raise more than £4,000 for the Association this year.

Racing as rehabilitation

Meet the Member motivated by motorsport (p24)



Agility golfers, featuring golf day organiser Mick Cornish (front row, centre)



Blesma Members Greig Phillips (above left) and Mike Browne at the Agility golf day



A big thank you to Niche Communications for being Gold Sponsors of Blesma Week 2016



HSBC National 3 Peaks Team with Blesma Member Kirk Bowett



Ottobock and Blesma raised funds at the Association's abseil of the Spinnaker Tower event earlier this year

OBITUARIES

Those we have lost



The Duke of Westminster (far right) photographed at the Blesma AGM, 2015

Gerald Grosvenor, 6th Duke of Westminster

22 December 1951 - 09 August 2016

THE DUKE OF WESTMINSTER AND HIS family have been associated with Blesma for many years. He became the Association's National President in the summer of 1992 after having been patron of the Chester Branch. Since then, he regularly attended Blesma AGMs; his first as President was in 1993 and his last was in 2015 when he unveiled a sculpture of Private Alex Stringer by the renowned sculptor Frances Segelman (above).

The Duke of Westminster was the richest person born in Britain. Aside from owning 330 acres of central London, his inheritance included 19,500 acres in Lancashire and 13,000 acres in Cheshire, the 11,000-acre Reay Forest in Sutherland, Annacis Island in Vancouver, as well as land in Melbourne,

Australia, 17 acres of California's Silicon Valley and office blocks in Singapore.

The duke was the biggest property developer in London, yet he would far prefered to have been the Ulster beef farmer to which, by upbringing and temperament, he was suited. "I'd rather not have been born wealthy," he once said, while his advice to young entrepreneurs was simple: "Have an ancestor who was good friends with William the Conqueror."

That Gerald Grosvenor would succeed was not certain when he was born in Omagh, Northern Ireland, in 1951. As a result of his father's farming interests and his dutiful involvement in Ulster politics – he was the Unionist MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone from 1955 to 1964 – the family

lived on the only inhabited island of the 365 in Lough Erne. A visit to the sweet shop involved a round trip of 14 miles.

"My childhood was the nearest thing to *Swallows and Amazons* one could possibly imagine," reflected the duke. "There wasn't one unhappy moment. I thought I'd spend the rest of my life there but then, at the age of 15, I realised that everything was about to change." The first he knew of what was coming was when a reporter approached him at school to ask what he thought of being the next Duke of Westminster.

Gerald Grosvenor was first sent to a boarding school in Enniskillen, where he was one of five boys among 450 pupils. He progressed to Harrow, which he loathed. His sense of isolation was compounded by the death of his uncle, the 4th Duke, in 1967. Aware that the new Earl Grosvenor was now heir to the fortune, his classmates at school ostracised him. He left Harrow with O levels only in history and

English. He was a skilful footballer though, and England's World Cup-winning defender George Cohen recommended he have a trial at his former club, Fulham. This was vetoed by Grosvenor's father who disliked "all that kissing" that players went in for.

Yet Gerald largely resisted the other temptations open to rich, footloose youngsters, though he became a chain smoker. "The worst thing I did was crash cars," he told the writer Hunter Davies in 1992. "I had an appalling series of high-speed crashes. I hit a brick wall at 90 in a Fiat 125 which fell apart like a pack of cards.

"My father said if I was going to crash cars, I had to get a bloody car that would stand up. I got a Triumph, and proceeded to drive that into a bridge in Rutland. It fell apart like a piece of cake!"

After leaving school, he travelled in the Middle East. In Iran, he found a rug he liked and telegraphed his father: "Found exquisite carpet, send money." Back came the reply: "Wrap carpet around head, have both examined."

In 1978, aged 26, he married Natalia Phillips, then 19 and whom he had known since she was seven. They went on to have three daughters and a son. He succeeded his father in 1979 and found himself engaged in a real-life game of Monopoly. In the 1990s he expanded into Asia and Europe, and later into North America. A combination of diligence, good judgment, sound advice and, above all, a booming real estate market vastly increased the value of the family's assets.

Aside from the indulgence of a private aircraft, which allowed him to commute in half an hour from Cheshire to London, he had thrifty habits. "I always pay cash and try to get a good discount," he revealed. "I hate lights being left on."

He was affable and yet could be distant, paternalistic but demanding of staff. Those few who were allowed to know the duke well, however, spoke of a larky spirit that was rarely unleashed in public.

He often said that he was a countryman and did not enjoy urban life. "I like simple meals," he continued, "an omelette, a salad, a baked potato. I've never understood all that nouvelle cuisine." In the evenings, he liked to watch old comedies on UK Gold, and then tuck up with "a historic heavyweight". He also liked thrillers – "fun, blunder and a healthy dose of sex". In 1998, as well as all his professional commitments, the duke had

more than 500 public engagements a year; he was the patron of some 150 charities. He found much satisfaction serving in the Territorial Army, where he succeeded largely on his own merits. He joined as a trooper in 1970, was commissioned in The Queen's Own Yeomanry, and in the course of 40 years as a Reservist rose to command it, the North Irish Horse and the Cheshire Yeomanry Squadron.

"In the TA, I started as an equal, with no advantages. I've done it all on my own. That's why it matters so much. I get told what to do, so it's kept my feet on the ground. I also meet people I wouldn't otherwise meet — my squadron were all Scousers and my regiment were from the mining areas... they saw me tucking into a fried egg butty and didn't understand."

In 2004, he became the first Territorial since WWII to be promoted to major-general. He was also appointed Assistant Chief of Defence Staff (Reserves and Cadets), heading up the nation's 40,000 Reservists and 138,000 cadets. His three years in charge coincided with an unprecedented level of deployment of its personnel, with some 15,000 seeing active service in Iraq (which he visited 14 times), Afghanistan (10 trips, often at weekends), Sierra Leone and the Balkans. He never allowed these expenses to be paid by the taxpayer. He persuaded Iain Duncan Smith to speedily

reverse a policy that deprived Territorials sent abroad of the jobseekers' allowance. He also reprimanded bosses who were reluctant to give positions to those liable to be called up for active service.

The duke was also the driving force behind the new Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre near Loughborough, which will soon replace Headley Court in Surrey. He made a founding gift to the project of £50 million and bought the site. At the start of 2007, he announced he was retiring from both the Territorial Army and the chairmanship of the Grosvenor Group.

The Duke of Westminster was deeply interested in rural affairs. He was a founder board member of the Countryside Movement, which he helped set up with an unsecured loan of more than £1 million, and for some years he occupied a similar position with the Countryside Alliance. During the foot-and-mouth crisis of 2001, he donated £500,000 to affected farmers to help deal with "the immediate welfare and stress problems".

In 1980, he bought the Lancashire grouse moor of Abbeystead, and it was there that he was taken fatally ill. He had previously survived a bout with cancer.

Gerald Grosvenor, 6th Duke of Westminster, was born on 22 December, 1951. He died on 09 August, 2016, at the age of 64.

Blesma's National President, The Duke of Westminster



OBITUARIES

Those we have lost



Major Alexander John Munro MBE TD

10 September 1916 – 01 September 2016

ALEXANDER JOHN MUNRO WAS known to us all as Alastair because he preferred the Gaelic form of Alexander. He died on 01 September, just nine days short of his 100th birthday.

Alastair was born in New Zealand, where his father was a shepherd in a remote area of the North Island. He nearly died twice as a child; first of diphtheria contracted as a baby and then at the age of three when he caught scarlet fever on a ship to Scotland in 1919.

In 1932, he began work with the Forestry Commission then, hoping to travel, he enlisted in the Royal Artillery by adding a year to his age. In 1937, soon after being posted to India, he was sent to join the Waziristan campaign on the north-west frontier. Then WWII started and, by 1941, he had been promoted to sergeant major/gunnery instructor.

In 1944, he was promoted to captain and trained in jungle warfare before being told to take the regiment's vehicles by road to Burma. He remembered it as a wonderful trip travelling 2,000 miles across India to Calcutta, Assam and on to Nagaland.

In Burma, he was told that he had been promoted to major and was given command of the battery. On 21 March 1945, the day after British troops had liberated Mandalay, whilst clearing Japanese soldiers from nearby villages, he was shot in the arm, suffering a life-threatening injury.

