

- 26 gold, 34 silver and 27 bronze medals for UK
- Blesma Members win 43 of UK's 87 medals
- Go behind the scenes at an Invictus training camp

A man with a prosthetic left arm is kneeling on a gym floor. He is wearing a green t-shirt and black shorts. His prosthetic arm is decorated with various stickers, including one that says 'NO LIMBS'. He has a black strap across his chest. The background shows a blurred gym setting with exercise equipment.

# INVICTUS GAMES 2017

Mark Ormrod and 36 other Members make  
their mark on 'the best Games yet'

## Northern Lights, Camera, Action!

The Association's top  
photographers find  
paradise in Iceland's  
rugged landscapes **p46**



## Get in touch with your BSO

Smaller Areas and more  
Support Officers mean  
better access to advice  
than ever before **p44**

## Putting a positive spin on things

Simon Taylor credits  
mountain biking with  
getting his life back on  
track. Saddle up! **p36**



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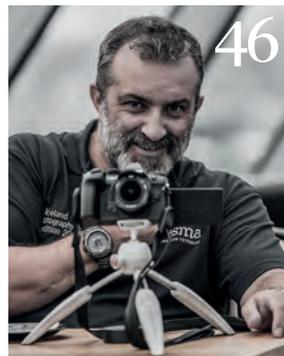
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Photography: Andy Bate



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# NEWS

News, views and opinion from the world of Blesma

## Third Invictus is the best yet say Team UK

The third Invictus Games was held during the final week of September in Toronto, Canada. Team UK, which was captained by a Blesma Member, heralded the event as the most successful and enjoyable yet.

“The Games were run outstandingly well,” said Team UK captain Bernie Broad, a former Major with the Grenadier Guards, who lost both his legs below the knee in 2009. “Even the police gave us escorts to make sure we were on time! The organisers rose to the challenge, and so did our squad.”

Bernie stressed that while the Brits won an impressive 87 medals (26 gold, 34 silver and 27 bronze), achievement at Invictus must be measured in more than just metal.

“Sixty two per cent of our squad members were new to this year’s Invictus Games, so we stressed that every individual needed personal expectations for each event so

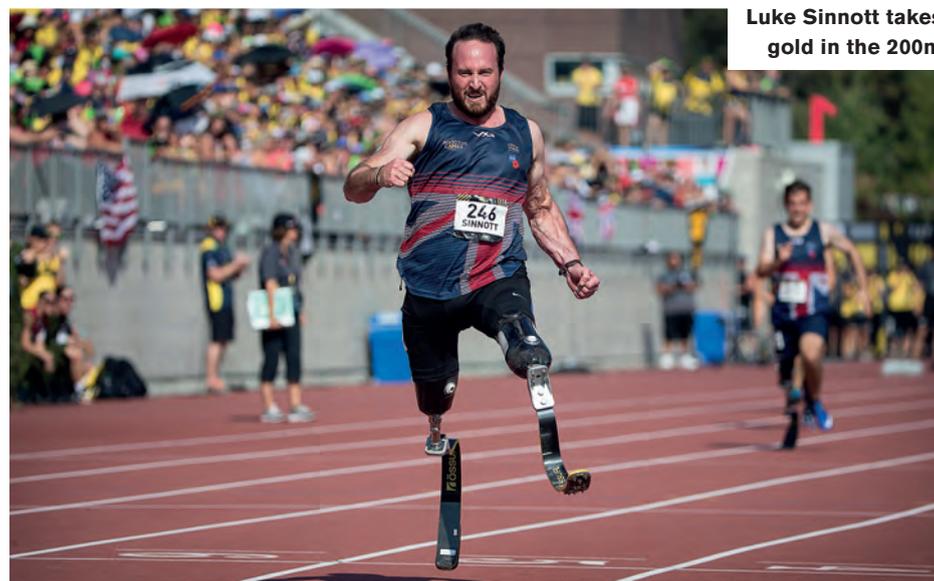
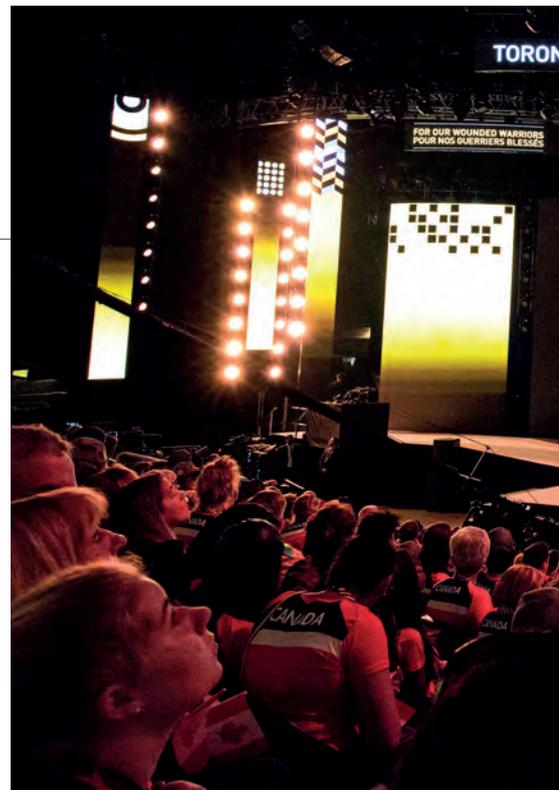
as not to get disappointed by a particular result,” said Bernie. “Getting the most out of the Games on a personal level was as important as the performance.”

### BIGGER AND BETTER THAN EVER

The Games themselves were bigger than ever, with 550 competitors from 17 nations competing in an expanded programme of 12 sports. And Blesma athletes were never far away from the heart of the action. The UK captain enjoyed spectating as well as participating, and got to spend a lot of time with Invictus founder Prince Harry.

“I loved the golf, which I’d have won by five shots if they’d counted the practice round!” laughed Bernie, “and I competed in the swimming, which was hard, and the wheelchair rugby, which was great fun.

“And Prince Harry was so impressive! He was focused on looking after the



Luke Sinnott takes gold in the 200m



Team UK captain Bernie Broad



**It was rugby silver for Team UK and Stuart Robinson**



**Lamin Manneh on his way to silver in the discus**



**Blesma in Borneo**  
Members giving back (p30)

# welcome

The summer appears to be over but the Blesma calendar is still full and a large part of the Activities Programme has yet to run. Billy Drinkwater and Wyn Austin tell us about their experiences with teenagers and overseas development in Borneo; this was a pilot that we are looking to build upon. Thank you to Billy and Wyn for leading the way.

Our photographers have ventured to Iceland. We are extremely keen to assess this trip in the round and how the photography interest group can continue to be supported. As with other activities, those engaged benefit so much in terms of independence and fulfilment – which is the Blesma Mission. Pushing the bounds of the Activities Programme, whether it be overseas or locally, a project or a social gathering, and attracting new participants, strengthening their wellbeing and place in society, is a realm Blesma wishes to reinforce.

On the subject of reinforcement, we have recruited an extra Support Officer to concentrate on Wales and parts of England in the west. We welcome Thomas Hall in this role – he will not only support the membership there but also establish our place in the Welsh veterans community and make ties with the Welsh Assembly to ensure our voice is heard. In the Midlands, we welcome aboard Samantha Wileman who will pay attention to the move of the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre from Headley Court to Stanford Hall near Loughborough.

A strong cohort of Blesma Members found their way to the Invictus Games and as you will read, all their hard work, commitment and preparation was rewarded. Simon Taylor and Michael Lewis have got out and about too, and we are grateful to them for revealing their stories.

Next year, the centenary of the end of the First World War will be commemorated. It was the end of this war, and the post injury trials of the veterans suffering limb loss, that caused Blesma to be formed. It seems right, therefore, to mark the membership's place in society and show the positive theme over the years. To this end, the Activities Programme will have even more unique features in 2018. Details will be forthcoming shortly with much opportunity for Members of all generations to play a part. I hope this has you guessing!

**Barry Le Gry**  
Chief Executive



Prince Harry chats to some of the swimming squad



Jack Cummings ready to let fly in the archery

**“THE WHOLE THING WAS OUT OF THIS WORLD! I LOVED COMPETING IN THE SPORTS BUT THE MAIN BENEFIT WAS HOW IT HELPED TO BUILD UP MY CONFIDENCE. IT WAS AMAZING”**



Craig Winspear helped Team UK to basketball bronze



Kirk Hughes wins bronze in tennis and takes part in handcycling (left)



families and friends of athletes. He had so much time to listen to their stories. He’s a brilliant man, and 100 per cent committed to supporting our veterans.”

And the Games were very special for Bernie on a personal level. “Being captain was a tremendous honour, and I proved to myself that I could lead. The atmosphere among the team was excellent – I absorbed all the energy from our athletes and it’s really given me confidence.”

David Scott, a former Army Major in the Army Physical Training Corps, also had a great time. “It was a phenomenal experience. The Canadians lifted the Invictus Games to the next level. Everyone was in one hotel, so I imagine it was a bit like being in the Olympic Village. That made the experience even better, because we had a brilliant time

mixing with athletes from other countries, both socially and competitively,” said David, who scooped gold in the golf. “The course was incredible, the crowds fantastic, and to win was unbelievable. Blesma have been very good for me and helped me get into disabled golf, so they can take some of the credit!”

David believes that sport has given him a new focus in life. “Competing at Invictus has brought back the camaraderie and the competitive edge, that military mind-set,” he said. “Playing sport and competing have given me a focus, and that’s really important psychologically.

“Sport can develop people so much, especially those who might have mental injuries as well as physical ones. There is nothing else like Invictus!”

Charmaine Healy is testament to this. She won a silver medal in powerlifting and a bronze in wheelchair basketball, and is living proof that the Invictus Games can make a real difference. Having suffered with PTSD, anxiety and depression, the Games have given her a real boost.

“The whole thing was out of this world,” she said. “I loved the sports, but the main benefit was how it helped to build up my confidence again. I usually struggle with crowds, and at Invictus we were around a lot of people all the time. I was nervous and had to push through my comfort zone. It did me a lot of good. It was amazing!”

*Go behind the scenes at an Invictus training camp on p22 to find out just what it took to be in with a shout of sporting glory*



# INVICTUS 2017 ROLL OF HONOUR

*Congratulations to all our Blesma Members and Invictus Games athletes*

<b>Bernard Broad</b> CAPTAIN	Golf, Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> ) Swimming
<b>Steve Arnold</b> VICE CAPTAIN	Handcycling ( <b>Gold in Criterium and Time Trial</b> ) Powerlifting
<b>Ross Austen</b>	Powerlifting
<b>Steven Boulton</b>	Wheelchair Rugby ( <b>Silver</b> )
<b>Andy Bracey</b>	Wheelchair Athletics ( <b>Silver in 100m, 200m, 400m and 1500m</b> )
<b>Steve Cokayne</b>	Athletics, Powerlifting
<b>Jack Cummings</b>	Archery, Swimming ( <b>Bronze in 50m Breaststroke</b> )
<b>Luke Delahunty</b>	Cycling, Rowing
<b>Kevin Drake</b>	Rowing, Wheelchair Basketball ( <b>Bronze</b> ) Wheelchair Tennis ( <b>Doubles Gold</b> )
<b>Daniel Gill</b>	Wheelchair Basketball ( <b>Bronze</b> )
<b>Ashley Hall</b>	Athletics, Powerlifting, Wheelchair Rugby ( <b>Silver</b> )
<b>Wayne Harrod</b>	Cycling ( <b>Silver in Road Cycle Time Trial</b> )
<b>Charmaine Healy</b>	Powerlifting ( <b>Silver in Mid-Weight category</b> ) Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> ) Wheelchair Basketball ( <b>Bronze</b> )
<b>Kirk Hughes</b>	Handcycling, Wheelchair Basketball ( <b>Bronze</b> ) Wheelchair Tennis ( <b>Bronze</b> )
<b>Olaf Jones</b>	Archery ( <b>Bronze in Team Open Compound</b> ) Athletics ( <b>Bronze in Discus and Shot Put</b> ) Jaguar Land Rover Driving Challenge ( <b>Silver</b> )
<b>Alex Krol</b>	Rowing, Wheelchair Tennis ( <b>Doubles Gold</b> )
<b>Rory Mackenzie</b>	Rowing, Swimming
<b>Lamin Manneh</b>	Athletics ( <b>Gold in Shot Put, Silver in Discus</b> ) Rowing ( <b>Bronze in Four Minute Endurance</b> ) Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> )
<b>Corie Mapp</b>	Athletics ( <b>Silver in 100m, 200m and Relay</b> ) Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> )

