

Paralympic Special

OUR PROUD PARALYMPIANS

Blesma's elite athletes talk tactics, training, and total commitment



On the hunt for Kirk and Jez

Discover what happens when two Members try to evade capture for a month – all in the name of telly **p50**



Meet Blesma's best seller...

Member Harry Parker has written a war novel with a difference. Find out how – and why **p24**

Craig Wood is in the spotlight

“The most difficult thing was trying to figure out what to do with the rest of my life” **p10**



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NEWS

News, views and opinion from the world of Blesma

Support for elderly and most infirm set to grow

Blesma has committed to further increasing the number of grants it makes to assist the needs of both Members and Widows in their own homes. The Association has also pledged to work more closely than ever with Service charities expert in the provision of residential and convalescent or respite care.

The demand for assistance by Members who wish to live close to their families and retain some independence, often in their own homes, has dramatically increased over recent years. This is in line with the national demand for later life care, which now sees residential care occurring much later in life.

Following this trend, requests for residence at the Blackpool Home have dwindled year on year. The Home hosted as many as 30 residents in 2014, but this year hosted only 13 despite opening its doors to Widows last year. Nine of those residents are from the North West, with a 30-mile radius being the recognised catchment area for a care home.

In 2015, Blesma spent £374,000 on 1,159 grants. Of those, 64% of the recipients (735 Members and Widows) were aged

over 75 and the grants were for practical help with assistive and adaptive technology, for example, to promote independent living.

In the same year, Blesma spent £694,000 on subsidising the Home. With all this in mind, the Board of Trustees has reluctantly decided to release the Blackpool Home.

The Board, the majority of whom are Blesma Members and veteran amputees, agonised for 18 months over the decision, having explored every possible option before finally taking the difficult step in the interest of all the Association's Members. The intention is to use these resources to be relevant and precise in meeting real needs.

"There has been a lot of soul searching but we have to consider the needs of all Members and the changing qualities and quantities of demand for assistance in later life care," said the Association's Chairman Lieutenant General Sir Cedric Delves.

"It has been a very difficult process, and an extremely hard decision to make, but our duty is always to provide the best care to all our Members, for life. We sought professional advice when examining the



The Home has been running at less than 25% capacity





Blesma's best seller

Harry Parker tells his story (p24)



More grants will help Members continue to live in their own homes



welcome

I'd like to steer you to the story on the future of care for the most infirm and elderly across Blesma (left). I must stress that Blesma is not ceasing to support through life, it is changing the way it does it. Demand for residential care at a single Blesma Home has fallen dramatically and that is set to continue. Meanwhile, the demand for assistance in one's own home is increasing. We have been adapting to this in recent years, but we will now make wholesale adjustments.

Sadly, the Blackpool Home will close but only after doing an exceptional job; one that the membership is now asking the Association to do closer to home. This change in demand has been highlighted by the Trustees at the last two Members' Weekends and AGMs.

I would also like to stress that it is business as usual for all those activities that took place at Blackpool; Seniors', Widows' and Activities Weeks, as well as respite breaks, are continuing elsewhere. The first Widows' Week has taken place in the North East, for example. We have the opportunity to spread the programme across all regions and we will take this up.

The Association had a moral and legal obligation to consult and confirm with the residents and staff first. Matters have moved at a pace set by them, a pace faster than many Members might have anticipated, but be assured Blesma is committed to caring, for life.

Elsewhere, I would like to thank Craig Wood, our Paralympians and Harry Parker for sparing their time and telling us their stories in this issue. We are all immensely proud of our Paralympians and inspired by their performances in Rio; their commitment has been immense and rewards thoroughly deserved.

We have a pause in the Direct Skeletal Fixation Programme at present due to component quality. We are assured it is only a pause, but it could be many weeks before full resumption. Meanwhile, the Headley Court access for those eligible with complex socket issues remains open. If you have concerns, or feel uninformed, please get in touch with Brian Chenier at Chadwell Heath.

Lastly, some great regional activity initiatives have been put together by Members with a little help from Chadwell Heath. Please keep them coming!

Barry Le Gry
Chief Executive



possibilities, which included relocation, collaboration with Service charities, specialist nursing, and opening the Home to all veterans. The Home has been running at less than 25% of its 45-resident capacity, and the demographics of our membership and national statistics combine to forecast that this downward trend will continue.”

The current residents are being resettled to new homes of their choice in consultation with families and guardians, and they will experience no financial hardship as a result.

“We are absolutely insistent that high quality care continues for them, and Blesma Support Officers and the Association will still be there for them. They remain Blesma Members and our support for them, as for every Member, is for life,” added Blesma Chief Executive Barry Le Grys, who paid tribute to the Home’s loyal and committed staff, who have been given professional coaching and individual assistance to help them transition into new employment.

“The staff have all been tremendous and many have given years of loyal service. Both the Association and the Members are extremely grateful for all they have done.”

Some of Blesma’s most infirm Members are still very young and the Association is keen that there are sufficient funds for their care in decades to come. But this pledge, said Barry, would certainly not be at the expense of elderly Members and Widows who need care now.

“We are all extremely sad to see the Home released but, ultimately, we believe what we will offer will be more relevant, fairer, more efficient, and sustainable for all our Members,” said Barry.



Blesma is releasing Blackpool Home due to the changing nature of later life care

“Our aim of supporting Members for life in the most constructive manner remains unchanged”



Blesma Magazine sat down with Chief Executive Barry Le Grys to understand the decision, and its repercussions for all Members, in detail

Are you proposing more bespoke support for Members in the future?

“Yes. We will be able to meet the needs of a greater number of Members nationally and will be able to be more responsive to individual needs. More of the Association’s resources will be designated for the elderly, predominantly through individual grants. Making this decision will allow us to make more grants relevant to the care needs of Members and Widows in their own homes as well as for care elsewhere.”

What about the excellent respite care provided, will that be scrapped?

“Absolutely not. We will continue to assist Members to take respite care at other locations, as is popular with some already. We anticipate supporting more respite care, and the prospect of short distance travel to local facilities will be more attractive to families and carers.”

Will you spread activities across the UK?

“Many activities already take place in other locations and we will continue to develop this. The Widows’ Weeks, Seniors’

Weeks, Activities Week and the full range of activities will still take place. In the future, we will be able to build up closer partnerships across the charity sector. This gives us an opportunity to host activities across the country to meet regional needs so that events are not concentrated either in the North West or within the M25.”

Couldn’t you run a scaled-down Home and increase its capacity with demand?

“We looked at every possible configuration in detail, but it just wasn’t viable to run a smaller Home. We need to provide the best possible care for our Members right now rather than speculate what might happen in 10, 20 or 30 years’ time.”

Why not join forces with another Service charity to run the Home?

“At Blesma, we have an enduring tradition of collaboration but, whilst we consulted with a number of charities, none were willing to run the Home or take a share in its running. Opening the Home up to other Service charity residents is not viable as it would incur increased costs for Blesma and divert funds away from Members. We also looked at other uses for the Home, but it is not optimised for other use and there has been a strong call to establish a more even regional spread of venues for activities.”

Can’t you open the Home to all veterans?

“Our charitable status restricts Blesma to caring for limbless veterans, and generations of the public and Members have supported us on that basis. To open the Home up to a wider veteran community would involve Blesma subsidising the scheme by more than £190,000 per year. This would divert funds away from Members and Widows.”

Why has this suddenly come up?

“This has been an agonising process that has lasted more than 18 months after it became clear that demand for residential care from elderly Members was falling and demand in other areas increasing. The issue has been raised at recent AGMs and Members’ Weekends. Our first priority has been to the residents and the staff at the core of the issue, and we have focused on them as we have deliberated every option for the Home.”



Residents are being resettled into care homes of their choice



“RESIDENTS ARE BEING RESETTLED IN NEW HOMES OF THEIR CHOICE WHERE THE QUALITY CAN BE ASSURED, AND WE REMAIN COMMITTED TO THEIR WELFARE, FOR LIFE”

Could you find an operator for the Home?

“This is all about the residents and what is best for them. It is not about the bricks and mortar of the Home. To hope that a suitable private operator would take on the Home, and run it to our high standards, indefinitely, is too big a risk, and all the uncertainty would cause personal distress.”

What will happen to residents and staff?

“Residents are being resettled into new homes of their choice where the quality

can be completely assured. As with all Members, we remain committed to their welfare, for life. Their Blesma Support Officers will continue to visit them on a regular basis and they will incur no financial hardship because of their change in circumstances. There has been a very measured and careful consultation with all staff and any representatives, meeting all statutory requirements. We are providing specialist advice on an individual basis to help staff seeking new employment.”

Why does Blesma have monetary reserves yet is releasing the Home?

“Releasing the Home is based upon a lack of demand and to continue running it would drain resources considerably. Our Members live with limb loss for decades and we intend to be there for every single one if, and when, they need us. To do this, we need to maintain a contingency for the casualties of future conflicts. The fact that Members are living longer than ever, the increasing complexities of their injuries and associated health conditions, along with the rising costs of care and prosthetic provision, and our holistic approach to well-being also have to be accounted for.

“Furthermore, we are acutely aware of the growing demands on NHS and Local Authority provision, and the need for the charity sector to help relieve the resulting distress for eligible beneficiaries. Blesma must have the resources to keep pace with change and challenges, and manage them efficiently by keeping overheads to a minimum, spending reserves wisely and to the best effect for beneficiaries in a long-term, sustainable fashion.”

What do you say to donors who have supported the Home?

“We are tremendously thankful for all the support Blesma has received, the vast majority of which is unrestricted in its use and therefore not tied to the Home. The minority of restricted funding has been put to good use at the Home already. Blesma has more than 3,000 potential beneficiaries and only 13 in residence in the Blackpool Home at the time of release. Funds will be put to good use supporting the whole of the Association. Our aims of supporting Members for life in the most constructive and efficient manner remain unchanged. The passing of the Blackpool Home will cause some sadness within the Association, but Blesma has remained strong for almost a century because it puts the welfare of all Members at the forefront of everything it does.”

How hard has this decision been?

“It has been extremely difficult. We have noticed the decline of residence demand over a number of years as the economic case for a new way of care has become stronger. Our duty is, of course, to do the best for all our Members, but the Blackpool Home has a special place in our shared history and we exhausted every possibility before reaching this decision. Yes, it has been tough, and everyone involved feels a tinge of sadness.”



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Activities give all Members a 'fresh purpose'

An innovate study by staff at St Mary's University in Twickenham into how activities positively impact on Members' lives has given Blesma's Activities Programme an even sharper focus than ever before.

The findings of Ross Wadey, who led the investigation, concluded that there was a very positive effect on the physical, psychological and social well-being of those Members who joined the programme.

"Opening up to new experiences is giving people a fresh purpose in life," Ross said. "We found that activities improve social integration among Members, so they feel like they can participate in more things, and feel a sense of belonging. Activities generate positive emotions in Members, decrease their levels of negative emotions,



and improve them as individuals – they can learn about themselves and make changes."

While this is obviously all great news, it does prompt the question; 'Why doesn't everyone want to take part?'

"We were very encouraged with all the results, but couldn't understand why many Members didn't want to participate. Blesma were seeing a lot of regulars, and wanted to encourage some fresh faces. So we devised the Activities Survey to find out more from Members. The response has been great, and hopefully it will help Blesma improve what is already an effective programme."

Read about the results of the Activities Survey in detail on p16



Picture: Zach Monties

Entrepreneur designs wheelchair for Africa

A young entrepreneur has designed a prototype wheelchair that could solve mobility issues for many disabled people in Africa. Industrial design graduate Janna Deeble was inspired to design a wheelchair that could be used on rough terrain after he broke his leg and found himself dependent on his flatmates.

Janna spent three months in a wheelchair and quickly became frustrated by just how difficult he found everyday tasks.

"I was so frustrated by the loss of my freedom as I've always been hugely independent," he said. "When I realised it was nearly impossible to get around, I decided I wanted to do something to help."

Having spent his childhood growing up in Africa, Janna decided to return to Kenya to spend time with people who needed help

with their mobility. He designed a prototype of an inexpensive wheelchair that was ideal for use on Africa's rugged terrain. The SafariSeat has four wheels that move independently and stay in contact with the floor at all times for total stability. Janna also knew the wheelchair had to be easy and cheap to build and repair, and so has designed it to be made from bicycle parts.

SafariSeat is currently at prototype stage, and Janna is raising funds in the hope of bringing the project to life and getting SafariSeat to as many people as possible.

Janna would love to hear from any Blesma Members with a background in design and engineering who might be interested in helping to further the prototype. Get in touch with him at janna@safariseat.org

ANDY GRANT RUNS INTO THE RECORD BOOKS

Andy Grant has broken the world record for the fastest 10K run by a single leg amputee. He obliterated the previous world record by 37 seconds, completing the run in 37 minutes and 17 seconds at the Wavertree Athletics Centre.

Andy, who won two gold medals at the 2014 Invictus Games, went after the record not only as a personal challenge but to prove that amputees can run long distances.

"It's amazing to have beaten the world record," said Andy. "I've put a lot of hard work into it over the last four months, but was worried that I'd set myself up for a fall!"



In the spotlight

Craig Wood



Rifleman Craig Wood, from Doncaster, served with the 2nd Battalion, The Rifles. He lost both his legs, and his left hand, when he was blown up by an IED while on patrol in Afghanistan in 2009.

“I always wanted to join the Army. My cousins were in the Royal Signals, and the military lifestyle and camaraderie really appealed to me. I signed up at 17, straight from school, and went to Catterick for Basic Training. I loved it straight away,” says Craig.

“I deployed to Afghanistan on 28 April 2009, three days after my 18th birthday. At first, it was pretty quiet, I just took part in a lot of routine foot patrols. Then, three months into my tour, I went out on a regular morning patrol. After an hour, we stopped for a water break because it was a very hot day.

“When we set off again, I was in the middle of the section. I remember walking 10 metres or so when I saw a white flash. I knew – and felt – that something was wrong instantly. I landed very heavily and remember my friend turning around and shouting my name. After that, I blacked out.

“I was in a coma for 14 days before I woke up in Selly Oak Hospital. It was surreal; even though you’re in a coma, your brain is working things out, and I’d been having very vivid dreams – my mind was fixing things and getting stuff together. I was aware that I was badly injured, so it wasn’t a massive shock to me when I came round. Seeing all my family was actually great, despite the bad circumstances, and I tried to keep a positive mental attitude.

STAYING POSITIVE

“Since then I’ve had so many operations, I couldn’t even count them. I’ve had 10 on my face alone, and loads more on my arms, legs and body. My recovery was OK. My mindset has always been to focus on getting better and moving forwards, not backwards. I’ve stayed positive, and so has my family. They would say to me; ‘You’ll be off your legs for a bit, but once you’re walking again, that’s sorted.’

“After three months in Selly Oak I was transferred to Headley Court. Learning

to walk again is an individual process, and it took me eight months or so to become proficient. You always have some issues though; your stumps change, or you have more surgery that means you have to relearn how to walk. It knocks you back. Going down stairs is still hard – hills are the hardest. On a big slope you know what’s coming, it’s the little ones where you have to switch between walk modes that are the toughest.

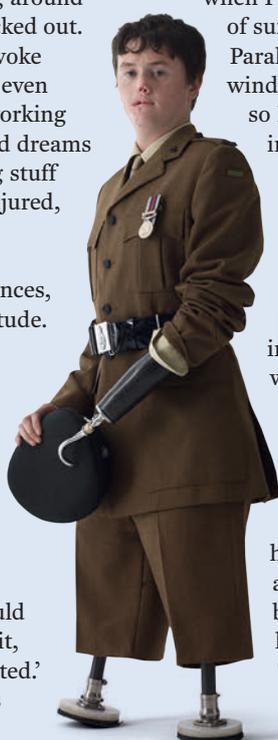
“I was at Headley Court for four-and-a-half years by the time I left in January 2014. It was like amputee Basic Training! I coped ok with the rehab – you want to get walking straight away, but you can’t push yourself too hard! The most difficult thing was trying to figure out what I was going to do with the rest of my life. I couldn’t just sit around and do nothing, but it was also tricky to plan things around Headley Court.