He was flown to nearby Meiktila, patched up and transferred to Bangladesh. From there he was flown to Calcutta through a fierce thunderstorm before being moved to Secunderabad, where he underwent major surgery. He was then moved to another hospital in Poona and then on to Bombay for a hospital ship home, but not before he had

suffered his third bout of dengue fever. Back in Scotland, amputation was advised but before the operation, he agreed to donate to a skin bank and large swathes of skin were taken from his thighs to help a burned child.

His arm was amputated in the Summer of 1946, and on 21 March 1947, exactly two years after being wounded, he was discharged from the Army and declared permanently unfit for military service. Despite that ruling, and the loss of sight in one eye, he joined the TA in 1952 and was awarded the MBE in 1961.

In 1947, he married Molly, one of the nurses who had cared for him at Larbert Base Hospital. In 1952, they moved to Blair Atholl when Alastair started work for the Atholl Estates. He worked for the Estate for more than 30 years before retiring in 1982. In 1966, he gave The Duke of Atholl help and advice over the re-formation of the Atholl Highlanders; the only private Army in UK.

In his 92nd year, after Molly had died, he moved to a small cottage in Bridge of Tilt, selling off his surplus furniture and donating the proceeds to Blesma.

He was a keen gardener but his real joy was target rifle shooting. In 1953, he joined the Small-bore Rifle Club and West Atholl Rifle Club, and was on the committee of the latter for 63 years – 33 of them as chairman. Even with only one arm and one eye, he was a very good shot, and represented Scotland at Bisley. He organised many successful competitions and encouraged many young people to take up shooting.

When the original rifle range at Blair Atholl had to close, he put a huge amount of work into developing and maintaining a new, longer range on the Atholl Estate. It is the longest rifle range in UK and now, mainly thanks to his efforts, it has electronic targets. The construction, development and maintenance of the Jubilee Range was his 'delight' and it forms a fitting legacy to his dedication to the sport and the contribution he made to the local area over his long life.

He was always stoical, modest and self-effacing, and will be sorely missed by his wide circle of friends and admirers. Our condolences go to his son John, and his children and grandchildren.

Composed from information contributed by Alastair's friends and family, and from an obituary written by Alison Shaw and published in The Scotsman on Wednesday 21 September

John Booth

14 March 1918 – 16 September 2016

BLESMA MEMBER JOHN BOOTH, WHO DIED AT the age of 98, was a former soldier from Lancashire who survived having both his legs amputated in a Prisoner of War camp on the notorious Burma Railway.

John, known to many as Jack, was born on 14 March 1918 in Chadderton, Lancashire, and was a driver for the Co-op before he joined the Royal Artillery at the age of 21. He trained in North Wales and Woolwich but his then-girlfriend, Irene, insisted they marry before he was posted overseas. John managed to get a 48-hour pass for the ceremony at St. Gabriel Church in Middleton, Manchester, on 22 February 1941. They had just one night together before John deployed to Singapore.

Ten months later, John was taken prisoner of war, along with many other soldiers, as the Japanese invaded Singapore. He was forced to work 12-hour shifts on the docks in tropical heat, surviving on meagre rations of rice, dead rats and snakes.

John was later shipped with 700 soldiers to work on the railways in Thailand and Burma. He was given a job transporting water up a rock face from the river, but developed tropical ulcers on both legs after suffering insect bites and bamboo scratches that turned septic.

John had both his legs amputated without anaesthetic after being given just five minutes to decide whether to choose amputation or be left to die. Four friends held him down whilst a medic PoW amputated his legs with



a saw. John later said he was relieved after the operation as he had been in such excruciating pain from the ulcers. Most men died after undergoing amputation, but John and an Australian PoW, Billy Hargreaves, were the only two double amputees to survive.

When John returned home, Irene had found a cottage for them to begin married life together and they went on to raise two children. John worked for the Co-op for 30 years, carrying out maintenance jobs, and remained independent, using his prosthetics for 70 years.

John joined Blesma in 1946 and latterly lived at the Blackpool Home for many years where he was loved by residents and staff. He passed away on 16 September.

Fred Tattersall's obituary will run in the Spring 2017 issue.

John Booth, known to many as Jack, was a Blesma Member for 70 years

Others who have passed away

September 2016 – November 2016. May they rest in peace.

Baker K	Cheshire	HQ	Nov 2016
Benfold D	RCS	HQ	Nov 2016
Burston M	Beds & Herts	HQ	Oct 2016
Campbell J W N	UDR	HQ	Nov 2016
Chapman K	RAF	HQ	03/11/2016
Clark W	Dorset	HQ (Chelmsford)	Sep 2016
Gash K	RTR	HQ	05/10/2016
Gingell Mjr-Gen L	RTR	HQ	22/09/2016
Iley J	RAF	HQ (Barnsley, Oxford)	Sep 2016
Irwin B	Royal Signals	HQ	01/10/2016
Knox M	Parachute Regt	HQ	03/09/2016
Rose T	Royal Lincolnshire	HQ	27/11/2016
Rowbottom N	RAF	HQ (Chester)	06/11/2016
Shaw A	Ox & Bucks LI	HQ (Wolverhampton)	01/10/2016
Shaw R	RRF	HQ	19/10/2016
Tattersall F	KOSB	HQ (Blackpool Home, Chester)	20/09/2016
Terry J	Grenadier Guards	HQ (E.Berks)	Oct 2016
Watson J	RN	HQ	17/09/2016
Whitchurch S	RM	Bournemouth	08/10/2016
White P	RAF	HQ	14/11/2016



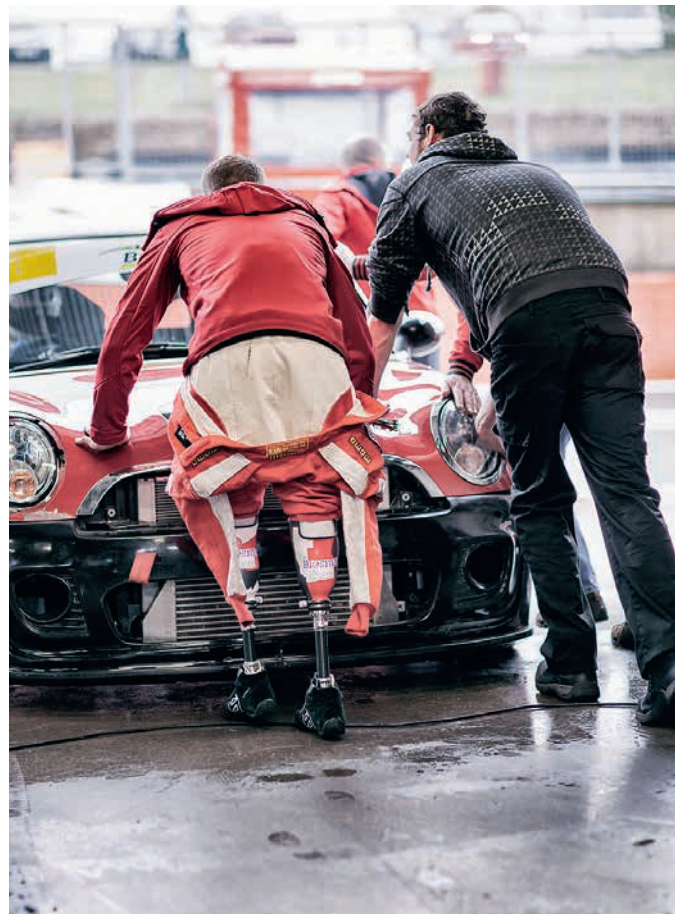
**“THE CLOSER
TO DEATH YOU
ARE, THE MORE
ALIVE YOU FEEL”**

For as long as he can remember, David Birrell wanted to join the Army. Then he was blown up and discovered he had a driving ambition...



Thinking big:
Former Infantryman
David Birrell has
his sights set on
racing at Le Mans





“When I used to go out on patrol, my senses would sharpen. The same happens here, things are amplified and magnified”

I am pretty nervous – this is a bit like how I used to feel before going into battle,” says David Birrell. The 30-year-old former Black Watch Infantryman is in a pit garage at the legendary Brands Hatch racetrack, and it’s a hive of activity. Three mechanics make frantic last-minute tweaks to his turbocharged Mini before the engine roars into life and the room fills with a heady aroma of petrol and oil (as well as the bacon and sausages being fried by the race team’s support staff). Outside, on the circuit, Ferraris, Lamborghinis and Ginettas thunder past in treacherously wet conditions. David is out next.

“When I used to go out on patrol, my senses would sharpen, and the same thing happens here,” he says. “I’m suddenly much more aware of everything. Things are amplified and magnified. You can feel so much around you out there on the track.