<b>Scott Meenagh</b>	Athletics ( <b>Silver in 400m and 1500m</b> ) Rowing ( <b>Bronze in Four Minute Endurance</b> )
<b>Michael Mellon</b>	Athletics, Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> ) Wheelchair Basketball ( <b>Bronze</b> )
<b>Pa Modou Njie</b>	Athletics, Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> ) Wheelchair Rugby ( <b>Silver</b> )
<b>Mark Ormrod</b>	Cycling, Rowing ( <b>Silver in Four Min Endurance and Sprint</b> ) Swimming ( <b>Bronze in 50m and 100m Freestyle</b> )
<b>Steven Palmer</b>	Swimming ( <b>Bronze in 50m Backstroke, Silver in 100m Freestyle</b> )
<b>Daniel Phillips</b>	Athletics, Swimming
<b>Netra Rana</b>	Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> )
<b>Stu Robinson</b>	Wheelchair Rugby ( <b>Silver</b> )
<b>Dave Sandles</b>	Cycling, Rowing
<b>David Scott</b>	Golf ( <b>Gold</b> ) Wheelchair Basketball ( <b>Bronze</b> )
<b>Luke Sinnott</b>	Athletics ( <b>Gold in 200m and 400m, Silver in 100m</b> )
<b>Clive Smith</b>	Powerlifting, Wheelchair Rugby ( <b>Silver</b> )
<b>Daniel Spender</b>	Swimming
<b>Charlie Walker</b>	Coach, Sitting Volleyball ( <b>Silver</b> ) Wheelchair Basketball ( <b>Bronze</b> ) Wheelchair Rugby ( <b>Silver</b> )
<b>David Watson</b>	Athletics ( <b>Bronze in Shot Put, Gold in Discus</b> )
<b>Craig Winspear</b>	Wheelchair Basketball ( <b>Bronze</b> )
<b>Jamie Weller</b>	Athletics ( <b>Bronze in 100m, 200m, 400m</b> ) Cycling ( <b>Bronze in Tandem Criterium</b> )
<b>Scott Yarrington</b>	Wheelchair Basketball ( <b>Bronze</b> )

**The 90-strong UK team takes part in the Opening Ceremony**



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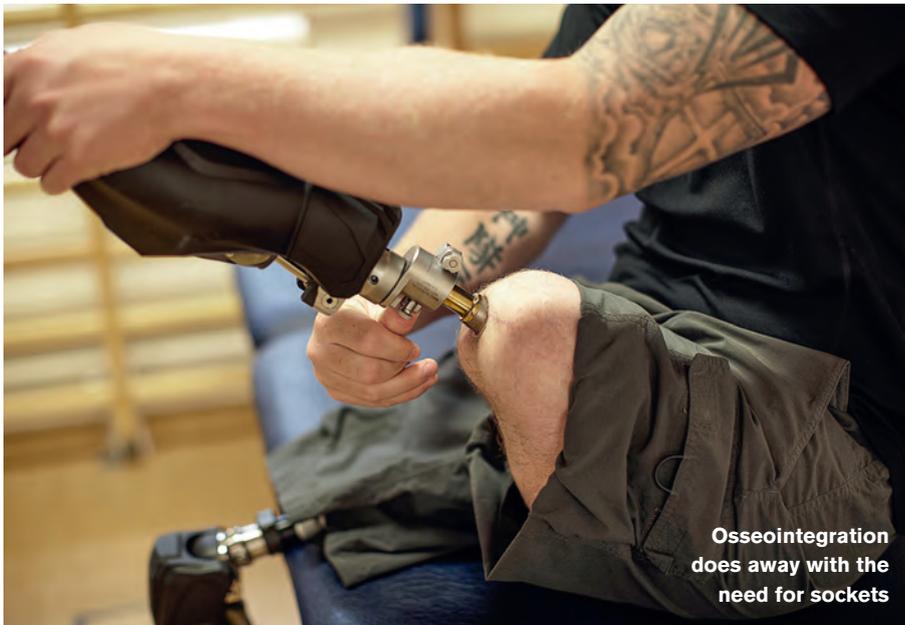
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Osseointegration does away with the need for sockets

## DSF operations make very welcome return

The MoD's Direct Skeletal Fixation Programme has resumed with three veterans having undergone the surgical procedure at Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital in September.

Administrative and supply chain issues led to a temporary delay in the programme for serving military personnel and veterans, but important lessons have been learned and the resumption of the programme has been warmly welcomed.

The complicated procedure, also known as osseointegration, involves permanently inserting a titanium rod into the bone so a prosthetic limb can be attached to an external fitting, doing away with the need for a traditional socket.

The programme only became available in the UK last April when the MoD received

£2m of LIBOR funding to conduct and evaluate a pilot programme. The money will fund up to 20 patients over the next two and half years, and learning will be shared as the NHS considers making the surgery available to NHS patients in the future.

Selection for the Direct Skeletal Fixation Programme is on a case-by-case basis and is subject to strict clinical criteria. Potential patients must first undergo an assessment at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Headley Court before being referred for the surgery.

*For more information on any issues relating to prosthetics, contact Brian at Chadwell Heath on 020 8548 7080 or at [bsoprosthetics@blesma.org](mailto:bsoprosthetics@blesma.org), or visit the Blesma website at [www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)*

### NEWS BRIEFS



#### LANDLUBBERS WANTED IN 2018

Blesma will set sail next year with a crew of wounded veterans and their families. The Association has chartered the tall ship *Tenacious* as part of its WWI commemorations and is inviting Members, as well as their carers and families, on board.

The ship will set sail from Southampton on 18 August bound for the Channel Islands. All disabilities can be catered for and no sailing experience is required. For more information turn to p55.



#### IT'S (NEARLY) CHRISTMAS!

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

There are six Christmas card designs to choose from, with packs of 10 cards costing just £3. An order form showing the different designs 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](mailto:officesupport@blesma.org)

## HEARTACHE FOR ENGLAND RUGBY

THE ENGLAND WHEELCHAIR RUGBY League team were denied a World Cup title in the last three minutes of a thrilling finale to the competition in July.

The team, which included Blesma Member James Simpson, made it all the way to the final against France, but were beaten 38-34 after the hosts scored a converted try with just minutes to go.

"We were disappointed not to win, especially after beating Australia in the semis. Losing out in the dying moments was a hard pill to swallow, but I think I've come to terms with it now," said double amputee and Leeds Rhinos player James.

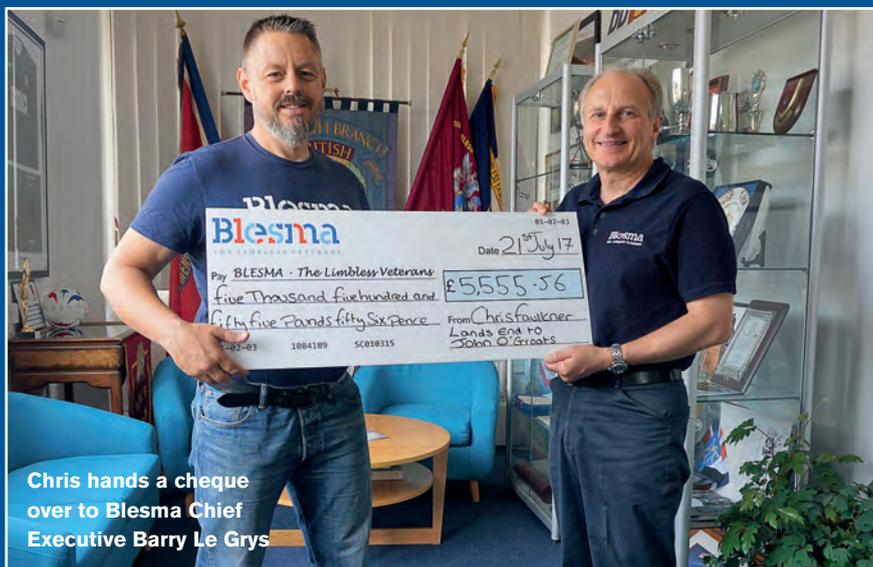
The rivalry is fierce between the two sides: this result is a repeat of the 2013

final, while England took home the most recent European championship trophy.

"I'm gutted it's all over," said James. "The atmosphere in the team was similar to being back in the Forces. That's why I'd love for more veterans to get involved. It's an impact sport and we're now building more teams to prepare for the 2021 World Cup which will be held in England."

Another Blesma Member, Michael Mellon, represented Scotland at the World Cup but the team came away without a win.

*For more information and advice on how to get involved in the sport, visit [www.rugby-league.com/leagues\\_competitions/wheelchair\\_rugby\\_league](http://www.rugby-league.com/leagues_competitions/wheelchair_rugby_league)*



Chris hands a cheque over to Blesma Chief Executive Barry Le Grys



## A BLESMA MAN FROM TOP TO BOTTOM

Train driver Chris Faulkner has hiked 874 miles in 45 days to raise £5,555 for the Association. The 52 year old from Upper Boddington in Northamptonshire, who served with the 1st Battalion Royal Green Jackets in the 1980s, walked from Land's End to John O'Groats during the summer, attracting a lot of attention along the way. "The first week was the hardest as my feet just fell to pieces with lots of blisters," said Chris. "But it was all worthwhile – lots of people stopped me to ask why I was doing the walk and were then kind enough to give me a donation. A few pubs I stopped at along the way even passed my bucket around!"



## MIKE IS OFFICIALLY THE FASTEST MAN IN THE WORLD!

IT'S OFFICIAL! AMPUTEE MIKE MULVEY is a world record holder. Back in May, the 57 year old took part in the Vitality London 10k with a goal to run the fastest 10k on one leg using crutches. He finished in an impressive time of 1 hour, 12 minutes and 25 seconds, shaving one minute and nine seconds off the previous record. And his attempt has been recognised by the Guinness World Records.

"It's a great feeling! I'd like to thank my trainer Kosta Beliaev and, of course, Blesma for entering me in the first place," Mike said.

What is even more impressive is that Mike, who lost his leg whilst serving with the Royal Pioneer Corps, set himself the challenge just 11 weeks before the race. He decided to prove that age and disability don't have to get in the way of your goals, and that anything is possible with the right training and planning.

And he's not finished yet. "I don't have a clue what my next challenge is going to be yet, but I do know that there will be another one next year!" he said after raising £555 for Blesma from taking part in the race.

## New plaque unveiled at the National Memorial Arboretum

MEMBERS OF THE WALSALL AND COVENTRY BRANCHES were joined at the National Memorial Arboretum by the Blesma photography group and Chadwell Heath staff this summer for the unveiling of a new dedication plaque.

The plaque is located in the Blesma Garden, which was officially opened in June 2001 at a special service of dedication.

"Coming from a military family, Remembrance has always been a massive part of my life, and since I began serving as an Army Reservist, it means even more to me," said Blesma's Media and Communications Officer, Bryony Stevens. "The unveiling of the new plaque was the perfect opportunity to reinforce our Members' stories of survival and give everyone a better understanding of this aspect of being part of the military community."



Words: Jessica Mackinnon

“ You don't have to worry about slopes or stairs because you have confidence in Linx. ” Paul



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In the spotlight

## Michael Lewis



**M**ichael Lewis, 34, served in 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment. He saw action in Iraq and Afghanistan but, in 2008, he was hit by friendly fire during a battle with the Taliban near Sangin. His right leg has since been amputated and he has lost some of the use in his left arm.

“I joined the Army when I was 16 – it was all I’d ever wanted to do. I loved the Para training and its elite nature – it was hard, and you had to push yourself to the limit to earn the right to wear that maroon beret.

“The first time I was hit by an IED was in Iraq in 2006, but I was lucky and only came away with minor shrapnel wounds. Then, in 2008, I deployed to Afghanistan as a Corporal and Section Commander. When I got there I was tasked with taking part in a major operation to transport a turbine from Camp Bastion to Kajaki, clearing any Taliban along the way.

“Everything went wrong before we had even set off! A massive IED exploded and all medical assists had to deal with the situation, which meant our patrol was prevented from going ahead on time. When we did eventually set off it was getting light – we had lost the element of surprise and, even worse, the Taliban could see us coming. As we approached the enemy stronghold we could see the Taliban taking cover in a treeline behind the village. My platoon took the first compound on the edge of the village and, as we moved inside, my section took up position on the roof.”

### COMING UNDER INTENSE FIRE

“We came under heavy fire from the treeline, which was only 34 metres away! During the intense fire fight the Forward Operating Officer fired three 105mm air burst rounds. The first landed behind the compound, the second nearer the treeline, and the third next to the wall I had taken cover behind. I was hit in the right leg, the left knee, the left arm and the helmet.

“There was dust everywhere, my leg was a mess, and my fingers were hanging off, but I was conscious throughout it all. Guys in my section got tourniquets on me, stuck me on a stretcher and carried me a mile to get me to the Chinook. The Scots Dragoon Guards, our fire support, knew what had happened and took

it upon themselves to drive down a known IED route to get to me. I was on the operating table in Camp Bastion within 40 minutes from being injured.

“I had initial surgery before I was flown back to Birmingham, where I was told that my leg was too far gone to save but that they’d be able to keep my arm. I’ve had more than 30 surgeries – skin grafts, nerve grafts, bone grafts, the fingers and muscles have been fused... It doesn’t work very well, but I’ve got about 30 per cent function in my ring and little fingers.”

### CHOOSING TO GET ON WITH LIFE

“I was frustrated afterwards. The entire incident had been preventable, and I couldn’t serve anymore. I was discharged because of my arm – I couldn’t complete a basic weapons handling test. It was a huge blow because I had planned to be in the Army for the long haul and had been training to apply for the Special Forces. That was all taken away from me.

“But the day I was injured, I vowed I wouldn’t let my injuries beat me and that I would one day get back to doing the things I enjoyed the most. There are people with worse injuries than me doing all sorts, so I knew I could carry on. When something like this happens you can either sit there feeling sorry for yourself or you can get out there and do something about it. I chose to get on with life, and after every setback from surgery, I just worked even harder.