KEEP MOVING FORWARDS

“I was really into windsurfing before my injury, and when I was in hospital for my penultimate round of surgery, I met a guy who worked for Team GB’s Paralympic sailing development team. Disabled windsurfing didn’t seem to be very organised, so I decided to try sailing instead and fell in love with it straight away.

“I now have my own yacht, a 40ft ketch that can fit 10 people in and which I can take anywhere in the world. That’s my plan now; I’m organising a round-Britain yacht expedition, and I’d like to get other disabled people involved and get them participating in the sport. I’m also trying to get disabled windsurfing set up as a proper sport, along with a friend who is visually impaired. It’s an amazing activity, very good for your health, and I’d love to help it expand.

“That ties in with Blesma’s aims; getting people involved in things they haven’t tried before. I joined Blesma as soon as I was injured in 2009. They were by my bedside from the very beginning and they’ve helped me out with adaptations to my house. They’ve also given me a lot of support and have made me see that the best thing to do is keep moving forwards with my life.”



“

I WAS AT HEADLEY COURT FOR FOUR AND A HALF YEARS. THE MOST DIFFICULT THING WAS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO WITH THE REST OF MY LIFE

”



18

Craig's age when he was severely injured serving his country

10

The number of operations Craig has had to rebuild much of his face

14

Days spent in a coma in Afghanistan and Birmingham after being blown up by an IED

20+

Operations on his three injured limbs and body since 2009

4.5

Years undergoing extensive rehabilitation at Headley Court

8

Months to learn how to walk again after his injuries





Vicky Parrett

HAVE YOURSELF A VERY MERRY BLESMA XMAS

Following on from the success of last year's Blesma Christmas cards, the Association is once again offering Members and supporters the chance to send friends and family Christmas wishes, while supporting Blesma at the same time.

There are six designs to choose from, with packs of 10 cards costing £3. An order form has been inserted into this issue of the magazine but if yours is missing, get in touch with Sue Stokes at Chadwell Heath on 020 8548 7091 or email her at officesupport@blesma.org



THE SKY'S THE LIMIT AT FALL FOR THE FALLEN

Fundraisers and Members took to the skies on 02 July to raise money in the Association's annual tandem skydiving event, Fall For The Fallen, which this year commemorated the centenary of the Battle of the Somme. The event took place across three jump sites – Hibaldstow, Peterborough and Netheravon – and raised a massive £23,000.

"It was incredible – the first time I really felt like the old me!" said Member Vicky Parrett (above). "I didn't feel injured, I felt carefree, I was genuinely laughing and loving life, I felt no pain, just excitement. It was the best few minutes since my injury!"

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Move More





Photographs: Brian Chenier



Allan, Eileen and Darren Selwood



Dave and Marion Lewan



BSO Paul Findlay (left) with Tony Hadley

Brilliant Brentwood Festival raises £10,000 for Blesma!

Thousands of music lovers flocked to Essex in mid-July for the annual three-day Brentwood Festival. They picnicked, partied, and danced to music from Tony Hadley, ABC, Level 42, Soul II Soul and many more.

Blesma is the festival's chosen charity for 2016, and an army of Blesma Members and volunteers, including Vic Boumonte, Dave Lewan, Luke Delahunty, Andy Bracey and Paul Findlay helped with the collections. Members even took to the stage to share their military experiences with the crowd and explain how Blesma has helped them since they were injured.

Generous festivalgoers donated thousands of pounds and bought more than 4,000 Blesma wristbands, with a little help from Tony Hadley who threw some into the crowd and encouraged fans to buy more.

The Brentwood Festival has helped to raise more than £200,000 for good causes since it began as the White Horse Festival more than 20 years ago.

"Raising money for charity is what the Brentwood Festival is all about and we're proud to be supporting Blesma this year – it's a fantastic charity," said White Horse

Pub owner and Festival Director Jason Jopson. Following a two-day 'mini festival' in May at The White Horse in Brentwood, Jason has planned another beer festival at The White Horse in October to raise even more funds for the Association.

"Blesma would like to say a massive thank you to the generous festivalgoers, and to Jason and Karen Jopson for this

wonderful opportunity to raise funds and spread the word about Blesma," said Barbara Warner, Associate Director Fundraising. "A huge thank you must also go to the many Blesma Members and volunteers for their enthusiastic support."

Plans are currently underway for next year's festival, which will be held between 14 and 16 July 2017.



Luke Delahunty does a spot of collecting

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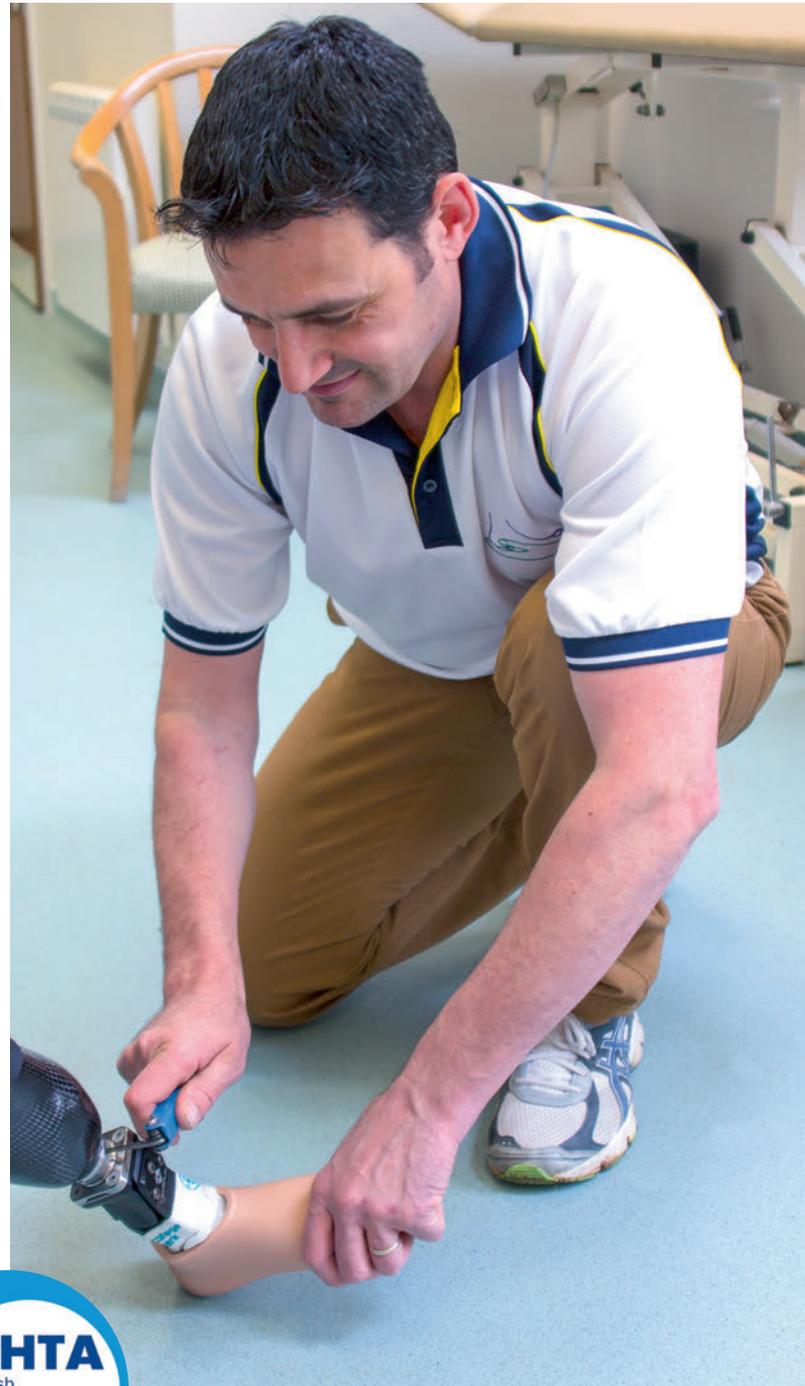
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A computer-generated image of the planned Team Britannia boat



FENLAND RUNNING CLUB RAISES £500 IN ANNUAL FUN RUN

Members of Fenland Running Club took part in their annual charity fun run in July, raising £500 for Blesma.

Carol Bowett, wife of Blesma Member Kirk (below), is a member of the club and suggested this year's fun run should be in aid of the Association. As well as one-mile, three-mile and six-mile runs, the club held a BBQ and cake sale to raise money. Generous runners also donated prizes of afternoon tea at a local hotel, a 30-minute jet ski ride, vouchers, wines and chocolates for a raffle.

"The event was a great success and raised awareness of limbless veterans in our community," said Kirk, who took part in the run. "Everyone came away from the day feeling as though they had taken part in a rewarding run and raised funds for a great cause. We would like to thank the members of Fenland Running Club for hosting us."

Find out what happened when Kirk went on the run in an altogether more stressful situation on p50



Blesma plays part in Team Britannia crew

A crew made up of world champions, world record holders and injured veterans is about to attempt to break the world record for circumnavigating the globe in a powerboat.

Team Britannia has joined forces with Blesma Members to try to break the current world record, which is held by New Zealander Pete Bethune, and stands at 60 days, 23 hours and 49 minutes. The team are aiming to complete the 23,850-mile journey in just 50 days.

The strict rules state that a successful circumnavigation of the globe must pass through the Suez and Panama Canals, cross the Tropic of Cancer and the Equator, and start and finish at the same place. The crew will start in Gibraltar on 23 October and will make seven fuel stops in Puerto Rico, Manzanillo, Honolulu, Guam, Singapore, Oman and Malta before finishing back in Gibraltar a month and a half later.

"The biggest challenge the team faces is keeping an average speed – it's a marathon, not a sprint," said Alistair Thompson, who is part of the attempt's onshore support staff. "Whilst we are already working with immigration borders so that the crew is cleared in advance, they may want to carry out inspections on the boat and we need to spend less than four hours at each stop!"

The idea to include injured veterans in the attempt came after Team Britannia's skipper Alan Priddy, chief engineer Steve Mason and medic Dr Jan Falkowski were moved by the Tower of London's poppy display in 2014. Blesma has supported the seven Members taking part by funding their training, which took place in September.

You can follow Team Britannia's attempt at www.teambritannia.co.uk and you will be able to read interviews with the crew members in the Winter issue

MARK MAKES A STRONG START ON WORLD STAGE

BLESMA MEMBER MARK SMITH HAS officially become the sixth strongest disabled man in the world.

Mark took on musclemen from around the world in August for the chance to be crowned the World's Strongest Disabled Man. It was the first time the competition had come to the UK, with Mark and the other huge hopefuls battling it out in six strength-sapping events; the deadlift, atlas stones, dumbbell medley, crucifix hold, truck pull and log lift.

"At first, I was quite disappointed with sixth," said Mark. "I'd been training right up to the day before the competition,



whereas everyone else had rested all week. I was totally drained by the end of the competition. I didn't realise what a jump in weight there was from the British event to the World competition. The truck pull went from three-and-a-half tonnes to nine!"

This is Mark's first year of Strongman competitions after a switch to the sport from bodybuilding back in March. Since then, he has already been crowned Britain's Strongest Disabled Man.

"I've set myself a five-year goal to win the World competition. I can now reflect on this year and what I need to do differently, and where I need to improve," said Mark.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Activities: what you really think

Activities Manager Jess March commissioned a survey to find out what Members like and dislike about the Activities Programme. We take a look at the findings...



Blesma's burgeoning Activities Programme lies at the very heart of the Association's ethos, but figuring out exactly what works well and less well for Members, and why some people don't take part in activities at all, is not always simple.

Now, thanks to an extensive survey, which was developed in partnership with St Mary's University, Twickenham and completed by more than 10 per cent of the membership, a much clearer picture has emerged into how and why Members use activities. The findings will now be used to improve and refine the programme, with the aim of attracting even more participants.

"We wanted to get a deeper understanding of why relatively few Members get involved in activities," explained Activities Manager Jess March. "The survey aimed to discover exactly what draws in those who do participate, and what elements of the programme they enjoy the most. We also wanted to find out why others don't, or can't, take part. From the results, we hoped to find a way to move forward that would benefit everyone."

The survey came about after staff at Chadwell Heath commissioned St Mary's University to carry out an innovative study into how activities impact Members' lives. Ross Wadey, who led the investigation, concluded that there was a very positive effect on the physical, psychological and social well-being of those Members who took part in the organised programme.

"Opening up to new experiences gives people a fresh purpose in life," he said. "We found that activities improve social integration among Members, so they feel like they can participate in things more, and benefit from a sense of belonging. Activities generate positive emotions in Members and lessen their levels of negative emotions. Activities also benefit the individual – they learn about themselves and can make changes."

A TWO-PRONGED APPROACH

Two surveys were sent out; one for those who had taken part in an activity over the last two years, and one for those who hadn't. "The response was phenomenal," said Jess. "We received almost 400 surveys and, of those, 271 hadn't been active – that's 70 per cent! People were really honest, and that's vital. That was what we were hoping for, because it will help us work things out."

Respondents who hadn't taken part over the last two years tended to cite medical reasons (52%), travel difficulties (40%), lack of confidence (25%), and family commitments as their main reasons for not joining in.

Better communication (22%), travel expenses (22%), and different activities (19%) were named as three things that might change their minds. More day trips (40%), UK-based events (37%), partner-friendly (37%) and family-friendly (22%) options also interested them.

Those who had taken part in the last two years were overwhelmingly happy with their experiences, praising the application process (91%), an activity's impact on their well-being (87%), and the fact that taking part had given them a new hobby (70%). A massive 96% of respondents said they would recommend taking part to other Members, and they were keen to step up and attempt more 'challenging activities' (49%), too.

This has given Jess and Membership Engagement Assistant Emily Mizon a clear direction for next year. "We have learned that better communication with our Members is needed," said Jess, "and we will be putting on more local events – trips to the theatre, days out, that kind of thing – and more family- and partner-based activities in response to the feedback."

"The budgets haven't been decided yet, but less popular events will be removed and new ones will be added. We are also hoping to increase our Member-to-



THE ETHOS IS TO HELP BUILD UP RESILIENCE. ACTIVITIES SHOULD HELP OUR MEMBERS TO LEAD FULFILLING LIVES, NOT FULFIL THEM DIRECTLY



The most popular reason for taking part in activities was to get to meet other Members

The facts behind the fun

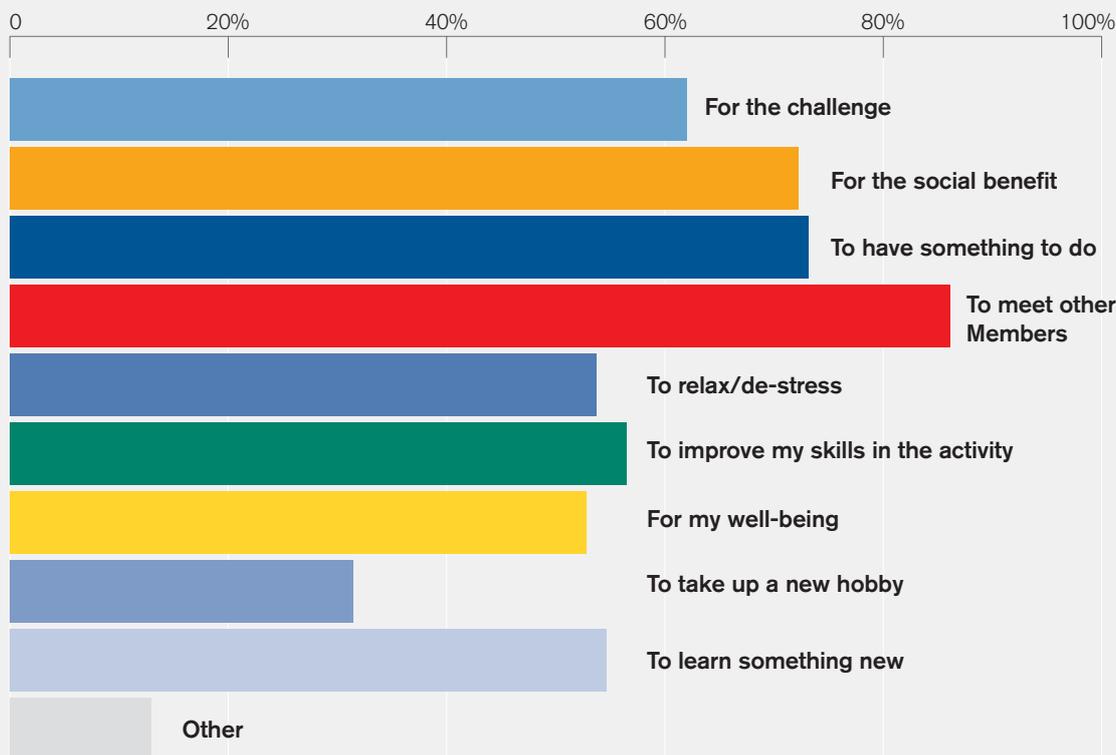
87% of respondents said that taking part in an activity impacted on their sense of well-being

75% of respondents have stayed in contact with other Members who they met whilst taking part in an activity

70% of respondents now consider the activity they tried with Blesma to be one of their hobbies

96% of respondents would encourage other Blesma Members to apply to take part in an activity

WHY DO YOU PARTICIPATE IN BLESMA ACTIVITIES?