And, as with being in a firefight, you need to concentrate for a long period of time.

“This is endurance racing, so you need unbelievable focus for an hour or two at a time. You’re being pushed to your limits, and it’s dangerous. I enjoy it so much. In the Army there are things you can’t control. You can be blown up, like I was. In a car, things can break and put you in danger. But I’ve always said that the closer to death you are, the more alive you feel.”

David has come a long way in the last few years to be at Brands Hatch on a rainy November afternoon. As a member of the Woodard Racing Team, he’s competing in Britcar, an eight-race endurance series that takes place on famous circuits like Brands Hatch, Silverstone and Donington Park. That would be impressive enough, but just six years ago, he was recovering from a devastating bomb blast in Afghanistan that would eventually cost him both legs.

“I was on patrol when my interpreter stood on an IED,” David recalls. “He lost his life. I was in front of him and all I remember is a flash, but no sound. Everything was dark, I was twisting around in the air. I didn’t have a clue what was happening. One minute I was walking, the next I had lost control and was lying on my belly.

“Initially, my left leg looked as though it didn’t have a scratch on it, but my right leg looked badly injured. Then, as I lay there, I came under attack. I was stranded on the other side of a river from the rest of my unit, and was being shot at. Bullets were zipping over my head. I grabbed my helmet and stood up, but my left leg just folded under me. Another soldier got my body armour off. I gave myself a morphine shot and got a tourniquet on to slow the bleeding. Eventually, a medic got over to me and we started extracting. There were bullets ricocheting off the stretcher!



“I wasn’t expecting much, I must admit. Control and feel for a car come through your feet – and David hasn’t got any!”

“In the helicopter, everything looked like a kaleidoscope, and I remember being in Camp Bastion and wanting a cigarette. Then I woke up with my left leg having been amputated and my right leg still a total mess. That was very hard to deal with mentally, it was a very tough time.”

RACING AS REHAB

Motorsport has proved to be David’s saviour. After rehab he began karting, beating able-bodied drivers straight away. “It was my ex-wife who suggested I should give it a go, as I needed something to do. She was looking after me – she was my rock, she saved my life. I was buying fast cars with my compensation from the injuries, but she realised I’d be better off doing real racing.

“At first, I was using hand controls, but that didn’t feel right. It wasn’t me, it felt weird. So I decided to give competing a go using my prosthetic legs. I like pushing

my boundaries, and I started doing well. I entered a Ginetta competition called want2race with 300 able-bodied people, and finished in the top 10. So Ginetta paid for my licence, and I did a race at Knockhill in 2013. I was away! Then I heard through some friends at Britcar that Woodard were looking for a driver and I applied for that. Now I’m reaching for the stars!

“Racing has turned my life around. I was wheelchair-bound for a long time. Surgeons tried to save my right leg with a skin graft, but that failed, and my leg was eventually amputated a year after the initial injury. Then, being discharged from the Army was a big blow. I’d wanted to join up since I was 10, and I did so much in the Infantry. I enjoyed the buzz of contact, and I liked the fact I was protecting my country, my loved ones. So after I left, things were really defeating me. Motorsport has allowed me to set goals – and achieve them – again.”

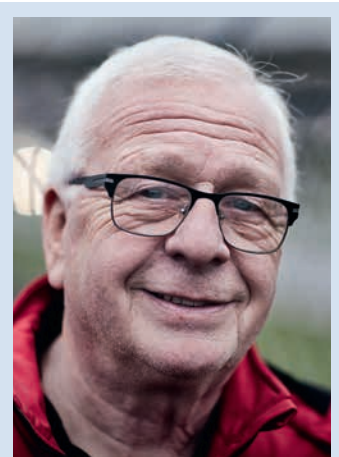
Team owner Peter Woodard didn’t think David would make the grade when he initially heard he was an amputee. “When David was suggested to me as someone who could try out for the team I wasn’t expecting much, I must admit,” he says. “Control and feel for a car usually come through your feet – and David hasn’t got any! But then we saw him drive, and he did very well right away. He’s been very impressive, and he’s in this team on merit.”

David credits his sporting and military backgrounds for his slick driving skills. “I used to be a boxer and I have that military mentality, plus a strong core and good balance. That all helps with driving. You have to stay fit so you don’t get tired in a race. I try to forget about my amputations!

“Physically, I’m using my thighs to change gear, accelerate and brake. I’ve not got the flex of the ankle, but I’m just using different muscles. I don’t think that not



Words: Nick Moore Photographs: Andy Bate



PETER WOODARD
TEAM OWNER

Tell us a bit about Woodard Racing...

As a family we've been involved in racing for 20 years. We go to Le Mans every year, and two years ago, fed up with watching others race and moaning that we could do it better, we decided to put our money where our mouth was and give it a go! We've started with a Mini in Britcar and we're going to modify it heavily for next season. It's a huge learning process.

How did David become part of the team?

The Britcar organisers told us: 'We've got this guy, would you like to give him a go in the car... he hasn't got any legs'. I had to pause because I'd not considered having a disabled driver, and had no concept of what might be involved. My first reaction was negative because I didn't want to put hand controls in the car.

But then you met David...

Yes, he's a great guy and he really threw himself into being part of the team. He gets on great with everyone and he drove well straight away. I thought: 'Blimey'. We've built a great relationship and he's changed my attitude towards people with disability.

Can other Blesma Members get involved?

Yes, we've already spoken to Blesma about that. Lots of the Association's Members have skills that we can use – we're always looking for good mechanics, technicians and electricians. Our message would be; if you're interested, please get in touch!





DANIEL WOODARD
CO-DRIVER

What appeals to you most about endurance racing?

The fact that it's not just down to one person, it's very much a team effort. David and I can be great in the car, but if everyone else gets it wrong, we won't get anywhere. And vice versa. It's not just about being as fast as we can individually. David and I have to think about preserving the car for each other, too.

You've got lots of motorsport experience. How good do you think David is?

He's got bundles to learn, but he's doing very well. David has already mightily impressed us with his racing ability. He needs to learn more restraint – how and when to reign himself in a little bit in order to be quicker over a long race. In endurance racing you can't always just rag the car! But there's no reason why he can't go all the way and achieve everything he wants to.

What does the road map to Le Mans look like?

Taking part in the 24 Hour Series next year will be a big step for all of us! For that, we will need four drivers. Then, the plan is to progress to racing prototype cars – basically F1 cars with a roof on. Then it will be British GTs, then the European Le Mans series. Each time we move up to the next class, we will need to learn about the car and the style of racing. It's a bit like being promoted in football. It will get harder and more expensive, but we have a good team spirit and believe we can do it.



having legs makes any difference: driving is about the line, and adding and taking away power from the engine – that finesse. There's no reason why I can't progress. I'd love to be a world champion one day."

IT'S A MARATHON NOT A SPRINT

The 2016 season has been a steep learning curve for David and Woodard Racing. Next year, they are aiming to improve their car significantly and take part in the National 24-Hour Series – six 12- and 24-hour races overseas – as well as Britcar. David will be funded by Blesma. And after racing around Brands Hatch at this event to conclude his debut season, David explains some of the technicalities he is getting to grips with as the team moves ahead with its mission.

"Endurance racing is very different from sprint racing," he says. "You've got lots of things to think about. You can't go out and give it 100 per cent every lap, you have to conserve your fuel and tyres. Consistency is the key. There's a lot of traffic to deal with on track but you want to stay within two seconds of your best lap time every lap."

So does David have an ultimate goal in mind? "No British amputee has ever raced overseas, so that's my first aim. Part of the job will be to get acclimatised to the heat differences, but I've done that in the Army – it doesn't get much hotter than carrying

60 kilos through the desert wearing body armour whilst being shot at. So I should be able to cope!" he says.

"I'm doing this, and have turned my life around, mainly for my family, for my three kids. I didn't want to show them that I could be defeated. Crap happens to you, but you can continue with your life. I wanted to prove to them that you can achieve anything you put your mind to."

GT racing, prototypes, the European Le Mans Series and then the big one, the Le Mans 24 Hour, are his targets. Each step will be harder and more expensive to achieve than the last, and will represent a significant challenge for David and the team. But don't tell him it can't be done!

"Imagine being a soldier who has gone from being badly injured and thinking his life had ended to having the chance to be a world champion. There wouldn't be anything better than that, would there? I think about racing every day. It gives me my motivation. I live for it, I obsess about it. It's exciting, and motorsport has given me so much support. Hopefully, one day, I can write a book about it all."

David's already written the first few chapters of a very interesting life!