“Now, I still ride my motocross bike and ski – I’ve got a great prosthetic ski leg that doesn’t even need a boot. I go to the gym five days a week: I love the social side and it’s great for taking out my frustrations, and my wife and I have just had our first baby.

“Blesma has played a massive part in my recovery, helping me with things like home adaptations and prosthetics guidance. And I’ve been on the Blesma ski trip to Colorado, which was amazing – it was inspiring to see so many amputees charging down a mountain!

“The best thing about the Association is the people: some are outgoing, some are struggling, but we all help each other. You learn practical things from other amputees and there’s support through the military sense of humour. Over the years, I’ve learned to adapt, improvise and overcome. Blesma has helped with that.”

“

**YOU CAN EITHER SIT AROUND FEELING SORRY FOR YOURSELF OR YOU CAN GET OUT THERE AND DO SOMETHING. I CHOSE TO GET ON WITH LIFE**

”

# Dust and derring-do

Simon Taylor on the pull of pedal power (p36)



Michael spends time with Member Peter Van Zeller



Words: Nick Moore Photography: Andy Bate

# Land Army veteran is finally recognised

Elizabeth Bartlett lost a leg serving in the Women's Land Army in 1941 but she didn't receive any compensation for 75 years. Then, Blesma got involved and fought her case...

**E**lizabeth Bartlett has told how she lost her leg on her first day working as a Women's Land Army volunteer and had to wait almost 75 years for compensation. Now 97, Elizabeth was just 21 when she gave up her job in a Sheffield steelworks to join the war effort in October 1941. She was sent to a farm 220 miles away in Kent, but fell into a threshing machine on her first day, suffering a devastating injury.

"I had worked on the machine in the morning but when I went to stand on it in the afternoon, someone had moved a board and I fell into the machine," she said. "My leg went into the machine, but I didn't have too much pain then; it came later on when I was in hospital. I remember riding to hospital in an open-backed farm van and going straight for an operation."

Elizabeth was one of 80,000 women who signed up to the home-based force, taking farming and industrial jobs to help the war effort. Many were the victims of crippling industrial accidents, but their injuries received little support from government authorities. Elizabeth even rejoined the Women's Land Army (WLA) once she learned how to walk again on a rudimentary false leg.

"I remember coming out of the anaesthetic and being told off by the matron for making too much noise. I shut up after that! From then on no-one contacted me, there was no interest in me, but I just got on with life," said Elizabeth. "You just got on with it because it was war and other people were in a worse state than you."

Blesma petitioned to win Elizabeth a war pension but the case was initially thrown out and a subsequent appeal lost. She was eventually granted compensation, although it was only backdated five years – from when Blesma took up her case.

"Elizabeth is very stoic and gets on with life without a shred of bitterness, but I was shocked by how she was dealt with," said Blesma Support Officer Bill Gillett. "She had served her country in the Land Army and, although she had never complained, she deserved compensation."

"Elizabeth doesn't feel any hostility to the authorities, which is an amazing attitude considering how harshly she was treated. If she had been hit by a Doodlebug, she would have been on a full war pension. I don't see the difference as she was serving her country and the WLA was recognised as a military organisation."



Words: Danny Buckland and Jessica Mackinnon

“**ELIZABETH IS VERY STOIC AND GETS ON WITH LIFE WITHOUT A HINT OF BITTERNESS**”

"The accident was terrible and they removed her leg as soon as she got to hospital. We forget how thin social welfare was back then and how harsh life could be, but Elizabeth just got on with it and managed without any adaptations to her home. It has taken a long time, but it is good that her case has been accepted."

Elizabeth's boyfriend at the time came to visit her in hospital on his way to serve with an artillery regiment. He was killed in action just a few weeks later, which meant she had to deal with heartbreak, come to terms with limb loss and get to grips with using a rudimentary prosthetic leg – all at the same time.

Later, after the war, Elizabeth married a horticultural expert and worked in gardens and orchards as she and her husband brought up their two children. She now lives in Watlington and District Nursing Home.

"Elizabeth is a very modest lady who has clearly overcome some huge challenges in her life, but even today remains stoic and simply gets on with things," said Julie Cooper, Sanctuary Care's Home Manager. "To return to the Land Army after the loss of her leg at such a young age is admirable – she deserves her badge of recognition so much and we're all very proud of her."



**JOHNO MARKS 10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY WITH A BALL IN HONOUR OF MEDICS**



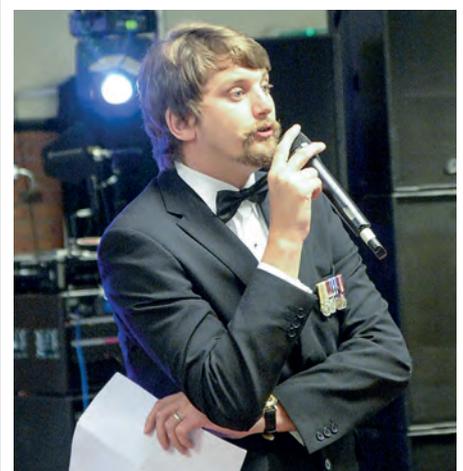
**MULTI-PLATINUM-SELLING SINGER** Gabrielle was amongst the entertainers at a sold-out Forces ball that was held recently to acknowledge the work of combat medics and two military charities.

The Unsung Heroes Ball was organised by Blesma Member Johnno Lee (below) to mark the tenth anniversary of him being blown up in Afghanistan and to thank the combat medics who saved his life. Johnno also used the celebration to acknowledge the work of Blesma and ABF The Soldiers' Charity, as he credits both with helping him through his recovery.

"The ball was superb and Gabrielle put on a great performance. She played lots of tracks, including her classics, and was encouraging everyone to get up and dance with her. It felt just like a mini-festival," said Johnno.

More than 350 guests, including combat medics, charity workers and military veterans enjoyed a packed evening of entertainment that included magician Shane Sterling, an auction and a raffle.

"The ball was 12 months in the planning, so I'd like to extend my thanks to everyone who was involved. I cannot thank the medics and doctors who saved my life enough," said Johnno.



Words: Jessica Mackinnon



**Nick, far right, wins another bronze**

# Euro, World and Para bronze for Beighton

**N**ick Beighton has paddled his way to bronze at the Para-Canoe European Championships. The competition, which took place in July, was double amputee Nick's first major competitive event since last year's Paralympic Games, in which he also won a bronze medal.

"We were expecting our second child when the World Championships were on, so this was my only race of the season," said the 35 year old. "It has been a difficult season in many ways. It was a challenge to reset my goals and motivations after putting so much energy and sacrifice into the Paralympics. For it to suddenly all be over and have the next four-year cycle staring me in the face was tough."

Nick spent the early part of 2017 going back to basics, concentrating on his fitness and technique, but despite winning bronze he felt disappointed by his performance at the European Championships.

"It's never a bad thing to win a medal at a major championships, but I was a bit disappointed – I suppose it means that I'm hungry for more! This result means I am the current European, World and Paralympic bronze medallist, which I am really proud of, but I'm also very keen to turn those medals into a different colour!"

"There are only 1,000 days or so until the 2020 Paralympics in Tokyo – that's probably about 3,000 training sessions – so I'd better get stuck in!"

## THREE PEAKS ON A BIKE FOR BLESMA

COMBAT MEDICS ROSS TITCOMBE (left) and James Irving have completed the epic Three Peaks Cycle Challenge in aid of the Association.

The gruelling event consists of climbing the highest peaks in Scotland (Ben Nevis), England (Scafell Pike) and Wales (Snowdon) AND cycling the 470-or-so miles between them!



"The challenge was disgusting. We didn't anticipate it was going to be that hard. Three months' training just wasn't enough.

Scafell Pike was especially difficult," said James, who is currently serving in the Caribbean. The team completed the challenge in 46 hours and 58 minutes, raising more than £2,000 for the Association.

## ↘ BLESMA BRIEFING

# A vital insight into Members' lives

It's important that staff at Chadwell Heath understand the problems, issues and difficulties that Members face on a daily basis. Time for a visit to a limb centre...

“  
BLESMA IS NOT AFRAID TO LET ME KNOW WHEN THINGS ARE GOING WRONG FOR ITS VETERANS. THIS VITAL INSIGHT IS ESSENTIAL

Alison Treadgold,  
NHS England

”

Staff at Chadwell Heath visited the Harold Wood Limb Centre in Essex in September to better understand the process and experience Members face when they are fitted with a prosthetic limb. The Chadwell Heath team were joined on the day by BSO London and Kent Paul Findlay, as well as Alison Treadgold, Head of Armed Forces Health (Midlands & North) at NHS England.

During the visit, the group was shown around by Alan Meyer, Prosthetic Clinical Services Manager at Harold Wood, who broke the prosthetic pathway down into three stages; the casting room, the laminating room and upper limb myoelectric prosthetics.

Using Paul (who is a Blesma Member as well as a BSO) as the casting model, Alan demonstrated how amputation scars, bone structure, muscle movements, and even weather are among a long list of things that prosthetists have to take into consideration when making a cast. As Alison and Emily Mizon, Blesma's Membership Engagement Assistant, cast Paul's leg, Alan explained how it is vital that prosthetists recognise every patient as an individual, and treat them as such.

The team at Harold Wood work with a wide variety of amputees, from Paralympic athletes to those who simply want to regain their freedom by being able to walk again. Every amputee has practical differences – the shape of their legs, for example – but also differences in their attitude, outlook and needs.

In the laminating room, the Blesma staff members were treated to a socket making demonstration.

“After years of listening to Members talk about their prosthetics, it's interesting to see how they are made,” said Emily. “It's amazing to see how many different parts an upper limb prosthetic has. There seems to be a solution for everything!”

The trip also highlighted to staff the importance of the charity's working relationship with the NHS, the limb centres and their teams of experts. The Harold Wood team took the opportunity to show Blesma staff how the centre has benefitted from the Veterans Prosthetic Panel funding, and explained how upper limb myoelectric prosthetics work.

“It's always fascinating to visit an NHS limb centre and meet clinical staff who are working tirelessly with veterans,” said Alison. “For me, Blesma very much acts as a thermometer and is not afraid to let me know when



Above: Chief Executive Barry Le Grys gets hands on

things are going wrong for its veterans. This vital insight and information is essential in helping NHS England to fund the right prosthetics for veterans, as is their support in getting messages out to Members when I typically don't have direct contact with veterans.”

Alan seconded Alison's comments. “I'd like to thank Blesma for raising the profile of the centre and making people understand what is going on in the industry. Blesma's work has helped the centre get better equipment through the Veterans Prosthetic Panel which can then be used to help civilian amputees, too. Blesma gives us the voice we don't have!”

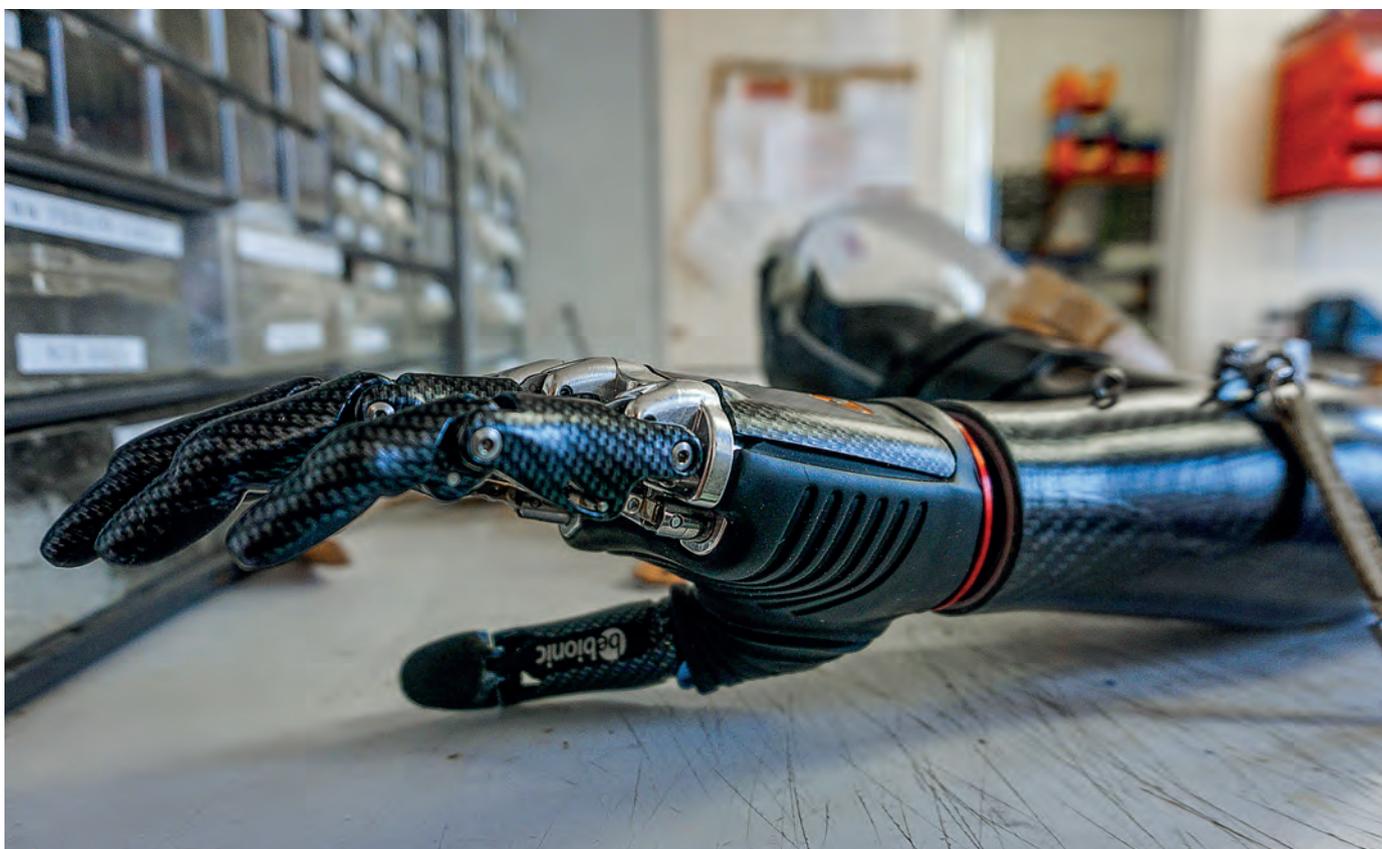
*For more information on any issues relating to prosthetics, contact Brian at Chadwell Heath on 020 8548 7080 or at [bsoprosthetics@blesma.org](mailto:bsoprosthetics@blesma.org), or visit the Blesma website at [www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)*