WHAT TYPE OF ACTIVITIES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE MORE OF?

34%

Would like more family-friendly activities

50%

Would like more adventurous activities

42%

Would like more relaxed activities

Member mentoring with the help of those already involved. We want to focus on increasing Members' confidence to give things a go for the first time because we know that when people do take the plunge, they really enjoy themselves.

"Now, after Members take part in an activity, we ask them to promote it within the Association. We ask them to call a Member they think might have an interest, and work with their BSO to get them to sign up."

Jess was also pleased with the level of feedback that she received about how the application process works.

"There was a bit of a backlash!" she said. "I think some people believe we draw participants out of a hat, that it's first-come, first-served, or that we select names we know. This simply isn't true. There is a clear and comprehensive system for each activity; we look at the activities each applicant has taken part in, their BSO reports, and if they're new to Blesma. We try to be as fair as possible. I want to reassure people about that."

The programme is evolving but one thing is certain; activities will remain at the core of Blesma's offer.

"It's central to the Association," said Jess. "Blesma is about promoting a better quality of life and these activities play a huge part in that. It's easy for people to think; 'They're putting on a jolly here', but the ethos is to help our Members build resilience and create independence – not a dependence. The Activities Programme is designed to help Members to lead fulfilling lives rather than fulfil them directly."

Jess was also full of praise for Ross Wadey, a senior lecturer in sports psychology at St Mary's University, who helped devise the study. "It has been incredible working with Ross," she said. "He is so knowledgeable, and it's great to get a measured outcome and opinion about activities, as well as getting feedback from Members saying; 'I had an amazing time!'"

"We used to make choices about events based on the emotions of Members after activities. This is the first time that we've had an independent evaluation of our programme, as well as specific feedback from Members, and we'll make sure we incorporate the findings in future programmes."

↘ BLESMA BRIEFING

Is there an expert in the house?

Brian Chenier, BSO (Prosthetics), offers the latest on prosthetics. This issue; the NHS policy on Microprocessor Controlled Knees, and putting you at the centre of your care



In our everyday lives, the majority of us will call out a plumber or mechanic rather than attempt potentially costly DIY projects ourselves. The same is true for prosthetic care. Although our choice of provider may be limited, the actual prosthetists in whom you place your trust have years of training and experience.

Prosthetists are skilful in the techniques required to produce artificial limbs and are aware of the products available. The wider multi-disciplinary rehabilitation team of consultants, doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, counsellors and technicians are experts in their own fields, and are focused on helping you with your rehabilitation goals.

But who is the real expert when it comes to knowing you? Only you really know what is and isn't working on a personal level. You are the expert when it comes to saying if a socket is comfortable, for example.

Most amputees did not have a choice in becoming an expert in living with limb loss; it happened and that's that. It is natural, and necessary, to focus on your situation. Every step or action requires a level of focus and effort that non-amputees take for granted. As time goes by, amputees become efficient in all aspects of daily living, and many go far beyond that.

It is this process of adaptation, learning and practice that justifies the assertion that the expert in living with limb loss is the person who is living it. It is vital that all the experts who make up the multi-disciplinary team are heard, but this must include the real expert in each case; the patient.

NHS ENGLAND POLICY DECISION ON MICROPROCESSOR CONTROLLED KNEES

On 11 July, NHS England set out the results of its annual process for deciding which new treatments and services it would make available to patients. One new service was the inclusion of Microprocessor Controlled Knees, a policy that Blesma, and others, have been demanding for three years. This was categorised as being Level 3 (out of 5, with 1 being the highest priority).

The following is taken from the NHS England website: *There is sufficient funding available in the expanded specialised commissioning budget for 2016/17 to enable the proposals in levels 1-4 of cost/benefit priority to be routinely commissioned. This means that they will be made*



Your opinion is vital when it comes to your care

available to patients who meet the clinical criteria set out in each policy. However, this investment remains subject to the outcome of a judicial review which will determine whether NHS England has the power to commission the use of antiviral drugs for the prevention of HIV, given before exposure to individuals who are at high risk of contracting the virus...

This means that the policies in each priority level may change and some of the services provisionally set to be funded could be displaced and not therefore funded.

On 02 August the High Court ruled that NHS England does have the power to commission preventative medicine. This has delayed, and potentially jeopardised, the implementation of the Microprocessor Knee policy as it may now need to be reassessed. NHS England has appealed this High Court Ruling and pending the decision of the Court of Appeal, Level 3 and 4 treatments/services are being reviewed.

Blesma and others continue to ensure this policy, and all matters relating to prosthetic provision, remain high on the NHS England agenda. This process does not affect prosthetic policies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Nor does it affect provision of prosthetics to eligible veterans via the Veterans Prosthetic Panel.

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

“ IT IS VITAL THAT ALL EXPERTS ARE HEARD, BUT THIS MUST INCLUDE THE REAL EXPERT IN EACH CASE; THE PATIENT ”



Photographers learn model behaviour

In August, professional photographers Parm and Kirsty Verdi kindly opened their studio to teach Blesma Members how to take professional photographs.

Members were invited into the Chadwell Heath studio for two days where they got to take photographs of model Victoria Joelle Montgomery. During the course, Parm and Kirsty taught Members how to set up their own home studio, how to take portrait studio photographs, how to work with and direct a model, and much more.

Mick Williams attended the event along with Luke Delahunty and Brenda Marison.

“It was an absolutely fantastic course. I learnt so much that I can now help people myself and set up my studio in my living room,” said Mick. “It is fantastic work that Kirsty and Parm do with our Members and I am very grateful to them.”

For more about Blesma photography courses, contact the Activities Team on mea@blesma.org or call 020 8548 7094

SUPPORT BLESMA AND WIN £10,000

For just £1 a week you can get the chance to win a whopping £10,000 AND you'll be supporting our limbless veterans at the same time!

As you probably know, Blesma doesn't receive any government funding, so we rely solely on the generous support of donors and fundraisers to enable us to help our injured veterans and Widows for as long as they need us.

The Forces Lottery costs just £1 a week and you can win anything from £5 to £10,000. You will be given a six-digit lottery number, and every Saturday you must match 3, 4, 5, or all 6 digits of the winning number in the correct order to win. To have a better chance of winning you can buy more than one six-digit number.

A leaflet explaining more about the Lottery and how to play has been inserted into this issue. If you don't have one please contact the Fundraising Team on 020 8548 3517



NEWS BRIEFS

DON'T LOOK DOWN!

Intrepid fundraisers, including a number of Blesma Members, abseiled 328 feet down the Emirates Spinnaker Tower in Portsmouth in August. The event, which was kindly sponsored by Ottobock, has already raised more than £8,000.

“It was marvellous! I had a brilliant day and I haven't done anything like that since I left the Forces. It was good to get out – it took me out of my usual routine!” said Member Dave Croshaw.



A SHORT TRIP ON A TALL SHIP

Member and keen sailor Ron Bright is attempting to arrange an activity for anyone interested in sailing on square rigged tall ships. The ships are designed and built specifically for use by disabled people, and can cater for Members who are blind or who use wheelchairs.

Last year, four Members took part in a week-long voyage on the Lord Nelson, and gained so much from the trip that they all want to do it again.

If you are interested in finding out more, please contact Ron by email at rfbright@btconnect.com or by phone on 01474 852222

HELP US TO IMPROVE YOUR MAGAZINE

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

INBOX

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

Help finding out about my father

I AM WRITING TO ASK IF ANYONE IN Blesma might have any details concerning my father, John Christopher O'Connor, who was born on 12 September 1912.

I believe my dad was in the Royal Ulster Rifles, and was in a glider plane that came down in Holland during WWII. Most in the plane lost their lives, and my dad suffered severe injuries to his legs, which had to be amputated. For a while, as he recovered, he was kept as a prisoner of war. Then he was tracked down by his sister and transferred to Nottingham hospital and subsequently rehabilitated in Roehampton.

Later, when he was able to return to his wife and child, the Red Cross and Blesma must have helped him. In this photograph he is already on his artificial tin legs which, being his second daughter, I remember so well. This photograph shows him accepting a car – a Morris Minor that was fitted with hand controls, because he was a double leg amputee. The photo shows two ladies and two other gentlemen, and it is signed from



John O'Connor (without hat) with his adapted Morris Minor

the Orpington Members and Gravesend Secretary of Blesma. There are 16 signatures on the back of the photograph in total.

This is a long shot, but I was wondering if anyone might have kept any records of

my father. Unfortunately, the Red Cross has been unable to help me. My older sister said she remembered a Mr Nash being involved. Any help would be much appreciated.

Eileen Page

Fun is the word as Branch celebrates 70th anniversary

At the Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft Branch AGM in February, our Members tasked the committee with organising something special for the Branch's 70th anniversary. After a great deal of head scratching, it was decided to have a 'fun day' on 18 August followed by a lunch the next day. The invite was opened up to anyone in East Anglia and the planning started in earnest.



Letters were sent out, a venue was found for the fun day (High Lodge near Darsham) which would include archery, clay pigeon shooting, fishing and golf. There would be a BBQ in the middle of the day so everyone could get to know each other and brag about how good a shot they were!

The day arrived and 47 Members and guests, ranging in age from three months to 88 years, attended. The weather was great and most people tried the archery and clay shooting (considering ex-Service men were involved, the clays got off very lightly!)

A big thank you must go to our friends from the local Masonic Marksman's Lodge as, without their expert tuition, even more of the clays would have got away! The golfers went out to spoil a good walk by hitting a little white ball all over the place, although I think they really just wanted to go rallying in the golf buggies!

Meanwhile, our fishermen and women sat by the ponds and whiled away the day. They claimed several big fish were caught, but without photographic evidence it's hard to believe them.

With the fun day over it was time for the anniversary lunch which was attended by 57 Members as well as the mayors of Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft. Speeches were followed by a raffle and entertainment, which went on late into the afternoon.

Everyone had a great day and a number of Members would like to do it again next year. So if you get a letter inviting you to come and join us, why not give it a try?

Bob Monkhouse



Martin Hewitt (centre)



Brian Hogg collects an award from Lady Jane the Baroness Willoughby de Eresby



Chief Executive Barry Le Gry



Blesma AGM is a celebration of Members, volunteers and staff

This year's Annual General Meeting provided a perfect opportunity to celebrate the inspiring work of the Association's Members, volunteers and staff, as well as report that the charity continues to find itself in a strong position.

Delegates and guests at the meeting, held at the RAF Club in Piccadilly, London, in June, heard chief executive Barry Le Gry (above) present the Trustees' Annual and Strategic Report and introduce a series of speakers who define Blesma's continued commitment to challenge and excellence.

Former Parachute Regiment Captain Martin Hewitt (top, centre) gave an uplifting presentation about the Adaptive Grand Slam project, in which he is attempting to climb the tallest peak on each of the seven continents, as well as reach both poles.

Those who attended the AGM also heard from Professor Anthony Bull, director of the Centre for Blast Injury Studies at Imperial College, London, about the research his multi-disciplinary team is undertaking into severe injury. His team's detailed work is helping to devise safer systems

and hardware to minimise the impact of explosive blasts on future frontline troops (see p44 for an in-depth feature).

Alison Treadgold, Head of Armed Forces' Health NHS England, also reported on activities across the health service that, with Blesma's strong input, have improved service provision for many Members.

Blesma also showed its gratitude to two authors. Former RAF Flight Lieutenant John Nichol raised £500 from a reunion of UK and US Gulf War PoWs to mark the 25th anniversary of the conflict. Ray Harwood (below left), donated the royalties from his successful *Sardana* novel series to



Ray Harwood (left) with his family

the Association. Meanwhile, (above) Lady Jane the Baroness Willoughby de Eresby, daughter of The Earl of Ancaster, presented her late father's memorial award to Brian Hogg for his tireless work with the Blesma skibob team, which has given many Members the chance to rediscover their physical independence and confidence.

"It was good to reflect on a successful year and hear from a broad spectrum of speakers about the future," said Chairman, Lieutenant General Sir Cedric Delves.

"Blesma is committed to doing everything it can towards helping our Members live full and independent lives. But we know there are always challenges ahead and we have to continue to work hard to face them."

The Trustees' Annual and Strategic Report 2015 was accepted unanimously as the board reiterated its commitment to work for Members through life.

You can read the Annual Report in its entirety at www.blesma.org/news-media/annual-report

OBITUARIES

Those we have lost

Jerome Church, OBE
photographed whilst
in his role as Blesma's
Chief Executive



Lieutenant Colonel Jerome W Church OBE

29 February 1948 - 11 June 2016

JEROME CHURCH BECAME CHIEF Executive of Blesma, the Limbless Veterans, on the eve of two wars in which the loss of limbs became a concern almost comparable to that for fatal casualties.

The insurgencies that followed the initial military successes in Iraq and Afghanistan featured widespread use of improvised explosive devices, imposing an insidious threat inhibiting deployment under fire and travel on and off roads.

Jerome lost a leg to an IED in Northern Ireland in 1972 but had the determination and humour to live an almost 'normal' life. This inspired him to help shape the report that transformed prosthetic provision for veteran amputees of all conflicts and to campaign for a radical reappraisal of

the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. He widened Blesma's adventure and challenge activities to rebuild amputees' mental and physical strengths, as well as their self-esteem. Above all, he embodied a fellowship that helped many severely damaged young men and women to begin newly independent and fulfilling lives.

An ebullient individual, Jerome Wilfrid Church was equally respected by his soldiers for his leadership and his example of how to endure, and even mock, disability. Asked how he was feeling on the way to hospital he quipped; "Well, legless, really."

His energy and resolution contributed to the incident in which he was wounded. Commanding a patrol of four Humber armoured personnel carriers, known as

'pigs' for their snout-like bonnets, in County Tyrone in February 1972, he gave chase to a civilian car that had made a rapid three-point turn on approaching a checkpoint. Despite radio warnings of a possible trap, Jerome continued until he reached a roadblock that the pursued car had by-passed using the grass verge.

He dismounted to guide two 'pigs' around the obstacle. As the first began to move, a blast from an explosion passed beneath the vehicle shattering Jerome's lower right leg and seriously injuring another soldier. The pursued car was later proved to be in use by the Provisional IRA.

As soon as the news of his injury reached his fiancée, Jane Merry, she flew home from Australia to be with him. She was living with her parents, Captain Vernon Merry, RN, and his wife, Marjorie, in Canberra, where Merry was naval adviser to the British High Commission. Jerome's own parents, Commander John

Church, RN, and his wife, Rosemary, had been killed in a motor accident when Jerome was just 15 years old.

Jerome was educated at Downside and commissioned from Sandhurst into the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers in 1968. It was while serving with 3rd Battalion in Gibraltar that he met his future wife, who was working as secretary to the commanding officer.

They were married in 1973 but at no time did Jerome consider any future other than to return to service with his regiment, rejoining the 3rd Battalion as soon as a prosthesis had been fitted. He developed a habit of knocking out his pipe on his artificial leg until on one occasion the mess sergeant approached him saying; "Sir, I think you will find that your trousers are on fire."