For more on David, his racing and his story, visit www.davidbirrellracing.co.uk

LIMBLESS VETERANS IN PICTURES
1856 - 2016

FOR QUEEN & COUNTRY

Blesma Members have posed for a new book by world-famous fashion photographer Rankin. So what was it like to say 'Cheese' for Queen and country?

I feel very sorry for anyone who buys this book," chuckles the fantastically-bearded Cayle Royce, the cover star of *For Queen & Country*. "I had no idea I'd be on the front, so apologies to anyone who gets it and has to look at my grid staring back at them!"

Cayle, a genial South African double amputee who has successfully rowed across the Atlantic Ocean twice as part of Row2Recovery, is having fun at the launch of the latest collection of photographs taken by legendary fashion photographer Rankin (right).



OK, so Cayle's not quite Kate Moss or Helena Christensen, who are among the photographer's other muses, but *For Queen & Country* is striking for its intimate, revealing portraits of injured Service men and women, a number of whom, like Cayle, are Blesma Members. This powerful book has been produced by Coming Home, the fundraising campaign for Haig Housing Trust, which provides specially adapted housing for injured Service personnel who are discharged from the Armed Forces.

Rankin (whose full name is John Rankin Waddell) made a name for himself by launching fashion magazine *Dazed & Confused* in 1992, and is one of the most in-demand photographers on the planet. But despite his packed diary photographing the likes of HM The Queen and Tony Blair, few projects have touched him as much as this.

"It is impossible to even begin to comprehend what these men and women have been through," he says about Cayle and his fellow soldiers, "both in the theatres of war and their extensive recuperation periods. It makes their bravery and zest for life all the more humbling. I made a decision to photograph them against a white background with the focus on their faces. I wanted to strip away the stigma and show the real people."

His vision has been given the thumbs up by the Blesma Members. "I like the way the book, and Haig,

have done something positive with this photography," says Cayle, who was hit by an IED in 2012 while serving with the Brigade Reconnaissance Force in Afghanistan, and spent 48 days in a coma.

"I was very lucky in my recovery in that I always seemed to come across the right people to help me at the right time. But that's not always the case for other people. Some struggle. If by doing this we can raise awareness, then I'm very happy to be involved."

"Rankin's studio was a hive of activity – it was very impressive. We had a good chat, he's engaging, open and professional. The results are really powerful."

Fifty special edition copies (£500) and 450 standard issues (£250) are available to buy with sales going to Coming Home. For more, go to www.coming-home.org.uk/content/rankin-limited-edition-book



CAYLE ROYCE

**Served with the Light Dragoons.
He lost both his legs to an
IED in Afghanistan in 2012**

What's it like being the cover star and the face of the exhibition?

I hadn't really thought about it like that! It's quite weird really. I don't normally like looking at my own picture but these are great. I think Rankin's done a brilliant job of making us look pretty good!

You've grown a pretty impressive beard since we last spoke...

I suffered some bad facial wounds when the IED went off. My body armour hit me in the face, my rifle hit me in the cheek, and I was also hit with a lot of shrapnel. Once my face healed, I grew the beard. It covers the scars. The beard was also helpful when I rowed the Atlantic – there wasn't much time for shaving, and it kept the sun and salt off.

And now you're planning on rowing the Pacific in 2018?

Yes. The Atlantic is 3,000 miles, but the Pacific is 8,500 miles. It's going to take between six and nine months for us to row that. We will be doing two hours on, two hours off for the entire time. It's exciting because this time around we're going to include American and Australian Service men too, in different crews. We were all together in Afghanistan, so we hope it will generate a lot of international media for lots of good causes.

How do you deal mentally with rowing for so long?

In one way you need a good imagination, while in another you need to just be able to wipe your mind. But being at sea is more interesting than training – rowing machines are the most boring things on earth! At sea, you've got so much going on. You're terrified at times, elated at others, you've got every element going, there are whales and dolphins, you're talking to your mates... There are periods of immense boredom, and it's physically hard, but most of all, it's a mental challenge.





ANGUS 'JESSE' JAMES

Served with the First Battalion, Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment. His right leg was amputated in 2014

How did you get involved in the project?

Haig Housing rehoused me. I was initially injured in 1999 when I was run over by a Land Rover, but I only lost my leg in 2014. I'd been in a three-bedroom house, but Haig found me a bungalow, which I now co-own with the charity. They've been great, so when they asked me to take part in the book, I was more than happy: it's a great project!

You're a photographer. How was getting your picture taken by one of the greats?

Amazing! I'm just getting into taking photos, and I have really enjoyed doing Blesma's photography courses, but Rankin is in a whole different league! He has this huge studio and a load of helpers rushing around, setting things up... it was absolutely incredible to experience. He's the big cheese and is usually hanging out

with supermodels, so it's pretty good that he found some time to take pictures of us!

What do you think of the end result?

I think the book is great, there are some really top shots. You could see from how he worked that it was going to be good. He does everything on a big screen as he goes along. I like the fact that I'm smiling in my shot, and the way he lit the picture was very good. I'm really looking forward to showing it to my friends and family.

Did Rankin give you any tips for your own photography?

He was a bit too busy for that – there were a lot of people lined up to be photographed that day! But he was a nice guy and we had a good chat. You can see why he's a top ranking photographer, excuse the pun!



MICHAEL SWAIN

Served with 3 Rifles. He lost both his legs above the knee when on patrol in Afghanistan in 2009

What do you think of your portrait?

It's not bad, is it – but nobody likes having their picture taken, do they? When the opportunity came up to have a photo taken by Rankin though, it was too good to miss. He works with an absolutely massive team, and he's precise, he makes you feel very comfortable. It was a quick process but he's a perfectionist, and that's why he's one of the best there is. He has a great eye, and the book has come together really well. I'm very happy to have been involved with it.

How were you injured?

I was on foot patrol in Afghanistan early one morning, going across an open field, when I stood on an IED. It sent me six feet in the air, I lost both my legs instantly, and got shrapnel wounds in both arms. Luckily, they saved my arms – I thought I might lose one. I was close

to death and lost a lot of blood, but they got me back to Bastion just in time.

You underwent Direct Skeletal Fixation, or osseointegration. How's that working out?

Very well. I have implants through my femur bones. I was the first soldier in the UK to have that done, but since then, another 10 soldiers have had the operation. It's fantastic, and life is good again. I love playing golf, and with my prosthetics I'm fine for 36 holes!

Do you fancy doing a photography course with Blesma now?

Not really. There seems to be a lot of bending over in photography, and I haven't got any knees! I've got two young kids who keep me busy, and I do charity work and some public speaking too, but I am keen to get more involved with Blesma. I need a new hobby, so it's just a case of deciding what I'd like to do.

DEREK DERENALAGI

Served in the Mercian Regiment. He lost both his legs in 2007 in Afghanistan, and competed at the London 2012 Paralympic Games in the discus

What's it like being part of such a major photography exhibition?

It's really exciting. It's great to see so many people supporting the book, and I really enjoyed the launch night in London. There were so many fellow injured Service men there, and seeing the pictures made me pretty emotional. It made me think that I could easily have been one of those who died – I'm blessed to be alive.

How was the experience of having your portrait taken?

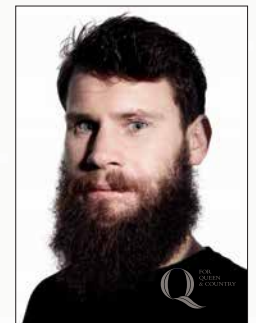
It was a real honour. It was great to meet Rankin. He is very cool, but very down to earth. I found him fascinating, and it's lovely that he's done this for charity. He was taking a lot of pictures on the day I met him, but it was a lot of fun. The picture is really good, and I'm happy to be part of something that will raise awareness of our injured soldiers.

You've come a long way since your injury. Does this project help you reflect on it all?

Definitely. I lost both my legs in Afghanistan, and I was only the second double amputee to come out of the conflict. It was all very new. I came back to Selly Oak and then to Headley Court, and it was a real challenge. I was in a coma for nine days and I was pronounced dead at one point. I had a scary out-of-body experience. It was hard to deal with. For a while, I gave up. But now I see I was given a second chance to live.

And you've proved that with your sporting achievements...

Yes. I was discharged this year and I'm going to concentrate more on athletics now. I'm hoping to compete at the Invictus Games in Toronto next year, and then perhaps at the Paralympics in Tokyo in 2020. I need to put a lot of hard work in first!