## An Icelandic adventure

A week in a photographer's paradise (p46)



**Membership Engagement**  
Assistant Emily becomes a  
prosthetist for the day as she  
learns how to cast Paul's leg



Words: Jessica Mackinnon Photographs: Brian Chenier



## West Ham and Blesma teammates once again

**W**est Ham United Football Club has chosen to support Blesma for another Premiership season. During the 2016/17 Premier League season, the Hammers announced Blesma would be their chosen charity. The club offered its support in a number of ways, including holding match day collections as well as awareness raising activities, with donations topping £3,000. Last year, the club also invited four Members to its training ground (above) to meet the players and watch them

train. Former soldier Matty Woollard was even lucky enough to land himself a pair of Mark Noble's signed boots!

"Our partnership with West Ham United is very special to everyone at Blesma and we are delighted to be their chosen charity once again this season," said Barbara Warner, Associate Director Fundraising.

*The club has invited Members to the match against Southampton on 31 March 2018. More info will be available nearer the time*

### NEWS BRIEFS

#### HADRIAN'S WALL IS NO MATCH FOR THESE HARDY CYCLISTS

Amputee veteran Brian Chapman has cycled the length of Hadrian's Wall to raise more than £2,800 for Blesma.

The 54 year old had a bike specially made for him which allowed him to cycle the 92-mile route without using his prosthetic limb. The former soldier was part of a group of eight cyclists who began the challenge with a 13-mile ride from Carlisle on Friday 04 August.

"It was very difficult. There were lots of steep hills and I had to get a helping push up a few of them!" said Brian. "I got some cuts and bruises from crashing twice, too. But it would have been much more difficult if I had used my prosthetic because it would have kept falling off. This way, I could strap my foot to the pedal and use one leg."

*You can support Brian's hard work by donating at [www.justgiving.com/fundraising/b-chapman1](http://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/b-chapman1)*



## Team GB hit for six on day one of Simpson Cup

TEAM USA SECURED A THIRD SIMPSON Cup win in September, comfortably beating Team GB by a score of 13 to 5.

The Ryder Cup-style golf tournament, now in its sixth year, pits 13 injured Service men and veterans from the USA against their British counterparts. Coming into this year's tournament, the British team, which this year included Blesma Members Mike Browne, David Ward, Ian Bishop, Jason Evans and Paul Skivington, had never been beaten on home soil.

That changed this year though, as the Americans eased into a 6-0 lead after the four-ball matches on day one at Royal Birkdale, producing the Simpson Cup's first ever clean sweep. Heading into the singles matches, the UK's chances of a win were slim.



"Unfortunately, I lost my four-ball match on the 18th hole. It wasn't my finest hour!" said single leg amputee David Ward, who has played in all tournaments, captaining the UK in the inaugural competition. "The Americans may have been leading into the second day but that didn't affect our play.



The pairings played great. The tournament was good but we were beaten by a stronger team," David continued. "We don't like losing but it's given us the motivation to work harder for next year's competition."

The event in 2018 will take place at Maidstone Club in New York.



## SOARING THROUGH THE SKIES TO RAISE MONEY FOR THE ASSOCIATION

DAREDEVILS WENT HEADFIRST DOWN the world's fastest zip line in September to raise more than £3,000 for the Association.

Eighteen thrill seekers reached speeds of up to 100mph as they flew headfirst over a quarry in Wales on Zip World Velocity.

"I'm absolutely terrified of heights and have avoided them since I was at school!" said Marion Meechan, partner of Blesma Member Dave Lewan, who decided to take on the challenge after being inspired by injured veterans on other Blesma activities.

Marion was able to conquer her fears and soar down Europe's longest zip line.

"It was fantastic and I'd definitely do it again. Blesma means so much to me and I didn't want to let them down. It was a well-organised trip and I'd highly recommend it to anyone. I'm wondering if I ever even had a fear of heights now!"



You could perform in front of thousands this time next year

## Take your place on stage to mark the centenary of WWI

**B**lesma has teamed up with the Graeae Theatre to offer Members the opportunity to be part of a major outdoor production to commemorate WWI.

Next year marks the centenary of the end of World War I, and to commemorate the occasion Blesma Members will have the chance to work with Jenny Sealey, who co-directed the London 2012 Paralympic Opening Ceremony, and writer Mike Kenny to perform to an audience expected to be in excess of 20,000 people.

Graeae is a theatre company that challenges preconceptions and champions diversity by putting deaf and disabled artists centre stage. For this production, Graeae will work with wounded veterans, deaf and disabled aerial performers, and a choir made up of veterans' families to remember those injured in WWI and tell the stories of today's veterans.

*More information on the productions and how you can audition to take part will be available in the Winter Issue*

### Those who have passed away

*June – August 2017. May they rest in peace.*

Adamson D	RA	HQ	03/07/2017
Baldwin E	Rifle Brigade	HQ	29/07/2017
Cheetham A	RGJ	HQ (SW Essex)	30/06/2017
Christie M	Kings	HQ	Jun/Jul 2017
Farnen P	Merchant Navy	HQ	27/06/2017
Ferry J	DLI	HQ	05/08/2017
Fincham M	RM	HQ	Aug 2017
Fitzgerald P	RCT/RLC	HQ	24/08/2017
Holt L	RN	HQ (Blackpool)	Jun 2017
Hughes W	RN	HQ	16/07/2017
Johnston R	RAF	HQ	18/08/2017
Kenton A	RRF	HQ	16/06/2017
Martin B	RAF	Sutton & Merton	Jun/Jul 2017
McCarthy Mrs M A	RN	HQ (Bournemouth)	17/08/2017
Morgan D	RN	HQ	16/06/2017
Reid A	Royal Hampshire	HQ	19/06/2017
Smith E	Grenadier Guards	HQ	13/07/2017
Whitby G	RN	HQ	29/08/2017
White B	RN	Portsmouth	20/07/2017
Williams C	RN	HQ	03/07/2017

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# Blockbusters get Blesma treatment

Working as an extra on a TV set or Hollywood film means you'll get paid for doing something out of the ordinary. And you might just rub shoulders with the stars, too



**B**lockbuster war films such as *Dunkirk* and *Fury* have been given an added dose of realism by employing Blesma Members as extras in battle scenes to play wounded and dying characters. The veterans are also able to use their expert knowledge to correct military inconsistencies during filming.

"It was great to be in *Dunkirk* and take part in what is an epic film," said 37-year-old Kirk Bowett, a former Corporal with 16 years' service in the Mercian Regiment. "We are able to give realism to a scene because of the natural way we patrol and hold our weapons, and our knowledge of uniform is second nature."

Kirk broke his neck and a leg, suffered broken ribs and lost his left arm below the elbow while working as a private security contractor protecting diplomats in Iraq. "We've corrected a number of mistakes before they have got to the screen, including guys wearing the wrong rank slides, a Captain saluting a Private, and a soldier calling a Sergeant 'Sir'."

"On *Wonder Woman*, the cap badges were in the wrong place on the berets and characters were wearing military insignia that had not been invented at the time. I've also been in a TV commercial where they had old soldiers wearing medals from Afghanistan. We made sure that changed pretty quickly!"

Kirk joined Blesma while he was recovering from his injuries and soon discovered there was a demand for ex-Service personnel in films. His credits include *Dunkirk*, *Star Wars: Rogue One*, *Wonder Woman*, and *Transformers*. He has also appeared in Netflix series *The Crown* and *War Machine* with Brad Pitt.

"There can be a lot of waiting around as an extra but it's great fun, particularly filming *Dunkirk* where we were running around on beaches for two days, playing casualties and getting paid for it. Being an extra in films boosts your earnings – you can earn anything from £85 to £120 a day – and it helps with confidence after suffering life-changing injuries. I get a real buzz out of recreating history and adding to its accuracy."

Jez Scarratt (pictured above) from Taunton, served 15 years in the Royal Marines before losing his right leg below the knee in a motorcycle accident. He has since rubbed shoulders with Brad Pitt on the film *Fury* and David Tennant on ITV's *Broadchurch* (above left).



Words: Danny Buckland

"It's good fun and a great experience. You meet new people all the time and keep in touch with other Service guys," he said. "I was a casualty in the opening scenes of *Fury* and you can see me and hear me screaming. But I also play able-bodied roles and really enjoy it."

Ben Hartley, a former Fleet Air Arm helicopter pilot set up MFS Casting agency with ex-Royal Marine Andrew Buckley to place ex-Service personnel in films.

"Military guys don't have to do too much to look authentic. It's the way they stand after a parade or how aircrew would hold their helmets as they walk; there's a certain military bearing that you can't teach," he said.

"If you hire 50 students to play marching soldiers you'll probably need to put them through a two-day boot camp first, so films can save on that extra cost. Military guys are also pretty hardy and don't mind if the weather is rubbish. They just get on with it and encourage others. A lot of Assistant Directors say you only have to ask ex-military people once and they snap to it; with civvies it can be like herding cats!"

*If you like the idea of being an extra in a future Hollywood blockbuster, drop us a line at [editor@blesma.org](mailto:editor@blesma.org) and we'll point you in the right direction*



**WE WERE RUNNING AROUND ON BEACHES, PLAYING CASUALTIES AND BEING PAID FOR IT. I GET A REAL BUZZ FROM RECREATING HISTORY**



## Preparing for Invictus

Behind the scenes at a training camp (p22)



Far picture (from left to right): Ash Hall, John Wilson, John Ray and Dan Richards take a break from cycling through New York



# Exploring the Big Apple. By bike

Injured veterans from Blesma and the Wounded Warrior Project in the USA joined forces once again this summer for an epic cycle ride through New York.

In an action-packed three days of riding, four Blesma Members had the experience of a lifetime. Dan Richards, John Ray, Ash Hall and John Wilson received police escorts as they cycled along closed roads lined with supporters cheering and waving flags.

The route took the cyclists from the start in Manhattan to Amagansett on the south

shore of Long Island. In between, there was plenty of sight seeing, BBQs and socialising with the American riders to enjoy, not to mention numerous interviews to be conducted with American camera crews.

“Soldier Ride New York is an amazing event – to be honest, that doesn’t even scratch the surface!” said Dan Richards after the event. “I am extremely grateful to the Wounded Warrior Project and Blesma for this amazing opportunity and I’m truly humbled to have been a part of this event.”

At the end of the ride, all the cyclists voted for the one person they thought had worked hardest for the benefit of their team. Dan was given the coveted accolade of being Soldier Ride’s ‘Super Domestique’.

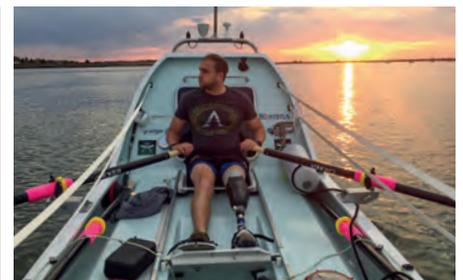
“I feel genuinely honoured to have been presented with the award, and for the first time during the entire week I found myself utterly speechless!” said Dan.

*To find out how you can get involved in Blesma’s cycling activities turn to p36*

## FALL FOR THE FALLEN 2017

The skies of Wiltshire were well and truly ‘Blesmarised’ on the weekend of 12 August as the Association’s Members and fundraisers took part in Fall For The Fallen. The annual tandem skydiving event raises vital funds for the Association.

Thirty brave skydivers took on the challenge this year, with some of them jumping from 15,000 feet at Old Sarum Park and Netheravon Airfield. So far, the event has raised more than £15,000.



## READY TO ROW2RECOVERY

Blesma Member Jordan Beecher (above) and Captain Jon Armstrong are making their final preparations for their Row2Recovery challenge. They completed the event’s 72-hour qualifying row in September and are now all ready to compete in the Atlantic Talisker Whisky Challenge.