His disability made returning to active service as a junior officer problematic, so he accepted posts where his natural enthusiasm and courage set an example. He was an instructor at the Junior Leaders Battalion, Oswestry, the Queen's Division's training centre at Basingbourn, and at Sandhurst. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel to become an instructor at the Kenyan staff college and then commanded the depot at Basingbourn. He served on the public relations staff of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe in Mons from 1994 to 2000.

Sailing in the Baltic with his family was his principal pastime as he and Jane brought

up their children. Jerome's wife, son and three daughters all survive him.

When he heard of the forthcoming vacancy of Chief Executive of Blesma in 2000 he quickly applied. On leaving 14 years later he was appointed OBE (Civil) having received an MBE (Military) for his work at the Directorate of Infantry in 1989. Motor neurone disease ended his sailing days, but he and Jane still travelled the world. He died

from injuries in a fall while they were visiting their daughter in New Jersey, USA.

Jerome will be remembered for his indomitable spirit. On being discharged from hospital in 1972 he greeted his company commander's wife with a grin when she saw his stump and crutches and asked; "Any chance of a cup of tea? I've just been auditioning for a part in *Treasure Island*."



Those who have passed away

June 2016 – August 2016. May they rest in peace.

Aiken D	RN	Bournemouth	July 2016
Andrews T	RA	Coventry	30/06/2016
Armstrong R	RAMC	HQ	June 2016
Carmichael Mrs M	Wrens	Blackpool Home	27/06/2016
Coats I	Royal Lancers	HQ	June 2016
Craggs G	Royal Corps of Signals	HQ	August 2016
Day W	RAF	Portsmouth	28/07/2016
Gill R	North Staffordshire	Gt Yarmouth	12/08/2016
Hickson R	RAF	HQ	03/08/2016
Hogan D	The Royal Hussars	Bournemouth	07/06/2016
Johnson E V	Parachute Regt	HQ (Bucks)	01/06/2016
Massey L	Royal Green Jackets	HQ	06/08/2016
Mears L	Queens Royal Lancers	HQ (Norwich)	02/06/2016
Middlewood G	Dorset	HQ (Bridlington)	03/07/2016
Penny P	Grenadier Guards	HQ	20/07/2016
Purdy E	Coldstream Guards	HQ	03/08/2016
Smith R	KOSB	HQ (Dundee/Tayside)	15/06/2016
Timblin S	REME/UDR	HQ	14/08/2016
Watts R	Essex	Sutton & Merton	12/06/2016

It was on 18 July 2009, when Harry Parker was returning from a night patrol with 50 men, that he made a mistake – deciding to take a line of soldiers on a short cut through a field rather than follow the longer path.

“It was only my arrogance to walk across that field. It was this close to camp and I thought; ‘Right, I’ll take a risk here rather than minesweeping it.’”

Of the moments surrounding his stepping on the IED, he says; “I never quite knew the full story because obviously I was eyes shut, gritting teeth.” His men radioed the company patrol base, where the incident was reported back to Camp Bastion – a process called a ‘nine-liner’ – to alert the medical emergency response team.

Fortunately for Harry, an American helicopter was already in the air and in the area. It landed at the patrol base and carried him away. It took 18 minutes for the helicopter to get him from Nad-e-Ali district in Central Helmand to the military hospital at Camp Bastion, during which time Harry, then a captain in 4th Battalion The Rifles, teetered on the brink of death.

“I thought I was conscious for all of it but then, 10 days later, someone told me; ‘We had to start your heart five times!’” the Blesma Member says now. He lost his lower left leg and a little finger in the blast, and after he was flown home his lower right leg was amputated at Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham.

“In hospital, you’re propped up by drugs, it’s unreal,” he says. “I felt that I was still serving, still setting an example, still stiff upper lip and all that. Even though there’s no need – no-one is expecting that of you.” It was only once he was home, recuperating with his family, that reality hit.

“Being in a place where I’d had a normal life before suddenly brought it into stark relief; I’ve got no legs,” he says. “It was one of those moments when realisation came; I couldn’t go for a run any more. There was an element of mourning a loss. It came in short bursts. It was quite similar to losing someone you really loved.”

Harry has used this traumatic period as the basis for his ambitious debut novel *Anatomy of a Soldier*. “Writing about the explosion,” he says, “felt good creatively,



Anatomy of an Author

How would a rifle round, a bike or a snowflake view amputation? When Harry Parker lost both his legs in an IED strike in Afghanistan, he decided to find out



**Harry Parker,
photographed
at the London
office of his
publisher,
Faber, in May**



but also, you've mined your personal experiences." The process left him "a sweaty mess". Harry recently completed a postgraduate course in fine art at the Royal Drawing School in Shoreditch, London. Writing and drawing, he says, have been key to the restitution of his independence and sense of self.

The first things you notice about the 32 year old are not his impressively futuristic prosthetic legs, but rather his impeccable manners and jolly demeanour – and he is surprisingly candid.

"When I left the Army in 2013, it was the first time for 100 years that there hadn't been a Parker in the Services." His father is General Sir Nick Parker who, only four months after his son was wounded, took up the post of Deputy Nato Commander in Afghanistan.

"Harry would be horrified if I didn't go," Sir Nick said at the time, "he'd think I was a wimp." His son confirms. "I told him; 'You'd better go.' I was getting on with recovery and Dad was getting on with his job." (Looking back, he says it was a "morphine-induced" reaction that led to him being so insistent that his father should leave.)

VERY DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW

There is little such bravado in *Anatomy of a Soldier*, a book that employs a unique conceit. The story of Captain Tom Barnes and his fateful encounter with a landmine is told from the viewpoints of 45 objects – helmet, bicycle, dog tags, rifle round, rug, medical instruments, handbag, medal, snowflake, drone – drawn from combat and domestic arenas, before, during and after the explosion.

Has Harry employed a mechanism that lets him keep his distance? "I didn't really want to write my story," he says. "I didn't want to write; 'I was in the Helmand Valley...'" Instead, Harry has created an accomplished piece of literary cubism.

"My story is much more complicated than Tom's in terms of what happens when you get blown up," he says. "Fiction let me tell more, in a sense. You can condense." In his novel Harry does not name the war zone, presumably to avoid any political comment about the conflict in Afghanistan, especially considering his father's role (he was in command until 2013). "I didn't want to talk about equipment, or lack of



it, or whether we should be there or not." He explains that the anonymous location put 'air' around the narrative. "But, of course, it is Afghanistan," he says.

Talking about his family, Harry makes them sound stoic about the trauma of what happened to him. "Obviously, they had their own thoughts about it, but for me they were only supportive." Friends reacted in different ways. "Some would take the mickey, to try and make it funny." Yet, he explains, his good friends "never really saw the injury, it was very quickly me again."

As for his colleagues in the Army, he says; "For a long time I felt much more comfortable being with people who weren't soldiers. I felt the people I served with were embarrassed in front of me. I was a reminder of what could happen to them."

After leaving Headley Court, Harry got a desk job in Whitehall before leaving in 2013 because his wife said he should do something 'more creative.' There are days when it is difficult to put on the hi-tech prosthetics. "Learning to walk again is very time-consuming. It's physically hard work. It's painful. It's frustrating. But at the same time it's exciting, you're achieving," he says.

"Six months in and you think; 'God, I'm better.' And then three years later you go; 'I'm better still.' But even now, skin grafts open up. It's still painful, but you manage it psychologically and physically." His strategies include staying fit and healthy,

keeping busy and using imagination to see past the restrictions of disability. And he has a determination not to be a victim.

"I've never had that waking up in the night thing." He pauses. "I've always looked forward. That's not to say in 10 years' time I might not break down and have some sort of flashback."

FROM ART TO THE ARMY, AND BACK

Harry was born in 1983 and was, he says, an 'Army brat'. Although the family home was in Wiltshire, he had an unsettled childhood owing to his father's postings to Germany, Gibraltar, Scotland and Northern Ireland. He has an older brother, Tim, who works in finance.

"I never really said I wanted to join the Army," he says. "I was more into drawing." He discovered art as a child in Gibraltar. "I used to watch the planes landing and draw those or the aircraft carriers."

After attending Radley College in Oxfordshire and completing a foundation year at Falmouth Art College, he studied history of art at University College London. But a brief internship at an advertising firm in Canada altered his course.

"I thought advertising was just lying to people, it wasn't for me." It was then that he considered joining up. "As long as I was commanding men and coming up with solutions to problems, that was being creative," he says. "For me, that's all that drawing and writing are; how do I answer this problem?"

In 2007, aged 23, shortly after leaving Sandhurst, Harry was deployed to Iraq as a platoon commander in Basra. The six-month tour was, he says, a sobering experience. "It was just before we pulled out of the city and went to the airbase, so it was a pretty hairy time. We were 600 soldiers in a city of two million people."

On returning from Basra he was stationed in Bulford, Wiltshire. When he was sent on tour to Helmand, Harry found

"FOR A TIME I FELT MORE COMFORTABLE BEING WITH PEOPLE WHO WEREN'T SOLDIERS. I FELT THE PEOPLE I SERVED WITH WERE EMBARRASSED. I WAS A REMINDER OF WHAT COULD HAPPEN"

Anatomy of a Soldier

by Harry Parker

My serial number is 6545-01-522. I was unpacked from a plastic case, pulled open, checked and reassembled. A black marker wrote BA5799 O POS on me and I was placed in the left thigh pocket of BA5799's combat trousers. I stayed there; the pocket was rarely unfastened.

I spent eight weeks, two days and four hours in the pocket. I wasn't needed yet. I slid against BA5799's thigh, back and forth, back and forth, mostly slowly but sometimes quickly, bouncing around. And there was noise: bangs and cracks, high-pitched whines, shouts of excitement and anger.

One day I was submerged in stagnant water for an hour.

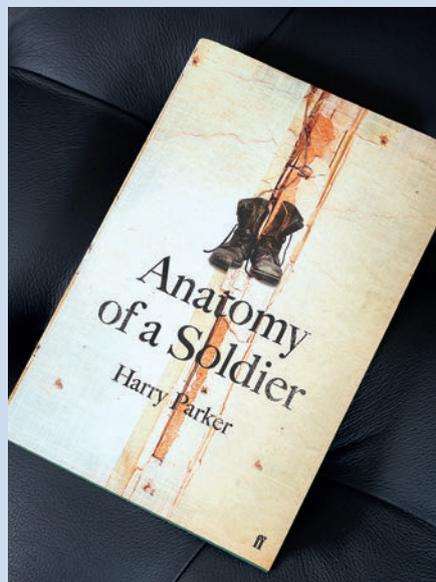
I went in vehicles, tracked and wheeled, winged and rotoed. I was soaked in soapy water then hung out to dry on a clothesline and did nothing for a day.

At 0618 on 15 August, when I was sliding alongside BA5799's thigh, I was lifted into the sky and turned over. And suddenly I was in the light. There was dust and confusion and shouting. I was on the ground beside him. He was face down; he was incomplete. I was beside him as rocks and mud fell around us.

I was in the dust as a dark red liquid zigzagged towards me over the cracked mud. I was there when no one came and he was alone and couldn't move. I was still there as fear and pathetic hopelessness gripped BA5799, as he was turned over and two fingers reached into his mouth, as his chest was pumped up and down and they forced air into his lungs.

I was picked up by a slippery hand, fumbled back to the ground, then picked up again. I was pulled open by panicked fingers and covered in the thick liquid. I was placed on BA5799. I was turned. I tightened. I closed around his leg until his pulse pushed up against me. And he grimaced and whimpered through gritted teeth. I was wound tighter, gripping his thigh; stopping him bleed out into the dust.

I clung to him while he was lifted onto a stretcher and he bit deeply into the arm of a man who carried him, when he no longer made any noise. I clung to him



as we boarded the helicopter. I was wound again then, and gripped him harder.

I clung to him as we flew low across the fields and glinting irrigation ditches and the wind rushed around the helicopter, when he pleaded with God to save him and metal pads were placed on his chest and his body jolted. And I clung to him when the machine read no output, when there was no pulse against me.

I was there when they ran across to the helicopter and took us into the cool of the hospital.

I was there when the doctors looked worried. I clung to him when he came back, when he had output and his faltering heart pulsed again. I was still there when they hung the bag of blood above BA5799 and they cut the remains of his leg away.

And then I was unwound and loosened and I was no longer there; BA5799 no longer needed me.

My serial number is 6545-01-522. I was at the bottom of a surgical bin and then I was burnt.

2

I was placed on a broken pallet with three other identical bags of fertiliser outside a shop in the village of Howshal Nalay.

I had been on the pallet for two weeks when Faridun came on his green bicycle. He greeted the shopkeeper and they started to haggle. Then Faridun handed him money

and the shopkeeper lifted me onto the bike's pannier. I sagged over its metal bars that pushed into my plastic skin and he fastened me down with orange twine from the shop. Faridun shared a joke with the man, then swung his leg over the crossbar and we rode away.

Faridun cycled us out of the village on the exposed road; a raised, sand-coloured backbone running through dusty green fields. The bike's buckled rear wheel squeaked below me as we weaved past potholes left by the winter rains.

He sighed when he saw the checkpoint through the vibrating air. He dismounted as we approached and pushed the bike along beside him. An iron bar was propped on two oil drums across the road, and a red-tanked motorbike leant next to it on its stand. A group of men sat in the dark shade of a compound.

One of them stood and walked towards us. He beckoned Faridun over with the hand that wasn't holding the weapon.

'Peace be upon you, young man. How are you?' he said.

Faridun shielded his eyes and looked up at him. 'Peace be upon you. I am fine, praise to God.'

The man was a black silhouette against the sun.

'I am on my way home from Howshal Nalay, I have been to the market,' Faridun said quietly. 'I need to get back before dark.'

The others emerged from the shade and gathered behind the man. Faridun glanced up at them and recognised his friend Latif. Latif had also recognised Faridun; he looked uncertain and then walked forward and whispered into the man's ear.

The man's face tightened. He stepped out and kicked hard against the bicycle's crossbar. Faridun caught his ankle under the sprocket and fell into the dust. I slumped onto the road with him, twisting under the orange twine. The man held the gun with both hands now and stepped onto the bike, crushing Faridun's leg.

Faridun didn't make a sound.

The man was over him and forced the barrel down against his mouth. Faridun pursed his lips closed, shaking his head from side to side. But the man wormed the weapon back and forth until Faridun's

lips were pushed apart and the barrel slid against his teeth, slipping up to peel away the gum from his incisor. Faridun opened his mouth in pain and the weapon banged through his teeth until it knocked into the back of his throat.

'Is your father Kushan Hhan?'

Faridun gagged and his tongue curled up against the metal. He nodded in shock. The man pushed down harder and Faridun convulsed and choked around the barrel again.

'Your father is working for the infidel,' the man said. 'If he continues to do this against the will of God, I will cut off your sister's head. Do you understand?' He pushed again a final time. And then the weapon was pulled clear and he stepped away.

Faridun's eyes were wet but he held the man's gaze as he got up out of his shadow and lifted the bike off the ground. The twine lost its grip and I fell off the pannier. Faridun's lip was already thickening and he looked over at Latif.

'May God be with you, Latif,' he said, before slowly wheeling the bicycle down the road, away from where I remained in the dust.

The men laughed and patted Latif on the back. One of them walked into the middle of the road, picked me up and threw me down against the compound wall.

That afternoon the men reclined in the shade and waved a group of nomads and their camels through. They took fifteen dollars in tax from a lorry driver and chatted with a group of men on their way home from the fields. Finally, as dusk sharpened the horizon, two of them left on the motorbike. The others moved the pole and oil drums into the compound, said they would meet again after prayers and drifted away.

The last man lifted me onto his shoulder. He walked down a path beside a silver strip of water until we reached a dark area of undergrowth in a maze of crumbling walls. He opened a wooden door, put me on the floor and pulled it shut behind him.