For more about the book go to www.coming-home.org.uk/content/rankin-limited-edition-book

LIMBLESS VETERANS IN PICTURES
1856 - 2016

QUEEN VICTORIA'S LIMBLESS VETERANS

Seriously injured soldiers from the Crimean War struck such a chord with Queen Victoria that she commissioned these photographs. They are, perhaps, even more striking 160 years later

In April 1856 a young photographer arrived at a military hospital in Chatham, Kent with his assistants. He had been sent by Queen Victoria, who had visited a few days earlier and had been deeply moved by the plight of the wounded soldiers she had met who had sustained their injuries in the Crimean War. By the end of the war in March 1856, some 22,000 British troops had been killed as a result of either battlefield injury, disease or starvation. For the soldiers who had been injured, however, the Crimean War never ended.

Robert Howlett (right) was an accomplished professional photographer who would become renowned for his revolutionary portrait of Isambard Kingdom Brunel in front of the launching chains of the SS Great Eastern. He had recently moved to London and become a partner with Joseph Cundall at the Photographic Institution as well as a member of the new Photographic Society. At the time of the commission from Queen Victoria, Howlett was only 24 years old, but was charged with the responsibility of photographing a number of convalescent soldiers,

many of whom were of a similar age to himself. The unique photographs (including the ones on these pages) were a reflection of Queen Victoria's sincere concern for the welfare of the soldiers injured in combat, as her published journals illustrated.

"One could not wish the war to have continued when one looked on these brave, noble fellows, so cruelly mutilated and suffering!"¹ she wrote. Queen Victoria made several visits to see wounded soldiers at hospitals along the South coast, but a visit to Brompton Hospital

in Chatham on 16 April 1856, when she was accompanied by George Russell Dartnell, Deputy Inspector-General of Hospitals, was of particular significance. Her recently-published journal recorded a few details of the 101 sick and 114 wounded, and showed particular sympathy for the amputees she met.² Her earlier visit on 28 November 1855 prompted the following:

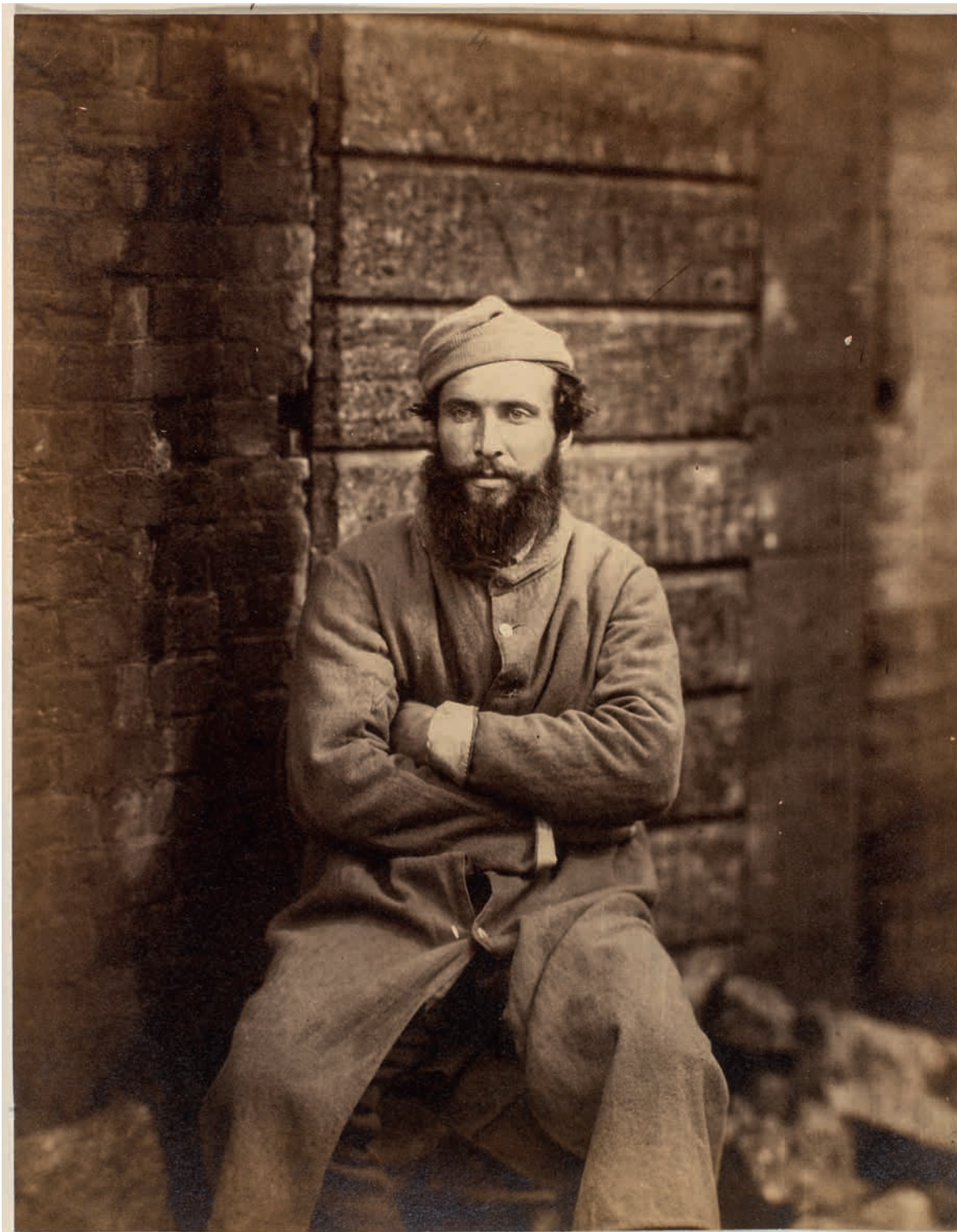
"There were 15 cases of amputation amongst the wounded. I never saw such a number without legs and arms. It is impossible to try and attempt describing the cases."³ A later visit noted; "All, excepting two or three, who were in plain clothes,



Photographer Robert Howlett

Words: Rose Teanby By kind permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

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PRIVATE JOHN DRYDEN

11th Hussars

Private John Dryden was wounded during the Charge of the Light Brigade. He was taken prisoner on 25 October 1854 after receiving three sabre wounds to the back of his head, a sabre wound to his left arm and the bridge of his nose, and 26 lance wounds to his back, body, and right leg. He was eventually exchanged at Odessa one year later, on 26 October 1855, was disabled from active service from vertigo and headaches, and was invalided back to England in January 1856.





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Left to Right:

WILLIAM YOUNG

33rd Regiment

William’s left leg was amputated at the knee and his right leg at the ankle due to shell injuries.

CORPORAL HENRY BURLAND

34th Regiment

Henry lost both legs to frostbite. His feet were amputated in Turkey and he underwent further amputation to his legs on his arrival at Portsmouth.

He was the recipient of two artificial legs as a gift from Queen Victoria.

JOHN CONNERY

49th Regiment of Foot

John’s left leg was amputated below the knee and a portion of his right foot was lost to frostbite.

Here he is holding his new prosthetic limb.⁴

having received their discharge, were in every kind of different uniform, which with empty sleeves and legs missing, had a sad effect.”⁵

Earlier that year, in March 1855, Queen Victoria had written; “The sight of such fine, powerful frames laid low and prostrate, with wounds and sickness on beds of sufferings, or maimed in the prime of life, is indescribably touching to us women.”⁶

Queen Victoria’s care for the injured was shown by her practical help – she offered employment or business support to all disabled veterans as equals, as well as to men of all ranks. She appointed Sergeant John Breese of the 11th (Prince Albert’s Own) Hussars, who lost his right arm in the conflict at the Battle of Inkerman, to a Yeoman of the Guard with a pension for life, for example. Elsewhere, the *Essex Standard* reported on Wednesday 23 April 1856 of the Queen’s concern for Private Thomas Walker, who had 13 pieces of skull removed after wounds he received at Inkerman. She saw him on each of her visits and sent him a present of £10.⁷

PROSTHETICS BY ROYAL APPOINTMENT

The Queen also commissioned Henry Heather Bigg to construct artificial limbs, at her own expense, for several of the men she had met in Portsmouth and Chatham.⁸ Henry Bigg was an early pioneer of replacement limbs and, in 1855, published *On Artificial Limbs, Their Construction And Application*. He showed great empathy with the amputees and acknowledged the need for replacement limbs to restore self esteem as well as returning lost mobility.⁹

The Queen also wanted a permanent visual record of the men who had moved her so deeply with their physical sacrifices. It was a daunting task to photograph these disabled soldiers. The first of many challenges was to assemble a makeshift studio in the grounds

THE CRIMEAN WAR

of the hospital before taking portraits of 17 soldiers, three views of each, using only daylight. Photography was still in its infancy and the technical challenges they faced were extraordinary. It involved a complex procedure involving large glass plates coated with light sensitive liquid that had to be developed in a portable darkroom within 10 minutes of the exposure.