The race will see them set off from La Gomera in the Canary Islands in December, and row non-stop for 3,000 miles across the Atlantic, finishing in Antigua about 50 days later. Good luck from Blesma!

# Eat Sleep Row Repeat

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE IN WITH THE CHANCE OF A MEDAL AT THE INVICTUS GAMES? TIME TO GO BEHIND THE SCENES TO FIND OUT

**R**owing, even at a leisurely pace, isn't exactly the most straightforward of pastimes. But when it comes to racing, the room for error when executing your strokes is so small that even minor mistakes can mean the difference between powering to victory and chasing your own tail in circles. And while it took a lifetime for world-famous British rowers like Sir Steve Redgrave and Alex Gregory MBE to reach the pinnacle of the sport, eight Blesma Members have recently been part of a squad of injured ex-Service personnel vying to make their mark on an adaptive version of the discipline in as little as 10 months.

Lamin Manneh, Mark Ormrod, Kevin Drake, Scott Meenagh, Alex Krol, Dave Sandles, Rory Mackenzie

and Luke Delahunty travelled to Toronto last month to compete in indoor rowing at this year's Invictus Games. They all competed in a number of other sports during the Games but when *Blesma Magazine* caught up with Lamin, Mark and Kevin in early September at the last training camp before Team UK headed out to Canada, they were all in agreement that rowing was proving to be their toughest test, both physically and mentally.

"It's an absolute killer, it just wipes you out," Mark says in between massive gulps of air, having just powered his way to a personal best in a dry run of the men's IR1 four-minute race. Kevin agrees: "It's horrendous; it makes my other two sports – tennis and basketball – look civilised!"

Blesma's tough trio are putting themselves through hell at Tedworth House in Wiltshire just three weeks

Mark Ormrod on his way to a personal best time at the final training camp in early September



Words: Matt McEvoy Photographs: Andy Bate



Lamin and Mark have very different styles but the same goal in Canada



## MARK ORMROD

**Mark has realised just how tough Invictus will be...**

### Tell us a bit about yourself

I'm a former Royal Marine. I lost both my legs and my right arm after being blown up by an IED in Afghanistan in 2007. I was the conflict's first triple amputee. Now, I work as a motivational speaker and author, and am filming a documentary about my life.

### What has your Invictus prep been like?

To be honest, I totally underestimated the Invictus Games – and para sports in general. I thought they were something you just went out and had a go at – and everyone clapped no matter what – but I've since realised just how hard they really are!

### How will the Games help with your recovery?

I've been in recovery for 10 years and I've never touched sport. My initial focus was to be wheelchair free, which I managed in 2009. With everything that was going on in my life, I never felt I needed sport. I now wish I'd got involved in it years ago!



before they're set to head out to Toronto. They're taking part in the last training camp before the Games, and they're having to endure a full dress rehearsal of the races – utter exhaustion and all!

The training day has been split into several sessions, both designed to accurately emulate what the guys will face during competition. Mark and Lamin are triple amputees, having each lost both legs and an arm in IED blasts in Afghanistan in 2007 and 2010 respectively. Kevin, meanwhile, was severely injured in an Afghan IED attack in 2013, and eventually decided to have his left leg amputated below the knee last year.

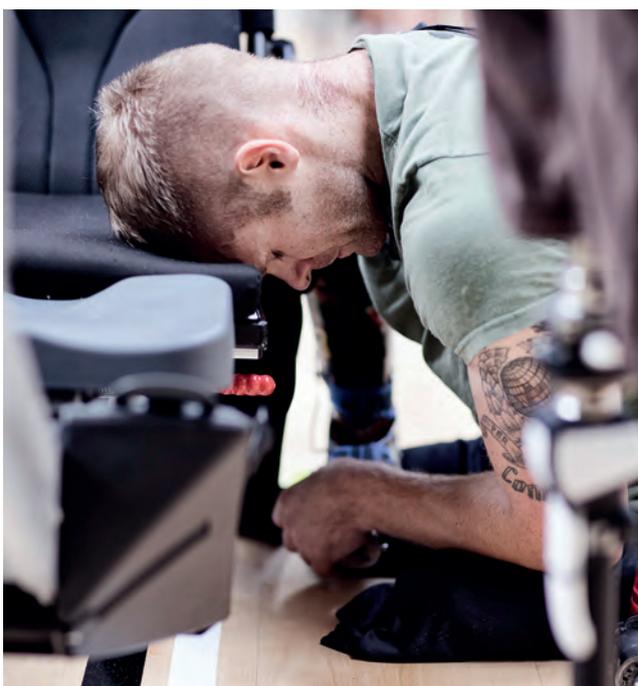
Like most Team UK athletes, these three have been training for the Invictus Games since last winter on a preliminary basis, before successfully making the final cut to the team in April. Put simply, this means they've had to become not just proficient, but competitive in each of their chosen sports in as little as five months.

### PRESSURE? WHAT PRESSURE?

The Invictus Games were created in 2014 by Prince Harry to 'demonstrate the power of sport to inspire recovery, support rehabilitation and demonstrate life beyond disability'. This year's Games, the third such event, saw more than 400 wounded, sick or injured veterans and Service personnel from 17 countries head to Canada at the end of September to compete in 12 sports. Archery, driving, golf, indoor rowing, athletics, swimming, powerlifting, cycling, sitting volleyball and wheelchair versions of tennis, rugby and basketball were all on the agenda – and all were fiercely contested.

Lamin took part in rowing, athletics and sitting volleyball for the second consecutive Games; Mark was gunning for gold in swimming, hand cycling and rowing; and Kevin was competing in wheelchair basketball, wheelchair tennis and rowing.

"I haven't entered the Games with any expectations,"



says Lamin, all smiles at the pre-Games training camp. “For me, it’s all about helping my recovery. I don’t feel the need to put pressure on myself. Professional athletes must always be worrying about what they’re going to do, what their opponents are going to do, what their coaches and fans think... that pressure must be huge! I want to go out there and enjoy myself. I won’t care too much about what the person next to me is doing, but if I win a medal it will definitely be a bonus!”

Medals are what Hannah Lawton, Team UK’s indoor rowing head coach, is aiming for. She’s all smiles after the only full run-through the team will get before doing it for real in Toronto goes without a hitch.

“I spoke to the team afterwards and everyone agreed it was a positive experience,” says Hannah. “Rowing is an incredibly technical sport, especially on the rowing machines, and we won’t get the chance to train at the race venue, so it was imperative everyone understood what was going to happen on race day. Half of the team achieved personal best times during this final training camp, so it was a very worthwhile session.”

#### PAYING ATTENTION TO EVERY DETAIL

Split into different classes depending on their disability, the rowing squad is taking part in lung-busting four-and-one-minute sprints. These are the events they will compete in for real under the bright lights of the Mattamy Athletic Centre in Toronto’s Maple Leaf Gardens. The goal is simple: row as far as possible in the given time. Despite the modest environment – a sparse gym kitted out with eight rowing machines and a few benches – Hannah is keen to replicate as much of the big day as she can.

“We’ve tried to make all the training sessions as realistic as possible, recreating what it will be like in Toronto, because we don’t know how any of the athletes will react,” she says. “Some of the guys who suffer from

**“IT’S BEEN A STEEP LEARNING CURVE, BUT I CAME AWAY WITH TWO PERSONAL BESTS, SO I’M FEELING MUCH MORE CONFIDENT AHEAD OF THE ACTUAL EVENT!”**

PTSD have told us that the constant thumping beat of the loud music which will be blaring out at the venue will be difficult to handle, so we’ve worked with their mental health teams to create a number of coping strategies.”

Potential curveballs that could disrupt the athletes’ vital pre-race preparations have been identified and are replicated during the afternoon. The racers enter the hall to blaring music, for example, while family members have been purposely positioned in close proximity to cheer on their loved ones. Two banks of rowing machines form the warm-up and race areas, and the transitions from one to the other are timed meticulously. A scrum of camera crews and journalists (including *Blesma Magazine*) have even been invited and are dutifully thrusting cameras and microphones under the noses of the athletes immediately after each race to mimic the press scrutiny they will attract during the Games.

“I was intrigued to see how it was all going to turn out,” says Kevin, a Sergeant who is just about to finish his service with the Royal Engineers, after his IR3 one-minute all-out effort. “I’ve learned a lot today, and I’ve thoroughly enjoyed it. I was apprehensive before this because I only took up rowing in May after having already been picked for the basketball team. The training

**Below: Kevin’s family will travel out to the Games in Toronto to cheer him, and fellow rowers Mark and Lamin (below), on**





## **LAMIN MANNEH**

**Lamin has already had a taste of Invictus glory, having won two medals in America last year**

### **Tell us a bit about yourself**

I served as a Guardsman in the Irish Guards before I lost both my legs and my left arm in an IED blast in Afghanistan in 2010. This year's Invictus Games will be my second – I won a silver in rowing and a bronze in shotput in Orlando at last year's Games.

### **How have you been ahead of this year's competition, and how has training been?**

I feel good, but I'm just going to do my best. Sometimes your best might not quite be enough, but all you can do is try. I've been doing a lot of cardio and power work. I needed more strength in my arm. I use my prosthetic legs a lot on the rowing machine because they give me balance. My training has involved a lot of hand cycling for cardio, walking on the treadmill for balance and stability, and heavy lifting for strength and endurance.



Kevin only started rowing in May. Now he's ready to take on the world

**KEVIN DRAKE**

**Invictus debutant Kevin is eager to make his family proud in Toronto**

**Tell us a bit about yourself**

I'm 38 and am serving as a Sergeant in the Royal Engineers. In 2013, I was injured on a clearance patrol in Afghanistan. After having a number of operations, I chose to have my left leg amputated in 2016. This will be my first Invictus Games and I'll be competing in wheelchair tennis, wheelchair basketball and indoor rowing.

**How have you found the training?**

It has been hard. I've not done as much basketball as I should have, but I've been able to get out and play tennis, and go to the gym. The rowing training is improving my overall fitness, so it's all helping!

**What have been the big challenges you've had to face?**

I have a young family, so the commitment they have to make is bigger than mine. The sacrifices they have made for me to be able to change have been huge – and I'm very grateful for their full support.



has given me something to work towards other than my rehab. At Headley Court, my goals are quite short-term but the basketball, tennis and rowing have given me long-term goals. Training on the rowing machine has improved my all-round fitness, too, which is a bonus.

“It's been a steep learning curve, especially to get really fit, but it's all paying off at the right time. I came away from today with two personal bests, so I'm feeling much more confident ahead of the actual event!”

**NEXT STOP: TORONTO**

The path to this year's Invictus Games hasn't all been plain sailing (or perhaps that should be plain rowing) for the assembled athletes. Each competitor's injuries are unique and vary greatly, so catering for everyone on a personal level hasn't always been straightforward.

“Every single person is different and that always poses a challenge,” says Hannah. “The difficulties facing a below-knee amputee on the machines are different from those faced by an above-knee amputee for instance, and how each athlete wants the machines set up for their race depends on their prosthetics, their build and height.”

The last few weeks have been used to iron out such kinks. Lamin, for example, rows using a single pulley