I am a bag of fertiliser. I contain NH₄NO₃ and I waited in that dark room until I was opened and used.



himself in a very different role in a very different landscape. As a liaison officer he acted as a bridge between the Army and the local Afghans. "I was trying to create a positive influence in the area, a cultural understanding of how we were acting," he says. But it was too dangerous to get a proper foothold in the community, and too difficult for him to do anything meaningful. "All I was doing was giving compensation to people whose fields had been burnt. I think young men fighting is such a waste. It is a waste, isn't it? But I suppose the five years growing up out of the Army, writing this... that distance lets you see it."

Anatomy of a Soldier is a novel of opposites – of infidels and insurgents, civilians and the military, able-bodied and injured – and yet the similarities between the combatants are telling. He shows how young Afghans are reacting to expectations.

"On the other side, you've got young men like me who join the Army for the same reason they built bases in the woods when they were 10," Harry observes. "As soon as I started writing, I began reading with a bit more of an eye on how people do

it," he says. "The more I wrote, the more I came back to my own experiences," he says.

In *Anatomy of a Soldier*, Harry explains, "I set rules. The objects don't have emotion, they can't speak. They can only know what someone is thinking if they are touching them. The rules don't matter for the reader, they were for me to keep a structure."

His book does not make for comfortable reading. There are moments when the objects expose bittersweet intimacies, such as when the protagonist's father shaves his bed-bound son. The voice of the razor captures a comforting sense of purpose for the older man. But perhaps the most bracing chapter chronicles the amputation of Barnes's remaining leg in hospital in Britain, an operation narrated by the electric saw. Harry was unconscious when he underwent the procedure, but he researched the details. "You can watch one on YouTube," he says. "I was like; 'Can I write a chapter which makes people gag?'"

In November 2009, Sir Nick Parker claimed in a newspaper interview that although his son had 'had a very unwanted change to his life, it won't stop him realising his full potential.' It may have seemed like a father putting on a brave face but it was prescient. In the years since, Harry has married, had a daughter, earned a master's degree, had his designs used for the medals awarded at the Invictus Games, and written an outstanding book.

And he maintains that he wouldn't change what has happened to him.

"You regret at times, but overall it was a positive experience. When people say; 'I'm so sorry,'" he reflects with a smile, "I say; 'Don't be, my life's much more interesting.'"

An extract of Anatomy of a Soldier (Faber, £14.99) appears opposite. We have five signed copies to give away. To be in with a chance of winning one, send your name and address in an envelope marked 'Book Competition' to Chadwell Heath by 01 November

"REALISATION CAME; I COULDN'T GO FOR A RUN ANY MORE. THERE WAS AN ELEMENT OF MOURNING A LOSS. IT WAS SIMILAR TO LOSING SOMEONE YOU REALLY LOVED"

“IT IS LIKE EVERY NEW CASE IS A CHALLENGE TO THEM”

Advances in socket design and technology have lagged behind those of prosthetics. But a Limb Centre in Liverpool has plans to change that...

The workshop bustles with activity but there is a very noticeable hush as the prosthetists and technicians at the award-winning Liverpool Prosthetic and Wheelchair Centre concentrate on pushing the boundaries once more.

Working with everything from nuts and bolts to intricately engineered silicone, the team pride themselves on crafting the best sockets for limbless patients aged anywhere from three to 93. The centre, based at the Aintree University Hospital's NHS Foundation Trust, six miles north of Liverpool's city centre, has some 1,100 patients on its books. Among them are former Royal Green Jacket Neil Holme (right) and a number of military veterans.

The 54 year old has had enduring problems with the fit of his socket ever since he underwent an above-the-knee amputation of his left leg as a result of an IRA bomb blast while he was stationed in Belfast in 1981. It seemed an intractable problem, but senior prosthetist Ian Talbot and workshop manager Terry Moore refused to be beaten, and their technical wizardry has culminated in a new style of socket

that has changed Neil's life and won an award from the British Association of Prosthetists and Orthotists.

For four years, Neil suffered pain and discomfort from the brim of previous sockets, along with issues caused by squeezing his residual leg into a stiff socket. A socketless socket from Martin Bionics in the US, which allows the limb to sit in a hammock support rather than in an encapsulated socket, would have been ideal. But the price is out of the reach of most patients in the UK – and certainly falls outside the NHS budget.

SO NEW IT DOESN'T HAVE A NAME

“Neil was keen to get a socketless socket but they are hugely expensive and I am not aware of anyone in the NHS who has one,” says Ian. “Neil went away from our consultation very disappointed, but Terry and I went into our workshop and looked at what we could come up with based on that design.

“Neil's socket had a flexible inner section with a hard outer shell, but it was coming loose so we looked at something more flexible and Terry, who is an amazing technician, made a socket from three layers of silicone.

“We have created a brimless femoral support socket, but it's so new that we haven't got a name for it. The system uses four struts to clamp onto the residual limb before being tightened to apply pressure to the length of the femur. As the struts are tightened, the muscles bulge, making them fire and contract, resulting in greater control and therefore more movement.

“We then decided to take away the brim, which could have been a disaster. But although Neil's stump touches the bottom of the socket, the fit is so tight that the weight is transferred through the struts rather than the residual limb. The benefits are huge; now Neil is not getting any problems around the brim line, he can flex and kick with a full range of motions – he can even cross his legs, which he certainly couldn't do before;



Former Royal
Green Jacket Neil
Holme had his left
leg amputated in
2012 having been
injured by an IRA
bomb in 1981





**Workshop manager
Terry Moore (left)**



**Senior prosthetist
Ian Talbot**



he used to have to sit in awkward positions to ease the discomfort which, in time, can cause problems to the pelvis and spine. But now he says he can feel his muscles working. It has been a great success for him.”

For Neil, the innovation has been transformative. He now has a socket which fits perfectly and, combined with a waterproof Genium prosthetic knee, allows him to swim in swimming pools or in the sea near his home in Rhyl, North Wales. He proudly shows video clips of himself diving into a pool and swimming through the water as evidence of the socket’s capabilities.

“The socket is great and all the pain I was suffering from has vanished. I’m so happy with life!” says Neil. “I couldn’t walk on my first prosthetic leg – I was constantly falling over. Since then, I’ve had all sorts of problems with groin infections, and doing even simple things like sitting down or driving have proved to be almost impossible. I am a really active person and have wanted to do so much more, so it has been very frustrating as well as painful!”

THE TEAM THAT NEVER SAYS NEVER

Neil, who was 22 years old when he was injured in an attack that killed two fellow soldiers, managed to serve another 10 years following a string of operations and six months in traction at Woolwich. After he left the Forces he worked as a foreman on the Mersey Docks, but the pain from his leg eventually became too much and, despite five replacement knees, he lost his leg in 2012 and was forced to retire.

“I was all doom and gloom because I loved the job,” he says, “but Ian and the team listened to what I was going through and always tried to do something new for me. They’ve never said there is nothing they can do, they just don’t work like that; it is like every single case is a new challenge to them.”

Helping Army veterans regain their mobility gives an extra professional reward for Ian as he left school to join the Royal Engineers before being medically discharged four years later after suffering from a lung illness that obliterated his fitness.

“As far as I was concerned, I had joined the Army for life, so being forced to leave destroyed me. I didn’t know what to do,” says Ian. “Obviously, I’d not had a catastrophic injury, but I can relate to the huge sense of loss that comes with being part of something and then having that taken away. Veterans tend to be more active than other amputees, and demand more from their sockets, so we have to be innovative and come up with solutions to help them reach their goals. That is part of the great challenge of the job.”

Ian worked as an electrician before going to Salford University to study prosthetics, and is now part of a team of four prosthetists, three technicians and a workshop manager working for Steeper, which has been contracted by the hospital to provide the service.

“The most wonderful part, and what always puts a smile on my face, is that as a team we have the skills to get an amputee who comes into the Centre in a wheelchair walking again. I feel really privileged to be a part of that. Prosthetics have moved on a great deal in the last few years, and the products available to today’s veterans can be life-changing. But socket



**Left: the team at Liverpool thought outside the box to come up with a solution for Neil’s prosthetic problem
Far left: a regular day at the Liverpool Prosthetic and Wheelchair Centre**

design and technology seems to have lagged behind. You can have the best microprocessor knee in the world but if it doesn’t have a good fitting socket, all those hi-tech components are completely wasted.

“The same socket design – a quad-shaped socket cast to the patient – has been used since WWII, but the shape of the socket is not a natural shape for a limb. This can create pressure and problems around the edges. Every patient is different; for some, this type of socket is fine, but for others it is excruciating.

“We need to push on with socket design and try new things. It can be challenging to innovate because it is difficult to fail. No-one wants to see a patient coming back two days later saying the socket doesn’t work, but we cannot let that put us off.”

WHY LIVERPOOL’S STAFF STRIVE TO ‘GET IT RIGHT FOR EVERY PATIENT’

The smart Liverpool Prosthetic and Wheelchair Centre is a medium-sized NHS facility located about 30 miles from the nearest Murrison Centre, in Preston. The Centre’s approach reflects the wider hospital’s ethos of ‘getting it right for every patient’.

“Neil is the perfect example of why we strive to live up to that ethos,” says Centre Manager Ann Connor. “Just because Neil’s needs weren’t mainstream, didn’t mean we wouldn’t do anything about them. Ian and the team worked hard to find a solution for Neil’s specific needs.

“Ian, Terry and the team approach a problem by having the vision to try different things and find answers. That is why we have ended up with this innovative socket.”

That freedom to experiment is backed up by the Centre’s multi-disciplinary approach to all prosthetic and socket problems. The workshop strives to meet the design challenges, whilst a physiotherapist, rehabilitation



engineer, orthotist and other specialist staff ensure the products are practical.

“Ultimately, it is about making it work for the patient, and the better the co-ordination between departments, the fewer repeat visits a patient will have to make,” says Ann. “Military veterans tend to be fit for their age group, and their backgrounds give them a particular outlook on life and a determination to get going again. They deserve a good service from the NHS and everyone here takes great pride helping them to do just that.”

How to...

Become a Paralympian

It's all smiles and waves on the top step of the Paralympic podium, but what does it really take to become an elite athlete? Since narrowly missing out on a medal at London 2012, Nick Beighton's life has been simple: eat, sleep, train, repeat...

Nick Beighton was a Captain in the Royal Engineers when he lost both his legs to an IED blast in 2009. Since his injury, he has narrowly missed out on a rowing medal in the 2012 Paralympics, he has taken on the challenge of a lifetime with Beeline Britain, and has just won a bronze in Rio in kayaking. He took precious time away from training in the run up to the Paralympics to talk about his remarkable journey and offer his tips on getting to the top for anyone with their sights set on the Paralympics in 2020.

GET OUT AND DO SOMETHING... ANYTHING!

"Becoming a Paralympian was the furthest thing from my mind post-injury. I'd been in hospital, I'd had a metal frame on my pelvis, and I was frustrated. I just wanted to do something positive. The week the frame came off, there was a Paralympic talent identification day in London. I went along and was throwing myself around. All the doctors were wincing, hoping I didn't knacker myself up! But I just wanted to be active. That was the first step."

CONSIDER SOMETHING NEW

"I enjoyed trying out activities I'd never done before. After my injury, sports that I'd done in the past could be tinged with a legacy of sadness, because I knew I was never going to be as good at them as I had

been. I'd never rowed before, so the whole process of mastering a new technique and being out on the water for the first time was incredible, and very good for me mentally."

FIND A GOOD SPORTING MATCH

"When UK Sport assess athletes, they look at your attributes and try to match you to



the right sport. My physique suited rowing. I wasn't in a healthy state five or six years ago, but I had potential. If you're thinking of going down this path, it's vital that you choose a sport you enjoy. If your only motivation is something vague about winning a medal, you're not going to be able to cope with the day-to-day, which requires total dedication. It needs to be something you want to get out of bed to do. Find a club, give it a try – then take it as far as you can."

SAVOUR EVERY SINGLE EXPERIENCE YOU HAVE

"For me, London 2012 was very difficult, because I just missed out on a medal and found that so frustrating. There was the pressure of the home Games, and I was so

Nick won bronze at the World Champs just 18 months after first sitting in a kayak



caught up in the performance that I didn't see the success of the whole story. With hindsight, I can appreciate it. I went from being recently injured, in a poor physical and mental state, to being active and positive. This time around, in Rio, I told myself I'd make sure I appreciated the fact that I've done well. Savour any experience, and appreciate how special it is."

DON'T LOOK TOO FAR AHEAD

"Not getting ahead of yourself is key as an athlete. In terms of a mental approach, I know what I need to do for the next session and for the next day – and I just focus on that. Making small changes over a period of time leads to big improvements. I've got a big picture in my mind of where I want to ultimately end up, but I have to focus on the immediate job at hand. I think a military personality definitely suits being

a professional sports person. You're already incredibly disciplined and dedicated – and know what working hard really means."

MIX IT UP

"I switched from rowing to kayaking after London for several reasons. One was

practical – I'd lost my Army quarters down south, and with my family in the Midlands, carrying on would have been logistically difficult. I also fancied a new challenge and wanted to take part in an individual sport. I rowed a double scull in London, but wanted the chance to deliver my own performance without the risk of someone else potentially holding me back."

REMEMBER YOU CAN LEARN FAST

"I first sat in a kayak just 18 months ago, having never paddled one before! There are still a number of technical improvements I can make, but I'll run out of time before Rio. But it's amazing how quickly you can improve at something if you really work on it. I had to learn a new technique, but also a completely different sort of fitness. Rowing is an endurance sport, but the 200m kayak is an explosive discipline."



PARALYMPIC TOP TIPS

LIVE AND BREATHE YOUR EVENT

“There’s no other way. I don’t have a social life, I don’t go for meals, I don’t have drinks with my mates... I have a family, and when I’m away, it’s hard for my partner and son. But they’re hugely supportive, and that helps me with the pressure. I compartmentalise things; when I’m training, that’s where my head is. When I get home, I switch off and I’m a dad and partner again – I don’t have my mind elsewhere.”

TRAIN, TRAIN, TRAIN

“To be a Paralympian, you live to train. With kayaking, my sessions change throughout the season; in Winter I do more gym work

and long water sessions, in Summer it’s more speed work. Whichever, I’ll train two or three times a day, six days a week. Kayak is high intensity, so I’m training at 100 per cent effort. Because of that, there’s lots of recovering, stretching and physio to make sure I can hit the next session hard.”

BE RESILIENT

“My race is a bit like the 100m in athletics – a pure sprint. My team are really good at addressing my mental preparations. Because this is a demanding sport, you need to know what your motivations are from the outset. I’m not asking for sympathy – I love what I do – but it’s

LEARN ABOUT YOUR LIMITS

“I took part in Beeline Britain, a challenge in which we travelled in a straight line by foot, kayak and bike, from Land’s End to John O’Groats. It was great fun, but something like that is unsustainable, physically. That was about emptying the tank – a one-time thing. Paralympic training is about managing your energy output and training smart.

“Beeline did teach me about myself, and improved my coping mechanisms. It’s easy to go through life and take the easy options. I like to put myself in positions where I don’t know what the outcome’s going to be, and see how I respond. That’s what life’s all about, constantly learning and developing.”

Nick gets ready to race in Rio and (inset) success with Beeline Britain



relentless. You need to have perseverance and determination. It helps to be something of a perfectionist too, because ultimately I spend a lot of time every day practising one movement to make a boat go quickly. You’ve got to be a stickler for detail to make changes that will translate into a 0.1 second difference.”

LIVE LIKE AN ATHLETE

“I’ve changed the sport I compete in, but the one thing that doesn’t change, and which benefits you whatever sport you do, is living well. Eating correctly, resting correctly, looking after yourself, stretching – all those elements are really important. I have that in place already from having competed in London, and so I came into training for Rio already in good shape.”

REMEMBER HOW FAR YOU’VE COME

“When I started training for Rio, I was still traumatised from my injury and my situation wasn’t ‘normal’ to me. Now, my mind has more of an equilibrium. Back

“I TOOK PART IN BEELINE BRITAIN. IT WAS GREAT FUN, BUT SOMETHING LIKE THAT IS UNSUSTAINABLE, PHYSICALLY. THAT WAS ABOUT EMPTYING THE TANK”



then, sport was a reason not to think about things, but time is a great healer and my injuries have become more normal to me now. Doing sport really helped with that.”