Howlett and Cundall were experienced in the unique demands of location photography, having visited Woolwich Barracks the previous month to photograph the Royal Artillery's returning Crimean veterans. Those triumphant images subsequently appeared on the front cover of the *Illustrated London News*, but the veterans at Chatham had no resplendent uniforms, fanfare or trophies of war.

In this highly unconventional setting, they broke with studio convention and took a natural approach, enabling the real character of their subjects to show through clearly. The physical and emotional suffering that these young men had endured in a war far from these shores was inescapable in their faces. They awaited a very uncertain future as a result of their amputations and these images neither glorified nor concealed their injuries. This sensitive approach let the soldiers' eyes tell the story of what they had endured, and what physical and mental trials lay ahead for them.

A POWERFUL RECORD OF CONFLICT

Though these extremely moving and personal portraits were destined for Queen Victoria there was no hint of stiff formality about them. This allowed the soldiers' genuine pain and suffering to be captured alongside their remarkable recovery and resilience.

Clemence Brophy (right) is photographed leaning against a wall following the amputation of his left arm, Henry Burland (p40) looks truly haunted by his double above-knee amputations and John Dryden (p39) is probably suffering from post traumatic stress in addition to the numerous physical injuries detailed in the portrait album notes.¹⁰

These portraits are the result of a private request from a monarch and they have remained in a volume of Crimean Portraits within the Royal Collection, accompanied by a description of each man alongside details of his injuries. Queen Victoria was profoundly moved by her visits to the Crimean wounded, writing; "Full of what I had seen, which so brought home to my mind and heart, the horrors and sufferings as well as the gallantry, heroism, and resignation of these brave, noble men."¹¹

Queen Victoria redefined the term 'hero', moving away from rewarding victory to the recognition of valour with the introduction of the Victoria Cross.



PRIVATE CLEMENCE BROPHY

34th Regiment of Foot

Clemence was badly wounded in the trenches on 31 August 1855, suffering severe chest injuries and losing his left arm. The Queen wrote in her journal for 16 April 1856; "The other case was Clemence Brophy 34th Regt whose left arm, shoulder, & shoulder blade had been removed, but he recovered! The enormous wound was entirely healed."

Every man had played his part, every one of equal value. As for Robert Howlett, he tragically died of fever just two years after these photographs were taken, whilst he was at the peak of his professional career. As some consolation, this legacy of irreplaceable images remains as an entirely unique window into history, and an invaluable and permanent reminder of the terrible human repercussions of war.

Footnotes

1 Royal Archives (RA) VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1856: 16 April **2** RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1856: 16 April **3** RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1855: 28 November **4** The National Archives (TNA): WO 97/1541 **5** RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1855: 19 June **6** RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1855: 3 March **7** www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid Accessed 08/09/2016 **8** Morning Advertiser 7th April 1856 - "Among the numerous acts of kindness displayed by her Majesty towards the wounded soldiers from the Crimea, the public will be gratified to learn that, at her own expense, the Queen has commanded Mr. Heather Bigg, of Leicester Square, to construct artificial legs for the following men, whose severe mutilation attracted her Majesty's notice during the recent visits to the hospitals at Portsmouth and Chatham..." **9** <https://archive.org/details/b21289165> Accessed 08/09/2016 **10** The Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser, Saturday 26th April 1856 reported: "A noted photographer with two assistants, arrived on Saturday at the Supplemental Hospital, Brompton, by order of her Majesty, with his photographic apparatus, for the purpose of taking the portraits of seventeen invalids, the names of them having been given by her Majesty. Each likeness was taken in three different ways for the Queen's approval." **11** RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1855: 19 June

BOOK NOW!

Members' Weekend 2017

04-06 June



The Members' Weekend is back for 2017 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 limited spaces available, which will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Make sure you don't miss out.

Book your place now by contacting

Sue Stokes on officesupport@blesma.org or **020 8548 7091**

THE LAST HOUSE ON THE BEST STREET IN THE WORLD

Twelve months ago *DIY SOS* transformed Lamin Manneh's life and wowed a nation. The team have returned to Canada Street for one more Blesma build

“I don't think that, as a project, this can be topped,” says TV's top builder Nick Knowles as he surveys Manchester's Canada Street, the huge renovation job that his *DIY SOS* team have been involved in for the last 12 months. The reaction to the 2015 BBC show, in which triple amputee and Blesma Member Lamin Manneh moved into a bespoke home on the road, was overwhelming. More than nine million people tuned in, and Nick remembers, it “brought the nation together to help support the people whose job it was to protect us.”

Since then, 15 more homes on the street have been renovated for injured ex-Service men and women, and their families. This slice of Newton Heath has been transformed into a close-knit community, and as part

of a follow-up programme, Nick and the team are set to rebuild the final house for another Blesma Member.

Simon Flores (right) joined the Royal Green Jackets in 2001. He was injured in an IED blast whilst serving in Iraq five years later, losing a foot. Since becoming a dad, he's struggled with life in his small council house in Oldham. So, as the building and design team began work on his future home, we caught up with him to find out how a new house will change his life...

After last year's DIY SOS project, how does it feel to be the recipient of the last home on Canada Street?

It's an honour! There are so many veterans who need help, so I was a bit overwhelmed. A few people were interviewed about the last house and I couldn't believe



Simon with his three children; Kobi, Lilly-Anne and Damaso

it when they offered it to me. I thought I was dreaming. When I saw it before the build started, I have to admit it brought a tear to my eye!

How much of a change will it be for you?

I live in a two-bedroom council house and I have three children; aged three, four, and five. It's very tight, very small, and that can be stressful. I do my best, but it is very tough. We can't really enjoy family life there due to the lack of space. I can't wait to see my kids' faces when they see it finished. Our life will be a lot happier because of this project and we can be a family again.

Will the fact that you've got fellow ex-Service men living on the street have a positive effect on you?

Definitely. I've already met Lamin and John who live on the street and were featured in last year's *DIY SOS*. They're great guys and will be good neighbours. Lamin is a Man United fan though, and I support Liverpool, so we'll have to do something about that! Our kids will play together, I'm sure. The social side of the street should be great. We can all help each other out.

A sociable street isn't so common these days...

It's something to value. I only talk to a few people where I currently live, and I don't socialise with them in the evenings. It's not a very nice area. There are police out every weekend, and there have even been armed police on the streets recently. My kids were out playing at the time and I don't want them seeing that when they are growing up. Being with people here, I know they will be safe, and that's brilliant.

Have you had any say in the design of the house?

Gabby, the interior designer, got in touch to ask what I wanted. I threw a couple of ideas her way. I've had some professional pictures taken of me with the kids, so it'd be great to show those off properly. The boys



want superhero stuff in their room, and my daughter is obsessed with *Frozen* and would like a princess theme in hers. She's very clumsy, too – she can trip over standing still – so I've asked for no sharp edges!

DIY SOS have renovated the last house on Canada Street for Simon Flores. The show will air in Spring

Does the house take account of your amputation?

Not really. I'm not in the same situation as Lamin, who needs a lot of adaptations as a triple amputee. I can get on with most things fine. The main thing is having a pleasant environment for my kids – a nice place to live. I just get on with things despite my injury. I don't like things to be too easy so I can push myself!

Tell us about your military career...

I was going to join up when I turned 16, but my dad, who is from Venezuela, took me out there for four years instead. I had a great time learning the language and experiencing a different culture, and when I came back to Liverpool, I joined up. I grew up during the

CATCHING UP WITH CANADA STREET'S MOST FAMOUS RESIDENT

Lamin Manneh lost three limbs in Afghanistan while serving with the Irish Guards in 2010. In 2015, the BBC filmed him moving into Canada Street with his wife and their five kids

How are you enjoying life in your new home 12 months after the TV programme?

We've settled in great. The kids all love their rooms, and my wife, Binta, absolutely adores the house. She is very happy to have been able to move from where we used to live, which she didn't enjoy at all. This place is a genuine community – there are people here who are on the same journey as me, who have been through some of the same things. We all gather together and look out for, support, and help each other. We've got mates here now, a network. The kids are making lots of friends and they love to play on the street.