**“IT'S BEEN INCREDIBLE TO WATCH EVERYONE'S JOURNEY. PEOPLE WHO HAVE OVERCOME SO MUCH GAIN EVEN MORE FROM THESE CAMPS”**

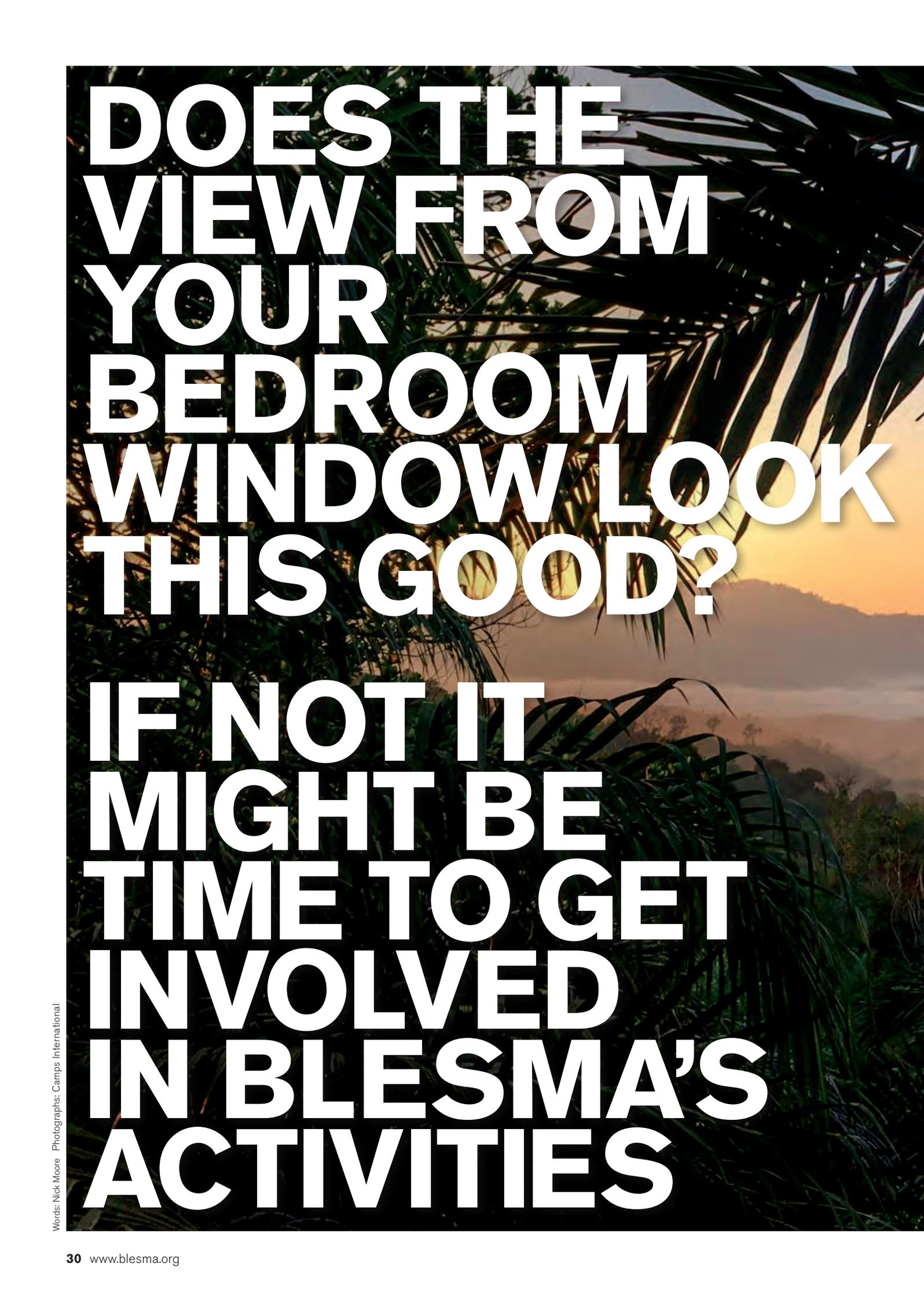
while he waits for the delivery of a prosthetic arm like Mark's that will balance his grip and help him generate even more power. Kevin, meanwhile, has asked the prosthetics team at Headley Court to design a different socket for his prosthetic leg for balance and comfort.

These kinds of challenges aren't new to the Blesma Members – the trial-and-error aspect of preparing to compete often brings up parallels with the journeys they have been on whilst coming to terms with their injuries. This, in turn, is what the Invictus Games is all about – helping to equip people for the challenges that lie ahead by learning to adopt new methods and strategies.

Hannah also believes the Invictus journey is about being part of a team, and being able to take advantage of a support network that helps you work for yourself.

“It's been incredible to watch everyone's individual journey,” she says after giving the team their final pep talk of the day. “People who have already overcome so much gain even more from these camps. The journey to Invictus is as much a mental effort as it is physical, and a lot of these guys are coming to terms with being back in a community of like-minded people. They may have lost that for a while when they left the Forces, and this experience brings it all back.”

Turn to page 04 for a full report of the Invictus Games

A tropical landscape with palm trees and a sunset over hills. The text is overlaid on the image.

**DOES THE  
VIEW FROM  
YOUR  
BEDROOM  
WINDOW LOOK  
THIS GOOD?**

**IF NOT IT  
MIGHT BE  
TIME TO GET  
INVOLVED  
IN BLESMA'S  
ACTIVITIES**





**“KIDS CAN HAVE A HARD TIME GROWING UP. WE SHOWED THEM THERE ARE WAYS TO GET OVER THINGS. THAT WAS INSPIRING”**

## A NEW PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN BLESMA AND CAMPS INTERNATIONAL GIVES MEMBERS THE CHANCE TO SEE REMOTE AND EXOTIC PARTS OF THE WORLD – AND GIVE SOMETHING BACK

**W**yn Austin, 29, from Grantham served in the Royal Dragoon Guards before he was injured in Afghanistan in 2010, losing his left leg above the knee when his Viking patrol vehicle was hit by an IED. Billy Drinkwater, 32, from London, served with the Royal Anglian Regiment, and lost his right eye in an IED blast in 2010.

In July, the pair spent a month in Borneo with a group of teenagers aged between 15 and 18 as part of a Camps International project. This award-winning volunteering organisation partners with communities across the world to run expeditions that aim to make long-term positive impacts. During their month in the rainforests of Borneo, Wyn and Billy helped oversee the construction of a market square and the building of a section of a new kindergarten. They mentored groups of teenagers from the UK in the process, each of whom had raised thousands of pounds to be there.

When the intrepid duo returned home they were eager to explain how it all went – and how they dealt with snakes, tropical storms and the odd cheeky teenager!

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

**Billy:** I've already taken part in the Blesma Community Programme, which teaches you how to tell your story to groups of students as a way to inspire them. It helps them to see and understand how you've overcome adversity. I really enjoyed doing that and so Blesma thought working with teenagers on this expedition would be a natural progression. I went along to the selection process and thought it sounded great.

**Wyn:** The guys at Blesma approached me because they thought I might be interested. I was interviewed by people from Blesma and Camps International, and was lucky enough to be selected. I didn't know much about the country before then to be honest, so I had to quickly do my homework.

### What kind of prep did you have to do before you travelled to Borneo?

**Wyn:** I was a bit worried about the heat and humidity, which can cause issues with my leg, so I went to see my prosthetist and got my socket as tight as possible. Then I just made sure I had the right kit: good boots, breathable clothing, knives, torches – it was just like being back in the military!

**Billy:** I wasn't sure what to expect in Borneo – especially when I had to get what seemed

**Billy (left) and Wyn (right) spent a month volunteering in Borneo this summer**



like every vaccination under the sun! I have a lot of trouble with my eyes – I have to keep them really clean – so I was concerned about how hygienic the camps would be.

### What were your first impressions of Borneo?

**Wyn:** It was a bit mad! It was an 18-hour flight and then we were in a pretty sparse hostel for the first night – just a mattress on the floor. The next morning we drove up to Camp Bongkud – where we were going to be staying and working – and the whole place was a quagmire after a tropical storm! We wondered what we'd let ourselves in for, but things soon improved.

**Billy:** I lost my phone as soon as we landed! The heat was crazy, but when we got to the camp everyone was very welcoming. We were given a tour of the village, and finally learned what we'd be doing.

### Which was?

**Billy:** We were going to build a market square, completely concreting it over with the help of the locals. Previously, if there

was a storm, it would just get flooded and people wouldn't be able to sell their goods, which had an impact on the local economy. We spent a lot of time mixing cement!

**Wyn:** Our job was to oversee the teenagers as they worked. We made sure health and safety was being observed, and showed them how to do things properly. The key was striking a balance between making them work hard and keeping them happy. They'd raised a lot of money to go out there, so it wasn't about making them bust a gut, but we still wanted them to push themselves, and feel like they'd really worked hard and given something back.

**Billy:** I also got involved in teaching English to small groups of kids aged between seven and 12. I really loved that. Every day it felt as though I grew and improved. I definitely saw a difference in my abilities.

**Wyn:** To actually complete the project was incredibly satisfying. We saw the local community hold a market in the square once it was finished, which was great. We also built a volleyball court. There was one there already, which the local community



loved – they hold big tournaments on it. The second one will help expand that community area even more. And we also worked on a kindergarten project, which will open towards the end of this year.

**How did you find the British teenagers who were working on the project?**

**Wyn:** Great. I’ve never worked with kids before, but Billy and I both seemed able to gain their respect and got them to follow the plan. They’re teenagers, and some of them have a few issues, but we found that if the teachers on the trip weren’t getting through to them, they’d usually listen to us. Maybe they responded to our military backgrounds. Billy and I both gave talks about our lives, and how we use resilience to overcome adversity. I think that made a difference. None of them gave us any lip!

**Billy:** I told my story to five different groups, and each time I told it, it got better and better. It meant everyone knew who we were. My injuries are less obvious than Wyn’s because I have a false eye, but they understood us better after the talks.

**“I’VE BEEN GETTING HELP FOR THE LAST SEVEN YEARS SINCE BEING INJURED, SO TO BE HELPING OTHER PEOPLE IS FANTASTIC!”**

**How did you find the locals?**

**Wyn:** They were really nice. It was very important that they wanted us to be there, and Camps International also provided some with employment. We were making the concrete for the market square, for example, but locals were being paid to trowel it out. For the kindergarten, skilled locals were also getting paid. It’s a beautiful place, too. We walked up Bongkud Hill, which has a lot of steps. I can only do one step at a time with my injury, so it took a long time, but the views of Mount Kinabalu at the top were superb.

**Billy:** I learned the language a little bit and really got on with everyone around the village and shops. Learning a few words really does go a long way. Everyone was so friendly and had so much time for us.

**How much did successfully completing the trip mean to you?**

**Wyn:** The whole thing gave me a massive sense of achievement. We were invited to the chief’s house on the last night, which is apparently quite a rarity, and when I was making a speech, something occurred to me that made complete sense. I said: “I’ve been getting help for the last seven years since being injured, so to be helping other people is fantastic.”

**Billy:** I got a lot out of it. I’d recommend it to anyone. I took part in a jungle trek at the end of our stay, and I felt like I was back in a team environment for the first time since leaving the Army. That was very satisfying, although I got a lot of blisters – and we even had to run away from a viper!

**Wyn:** Our talks made a massive impact on the kids, too, which was something we



weren't expecting. Camps International has a system where you can anonymously leave positive notes for people in an envelope. We got so many! Some of them were making us choke up with emotion. Kids can have a hard time growing up, and we helped to show them that there are ways to get over things. That was incredibly inspiring.

**Do you think the experience will spur you on to do more things like this?**

**Billy:** Definitely. I've never done anything like this before, but I'm going out to the Philippines in January to receive more project work. I might even do the TEFL course and go around the world teaching.

**Wyn:** I'm about to go travelling for a year with my girlfriend. I'd recommend Camps International to anyone: the sense of achievement is special and you can see they really use their funds in the right way.

*For more on Camps International, get in touch with Jess March on 020 8548 3519 or email her at [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org), or visit [www.campsinternational.com](http://www.campsinternational.com)*

## CAMPS INTERNATIONAL: HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

*Wyn and Billy's mission to Borneo was a success, both on a personal level and for the Association. The hope, says Activities Manager Jess March, is that this will pave the way for more collaboration between Blesma and Camps International*

"I was so impressed with the scheme," says Jess. "It's a big commitment for Members, so I wanted to make sure that it would really work. It's a great set up, and as Wyn and Billy's trip has proved, it's something really different for Members to get involved in. It's a fresh take on the idea of activities."

Jess was particularly keen on the chance for Members to give something back.

"We're constantly striving to prove that our Members

can do all sorts of things, and this was an activity that did just that, yet also rewarded the participants because they were helping others," Jess says. "Hopefully, after a trip like this, Members can push on, change their outlook and achieve even more. For Wyn and Billy, this experience has been huge."

The Borneo expedition will be added to the calendar of events for next year, and Jess is hoping there will be more places available

to Blesma. "Members will be able to apply in the usual way, but the process of being accepted will be slightly different," says Jess. "Camps International insists on an interview stage, which helps to ensure the right people are selected for the right expeditions. Going forward, this will be a trip in which Members really will have to prove themselves and work hard, so we need to make sure everyone who goes on it gets the most out of it."

# BACK ON TRACK

STRESSED, DEPRESSED AND RACKED WITH GUILT AFTER HIS INJURY,  
SIMON TAYLOR WAS STRUGGLING. THEN HE HAD A GO ON A BIKE...



## ACTIVITIES



**From novice to no fear: Simon credits cycling with beating stress, turning his life around and even helping him find a job he loves**

**S**imon Taylor, a former Sergeant in the Light Dragoons, remembers feeling depressed as he struggled with multiple medical setbacks after being hit by an IED explosion in Afghanistan. Then he was given a mountain bike and his life changed for the better. During a training day tearing through Thetford Forest, Simon talks through his bumpy road to recovery – which has ended up with him competing for a top mountain bike race team – and explains how the off-road sport can benefit everyone, regardless of injury, ability or experience...

**Road biking is hugely popular among Members. Should they consider tackling some off-road tracks?**

Road bikes are fantastic, but they're not for everyone. I find it a bit boring to be honest – wearing lycra and looking at somebody else's backside all day long isn't for me! I love the accessibility mountain biking gives you. You can get up in the Atlas Mountains on a Blesma trip to Morocco, or just ride some trails through your local forest. It gets you out in nature, to isolated places. You can stick a lightweight poncho and a bivvy bag in a backpack, and be gone for the weekend. I love it!

**Isn't it dangerous, though?**

Not at all. Let's face it, it's far safer than on the roads. I took part in a mountain biking trip in Vietnam, and the only time I was injured was on a road between

trails – someone in an Audi knocked me off! Yes, you can fall off a mountain bike if you push yourself, but you're prepped and you should be wearing safety gear, so it's all part of the fun. And if you want to grip the brakes all the way down a trail, you can do that and be perfectly safe. My seven-year-old daughter often comes out with me, so it's something anyone can do.

**What about adapting to amputations? Doesn't that make the bumps tricky?**

Not at all. Last year, I went to the Atlas Mountains with Alistair Cope, who organises a lot of Blesma's cycling trips, to scope out the Morocco expedition. We were with another below-knee amputee and a Member who is missing an eye – and we were all fine. It's a mind-blowing journey, and I've seen people with missing arms and legs complete it. We've even taken a handbike to an event in France for a Member who is paralysed. Off-road cycling is accessible to all.