EVEN A SOLO SPORT IS A TEAM SPORT

“It’s not just about me as an individual. As a Paralympian, you have a huge support network behind you; physios, coaches, gym instructors, nutritionists, psychologists, massage therapists. You are all part of a bigger team working towards one goal. It’s similar to the Army; everyone is pulling together to achieve one particular goal.”

DON'T SWEAT THE THINGS YOU CAN'T CONTROL

“Of course, the goal was a medal in Rio – that’s ultimately what I do this for. But I can’t control how others perform, so there were no guarantees. I can only control how I perform, so that’s what the focus had to be on. I focused on my process; it’s about doing the best race I can. If you get too caught up in the end result, it can distract you from the important details. I’m in a good place today; I’m confident, and

I think I’ve improved since I took bronze at the World Championships.”

GIVE SOMETHING BACK

“Now Rio’s over, I’ll have a rest, and think about my next step. Kayaking is something I love, so I’d be open to carrying on until Tokyo 2020. But I’m also looking at getting into coaching and mentoring. I’d like to use

what I’ve learned to help other people on the same journey. I’m an ambassador for a charity called Climbing Out, which helps young adults with life-changing injuries. We take them away for a week, do activities and work on personal development. They get a lot out of meeting an adult who has been through similar things, and taken part in the Paralympics. I love helping them.”



How to...

Become a Paralympian

“I LOOK AT SILVER AS THE FIRST PLACED LOSER. IT’S HARSH, BUT I’D SWAP ALL THREE SILVERS FOR ONE GOLD ANY DAY!”



Photo by Bym Lennon/Getty Images

JON-ALLAN BUTTERWORTH

AGE 30, from Cheshire
EVENT Cycling

Jon-Allan Butterworth was a weapons engineer in the RAF before his injury in 2007. He represented Team GB at the 2012 Paralympics, winning three silver medals, and was desperate to go one better in Rio.

Tell us about your journey to become a Paralympian

I joined the RAF in 2002 and lost my left arm at Basra airbase in Iraq in 2007. It was severed above the elbow when we came under rocket fire. I was quite sporty before my injury – never anything too serious, but I’d go to the gym quite a bit and play football, cricket and rugby. After my injury, I took part in a Paralympics GB talent day, and it just went from there.

Why did you choose cycling?

They said I had potential and I liked the idea of cycling, although I would have given any sport a try. I’d watched a bit of the Beijing Olympics and cycling looked exciting, so I started with British Cycling in 2009. I didn’t think I’d ever become a Paralympian, but I enjoyed the process of getting better, and the next thing I knew, I was competing at London.

How was 2012 for you?

I didn’t enjoy it. It was very stressful. I competed in a lot of races – the 1K, 4K pursuit and team sprint in

the velodrome, and the time trial and road race. It was hectic! After I finished racing I only had a few days to enjoy the experience. I did enjoy the closing ceremony and the bus victory parade. I won three silver medals, and while I know that’s an achievement, I came into the races as a world champion and a world record holder, so I was very disappointed.

Can you reflect on it as a success now?

When it comes to British military Paralympians, I believe that I have won the most medals, but three silvers are a reminder of how close I came to success on three occasions. I look at silver as the first placed loser. It might sound harsh, but it’s the simple truth. I’d have swapped all three silvers for one gold any day!

Did that spur you on even more for Rio?

Of course. All I wanted out of Rio was to be on that top step [*Jon-Allan won gold in the team sprint*]. I can appreciate now that I only took up the sport three years before London, at a time when I was overweight and unfit. I’ve done more in the last nine years than I did in the nine years pre-injury. But winning is what drives me.

What are your plans post-Rio?

I’m trying to get into motorsport and possibly do some TV work. I’m also planning on having a long holiday with my girlfriend. Then, depending on how I feel, I might get back on the bike and target Tokyo in 2020. I’ll have to have a long chat with a number of people first and see where I’m at.

JAMIE BURDEKIN

AGE 36, from Liverpool
EVENT Wheelchair Tennis

Jamie was on the verge of becoming a Royal Marine in 2000 when a car crash left him with spinal injuries. He won bronze in quad doubles wheelchair tennis in Rio.

How did you get injured?

I was 26 weeks into Royal Marines training and was preparing to complete my final test. While I was on leave, I got a lift coming back from a club in Liverpool. The driver put his foot down coming around a blind bend. Tragically, the girl sitting next to me was killed. I broke my neck and my back in the crash. I'm classed as tetraplegic, but thankfully some feeling did come back to my legs.

How was rehab?

All I'd ever done before my injury was train, so I was the first in the gym and the last out. I hobbled out of the ward 10 months later on crutches. I can't walk very far, but I'm not totally wheelchair bound. Even back then I thought; 'These are the cards I've been dealt, I need to make the most of my life.'

How did you get into tennis?

I was always someone who naturally took to any sport. After my injury, lots of sporting bodies showed an interest in me, but I met the tennis world number one and he persuaded me to try it. I've never looked back. A year and a half after that, I was representing my country in the World Team Cup, the equivalent of the Davis Cup, in New Zealand.

You've gone on to have a great sporting career...

I didn't take it seriously at first. I thought; 'This is disabled sport', but eventually I realised that it is elite level competition. I've travelled all over the world and helped my country win the World Team Cup twice, but the highlight so far has been winning Paralympic bronze.

What was it like to be involved in the 2012 Paralympics?

Amazing. It was therapy. I was still new to wheelchairs, and everyone has their own way of dealing with injury, but being at the Olympic Village opened my eyes. I didn't realise there were so many disabilities! I felt quite able compared to some people. I saw light at the end of the tunnel. Plus, I met loads of incredible people and got so many tips and pointers from them.

London 2012 was frustrating for you on a personal level though, wasn't it?

Individually, yes. I was ranked fifth in the singles, but I drew the world number one in the first round! I gave him the toughest match he had all tournament, but unfortunately lost. London overall was great, though. It changed the perception of wheelchair sports. Paralympians are household names now, and never in a million years did I think that would ever happen.

What were your hopes for Rio?

I wasn't going to start shouting about winning before I went, but I wanted to medal in both the singles, where I'm ranked seventh, and the doubles. I'd been training so hard. We went to recce Rio last November, simulated the warm-up camp, and even got all the tourist stuff out the way, so when we went back out this time, we could concentrate on competing.



"I'VE BEEN ALL OVER THE WORLD AND HELPED MY COUNTRY WIN THE WORLD TEAM CUP TWICE, BUT THE HIGHLIGHT HAS BEEN WINNING PARALYMPIC BRONZE"

DAVID HENSON

AGE 31, from Southampton
EVENT Athletics (100m and 200m)

Dave Henson was serving as a Lieutenant in the Royal Engineers when he was injured in 2011. He won bronze in the 200m in Rio.

How did you get injured?

I was in Afghanistan over the Winter of 2010/2011. As a Lieutenant, I was in charge of a group of Royal Engineers and we were clearing a compound. I found an IED – with my foot! I lost both my legs.

Did you get into running as part of your recovery?

I was never really into sports even before I was injured, especially anything to do with a ball. Having said that, running was a big part of my life being from a military background, and it was always my escape – I'd often run 5Ks and 10Ks, and it was something I wanted to get back into. From early on, I had my sights set on a pair of running blades – that was my goal.

Can you describe what it was like to learn to run again with prosthetics?

Nothing is ever easy as an amputee. The first time I put my blades on I only managed to run seven metres! Everything has to be just right all the way up from the blades to the sockets. It's tough losing your knees and ankles. It completely changes everything. You've got to learn where to put your body weight with each step – not only have you got to learn a good way to run but you also have to learn a safe way to run. It took me a year and half before I felt confident.

What was your training like building up to Rio?

It was awful! Really tough and so intense! It was non-stop sprints which hurt so much, but it was all worth it. I spent a lot of time on the track and in the gym, and I was on a strict diet. There's definitely going to be cake and pizza in our house for the next few months!

Did you meticulously plan your preparations?

It's not easy being a para athlete. You've got to work hard but work smart, plan realistic objectives and targets, get a good support team to bring out the best in you, and be lucky enough to have a family that understands the sacrifices. Then it becomes achievable. Becoming an amputee made me believe in myself more because I face challenges every day and conquer them. You get to see the strength inside yourself.

Have previous Paralympics inspired you?

I watched the London Olympics but couldn't even watch the Paralympics in 2012, perhaps because of my own injuries. After London, the Paralympics started getting lots of awareness. I watched reruns on YouTube and thought; 'Actually, I want a piece of that.' The Invictus Games have been amazing, but taking part in the Paralympics was something else entirely.

Did you have a target for Rio?

I headed out to Brazil completely focused on my own performance. If I'd focused on a medal, then my mind wouldn't have been on running to the best of my ability. It was a real adrenaline rush, but I had to keep it all in check. I knew I had a better chance of a podium if I focused on a good performance. My target was to come away with a new personal best.

“THE FIRST TIME I PUT MY BLADES ON I COULD ONLY RUN FOR SEVEN METRES! IT TOOK ME A YEAR AND A HALF TO BE CONFIDENT”



Photo by Tom Jenkins/Getty Images

How to...

Become a Paralympian



MICKY YULE

AGE 37, from Southampton
EVENT Powerlifting

Micky Yule served as a Staff Sergeant in the Royal Engineers. He lost both his legs above the knee after stepping on an IED in July 2010. He competed in powerlifting at the Games, finishing sixth in his class.

You were already a good powerlifter pre-injury. How hard was it to transition to Paralympic level?
I'd just started getting into strength sports before my injury. I was always the strongest guy in the gym and I'd started to enter competitions. After my injury, lifting weights became part of my rehabilitation. But you can't begin by thinking you're just going to become a Paralympian. Lots do, and they get a fright! I've seen them come and go. They've been told that they're strong, then they come and train with us and it's a whole new level of pain!

When did you realise that you might be able to make the grade?

I was winning British championships, so the Institute of Sport in Scotland assigned me a coach, and together we targeted the 2014 Commonwealth Games. I came fourth in Glasgow, and was the only injured Service man competing in the powerlifting. But the step up to Paralympic level has been major. I knew I'd have to lift around 20kg more than at the Commonwealth Games just to qualify for Rio.

You must train ridiculously hard...

Paralympians actually lift more than the able-bodied competitors in bench press – because that's all we train for. Able-bodied guys in my weight group won't touch me! We qualify in body weight groups, like in boxing, so diet is important. I still had three kilos to lose just a few weeks before Rio and went there with six per cent body fat. I eat to sustain strength. There's no slack.

There were no puddings for you for a while, then?
I looked at it like this; did I want to eat rubbish or go to Rio? I look at people who are supposedly on diets and think; 'You're bluffing yourself.' It's a crazy life. We often make the weight on the day because we all want to be the biggest guy in our group.

What were your Rio targets?

Top five. I'd been training in Loughborough with some of the best brains in sport. London was funded for participation, but it's not like that now. Nobody goes out just to get a tracksuit. And while there were a few experienced guys who maybe didn't see me as a threat, I'm getting within range.

Did London 2012 inspire you?

Yes. I watched the closing ceremony from a hospital bed in Salisbury after having an operation. The Paralympics used to be a bit of a school sports day for disabled people. It didn't get much coverage, but London changed that. We're still riding that wave – the levels are going through the roof!

How to...

Become a Paralympian

“THEY'VE BEEN TOLD THEY'RE STRONG, THEN THEY COME AND TRAIN WITH US AND IT'S A WHOLE NEW LEVEL OF PAIN!”

How to...

Become a Paralympian

“I WANT TO SHOW MY KIDS THAT NO MATTER HOW BAD THINGS GET, YOU CAN DO SOMETHING BETTER AND TURN IT AROUND”



PHIL EAGLESHAM

AGE 34, from Somerset

EVENT Target Shooting

Phil Eaglesham is serving as a Corporal in the Royal Marines. He joined the Marines in 2004 and contracted Q Fever, a bacterial infection passed on by animals, whilst serving in Afghanistan in 2010. Although the infection has been treated, Phil's condition continues to deteriorate as he increasingly suffers from severe exhaustion and loss of use of limbs. He competed for Ireland in target shooting at the Paralympics.

Has sport always been a part of your life?

I was always playing rugby before I got ill. When I tried sports again for the first time at the US Marine Corps Warrior Trials in 2012 I didn't think I would be able to take part in anything because of my condition. I tried adaptive shooting there and talked to some of the coaches, and it just came naturally to me.

How did it feel when you were confirmed for the Ireland Paralympic squad?

It was all very surreal – it still is. I couldn't believe it was happening until I actually got there. I feel really lucky to have been in the Ireland squad. The rest of the shooting team have all been in the military, so rather than just sitting in the house all day resting, I feel normal. Target shooting gives me a sense of being a Marine again. It takes me back to who I was probably more than anything.

And it meant a lot to your family...

Not being able to play with my children has affected me more than I could ever explain. My three kids and my wife came to Rio and they were so excited. I've wanted to do this for my kids so much. A little over a year ago I was in a bad place. I wanted to show my kids that no matter how bad things get, you can always do something better and turn things around.

How did you prepare for the Games?

I took part in a two-week training camp in Germany in August as part of my preparation. I trained three times a week for an hour and half because that's all my body allowed me to do. But I prepared myself mentally and got plenty of rest.

What were your goals for Rio?

No one goes to the Paralympics – or any competition for that matter – just to turn up. Everyone wants to make it into the final and come away with a medal. I'm just the same, although it didn't happen this time.

Did you have a firm goal though?

As long as I did the best I could on the day I knew I'd be happy but, of course, I wanted to come away with a medal. I haven't been able to take part in the Invictus Games because shooting isn't an event there. Hopefully, the Paralympics will change that as it's such an adaptive sport. I don't know if my condition will get worse, so that means I don't know if 2020 will be an option.

JOE TOWNSEND

AGE 28, from Sussex
EVENT Triathlon

Joe Townsend was serving in the Royal Marines when he stepped on an IED during a routine foot patrol in Afghanistan. He lost both his legs above the knee in the blast in February 2008. Joe competed in the triathlon at the Rio Paralympics, and finished sixth.

Can you tell us a little bit about your experiences immediately after your injury?

I was in a very bad condition. I spent more than 14 hours in surgery at Camp Bastion where doctors tried to stabilise me before I was flown back home to the UK. I spent a further five and half months in Selly Oak hospital undergoing surgery. The whole time my mum didn't leave my side. The next three and half years were spent trying to learn to walk again with prosthetics.

How did you cope with it mentally?

I've always been so focused on trying to get better that I've never really wallowed or spent much time thinking; 'Why has this happened to me?' My mind has never really worked like that and I think I'm very lucky in that respect.

When did you get into sports?

I was introduced to lots of different sports while I was at Headley Court. I tried everything I was offered but I quickly realised that I really enjoyed hand cycling and wheelchair racing. One day a rehab instructor I was working with told me about Team True Spirit;

a group of injured Service men and women who were taking on triathlons and Ironman events for charity. At the time, I hadn't tried swimming since my injury, but I just thought; 'Why not?' I gave it a go and got the triathlon bug from there!

How did you find learning to swim again?

I had to pass a swimming test to get into the Royal Marines but I was never very good in the water. After losing my legs, I had to learn to swim from scratch all over again. I obviously haven't got any propulsion from a leg kick so it's all down to my arms. It's a really technical sport and you can't just go hard to go fast in the water.

What was an average day like for a Paralympic athlete preparing for Rio?

All I've been doing for months is train, eat, sleep and repeat, all day long. I've had to make lots of sacrifices; I moved to Loughborough away from my wife so I could benefit from the best training, I didn't have a social life, I did two or three training sessions a day, seven days a week. But I love competing in the sport and I love pushing myself in training. I have the best job in the world!

What are your plans after Rio?

In 2014, before I moved to Loughborough, I was studying for my Strength and Conditioning Science degree at St Mary's University in London. I put my degree on hold to concentrate on competing in the Paralympics. I have my final year to complete, which I'm supposed to be doing now that Rio is over, but I'll see how I feel after the Games.