What has been the most life-changing part of the house?

They fitted a lift, which means I can get upstairs and put my kids to bed. That's brilliant.

And you competed in the Invictus Games this year...

Yes. That was incredible, one of the best things I've ever done. We got treated so well out in the States. I met so many different people from all over the world. The Invictus spirit is not about winning, it's about taking part and getting to that finish line, no matter what might have happened to you. In Orlando over the Summer, you could feel that everywhere, and I loved it.



Words: Nick Moore Photography: BBC/James Stack, Robert Whitrow

“I HAVE THREE CHILDREN, AGED THREE, FOUR, AND FIVE. I DO MY BEST, BUT IT IS VERY TOUGH. I CAN’T WAIT TO SEE THEIR FACES WHEN THEY SEE IT FINISHED”

Gulf War and I wanted to see the side to military life that wasn’t shown on the television. People decide to join the Army for all sorts of reasons – I wanted to go to different parts of the world and help people.

How did your injury come about?

I was on my second tour of Iraq in 2006. I remember it was 10 December and I had 10 days to go before my R&R. We would do six-hour mortar baseplate checks, going out and looking for the places where insurgents would put their mortars to fire on our camp. On our way back in, they were waiting for us. They hit our vehicle and the explosion took off my foot.

What did you do immediately afterwards?

I had to do what I could to stop the bleeding. I rested my foot on the dashboard and helped my colleague, who’d lost his calf muscles in the explosion. They couldn’t get us out of the vehicle initially, because the explosion had welded the door shut. We had to wait for a Warrior armoured vehicle to tow us 2km back into camp. I was out there for half an hour fearing another attack! I was in the field hospital for three days, then I was flown back to Selly Oak.

How was your rehabilitation?

It was fine. I went to Headley Court and I was ‘over’ the injury by the second day. What was the point crying about it? My foot wasn’t going to grow back! You either just get on with life, or you let it consume you, go into dark places and lose the plot. I got on with things.

You’ve overcome a lot, though...

Yes, I guess I have. I loved Army life and didn’t want to leave, but I had to take retirement. I’d served for 13 years and it was all I’d known. Sometimes it can be tough. I was working for a fundraising company in Manchester for a year and they had me walking around, knocking on doors for five hours a night. I left because I was having to drink eight Red Bulls a night to keep going! But I keep trying. I’m going to the gym a lot now, and it’s working quite well. I recently saw a mate I’d not seen in years, and he didn’t recognise me.

Have Blesma helped you along the way?

I’m a Member but I’ve not done too much with Blesma yet, as I’ve been so busy with the kids. But I like the idea of the skiing trip and the family glamping. I’d certainly like to get more involved in the future.

Lamin is a minor celebrity around Manchester after last year’s *DIY SOS*. Are you ready for stardom?

Doing a TV show has been quite strange. What’s about to happen hasn’t sunk in yet. I don’t think it’ll properly hit me until I see the house. I don’t show my feelings very often, but I think I’ll be gobsmacked!



DIY SOS HAS PROVED IT CAN BUILD COMMUNITIES, NOT JUST HOUSES

Nick Knowles is the presenter of the BBC’s hit show DIY SOS, which has helped to give Blesma Members hope for the future

Were you expecting the overwhelming reaction to Lamin’s programme?

No, it really was massive, on so many different levels. Nine million people tuned in, which was amazing. And the audience engagement with Lamin was wonderful, very emotional. Lamin is such a proud man, and he was in control of his emotions all the way through... until the end when we showed him the house. Then it hit him that people had done this for him, for his family.

You seem to be personally committed to making sure we don’t forget our soldiers...

The show was an opportunity to get more people to engage with that, to see what our military goes through, what they come back to

and have to live with. I felt it was our chance to give them the support they deserve and need. I wasn’t proud for me, or *DIY SOS*, or even the BBC – I was proud for what can be done as a community if we all pull together and help each other out.

How do you hope Simon’s show will play out?

Simon is a great lad and we want to build him somewhere where he can make memories with his children, and feel safe and supported. We also want to show once again what can be achieved with derelict housing in an inner city – how it can be used to regenerate an area, and how it works. Canada Street feels like a community the way communities used to be.

Simon’s DIY SOS build, the final house to be renovated on Canada Street, will air on the BBC in Spring 2017. Keep up to date with www.blesma.org to make sure you don’t miss it!

Lee Spencer
(middle) and
Richard Hunt
(right) on a
training exercise
in September



**“IF I LOOK CALM AND RELAXED,
SO SHOULD YOU. IF I’M
RUNNING AROUND LIKE A
HEADLESS CHICKEN, GOING
‘BOOHOO, BOOHOO’ IT MIGHT
BE TIME TO WORRY!”**



TEAM BRITANNIA RULES THE WAVES

A state-of-the-art powerboat (not this one!) is set to blast across the world's oceans in pursuit of a world record – with six Blesma Members at the helm!

It's certainly no secret that Blesma Members are an adventurous bunch. The Association is made special by a constant drive to push the boundaries of what others think is achievable for limbless veterans. When it comes to taking on a challenge then, Members like to go big – world record-big!

That's why, in March 2017, half a dozen Blesma Members – John Sandford-Hart, Jez Scarratt, Lee Spencer, Ray Finch, Craig Howorth, and Richard Hunt – will join the crew of Team Britannia in what will be a bold attempt to break the world record for the fastest circumnavigation of the planet in a powerboat.

John Sandford-Hart and Jez Scarratt will both be full-time crew members during the attempt, while the other four veterans will pair up for three stages each as they attempt to beat the current Union Internationale Motonautique (UIM) record of 60 days, 23 hours and 49 minutes, set by Kiwi Peter Bethune in 2008.

"We'll be at the skipper's disposal, it's as simple as that," says Jez Scarratt. "If we need to cook we'll cook, if general maintenance of the ship is required, we'll get on the tools, if it's cleaning the head, we'll do it."

As one of the two full-time Blesma Members who'll be on the boat, Jez is looking forward to an opportunity that very few people will get in their lifetime: the chance to break a world record. "Honestly, hand on heart, it's going to be one of the biggest experiences of my life," he says. "I don't have a world record at the moment – not many of us do! – so to be in with the chance of getting one already makes this an amazing experience that will stay with me forever."

Rules state that the 23,000-mile expedition has to begin and end in Gibraltar. The route will take the team across the Tropic of Cancer, through the Panama Canal, up along the Central American coast before reaching the Pacific Ocean. From there, Team Britannia must sail across the Equator, before navigating past South East Asia, travelling to the Horn of Africa, and then heading through the Suez Canal to finally reach Gibraltar once again.

THE ROUTE

Union Internationale Motonautique rules state that the record attempt must be run in a westward direction. The Team Britannia vessel must pass through the Tropic of Cancer, the Panama Canal, over the Equator and through the Suez Canal, using only approved ports to refuel. At each stop, the crew will only have four or five hours to refuel, resupply and change the boat's personnel.

REFUELLING STOPS:

- Gibraltar (**Start**)
- Puerto Rico
- Manzanillo, Mexico
- Honolulu, Hawaii
- Apra, Guam
- Jurong, Singapore
- Salalah, Oman
- Valetta, Malta (possibly)
- Gibraltar (**Finish**)



Throughout the journey, the team will only take short fuel stops in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Hawaii, Guam, Singapore, Oman and, if necessary, Malta. They'll also use these stops to change personnel, with one pair of Blesma Members making room for another.

The boat's skipper, powerboat legend Alan Priddy, believes if all goes well the circumnavigation could be completed in fewer than 50 days. Alan, now 63, has a boat-load of experience when it comes to challenges of this magnitude. He has held 37 world and 12 British records in a career spanning four decades. From sailing around the British Isles as quickly as possible, to 24-hour endurance races around the Isle of White, Alan is a legend in extreme powerboat challenge circles. But, he says, this challenge transcends anything he's done in his long and illustrious career. Sharing a speedboat with Blesma Members, he says, is a token of thanks for every soldier's service.

"This is us showing our appreciation for those who have gone before us, those who've willingly stood up and fought for Queen and country. You can't get away from the fact that people who go to war give everything. We all buy poppies and we all donate, but this is about more than that. It's about taking part and that's why I want to share it with these men," he says.