**What about trying to get up hills when an amputation means you lose so much power?**

There are several different options. I'm a below-knee amputee, which means I've lost about 15 per cent of my potential power. But now I have one massive thigh to compensate! For those who might be losing more power, there are e-mountain bikes, which include a pedal-assisted generator. In top mode, whatever power you put in, the bike will give you 75 per cent back.



“YOU CAN CRY  
INTO YOUR  
PILLOW FOR  
YEARS AFTER  
AN INJURY, BUT  
MY KIDS DON’T  
WANT A DAD  
LIKE THAT”

## PEDAL POWER: SIMON'S POSITIVE SPIN

### STRONGER

“Mountain biking gives you a great all-round workout. It's a lot more dynamic than road riding – I find being in one position all day can hurt my back. You constantly have to be on the lookout for obstacles too, which sharpens your reactions.”

### FITTER

“Biking has proven benefits for the heart and lungs,” says Simon, “and you certainly have to put a lot of effort in to get to the top of the trails. By the end of a session you definitely know you've done a full day's riding!”

### HAPPIER

“Getting on the bike makes you feel good. You can cry into your pillow for 10 years after an injury, but my kids don't want a dad like that. And the look on people's faces when you overtake them and they realise you've got one leg is amazing!”





**“Mountain biking became a form of escape. I was just thinking about not falling off – and how knackered I was!”**

I ride with a guy who is paralysed in his right leg and his e-bike allows him to keep up easily. It’s opened up a whole new world of exploration to him.

**Biking has obviously helped your recovery. Can you tell us about your injuries and how tough it got?**

I started as a Gunner in the Light Dragoons and later in my career became a PTI and Sergeant. I went to Iraq and Afghanistan, and in 2009 took part in Operation Panther’s Claw. I was injured that September. It was a silly thing, really. I remember my dad, who was also in the Army, used to say: ‘Never volunteer for anything!’ But, unfortunately, that day I did!

**What happened?**

I volunteered to go and help fix a generator. We were in a REME recovery vehicle when we drove over what is thought to have been a 50kg pressure plate IED. Our driver was killed immediately. I was luckier – but my helmet came off and smashed my jaw and teeth, I had a brain injury, I broke L1-5 in my spine (which was also compressed), I broke my collar bone, several ribs, my hip, my femur... and my right foot was annihilated. I woke up from a coma in Birmingham a month later.

**And then you had multiple setbacks...**

So many! I was incapacitated at first and was put in a full spinal brace – the doctors were worried that I was paralysed. I flatlined in theatre several times. My leg was eventually pinned but later, at Headley Court, it became terribly infected. I eventually managed to run again but then I snapped my ankle! That was fused by a surgeon, but after another fall we decided to amputate. Then I had more problems with my spine.

I’d been away with the family, and had even done some light boxing, when my consultant discovered that I had broken my back again. I had fifty-fifty odds of being paralysed during surgery, and had a very bad bleed during the operation.

**It must have all been incredibly difficult mentally...**

I’d made arrangements for if I died in Afghanistan, but what I hadn’t prepared for was someone else dying while I survived. When I met the family of Lance Corporal Brandon, who had been driving the vehicle, they were fantastic but it almost broke me. I had a lot of time to overthink things. I started getting flashbacks and was suffering from depression. I had to give up my career, too, and the Army was all I’d ever known. I got very down. That’s when I discovered biking.

**So what got you started?**

I was given a basic bike in 2012. It was nothing special, but when I got it home, I decided to do a lap of a field near where I live. I went further in that 20 minutes than I’d managed to go in years. That was it – I was hooked. It was amazing! Mountain biking quickly became a form of escape from the stresses of what I was doing, or where my life was going. I was just thinking about not falling off, and how knackered I was! Suddenly, I was riding for 50km a day.

**And that spread into other areas of your life?**

Yes. I looked at going to university, worked in a bike shop, did the trip to Vietnam. Then, in 2014, a lady in one of the recovery centres applied for a job on my behalf: youth work with 16 to 25 year olds. I didn’t think it was for me, but I tried it and it went well.

## ACTIVITIES

I'm now employed by the Jon Egging Trust, working with 12 to 16 year olds, and I've discovered that I have a genuine passion for youth work.

### How did you get into racing bikes?

I wanted to try and get a number of Service charities to support mountain biking for amputees, and I thought if I entered some competitions I could help prove what cycling can achieve. So I started taking part in a few cross-country races. I stumbled upon a discipline called Enduro Racing, in which you ride all day but only get timed on a few technical stages over a couple of kilometres. It levels the playing field a little bit for disabled riders. The trails are rocky and technical, and you can really push it – but it's also a really friendly race series with a great social side.

**“MY NEIGHBOUR TOLD ME TO GROW UP THE OTHER DAY BECAUSE I WAS DOING WHEELIES OFF THE PAVEMENT!”**

### And you've since been signed up by a team?

I now compete for a team run by Steve Peat, who is a legend in mountain biking circles. He's focused on developing riders to where they want to be. For some, that's on podiums, but for me it's about improving and being competitive with myself, becoming the best rider I can be. I want to get faster, but I compete mainly as a showcase to get more injured guys involved.

### And this is where Blesma has come in?

The Association has funded my racing, which I'm very grateful for. It's been an excellent learning curve: the team have helped me with my technique, I'm using a better bike and different kit – I'm learning all sorts. And Blesma's annual Morocco trip is just fantastic. We want people to enjoy not endure it, and that's exactly what happens. If you're tired, you can hop in the van. If you want to go slowly, you can. It's as demanding as you want it to be. But it's a spectacular place. I measure how successful a day on the bike is by the size of the smile on my face, not by my time.

### And you feel fully recovered?

Pretty much. In the past, I had lots of bad days and the odd good day. Now it's lots of good ones, and just the odd bad day. That's great progress!

## Beginners wanted to be Blesma bikers

Cycling is a great pastime for many reasons: it is accessible to Members with almost any disability, it is a great form of exercise that doesn't cause too much strain on the body, it's a fantastic way to enjoy the outdoors and it's incredibly sociable. Get involved in Blesma's cycling activities next year

### INTRO TO CYCLING

The event is for Members who haven't tried cycling since being injured. It introduces participants to different types of adaptive cycling, all under expert guidance. By the end of the course you will be fully informed about how to take your cycling to the next level.

#### Who can take part?

Any Member. The bikes for this activity are supplied – you just need to turn up.

### ADAPTED BIKING EXPEDITION

New for 2018, the Adapted Biking Expedition will combine fitness and stamina techniques whilst touring in Europe.

#### Who can take part?

Open to all levels and abilities, from beginners to keen cyclists. This event will be suitable for wheelchair users.



### SOLDIER RIDE NYC (SRNYC)

Every year, Blesma Members head over to New York to cycle with the Wounded Warriors around New York City for three days. The streets are packed and the event ends with a big party.

#### Who can take part?

Anyone who can use some form of adaptive bike. You must be able to enter the USA.

### BATTLEFIELD BIKE RIDE

An annual commemorative ride to the WWI battlefields and cemeteries of Ypres in Belgium.

#### Who can take part?

Any Member with their own bike who can cycle up to 30 miles a day for five days.

### SOLDIER RIDE UK

A chance for Members to enjoy a week's cycling across beautiful

For more information  
email [mea@blesma.org](mailto:mea@blesma.org)  
or call 020 8548 7094

English countryside. You will be able to enjoy the company and camaraderie of other Members as well as wounded veterans from the USA.

#### Who can take part?

Any Member with their own bike who can cycle up to 30 miles a day for five days.

### MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAINING WEEKEND

Members will have a fantastic opportunity to work on training and mentoring in mountain biking. They will also get the chance to work towards a possible expedition in 2019.

#### Who can take part?

Any Member who has their own mountain bike.

## SIMON'S TOP TIPS FOR GETTING ON YOUR BIKE

### ANY BIKE WILL DO

"Obviously, it needs to be safe, but I started with a bike that cost just a couple of hundred pounds and it was absolutely fine for everything – from the Blesma Morocco trip to the Atlas Mountains, to cycling around my local forest."

### MANAGE YOUR INJURY

"I have a spinal injury, so I've got a bike with adjustable suspension. The great thing is that the gear is out there to make mountain biking accessible to just about anybody. Whether it's an electric bike or an off-road handbike, it can be done."

### GO AT YOUR OWN PACE

"I like to bomb around, jump off rocks and do all sorts of extreme tricks – my neighbour told me to grow up the other day because I was doing wheelies off the pavement! But you don't have to be like that. Anyone with basic riding skills can complete a good day's mountain biking."



# MORE BSOs MEANS MORE SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS

ARE YOU MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR BLESMA SUPPORT OFFICER? THERE'S BOUND TO BE SOMETHING THEY COULD HELP WITH – AND NOW THEY'RE MORE ACCESSIBLE THAN EVER

**T**he Association is changing. To make sure Members continue to get as much support as possible a brand new Area – West – has been created, bringing the number of Areas to nine. The other eight have all reduced in size to ensure each BSO is responsible for as few Members as possible.

“Following the Trustees’ decision to invest in the BSO team, the BSO Areas have been reviewed, and a number of boundary and Area changes made as the size of the areas is reduced,” explains Heather Nicholson, Director of Membership Services.

“Reducing the size of Areas will enable BSOs to spend more time supporting individual Members and Widows. It will also allow Support Officers to generate closer relationships with existing partners and seek out new collaborations with those who can improve Members’ access to other specialist support and services.”

As part of the changes, Blesma welcomes two new BSOs. Former Staff Sergeant Sam Wileman succeeds Charley Streater in the Midlands, while former Captain Tom Hall heads up the new West region.

Tom began his 29-year military career in The Coldstream Guards before transferring to REME in 1988. He has served across the world, including a tour of Afghanistan as Garrison Sergeant Major in 2009, and has also worked at the Personnel Recovery Unit in Brecon. “My role in the PRU allowed me to work with – and help – many wounded, injured and sick soldiers, including amputees,” says Tom. “I have worked with Blesma before, and I love how helpful and caring the Association is, and how fast it works for its Members and Widows.”

Tom was so impressed with Blesma that he sent his CV into Chadwell Heath almost two years ago, asking to be kept on file in



**BSO Paul Findlay (left) drops in on Member Alex Stringer for a cuppa and a chat**



**BSO Sam Wileman**



**BSO Tom Hall**

case a job came up. “I’m passionate about helping veterans and have always wanted to work in the charity sector, so Blesma is the perfect fit. I’m looking forward to being a strong voice for those Members who can’t speak for themselves,” says Tom.

Also settling into her new role as BSO Midlands is Sam Wileman. Sam served in the Royal Signals and the Army Welfare Service for 15 years, during which time she was posted across the UK, as well as to Northern Ireland, Germany and Afghanistan. She currently lives in

Coalville, Leicestershire with her family.

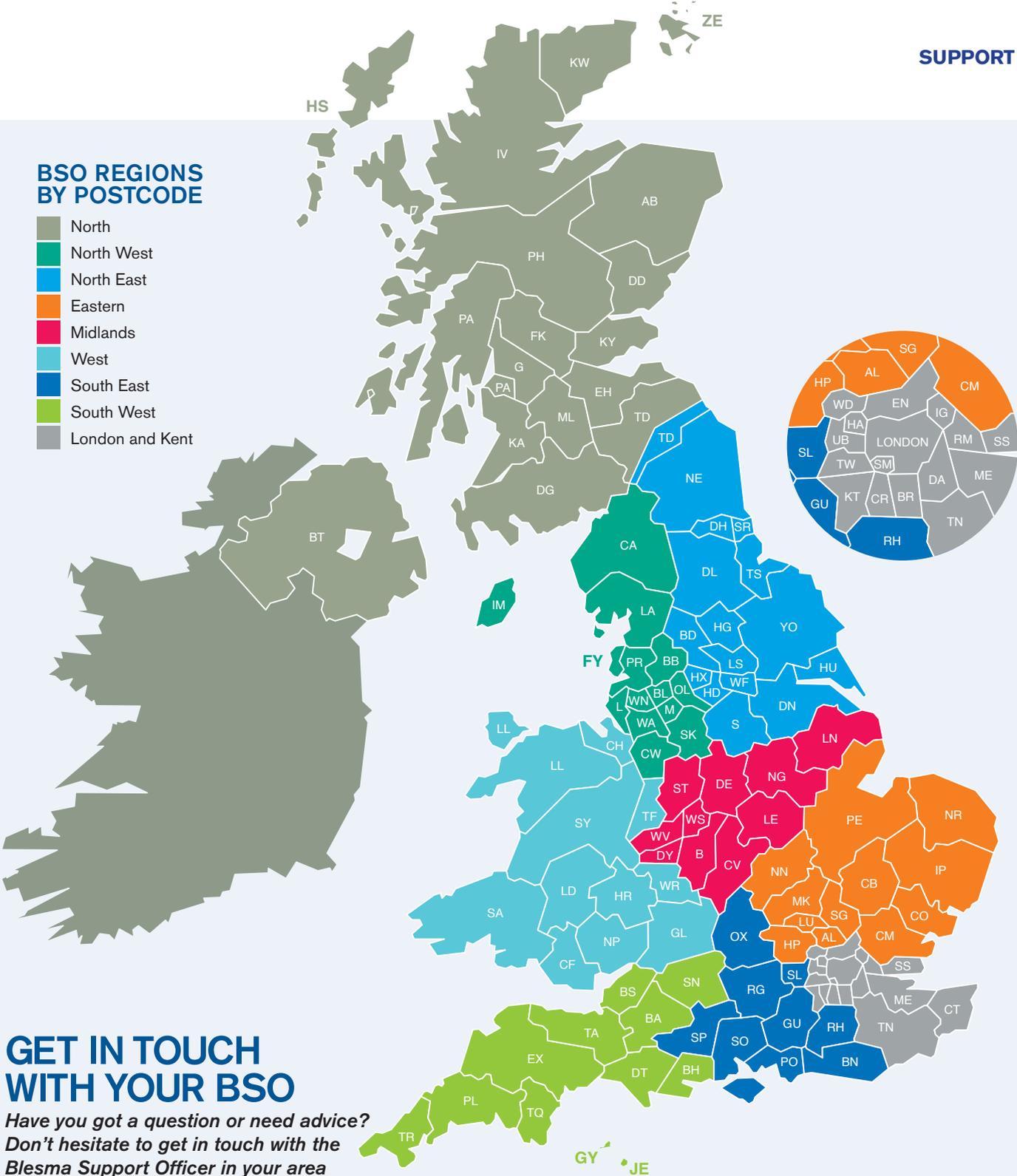
“Through my previous job at the Army Welfare Service, I’d got to know about Blesma and the support it could provide. I’ve already supported several amputees as an Army Welfare worker, so I’m hoping that the knowledge and experience I have will lend themselves to the already fantastic service that Blesma provides,” says Sam.