"ALL I'VE BEEN DOING FOR MONTHS IS TRAIN, EAT, SLEEP AND REPEAT, ALL DAY LONG"

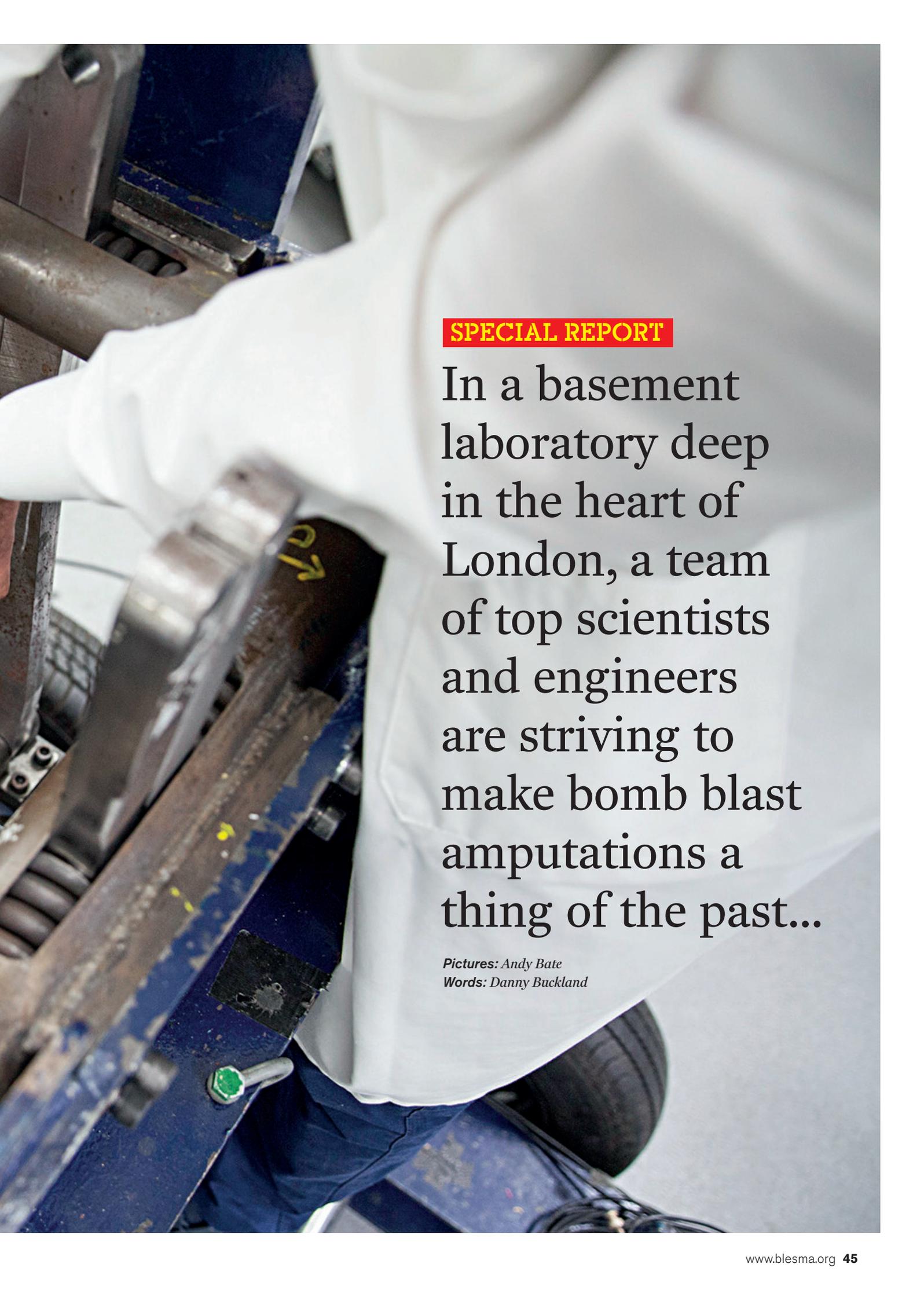
How to...

Become a Paralympian



Picture: onEdition



A close-up photograph of a person wearing a white lab coat and blue trousers, working with a piece of industrial machinery. The machinery is blue and has some yellow markings. The person's hands are visible, and they appear to be focused on their work. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the laboratory environment.

SPECIAL REPORT

In a basement laboratory deep in the heart of London, a team of top scientists and engineers are striving to make bomb blast amputations a thing of the past...

Pictures: Andy Bate

Words: Danny Buckland

“WE MEASURE OURSELVES BY THE REAL BENEFITS WE MAKE TO VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES. WE ARE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER RESEARCH CENTRES”



The Centre for Blast Injury Studies (CBIS) is just a short walk from London’s Royal Albert Hall and the hundreds of tourists busy posing for selfies. A steep flight of stairs leads down to a basement that was once the fantastically-named Radioactive Rocks Store at the Royal School of Mines. Behind a solid door lies a modern laboratory where high level testing is unravelling the dreadful science behind blast injuries.

The Centre used to be located on the sixth floor of Imperial College, in London’s south Kensington, but the ever-increasing ferocity of the team’s controlled explosions started to make scientists in neighbouring labs drop their test tubes. Shortly after, they were relocated to this reinforced bunker where they could experiment at will.

Today, Centre Director Professor Anthony Bull and his team at CBIS are tweaking the controls of a rig on which sits a specially-constructed plate that simulates the impact of an IED blast with enough force to shred sinew, flesh and bone.

This is a test Professor Bull’s team have carried out more than 300 times, and the results have already helped design safer armoured vehicles and military boots, and have even given guidance on the best posture for soldiers to use in armoured vehicles to mitigate serious injuries.

“We have put a lot of effort into studying the injuries military personnel sustain from ‘deck slap’, when huge forces of energy are transferred through the floor of a vehicle as it drives over an IED,” says Professor Bull, who is an expert in musculoskeletal dynamics and is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering. “This was common in Afghanistan, and often resulted in crushed heels with severe smashing above the boot, shattering of the bones, and shredding of soft tissue, ultimately leading to amputation. The resulting lack of skin was then often a problem because you need a decent amount to create a good stump.

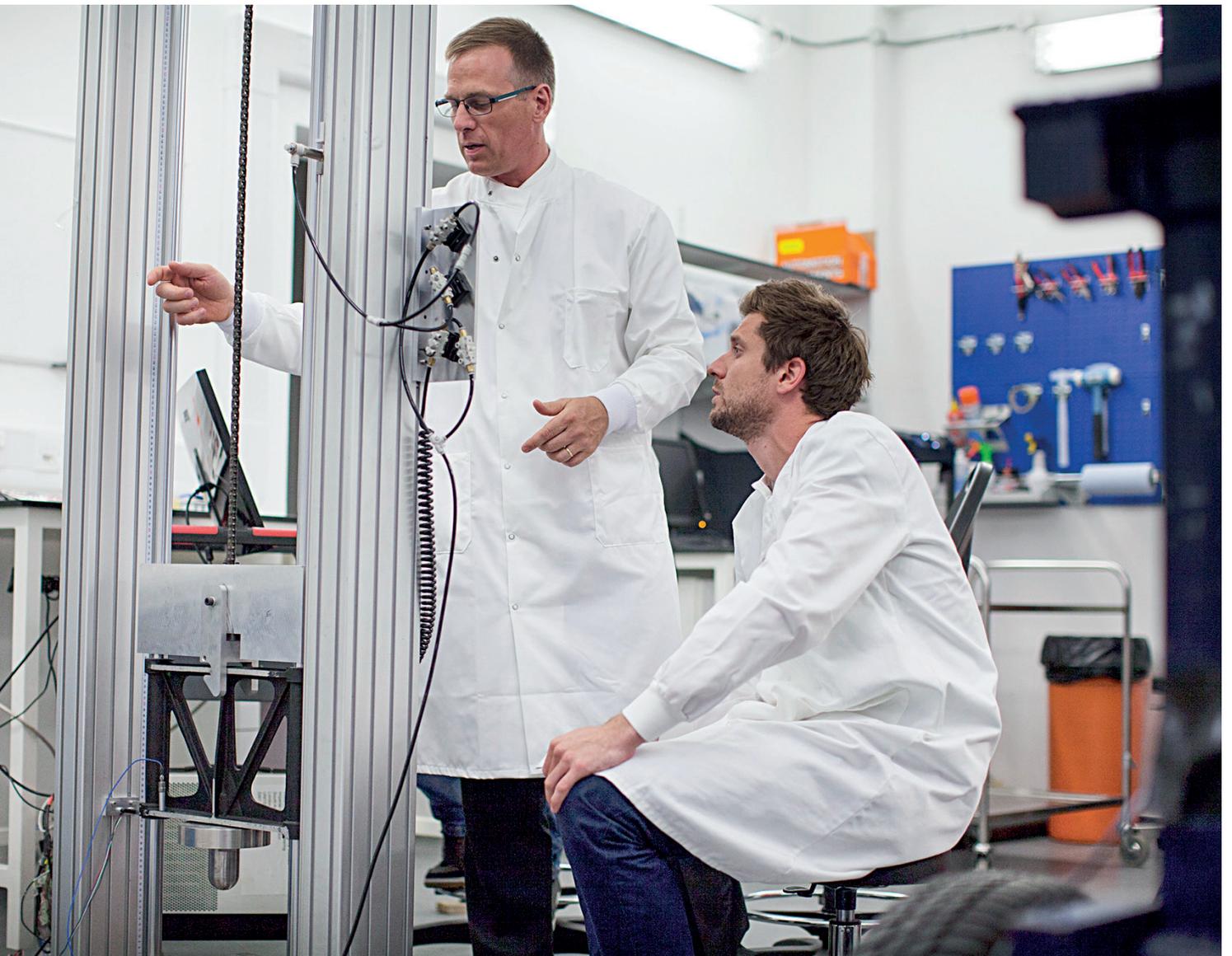
“The core aspect of what we do here is to understand the nature, cause and extent of an injury, and then work out how to protect against it in the future.”

CBIS, which employs military doctors who are carrying out research and studying for PhDs to ensure knowledge is shared across the three services, employs 30 staff with backgrounds in engineering, physics, life sciences, medicine and computing.

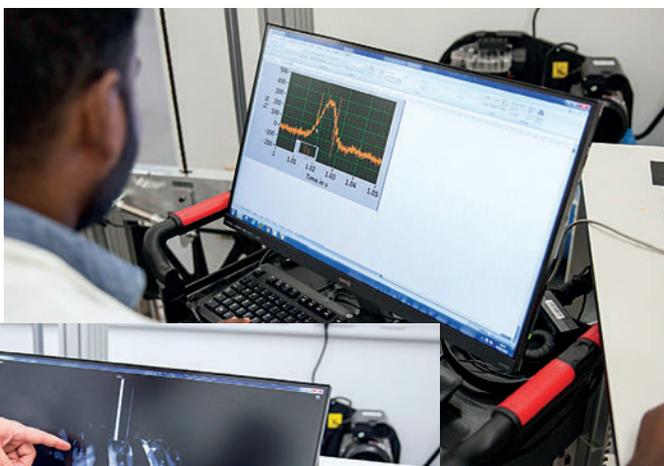
“Although we are an academic institution with a high-powered scientific output, we are also very practically minded and focus on the clinical benefit for the end user in everything we do,” says Professor Bull, who addressed Blesma’s AGM this year and plans for ties with the Association to get stronger in the coming years.

HOGWARTS FOR HEROES

The CBIS, generously funded by the Royal British Legion, is a permanent hive of activity and collaboration. In one part of the laboratory, a team is experimenting with sending shockwaves down a tube to mimic the force from an open field blast, while another room is littered with cameras and pressure plates to study the gait of amputees and injured military personnel. The Centre also conducts a range of



**CBIS Centre
Director Professor
Anthony Bull
(above left) and
his team hard at
work breaking new
ground – again!**



sophisticated tests in the Anti-Vehicle Underbelly Blast Injury Simulator. Here, compressed air is used to send blast waves through false and cadaver limbs (which are strictly approved and kept to an absolute minimum) that are laced with sensors to recreate the exact forces of blast impacts.

The sensors collect critical data which is fed into hi-tech computer models primed with existing research, so that the team can study a shockwave's journey through the body. Being able to interrupt, deflect or deaden this trail of destruction at various stages can mean the difference between saving or losing lives and limbs.

“Trauma medicine advances massively in every conflict, and Afghanistan and Iraq were no different,” says Professor Bull. “The survival capability has improved greatly in recent years, but that means we are now seeing injuries we have never seen before because they are only now survivable.”

Partly for this reason, the research that is being carried out at the Centre has a huge bearing on the future of prosthetics as well as protective equipment.



MAKING MATS WITH MUSCLE

The Centre designs and tests blast mats. Fitted to the floor of a vehicle, they reduce the severity of the blast transferred to the occupants from below



“One of the problems with an above-knee amputation, for example, is that it is very difficult to wear a socket because the stump cannot bear load very well. In general, this results in an inability to walk well with a prosthetic,” says Professor Bull. “We are working on an implant that will attach to the end of a bone and allow a stump to bear load through it. We already have a prototype and want to develop it further.”

“Direct skeletal fixation is a relatively new technology that is being offered to a group of people who have no other real alternatives; it allows direct weight bearing and, by transmitting the load directly to the bone, it reduces many of the difficulties with traditional sockets. There are, however, some risks and, however minor these are, we want to pursue other options.”

“I want to provide an alternative where an implant allows the bone to transmit load more efficiently. It will be like an orthopaedic implant – an artificial joint – in the stump.”

WORKING WITH VETERANS

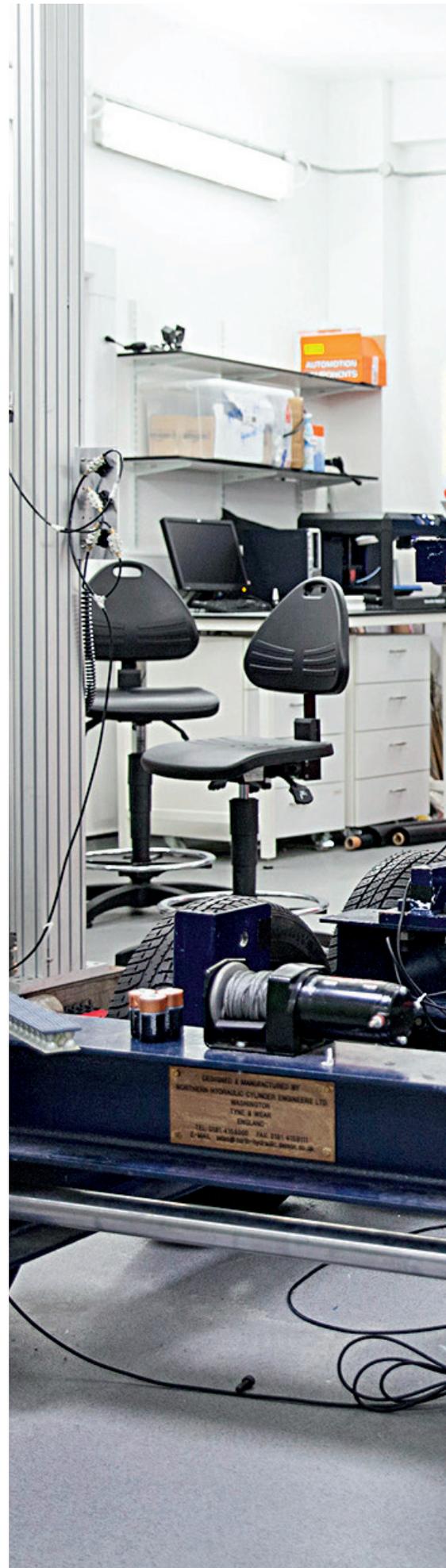
The staff at the Centre consult veterans regularly, and Dave Henson MBE, a double amputee, Rio Paralympian (see p40), and Blesma Member is also a bioengineering PhD student at Imperial College. His experiences with the amputation of his right leg above the knee and his left leg through the knee, and his subsequent rehabilitation, are proving invaluable to the Centre’s research as well as his own.