MAN AND MACHINE (ALMOST) IN HARMONY

Team Britannia's vessel is an example of the finest marine engineering this country has to offer. The £2.9 million eco-powerboat is still in the process of being built, and will feature revolutionary wave-slicing technology to make the ride as smooth as possible. It will be eco-friendly too, using a mixture of diesel, water and an emulsifying agent that will cut harmful emissions like nitrogen dioxide by up to 30 per cent.

The six Blesma Members who are taking part are not quite the finished article either and, like the boat, are in the middle of their preparations.

"They've all volunteered for this challenge and have already worked so hard for it," says Alan. "Preparing for an event like this isn't easy – and it hasn't always been enjoyable! – but to get them over the finishing line will be the proudest moment of my career."

For our six soon-to-be super-seamen, the chance to travel the world and make history was too good an opportunity to pass up. "The fundamental reason for me wanting to take part is that this is an amazing opportunity to do something incredible," says former Royal Marine and below-knee amputee Lee Spencer, who was part of the four-man Blesma crew to become the first British all-amputee team to row non-stop across the Atlantic Ocean in February.

Through a series of training courses in Southampton in September, the six Members have learned the basics of powerboat handling, man-overboard drills and powerboat runs at speed. These competency tests ensure they all know what to do in case of an emergency, but they have also given the Members a greater appreciation of the magnitude of the task.

The gentle waters of the Solent are one thing, but rough seas and unpredictable weather at speeds of 50 knots (57mph) will prove very different. As Alan explains, each man will have to earn his keep, grafting through his shift to make sure the attempt runs as



THIS IS THE FUTURE OF FAST

Team Britannia's cutting-edge 80ft powerboat is being built specifically for this challenge. Its efficient hull has been designed to slice through waves rather than ride over them, making the ride much smoother – and faster!

The boat will be fuelled by a revolutionary mix of diesel, water and an emulsifying agent which will reduce harmful emissions such as carbon dioxide and nitrogen dioxide by up to 30 per cent. The boat will be able to travel for 4,800 nautical miles on one load of clean fuel, powered by two six-cylinder engines and two turbo drive water jets that will propel it through the water at a top speed of 50 knots (57mph). Couple this with the craft's super-light aluminium hull and you have a vessel that will be able to withstand the forces of some of the most ferocious oceans on the planet, at serious speed.

The boat berths 12, and the crew will live in close proximity. The food they'll eat is equally state of the art; freeze-dried meals that are definitely a cut above the ration packs they grew accustomed to in the Forces. High-speed internet and radio comms will give the boat 24-hour access to the outside world, but will be kept to a minimum.

Left: the six Blesma Members get to grips with the basics on a training course in Southampton

smoothly as possible. Work will include constantly monitoring fuel supplies and distances travelled, as well as charting emerging weather patterns with the more experienced members of the crew. Meanwhile, more mundane but equally as important tasks such as cooking and cleaning will be non-stop.

"Mathematical calculations and paperwork will need to be done every minute of the day," says Alan. "We'll need to know every centilitre of fuel used, every inch of water that's covered... If we don't hit certain targets we simply won't make it around the world."

While all the Blesma Members on the crew have completed gruelling physical challenges before, being on a powerboat for up to seven days at a time, in one of the most hostile environments on the planet, will be tough. According to Alan, they can expect vicious swells, towering waves, sleep deprivation and even the threat of pirates. Then there's the psychological challenge; will they be able to hack the intensity of all this in a race against time?

The key to it all, says Alan, is to have a good sense of humour. "The crew are a terrific bunch, we know how to have a laugh and we know how to keep each other motivated through tough times. I've introduced everyone to an old rule I've lived by for many years; if I look calm and relaxed, so should you. If I'm running around like a headless chicken, going 'Boohoo, Boohoo' it might be time to worry!"



JOHN SANDFORD-HART (RIGHT)

Age: 50

John is a former Royal Engineer and powerboat racer. He will be one of two full-time Blesma Members on the boat

What should the Blesma guys taking part expect?

It will be very difficult to beat the existing record if it becomes a 'Me, Me and I' job. The only way we can succeed is if this is a team effort from the very start. We're all going to have to pull together as we'll all be living and working in a confined space for a long time. But I'm sure all the guys will crack on and play a very important part.

What do you think you'll get out of it on a personal level?

A lot! People may think it sounds like a crazy venture or that it's too dangerous but, as with most things, it wouldn't be worth doing if it was easy, would it? Taking part in this expedition will definitely be a massive tick in the box that I never thought I would get, and it will be an absolute privilege to have taken part in trying to break such an incredible record.

What message does this send out to other Members?

It may sound a bit cheesy, but having Blesma Members take part in challenges and expeditions like this shows that you should never give up, that you should always remember that there's someone worse off than you, and that you're lucky to be here. Use the time you've got here to do something worthwhile.

“THIS SHOWS YOU SHOULD NEVER GIVE UP AND REMEMBER THAT YOU'RE LUCKY TO BE HERE. USE THE TIME YOU'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING WORTHWHILE”

RICHARD HUNT

Age: 46 **Richard was in the Navy from 1987 to 1991 and has previously attempted to circumnavigate the UK in a kayak in 2014**

What was your motivation for joining the expedition?

I love doing different things and having an adventure, so when I was asked if I wanted to go on a 'boat trip', I couldn't say no! I'm taking part to represent Blesma, too, and to get the word out there about the good work they do.

What will be your biggest challenge?

I think it's all big! Firstly, it's about not letting my teammates down, that's the main thing.

You don't want to be the weak link, and you want to be doing everything you can to make sure this challenge succeeds. There are something like 27 records to break – I don't even know what most of them are!

How will the expedition help Blesma?

My mission for the last few years has been to tell as many people who'll listen to me about Blesma. I think this challenge will bring the charity the credit that it deserves.





DANNY SPENDER

Danny Spender, 35, served with 1 Rifles and lost both legs to an IED in Afghanistan in 2011. He now works internationally as a security risk consultant

I'm from Warminster but now live with my family in Chepstow. When you grow up in an Army town, and join the Cadets as a kid, you're likely to want to become a soldier. I joined the Royal Gloucester, Berkshire, and Wiltshire Regiment when I was 16. Soon after, I deployed to Kosovo and Northern Ireland before doing three tours of Afghanistan.

I loved military life and soldiering in difficult, challenging environments. I was outdoorsy – camping, sports, fitness. The Army is all that rolled into one. The travel was great – Belize or Brunei or Kenya.

The Army gave me the discipline I needed as a youngster, the drive and determination to get things done – and done in the right way. That attitude has crossed into the work that I do now.

I was injured in 2011. I was a Platoon Sergeant on my third tour of Afghanistan. We were based at a remote compound and as we were clearing our way out on patrol one day, I stepped on a low metal content pressure plate.

I remember everything. The blast didn't blow me up – if anything, it snapped my legs. I managed to get on the radio while two young riflemen in my patrol patched me up. They saved my life, along with an amazing medic.

I was lucky that I was woken up in Bastion. A lot of guys were only finding out the extent of their injuries when they woke up in hospital in the UK.

Rehab went well. I have an above-knee and a through- knee amputation. Within seven weeks I was walking on stubbies at Headley Court, and within three months I was on microprocessor legs. I was discharged in late 2013.

A month later I was working as a security risk consultant. I've travelled all over the world with multinationals, large corporates, and NGOs, helping to identify and mitigate the risks in the often hostile security environments they operate in. Part of my work involves developing security policies, plans, and procedures to support their businesses.

My experience helps. There is often something I've done on operations that I can apply in a civilian context. I love the challenge, variety, and travel.

**“GET NETWORKING
WITH OTHER
AMPUTEES, WITH
BLESMA, WITH
PEOPLE IN
INDUSTRY...”**

I'd advise anyone looking to get back into employment post-injury to have a plan. If you're not sure what you'd like to do, get networking – with other amputees, with Blesma, with people in industry. Get advice on how to get where you want to be, then get a checklist together. Stick to it, and work hard.

Blesma have been great. They supported me with doing a Master's degree for my new job, which helped give me an edge when looking for employment. They've helped with adaptations to my house and garden office, so I don't have to commute into London all the time. It's great knowing Blesma are there if you have an issue.

Get Active in 2017

From photography courses to family adventures, there's a free Blesma activity to suit everyone. Find yours in the Activities Brochure inserted into this issue of the magazine.



Apply now by completing the application form provided,
by contacting **Emily Mizon** on **020 8548 7094**
or by emailing her at **mea@blesma.org**



A man with a prosthetic leg is pushing a wheelbarrow filled with bags of soil in a garden. He is wearing a plaid shirt, shorts, and gloves. The background shows a house and lush greenery.

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