“I’m aware that I will be the first female BSO the charity has had for a while, but I’m used to working in a male environment and really wanted to continue to work with serving and ex-Service personnel. I’m really excited about joining Blesma – I have heard nothing but great things about the charity, the staff and its Members.”

*If you would like support or advice on any matter, don't hesitate to get in touch with your Blesma Support Officer. A full list of contact numbers, and the area each BSO is responsible for, can be found opposite*

**BSO REGIONS BY POSTCODE**

- North
- North West
- North East
- Eastern
- Midlands
- West
- South East
- South West
- London and Kent



**GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR BSO**

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

**BSO (North)**  
**STEVE BURTON**  
 Tel: 0131 226 2910 Mob: 07766 258461  
 Email: bsonorth@blesma.org

**BSO (North West)**  
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**BSO (North East)**  
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**BSO (Eastern)**  
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 Tel: 01480 469216 Mob: 07825 536364  
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**BSO (Midlands)**  
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**BSO (West)**  
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 Tel: 020 8598 9459  
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# NORTHERN LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

*With its gigantic glaciers, magnificent mountains, ice fields, waterfalls and geysers, Iceland is a photographer's dream*

Words: Nick Moore

ICELAND'S LANDSCAPE IS LIKE NO other. It is stark and unforgiving but eerily beautiful, a crazy clash of angular lava fields and glistening glaciers. With crashing waves, spouting geysers and bubbling, living volcanoes, it's no wonder the ancients wrote all kinds of folk sagas about the place – or that half of *Game of Thrones* is filmed here.

Because of all that it's hard to take a bad photo here, even if you're just equipped with

a smartphone and an Instagram filter. But for those with the ability, technical know-how and passion, special images can be captured. Which is why Blesma ran a 10-day trip here in September, giving committed members of the burgeoning photography group the chance to take their skills to the next level.

The trip was the brainchild of Sue Wright, who led the group of six Members alongside Activities Manager, Jess March. "I've been

to Iceland twice, one time circumnavigating it in a camper van, and thought that with some good planing it would be achievable for Members," says Sue. "I'm an above-knee amputee, and I found most places there surprisingly accessible, so I ran the idea by Jess, and then put a proposal together."

The appeal to those with a passion for photography was obvious to Sue. "Iceland is untamed and feels like a real adventure.

**PETER NORTON**

“We all hoped we’d get the chance to take pictures of the Northern Lights, even though they’re never guaranteed to come out. So we were lucky that we got a couple of very good chances. This was my first ever time seeing them, so I experimented a lot with settings to see what worked. This shot was taken by our hotel near the Blue Lagoon, looking north east towards Reykjavik. I got so much out of the trip photographically.”



The landscapes are astonishing and they change as you drive around. Everyone got really good shots. We knew that this group was one that would really get something out of it and they were all very keen. They had the time of their lives!”

The group flew into the capital Reykjavik and drove to the small town of Vik on the southern coast; a perfect base to capture some of Iceland’s most photogenic spots.

The photography was focused mainly on three areas: volcanic landscapes, waterfalls and glaciers. On day one, the intrepid explorers drove west to photograph two gigantic waterfalls, and the next day they headed east, hunting volcanoes and glaciers on a 160-mile trip to the Jökulsárlón lagoon. The miles flew by as they stopped along the way to capture whichever bits of volcanic landscape caught their attention. “It was

all very jovial,” says Sue. “We stuck with the same people in our two 4x4s the whole way, which resulted in a bit of a rivalry and banter between the teams about who could take the best pictures!”

On their meanderings, they paused at the Fjallsárlón glacial lagoon and the Skeiðara Bridge monument, which commands views of the highest mountain in Iceland as well as two stunning glaciers.



### TERRI HUNT

“Photography is all about getting lost in the moment and taking in your surroundings, but it’s also nice to notice that happening to other people. This is Sue and Steve on the shore near the glacier, and I could see they were absorbed in what they were doing. I’m not surprised, because everywhere we went in Iceland we were just in awe. You want to recreate the mood that the scenery creates inside you in your photo, and this shot does just that for me.”

“Seeing the Members set up with their camera gear looking so tiny in front of the huge glaciers was just awesome,” says Sue. “Some of these people have received the George Cross, and everyone has incredible stories of bravery to tell. It really moved me and I am so proud to have been given the chance to organise this trip.”

The Members were impressed, too. “I was so in awe of the environment that I forgot to press the button on the camera half the time!” says Terri Hunt. “But it really built up my confidence. It was a great group.”

Andy Mudd agrees. “It was magnificent, a marvellous experience. But the most important thing was the photography. This was a progressive course, and there was lots of technical talk. We all learned from each other, and that’s what Blesma is all about – pushing each other forward.”

And as the days rolled by, more iconic spots were covered off: snowmobiles were taken to Mýrdalsjökull glacier, an icecap covering one of Iceland’s largest volcanoes,

before the group explored the curious black beaches and captured images of the basalt sea rock formations known as Reynisdrangar.

They visited the Dyrhólaey lighthouse (Iceland’s most southerly point) and Vík church, before basing themselves close to Reykjavik for the second half of the trip so that they could take advantage of the dark skies to photograph the magnificent auroras. And on the last full day, the group visited Reykjavik and turned their cameras to the city skyline, portraits, food and architecture.

“Whether we were approaching glaciers, taking long drives or packing gear into the cars, this was all about Members helping Members,” says Sue. “It was Blesma at its best. Everyone looked out for each other, whether it was physically or with tips and tricks with photography.”

“And the Icelandic people were so lovely. They are very welcoming and hospitable – and the culture and food is something special, although you need to like fish to experience the best of their cuisine!”

Sue’s personal highlight was being able to photograph the Northern Lights. “Kevin Bryant was very keen to see the auroras,” she says. “He lives in the Shetlands and often takes night pictures, and that’s something he wanted to share with the group. Seeing everyone excited as they got ready to go out at midnight was a special moment, an adventure, and the lights were just magical.”

For those interested in giving it a go one day, Sue has an encouraging message. “If you haven’t picked up a camera before maybe simply start out taking pictures in your back garden,” she says. “It’s a lovely way to forget about your injuries, and just lose yourself in something creative. Taking photographs and sharing them with the Blesma photography community opens up a whole new world.”

*To get involved with Blesma’s photography programme call Jess March on 020 8548 3519, email her at [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org) or visit [www.blesmaphotography.org](http://www.blesmaphotography.org)*



**STEVE BARNES**

“Pete and I went for a little look around one afternoon and I got this picture up by the lighthouse. The weather was pleasant and the clouds were fluffy, it just caught a moment. For the aurora [below] we were taking images from our hotel, but the rocks in the foreground were a bit uninspiring, so I shone a little blue LED light on them, and it just made the image that much nicer. It complements the green of the Northern Lights very nicely.”



## ACTIVITIES



### ANDY MUDD

"The first sight of the large glacier moving down the mountain was mind-blowing. That day, we drove a long way, stopping off where we liked, and I thought the self-driving element of the trip was great. This was a beautiful spot. The glaciers caught my imagination: they are spectacular. Being on them and knowing there's 500 metres of ice beneath you is quite something. The photography was great and I learned so much – we had some very deep conversations about f-stops and filters!"



### KEVIN BRYANT

"When I took this image we were in the middle of a long drive and I just sat down to take in this view. There were actually quite a lot of tourists milling about, but just as I took the shot they cleared away, and I was left with Mark standing alone on the shore. I didn't think it'd be a great shot because the weather was poor and the colours didn't stand out – but then I put it onto the computer. I realised that in black and white it looked like an old-fashioned lone explorer – really nice."





**MARK JENKINS**

"The odd thing with photography is that sometimes you spend hours setting up your tripod and fiddling with settings, and you can't quite get what you want, whereas other times you catch something nice almost by accident. This is one of those good times – I actually took it by sticking my camera out of a moving car window! I dismissed any hope of it being a good image until I saw it later. I loved the trip and I enjoyed helping people out with their photography as well as improving mine. The camaraderie was great."



**SUE WRIGHT**

"This was taken at Jökulsárlón lagoon, where large chunks of ice fall off Vatnajökull glacier and make their way to the ocean. We all just sat by our vehicles for a while looking at the shapes and colours of the ice, waiting for the perfect light to take a picture. I managed to get a nice wide-angled shot that picked up the colours of the ice superbly. The image hasn't been processed or changed in any way – the ice really is that blue – and to see the darker layers of sediment from volcanic eruptions from the past is incredible. The blue sky just breaking through and the darkness in the clouds made it perfect."





## RON BRIGHT

*Ron Bright, now 87, lost his right leg whilst serving as a conscript in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. He only found out about Blesma 60 years later*

**I was nine years old when World War II started.**  
At school I found a real interest in chemistry, which would stay with me for the rest of my life. I joined the school's chemistry club when I was 11, and I turned the shed in my back garden into my own lab!

**When I was almost 18 I was conscripted into the Forces and served for three years.** I applied to go into the Navy but ended up in the Army as a Storeman. I was posted to an ammunition dump and spent most of my service there. I completed a chemical warfare course and became a Chemical Warfare Technician.

**Two weeks before I was due to be demobbed,**  
I was knocked down by a vehicle. I still don't really remember exactly what happened, but the inside of my right foot was crushed, my femur was broken, and my ankle, knee and elbow were fractured.

**I had several operations to tidy up my leg,** but the surgeon had to amputate it as it had developed gas gangrene. I was 19 years old. My attitude was that 'whatever happens, happens', so I accepted it. I was on crutches for a year before I was fitted with a prosthetic.

**The law at the time stated that employers had to give conscripted soldiers their jobs back,** so I returned to work as a chemical analyst, but they didn't really want me there because of my disability. As a test, they gave me a bottle of

concentrated acid and told me to walk the length of the factory with it. They thought I'd quit, but I did it!

**In 1969, I started my own business, which is still going strong today.** We work with thermosetting resins to create indestructible materials which can be used in a wide variety of industries. Chemistry is my passion, which is why I still work two days a week. If you tell a doctor your problem, they'll give you a diagnosis – that's the way I work with chemistry. My need for information keeps me active and busy.

**I have three daughters, two grandsons and two great granddaughters.** I'm very happy and proud of my family.

**“I NEVER GOT TO SAY GOODBYE, SO JOINING BLESMA WAS LIKE GOING BACK INTO THE ARMY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS”**

**I joined Blesma in 2012 when**  
I needed help replacing a wheelchair I had accidentally run over! Because I had been injured whilst all my pals from the Army were demobbed, I never got to say goodbye. Joining Blesma was like filling in the gap and going back into the Army after all those years.

**Once I had joined the charity I wanted to take part in as much as I could.** Over the last few years I've been to Members' Weekend, I have taken part in some of the photography courses and sailing activities, and am also part of the group rebuilding the helicopter 'Gladys'.

**Now I keep my mind active by model making and have considered setting up a Blesma model making group.**

# Set sail on a unique adventure next year

## Members wanted for the trip of a lifetime

Fancy being part of a Blesma crew for a week's sailing next August? The Association has chartered a tall ship from the Jubilee Sailing Trust to sail from Southampton to the Channel Islands on 18 August 2018.

*Tenacious* has 36 berths and caters for all disabilities. Members will get stuck in, take part in watches and contribute to work on board, although no previous sailing experience will be required. Carers, spouses and families are welcome, however children must be at least 12 years old.

*For more info and to apply, email*  
**[mea@blesma.org](mailto:mea@blesma.org)**

*Or call*

**020 8548 7094**



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