“We have learnt an incredible amount from our 265 major military amputees, and often invite them in to talk to staff and students,” adds Professor Bull. “We now know, from talking to soldiers like Dave, that through-knee amputees fare much better than above-knee amputees. We are six months into a project on prosthetics and hope to have new models tested in 18 months.”

A number of other groundbreaking results are expected to come out of the Centre soon. Elevating the foot position for personnel in armoured vehicles will attempt to minimise the devastating effects of blasts on lower limbs, for example. Meanwhile, a new form of pelvic protection to save the key bone structure that is opened up on impact is being considered.

Professor Bull’s team are also testing an energy absorbent product which stiffens on contact in the hope that it can provide another level of protection in soldiers’ clothing. Elsewhere, the Centre’s work protecting against head trauma is central to NATO equipment and vehicle design.

“We exist to mitigate injury, protect military personnel, and benefit veterans and their families through our advanced studies to understand not only the cause of injury but the rehabilitation process,” says Professor Bull. “We measure ourselves not by our scientific output, but by the very real benefits we make to veterans and their families. In this regard, we are very different from most other research centres.”





BONING UP ON BONE MARROW

One of the many key investigations currently underway at CBIS is into how bone marrow cells respond to blast injuries and why they form extra and irregular bone in amputees' stumps.

The team are putting Mesenchymal stem cells – which can form bone, muscle, fat or cartilage – under extreme stress by sending a metal mass hurtling through a thin tube and into a bar, generating shockwaves through the cells which are held in a plastic casing. How the cells react is crucial to the research and, CBIS hopes, the future of stump management.

“One of the biggest effects of traumatic amputation is the high incidence of bone forming where it shouldn't, this is called heterotopic ossification,” says Professor Bull. “Something happens to the cells and the growth can encapsulate nerves, resulting in intense pain and pressure sores from the misshapen bone.”

Research has shown that heterotopic bone forms in 65 per cent of military amputee cases but perhaps in only five per cent of civilian injuries. The experiment has been designed to tease out the peculiar properties of a blast in conflict.

“RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT HETEROTOPIC BONE FORMS IN 65 PER CENT OF MILITARY AMPUTEE CASES, BUT PERHAPS IN ONLY FIVE PER CENT OF CIVILIAN INJURIES”

“We need to know how blasts affect bone formation, and studying the behaviour of the cells post-impact is revealing,” says Professor Bull. “Why do the cells die or form bone more quickly? Answering questions like this will form the basis of developing a therapy to stop it happening. The end point could be a drug, or even a prophylactic, to treat it but we are also working on mechanical mediation, such as changing tourniquet pressures, socket fittings and the way people walk to reduce the impact.

“The project is a perfect example of our inter-disciplinary work as we need engineers, physicists, biologists and computer modelling to find the solution.”



WANTED!

NAME: JEZ SCARRETT
AGE: 57
SERVICE: ROYAL MARINES
INJURY: RIGHT LEG AMPUTATED BELOW THE KNEE



WANTED!

NAME: KIRK BOWETT

AGE: 38

SERVICE: MERCIAN REGIMENT (INFANTRY)

INJURY: LEFT ARM AMPUTATED BELOW THE ELBOW

WANTED!

Have you ever wondered how easy it would be to jack it all in, leave home and fall off the grid? As military folk with more than a smidgen of fieldcraft and experience of living off the land, it shouldn't be too tricky, right?

But what if you're being chased? What if you're being hunted by some of the best surveillance minds in the intelligence community? That's the situation Blesma Members Kirk Bowett and Jez Scarrett faced when they applied to become contestants on the hit Channel 4 show, *Hunted*.

In the second series of the reality TV programme, which hit our screens at the end of September, 22 members of the public worked in pairs as 'fugitives', attempting to evade capture by a crack team of former police and intelligence officers for 28 days.

Although Kirk and Jez's military service was a generation apart, they combined their skills to go on the run. Kirk, 38, is a former Infantryman who served with the Mercian Regiment and worked in close protection after he left the Army in 2010. He lost his left arm below the elbow in an IED attack in Iraq in 2013. Jez, meanwhile, is a 57-year-old former Royal Marine, who had to have his right leg amputated after a motorcycle accident in 1982.

They shared the same objective however; avoid capture by any (legal) means necessary. Here, they tell us about their time on the run...

How did the opportunity come about to participate in the show and who convinced who to take part?

Kirk: I had asked a few friends within Blesma if they fancied it, but most of them were quite nervous about going on the show because of their military backgrounds. We're meant to be subject matter experts when it comes to escape and evasion, so if we were to fail it could potentially be a bit embarrassing. Let's just say that I'll be expecting a lot of 'constructive criticism' from the lads after they see the show [laughs]. In that regard I suppose I well and truly dropped Jez in it!

What was the driving force for you deciding to take up a life on the run?

Kirk: Blesma's Fundraising Executive Zanika [Fearon] sent out an email asking Members if they wanted to apply to go on the show and try to win a share of the £100,000 prize. I wanted the chance to pit my wits against the intelligence community, as well as to see if we could win a share of the money for Blesma.

I decided to send in a video explaining what life is like as a limbless veteran. Despite my injury, I live a normal life now, but I was motivated to see if I could still do this kind of stuff. I wanted to put myself back in a military-style situation; living off the land, going out hunting, sleeping in a bivvy. I had to ask myself; 'Can I still do this even though I've got one arm?'



No cards, no phone, and avoid CCTV... staying hidden is a lot harder than you would think

The challenge was to spend one month on the run and successfully evade capture. What was your plan?

Jez: We decided to use third-party phones all the time, and never use our credit or debit cards – only cash. We drafted up a list of friends and contacts across the country who we knew would help us if and when the time came; we wanted to use as many Blesma Members as possible so we could highlight to the TV audience what limbless veterans go through and how Blesma helps them.

If we'd played it the way we would have for real in the military, it would've made quite boring TV. If we'd have decided to just go out into the wilds it would have been quite easy to go dark and not be discovered, but we decided to keep busy and keep on the move instead.

I think it will make interesting viewing – better than watching two ex-soldiers sitting in a bivvy, freezing their proverbials off, not doing much for a month!

What did you do next? What was life like on the run?

Kirk: First, we totally sanitised ourselves; emails were deleted as we knew they would be hacked, mobile devices were left at home. I even bugged my own house with cameras that we could access remotely so we could spy on hunters who came to interview my wife.

Jez: We spent quite a lot of time in cars, getting from A to B, which was slow going. It took us six hours to drive from Birmingham to Cambridge via a series of B roads as we knew the A roads were watched by ANPR cameras. We spent the first night in a barn, sleeping in the straw, which was very cold. We were busy every single day. From what I gathered about the last show, there were days when people would do absolutely nothing, but we kept active.

Did the experience stretch your friendship?

Jez: Kirk served in the Forces more recently than me but we were both on the same page when it came to what we needed to do, why, when and how. We had a few frustrating moments together though – Kirk is the talker of the team and sometimes he wouldn't listen – but it didn't come to blows [*Jez laughs*]. We're good friends, so we bounced off each other well.

How did your military background help and what skills did you apply?

Jez: Street patrols during three tours of Northern Ireland give you a massive insight into what you need to look for when heading into new areas. It certainly heightens your sense of perception; people who don't look right stand out in a crowd a mile off, but you can also identify problem people who can blend in.

Likewise, you can disappear into a crowd yourself and it makes you super observant; from 300 yards away you can spot something that looks like a CCTV camera and from 200 yards you know for sure of it is and can then make a decision about how to avoid it.

Kirk: During my time in the military, I became more and more technologically savvy. Maybe that was understanding how to trace someone digitally using an email chain, for example. We now understand how technological warfare can be one of the most important aspects of today's conflicts.

And we know that all our devices are traceable. They create breadcrumbs, and once you trigger one, the others can quickly lead to your location. Even if you break that chain, you're probably making a footprint elsewhere. It's quite unnerving really.

How did your injuries factor into the experience? Did they make it more challenging?

Jez: It's always going to be a bit more of a challenge as an amputee because mobility is often restricted. I do tend to be a bit obsessive about looking after my injury, but as a leg amputee I have to maintain my cleanliness and manage my stump. We did a lot of walking, and in the first few days it gave me quite a lot of back pain, but then my body started to sort itself out. By Day Five I was quite happy and would have been fine walking all the time.

What do you think other Blesma Members can learn from your experiences on *Hunted*?

Kirk: Hopefully, we've set the bar for veterans to do their own challenges. It's not about being injured



and being taken care of. I think it's our responsibility as veterans to keep our experiences in the public eye. Whether we're injured mentally or physically, we need people to understand what it's like living with limb loss. If we don't, the public could move onto the next charity and funding for Blesma could stop. It's also about being a role model for other people. It gives you self-confidence and proves you can still do these things.

To find out how Kirk and Jez fared on the run, watch *Hunted* on Thursdays at 9pm on Channel 4. If you have missed any episodes, you can watch them on demand at www.channel4.com

HOW HUNTED IS HONED INTO A HIT SHOW

Ever wondered how the creators of *Hunted* make the hit fugitive thriller? Jez and Kirk weren't the only ones to go on the run in the latest series of Channel 4's reality show. They were joined by 10 other pairs of would-be Jason Bournes who all tried to evade capture by the team of elite hunters.

To be successful, each pair had to go on the run for 28 days, avoiding being tracked down by members of the intelligence community, ex- and serving police and military personnel, crack computer hackers and even an investigative psychologist.

This series, each pair competed for a share of a £100,000 prize, awarded to anyone who successfully outwitted the 30-strong team pursuing them.

The contestants did have to live by several rules whilst on the run though. Principally, they were not allowed to do anything illegal and they had to live off a strict budget of just £250 per person. Apart from that, they were free to try and evade capture however they wanted to.

When it came to recording their movements, each pair was assigned a cameraman, who documented every waking moment of their time on the run. He or she ate, slept and travelled with the contestants, living the same lifestyle as a matter of authenticity.

But it is the characters trying to evade capture who really make the show – they all bring something to the table which results in great TV.



Luke met Karen again – 20 years after she saved his life

LUKE DELAHUNTY

Luke was serving in the Royal Air Force when he was severely injured in a road traffic accident. Twenty years later, he decided to find the person who saved his life

I was 17 years old when I joined the RAF. I served for six and a half years before my injury and eight years before I was medically discharged. My first posting was to the Queen's Colour Squadron and I was in parades like the Royal Tournament and the Festival of Remembrance.

I was travelling back to my base at RAF Honington on a motorbike in October 1996, and was about to overtake a line of traffic when a tractor turned into my path. The tractor was towing an 18-tonne trailer which ran over my chest. I was paralysed from the chest down.

I was lucky that a St John's Ambulance medic was in one of the vehicles that I'd passed because she kept me conscious and breathing until the ambulance arrived. Her name was Karen and she visited me in hospital for weeks while I was recovering, although I didn't know that at the time.

This year is the 20th anniversary of my accident, and I wanted to mark it by finding the person who saved my life. I built a website explaining what happened to me and posted it on social media on a Monday night. By the Tuesday I'd received a text from Karen!

We finally met up in August. It wasn't as emotional as I'd expected it to be. It was like two old friends meeting up.

We visited the road where I had my accident and Karen told me more about what happened. It actually felt like I was learning about someone else's life.

I now work in the National Spinal Injury Centre in Stoke Mandeville Hospital. I organise the rehabilitation and education for spinal injury patients. When you become injured, knowledge is power.

I've achieved a lot of things; I've climbed Mount Snowdon, been skiing and skydiving, and this year I competed in cycling and rowing at the Invictus Games. I'm not a person who gets nervous easily, but before the rowing event I was a bag of nerves.

Five years ago I even managed to get back on a motorbike!

“IT WASN'T AS EMOTIONAL AS I'D EXPECTED IT TO BE. IT WAS LIKE TWO OLD FRIENDS MEETING UP”



My friend carved me a slate of the Invictus logo and I got the chance to give it to Prince Harry. The same friend kindly made me another and I gave it to Karen! There's only two in existence and I've had to promise if he makes another I won't give it away!

Blesma have been fantastic over the few years that I've been an active Member. I've met some great people and made some great memories. They've also helped me to adapt my house to make my life easier.

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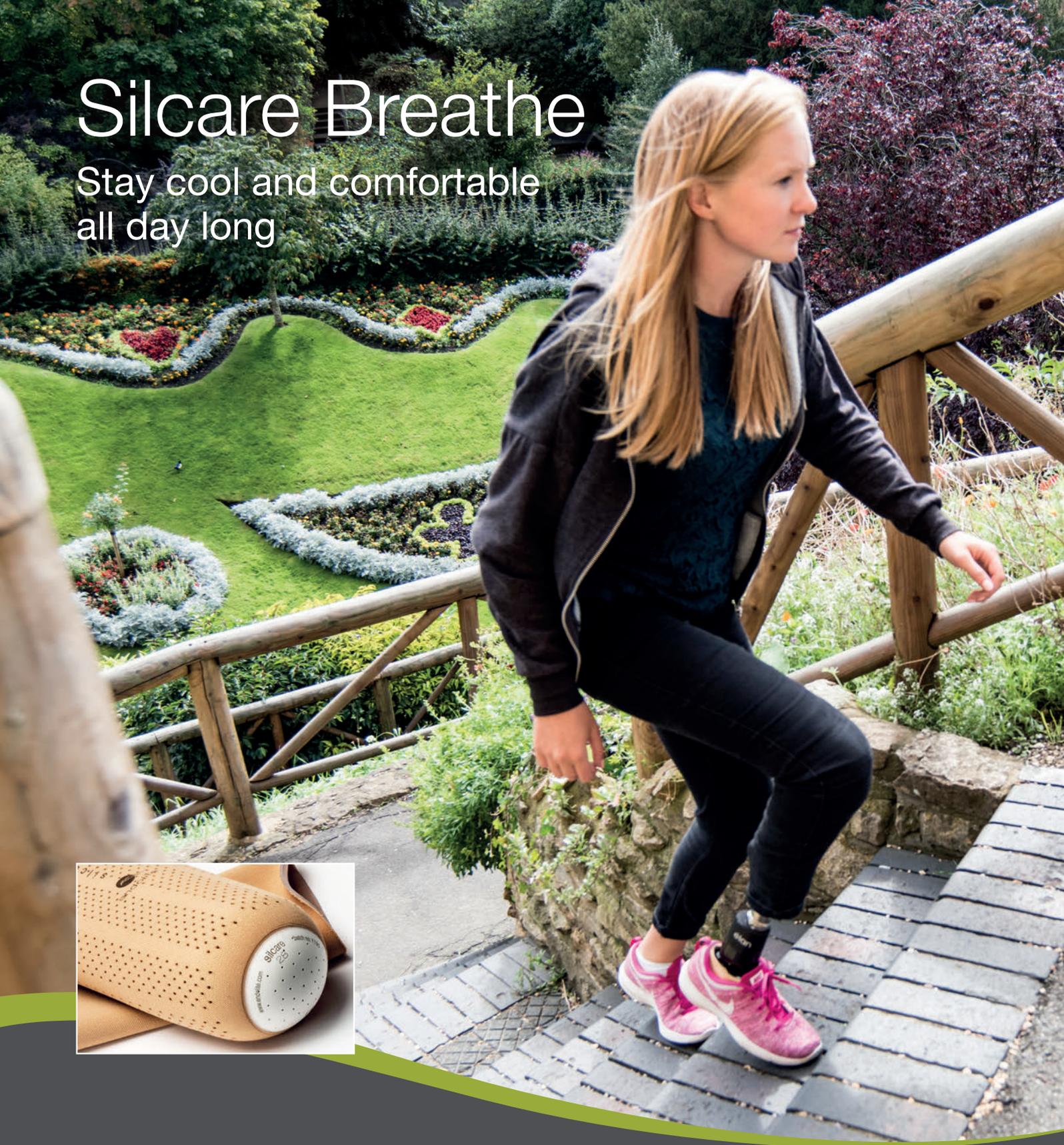
RHEO KNEE XC helps users explore new places and uncharted terrains, overcome boundaries and pursue a life without limitations. It is the ideal companion for active people who want to engage in high-impact, ambitious endeavors.

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